

club life

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OF THE HEAVY BRIGADE?**

ATMS & LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

**(RE)AWARDING
THE CLUB INDUSTRY**

THE NEW-LOOK MODERN CLUB AWARD

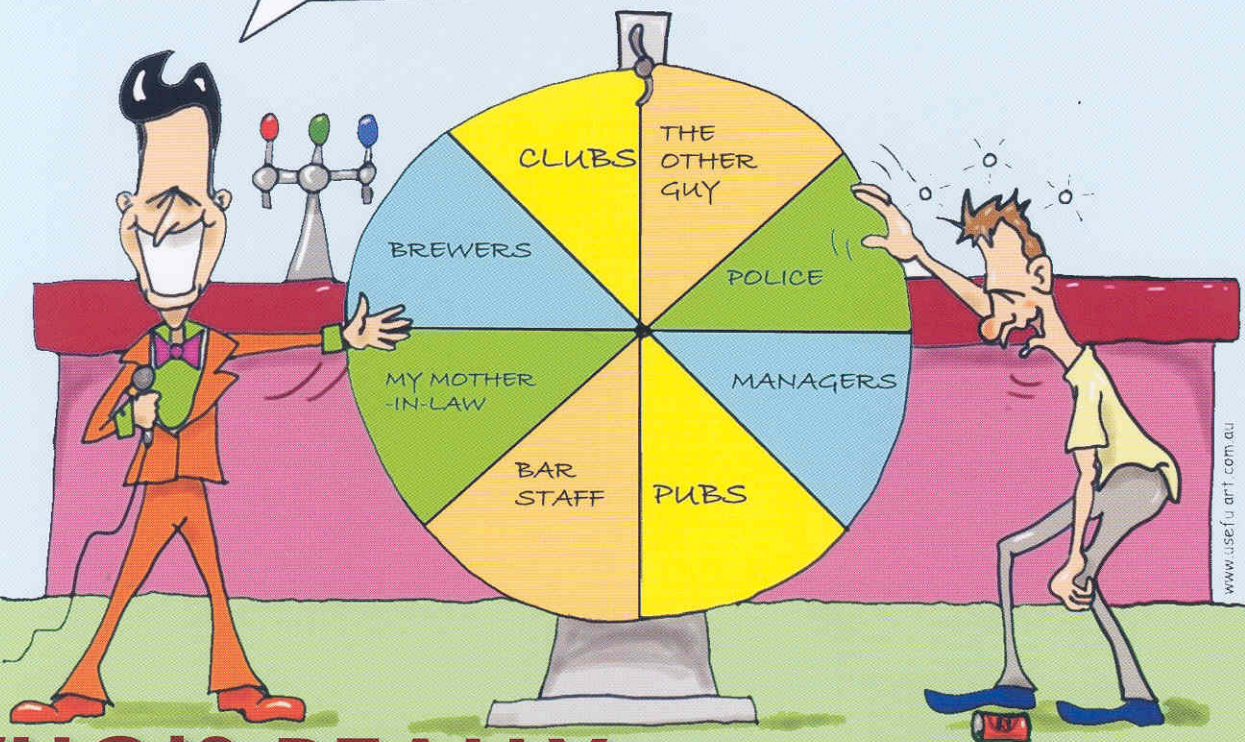
THE ECONOMIC STATE OF PLAY

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH NSW
SHADOW TREASURER MIKE BAIRD

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BUILDING SAFE AND
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BEFORE YOU LEAVE SIR,
LET'S PLAY...
"NOT ME, SO WHO'S TO BLAME?"



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WHO'S REALLY RESPONSIBLE?

THE CURIOUS CASE OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

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ClubsNSW

HOW GOOD IS YOUR NET-WORKING?

Regardless if you have an existing online presence or not, internet marketing is crucial if you don't want your club to get lost in the vastness of the web. *Club Life* spoke with de Groots Media (the masterminds behind the successful sites *Best Clubs*, *Best Venues*, and *Best Restaurants*) about getting your net-working just right.

BY AGNES GAJEWSKA

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the 21st Century. This is an era ruled by the internet and the internet savvy. From social networking sites to directories, and *Twitter* to email, something that entered the commercial world so modestly in the mid 1990s has become a phenomenon. More than that – it has become an integral part of life and business. In a sign of its growth, in 2006 *Google* was admitted into the *Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary* and the *Oxford English Dictionary* due to the sheer number of people who used the term (and the search engine only represents approximately 75% of total traffic). This is a big deal. The internet is big and it is dominating, so finding a way to utilise it to your advantage is crucial.

Think of it another way: Approximately 1.668 billion people use the internet – that's more than the population of China (1.33 billion) and the US (307 million) combined! Closer to home, according to www.internetworldstats.com, 79.6% (16.9 million) of Australians use the internet, with the majority of them relying on it daily – and considering that the national circulation of daily newspapers sits at about 3 million copies, the internet has left print for dead. Even radio and television, which are exceedingly popular mediums don't reach internet figures (viewership is estimated at about 13 million each for television and radio) and are far more costly.

According to de Groots Media, which runs a popular suite of hospitality websites including *Best Restaurants*, *Best Venues* and *Best Clubs* (with over 500,000 unique visitors viewing its sites every month), after just one year of being launched, the group's dedicated registered club site, *Best Clubs*, is receiving 25,000 unique visits a month – that's enough to fill every seat at the ACER Arena and still leave some 8,000 people standing outside, all of whom are specifically looking for a club. And this demand is growing at 33% per a year.

However, while the existence of thousands of people who are eagerly seeking out your business is a happy notion, unless you have an online marketing strategy in place, getting them to actually find your club and commit to it is another matter altogether. For every enthusiastic client there are hundreds of other clubs, restaurants, venues, and unrelated services vying for their attention. So, even if you've invested a sum equal to the gross domestic product of a small country on developing a website, getting it noticed by the right people, looking for the right thing at the right time, is actually a big ask.

So, why is this? There are two main reasons:

- **Awareness:** A good percentage of people who search for a function venue, restaurant, or some other entertainment facility don't know anything about most clubs across New South Wales. If they search for a club directly, they are most likely already existing members. Even if they search for the term "club" paired with a suburb, they are a part of an educated minority. And while it's fantastic to have them on board, and it's a great branding exercise, there is a much larger, untapped source of members – namely, everybody else.
- **Placement:** The success of your website will depend on where your site comes up in search engines such as *Google*, *Yahoo*, and *Alta Vista*. This is determined by several factors which are broadly known as search engine optimisation (SEO) – how well your site is searched, how often content is updated, and how much traffic the site receives. According to "Get to the top on Google," 85% of people don't stray beyond the second page of *Google*. Of the remaining 15%, the majority lose enthusiasm very quickly. So, in other words, if your club doesn't come up, it simply won't be found. However, users are far more likely to search using a combination of keywords such as "venue," "French cuisine," "restaurant," and so forth. But there are many different businesses which use (and therefore compete) for those terms and significantly reduces any club's ability to singularly blast itself into *Google* glory.

For these reasons savvy businesses, particularly when faced with economically challenging times such as what we're experiencing at the moment, have had to become resourceful. One way they have done this



Food & Beverage

is through dedicated information sites such as de Groots Media's *Best Clubs*, *Best Restaurants* and *Best Venues*. These sites work by providing clubs with web pages on which they can list their address, contact details, images, website, services, menus, facilities, function spaces, and so the long list goes on at a fraction of the cost of developing a website themselves. And aside from providing clubs with their own slice of web space – or with a way to supplement their existing websites – these sites also act as powerful marketing tools.

Since information sites have a high level of traffic, a wide breadth of constantly evolving material, and are search engine optimised, *Google* loves them. The de Groots Media suite of websites, for example, produces content that ranges from news to event information and specials, and as a result ranks near the top of the first pages of *Google* for a multitude of keywords such as "restaurant," "venue," "dining Sydney," "birthday venue," and even "Gosford buffet." Additionally, the sites *Best Restaurants*, *Best Venues* and *Best Clubs* cross-link between each other, so someone searching for a wedding venue or a good restaurant in Randwick can easily land on a club page and find what they were looking for in a market that they had not previously considered – this is also an effective way to extend membership. Lending strength to this is the stagnation rate. Once a potential customer finds their way onto one of the sites, they generally don't divert back to *Google*, but rather use the site's own search function, drastically reducing the pool of competition.

Aside from people who search on *Google* however, information sites also introduce their own viewers. This means that by being listed on such a portal, clubs have the ability to reach an additional quarter of a million potential customers who don't use search engines for food and venue information.

Now a word on target audiences. A popular line taken by television, radio, and print media is that they have the ability to target specific demographics. However, while demographic sketches can be drawn from certain shows – especially those with an interactive component – and printed publications, there is no comparison to the online medium. Web-based analytical tools make it possible for websites to understand their audience to a very refined degree, while the ability to communicate with customers through email enquiries, competitions, and blogs provides immediate, tangible results. This very much is capitalised on by information sites for effective, targeted promotions. de Groots

Getting a Byte In

One of the best things that clubs have on offer is the restaurants which sit within their complex of well-stocked bars, sophisticated decor, amiable service, and variety of function areas. However, promoting those restaurants outside of the area of the club itself can be quite a challenge. After all, Sydney alone has more than 5,000 restaurants – which translate into a lot of competition! In addition, there is still a portion of the market which is simply unaware that there are great dining institutions available at their local club. So, in order to spread the message, many clubs have capitalised on the de Groots Media websites by listing their restaurant on the *Best Restaurants* site (or their function spaces on *Best Venues*) individually as well as promoting all of the facilities of their club on *Best Clubs*. In this way people who currently don't search for dining (or event spaces) at a club can be introduced to the idea. And, if they live locally, this style of marketing can also lead them to discover all of the other benefits of their local club.

Media, for example, uses regular newsletters and other forms of communication to send the right message to a wide audience – from individuals and families to hotel concierges, tourism bodies, inbound and conference companies, and corporations in Australia and overseas. In this way it becomes a powerful tool to educate and introduce new audiences to concepts such as club dining, club functions, club facilities, and club culture.

In addition, being listed on selected internet sites can lend credibility and reputation to clubs. For example, de Groots Media has been a strong part of the industry for more than a decade and has formed partnerships with powerful companies such as American Express, Virgin, Tourism Australia, Fairfax Media, and Channel Ten. It's widely recognised as a premium hospitality and lifestyle brand which means that any club, venue, or restaurant listed on its sites is broadly recognised as being the premium choice. Consumers tend to trust sites which they view as objective and unbiased over those directly related to a particular business. In this way if a club is "recommended" by an information site such as *Best Clubs*, this profile is viewed more favourably than a direct club promotion. And since these sites often list a club's website as part of the contact information, they also work as a powerful driver to the club's own site.

In a big world, with a big internet (and many other marketing and advertising options) it's often hard to decide which path will lead to success – usually it's a combination of several. However, an information site, if used properly, will not only pay for itself by the bookings it brings, but will also introduce meaningful business to clubs. And, in the age of the internet, an important thing to remember is that it's not about how big your budget is, but how you use it. For more information contact de Groots Media today on **02 9211 6088** or visit www.degrootsmedia.com.au ■

How to Get Noticed

Even on an information site, with search odds weighed in their favour, any club is competing with several hundred others. This isn't a bad thing – it's this characteristic that draws people to the site. Australians like to have the ability to choose. However, to set yourself apart there are a number of things your club should do to effectively market itself. These include:

- Keep your page as fresh and updated as possible – new material draws the eye.
- Promote specials – use an information site to tell potential members and guests about your promotions.
- Use special events to promote your club – information sites are particularly busy around special occasions such as Father's Day, Mother's Day, Valentine's Day, Christmas, Melbourne Cup, Easter and so forth. This is when people are searching for a place to have a function or somewhere to take family or friends. Use this to your advantage with targeted marketing – beer promotions around Father's Day, free meal, drink or dessert for mum on Mother's Day etc.
- Provide additional images that information sites can use in their promotional material. If information portals have an exhibition stand which uses an image of your club, it will draw attention.
- Think outside the box – what is it that you can deliver that sets you apart from your competitors? Use this information on the information site.