

Online Tools – the Good, the Bad & the Ugly

These days a bad web presence is almost worse than no web presence at all and an out-of-date web presence is a very bad advert for your business indeed.

Below is a quick guide to the tools available to you for online marketing and a brief synopsis of how to make them effective.

If you can't afford to set up a proper website then there are a lot of free alternatives that, if kept updated regularly, can help you promote your site.

The first thing you need to do with all of these web tools, however, is to ensure that people know about them! So, when you launch your website/blog/Facebook page/MySpace presence or personalised social network don't forget to put the web address on posters around the pub, and at the bottom of your menus and press releases.

Websites

The first step to take when you are thinking about website design is to trawl the internet for how you would best like to portray your pub, check out what the opposition is offering and then settle on your three favourite pub websites and get three separate quotes from three different companies.

Remember, as with any other tradesman's quote, the cheapest isn't always the best – make sure you ask to see examples of their previous work and testimonials from satisfied clients.

When you are writing the brief for your website, in the main it's best to keep it simple. Simple design, navigation and information are all key to a strong web presence.

Another to make sure of when you are setting out your requirements for your website is that you are able to keep it regularly updated through the use of a simple private area of the site, that only you can log into.

What this will allow you to do is keep your food, beer or wine menus to date or make sure people know the details of special events or regular quiz/music nights.

Facebook

A ubiquitous word in today's society and the way that many people now choose to communicate with each other to organise drinks, birthday parties and pretty much life in general!

Having a www.Facebook.com page as your web presence, or in addition to it, is not a bad place to start. The added bonus is that you can create a 'group' that you can constantly communicate with.

It's very simple to do, but if you're finding it difficult, ask anyone under the age of 30 and they'll be almost guaranteed to be able to help you.

Blogs

For those of you who don't know what a blog is, the word is short for web log and it is designed as an online diary.

We think the most user-friendly version of this free service is www.blogspot.com but there's also www.wordpress.org as well, which is a little more advanced.

These are very simple to set up and are good to create a nice interaction with your clientele as many of them will start to follow the blog on a regular basis.

Personalised Social Networking Sites

Hosted by such entities as www.ning.com you can actually create your own Facebook-style social network.

For example, the Boxing Donkey in Roseville, California has nearly 200 members of its social networking site, which it uses to send out what are called broadcast messages (group emails effectively) to all its patrons and followers – thus always being able to reach them when it is holding special events, or to engender further loyalty by creating special offers solely for the site.

MySpace

The forerunner of Facebook, www.MySpace.com is now primarily used by music-driven venues, so if you offer live music then it's probably a really good place for you to start or add a web presence.

The other key to using MySpace is to ensure that you enquire of every musical act that comes through your doors whether they have a MySpace page too – and by linking to theirs you will not only be encouraging their fans to follow them through your doors but you'll probably get quite a bit of return business once they know you offer their kind of music.