

# **Minnesota Public Radio: Marketing and the Internet**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

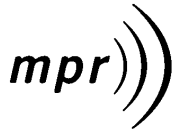
For many public radio enterprises, early Internet marketing efforts focused on on-air promotion (a powerful “given” in the radio industry), banner advertisements and email campaigns. Banner ads and emails are only a part of Internet marketing, and they are most effective if they are part of a comprehensive, integrated marketing program. In an integrated marketing scenario, banner advertising and Web design would mirror what you see in print advertising. Direct mail and email would work together to acquire traffic. Online and offline PR campaigns would complement the entire marketing effort.

MPR’s Internet marketing efforts were moved to the organization’s Marketing Division in July 2000. Coming from the New Media Division, senior management challenged the marketing staff to integrate both offline and online marketing channels, campaigns and messages to present a strong brand. This paper looks at what Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) has learned about Internet marketing to its regional audiences. It includes a discussion of the Internet marketing process and a review of Internet marketing tools that support each process.

## **INFORMATION INTEGRATION IMPERATIVE**

Search the Web and you will find a fleet of vendors offering software to help with Internet marketing efforts, not to mention organizations to help with email marketing, contests, auctions, loyalty programs, and more. The New Media IT group worries about data incompatibility when using tools from different vendors, and that a collection of unrelated tools can lead to a disjointed site design. MPR has taken advantage of a number of such offers, but continues to work toward in-house solutions.

MPR New Media IT starts the integration process by carefully reviewing data needs and moving toward an enterprise-wide database. Reporting from this central database will allow MPR’s marketing group to better assess visitor needs, improve marketing efforts, and move its online audience through the giving path to membership. Such a central database should also provide results-related reporting for membership, online underwriters and program sponsors.



The primary reporting tool for MPR continues to be its internal Web logs. MPR has opted for an internal, unaudited Web activity reporting system. Internet marketing efforts take advantage of the system to track site and visitor growth, as well as referring site data, to better understand customer needs.

## **MPR INTERNET MARKETING**

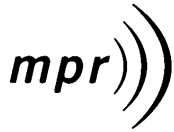
Internet marketing is not a single technique to drive people to your Web site. Different Internet marketing techniques serve different purposes. Web log data helps set strategy for Internet marketing efforts (increase page views, focus on retaining existing site visitors, develop site link program, etc.). While the most popular marketing techniques are aimed at getting new visitors, other types of marketing will apply after the first visit. MPR's Internet marketing efforts fell into five key categories: site development, initial visits, revisits, loyalty/trust, and revenue.

### **1. Site Development**

Anyone who has developed a Web site knows the development cycle is ambitious, with timelines that keep you racing to design, produce, assemble, and launch. MPR's Web development group is charged with developing the station's sites; they continue to pay careful attention to site design, navigation, and production (see *A Minnesota Public Radio White Paper on Visual Design for the Web*, July 2001).

MPR's Internet marketing efforts focus on company core competencies and what research shows users want from the Internet: Information/content, interactivity, shopping and freebies. The more of the four key elements MPR delivers via its Web sites, the better our position to drive traffic and to keep that traffic coming back for more.

- **Information/Content.** The Internet is one of the world's largest information sources. No matter what the topic, the Internet has become the first choice to find the answer. The MPR Web site has a wealth of quality information, backed by the reputation of the public radio brand.
- **Interactivity.** People use the Internet for information, but they also use it for entertainment and interaction. They play games, post their opinions, participate in surveys, chat with their buddies using instant messaging, and send greeting cards to friends. MPR's Web group includes an Interactive Producer who is responsible for increasing interaction with MPR site visitors. We know we have an active, informed audience, and interactivity allows MPR to learn more from this valuable asset.
- **Shopping.** The Web has tens of thousands of shopping outlets. Jupiter Communications put online spending at over \$48 billion in 2000. MPR offers a number of e-commerce opportunities online, from its own affiliate program -- the Public Radio Music Source, PRMS ([www.prms.org](http://www.prms.org)) -- to an online catalog of Prairie Home Companion merchandise. *The Splendid Table* site



(www.splendidtable.org) is an affiliate of Zingerman's (www.zingermans.com). PRMS also positions MPR as a leader in the public radio industry, offering other stations the opportunity to gather names and make some revenue from music sales. In addition, MPR membership has an ongoing presence on the MPR home page touting member benefits, and visitors can become members online through a secure site developed and maintained by MPR's New Media IT group.

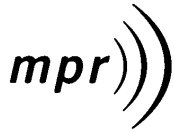
- **Freebies.** Web visitors expect freebies, including software, contests, email and advice. MPR's family of Web sites offers regular and ongoing elements in this category. Some lucky visitors win special prizes, and MPR benefits by growing its marketing database.

## 2. Initial Visits

Launching and maintaining the MPR Web sites is only the beginning of the Internet marketing process. Best practices dictate that initial visit strategies include a mixture of traditional offline and online marketing campaigns. For example, a re-launch of MPR's Your Voice pages included print ads, on-air promotions, an advertisement included in the MPR News opt-in newsletter, and an opportunity to win a prize for posting.

The Internet also helps streamline some of the more traditional marketing techniques. For example, MPR posts its press releases on the site, and submits company news through distribution of press releases by Internet service bureaus.

- **Direct mail.** Traditional direct mail mandates that you pay attention to audience, list, messages, offer, and call to action. Online direct email also demands that you pay attention to privacy and permission concerns. Where email lists are available for purchase, MPR opts to use its own marketing and membership email lists, as well as opt-in email lists from their own email programs, instead of purchasing lists. The privacy policy also gives recipients the opportunity not to receive such emails. MPR's program-related email lists are opt-in, meaning recipients choose to receive the messages; the company's member email is more in line with an opt-out program but all member emails include an unsubscribe option.
- **Affiliate programs.** MPR offers a number of affiliate-style programs that help acquire new visitors and members. In the case of the Public Radio Music Source, affiliates are compensated with revenue sharing and names. MPR also offers a national public radio program search service – RadioScout; its compensation is a service that allows all affiliates to provide the service on station and program Web sites, a great service that assists with both initial visit and revisit strategies.
- **Search engine registration.** Data supports the value of generic traffic from online consumers who use search engines to find Web sites. According to IMT



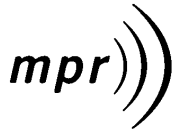
strategies, 46% of Internet users rate search engines as the top method for discovering Web sites, that means getting your site a high listing among popular search engines is a must-have, non-negotiable requirement for successful sites. Some search engines and directories make use of the META information contained on the site. Others require you to go through a registration process (with a single, required category selection). MPR registers its sites on a regular basis, and reviews placement using a program called SubmitWolf. Also included in every marketing campaign are review and registration in topic-specific databases and directory listings, as well as site submission to general and industry-specific announcement sites and lists/newsgroups.

- **Advertising.** With sufficient marketing budget, banner advertising does boost page views and introduce Web sites to new target audiences. A less expensive option is email advertising, where you add your advertising message to popular opt-in email newsletters. Traditional print advertising has also been shown to increase page views, but (again) sufficient budget is key. You may consider trades for all advertising, and be sure to take advantage of your own site's banner advertising opportunities, if available.
- **Brand building.** Building an online brand increases the volume and frequency of visitors. MPR has developed a consistent look and feel to its site, a design that echoes the station brand. Consistency is key in logos, taglines, tone, and voice. While Internet marketers can spend a high percentage of their marketing budgets on branding to drive consumers to their Web sites, a Harris Interactive Study reports that 40% of online consumers could not name a single player in 12 out of 13 leading Internet categories. (Source: Harris Research, May 1999). Despite Amazon's high level of promotion, 40% of consumers still do not remember its URL (Source: Opinion Research Corporation, 1999). Such research points to a question of how to leverage an offline brand in the Internet environment, or whether to stay with more traditional marketing techniques for brand building.

### 3. Revisits

Once introduced to new visitors, what keeps them on the site? Strong, updated content delivery and an effective search mechanism that gives visitors what they want as quickly and efficiently as possible.

- **Delivering content.** One of the fastest ways to lose a Web visitor is to make it difficult for him/her to locate sought-after information. Helping visitors find what they are looking for quickly is a must. Knowing this, MPR redesigned its main home page in 2001, adding strong navigation, a text-only home page option, and continued support of its search function.



- **Help visitors make decisions.** The MPR home page acts as a promotion vehicle for content that exists deeper in the site. Most of the materials that exist on the home page also benefit from comparable on-air promotions to entice new visitors. In addition, MPR offers services like its broadcast and events calendar, giving returning visitors the opportunity to see on a single page many of the regional events and broadcasts that its membership is most interested in.

#### 4. Loyalty and Trust

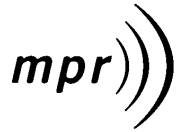
With new visitors finding the MPR Web site every day, and returning visitors beginning to acknowledge the site as a favorite, the next step in the marketing path is to give users reason to become regular customers and build the relationship between MPR and one of its newer audiences, offering incentives and strategies that increase the bond between site and user and move visitors along path to giving path to membership. For MPR, this means a combination of contests, opportunity for interaction, surveys, fresh content, and newsletters.

- **Fresh Content.** Fresh, new, updated content is a magnet for users and members. MPR offers its visitors live streaming of its morning talk shows, a decrease from the two 24x7 streams offered in previous years (cost constraints dictated limited streams). Also offered are live webcasts of special events (especially MPR events taking place at the organization's Fitzgerald Theater).
- **Contests.** Offering special site promotions helps build a loyal user base. Contests offer excellent marketing leverage because they benefit both the site and the user. The user gains an opportunity to win a valuable prize and MPR obtains information about users when they register.
- **Newsletters.** Electronic newsletters are an efficient way to build and maintain user loyalty. MPR offered its first opt-in email newsletter options in 2001. Sensitive to the limitation of connection speeds, and fully aware of tradeoffs between text-only and HTML formats, MPR offers its newsletters in text-only format, but does ask users about their interest in HTML newsletters in the subscription process.

#### 5. Revenue

Revenue is of course necessary to sustain online programming – converting visitors and page views to dollars, and creating opportunities for site sponsorship. Membership, affiliate programs, online auctions, banner advertising all can help amplify revenues above and beyond standard e-commerce initiatives.

- **Membership.** Since 2000, MPR has increasingly incorporated Web pledging into its membership drive. In its first attempt, MPR offered a Web-only day, introducing its membership to the new, improved way to pledge. Although it



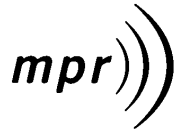
continues to offer such opportunities, usually directly preceding more traditional pledge drives, MPR now integrates Web pledging into its standard pledge drive weeks.

- **Affiliate programs.** Affiliate programs can generate revenue for you by promoting your products and services on other Web sites. Not too surprisingly, making money motivates most affiliates, so MPR offers compensation strong enough to attract strong sites.
- **Banner ads.** Sites may be an attractive target for banner advertising if the page views average 100,000 page views per month; however, in its first online advertising sales effort, MPR focused its efforts on run-of-site advertising, the lowest paying ad category, with little success. The site eliminated banner advertising from its site beginning in 2002, focusing instead on sponsorship/underwriting sales.
- **Newsletters.** MPR currently has four opt-in email newsletters, one for its local news updates, and three for key national programs. At last count, MPR has over 5000 subscribers to these newsletters. Once the company reaches about 20,000+ opt-in names, it is likely they will successfully attract email advertisers. At this point, they advertise internal programs, such as membership and the company's Public Radio Music Source.

## CONCLUSION

Like the fast-paced environment it seeks to leverage, Internet marketing continues to add tools to introduce new visitors to the site and move those visitors through the giving path. Strategic online promotion trends dictate that MPR should consider such options as "email this to a friend" and "make the MPR home page your home page," and a closer review of how the Web can support MPR's brand marketing structure is certainly warranted. A strong Internet marketing program would have campaigns structured to leverage the online visitor's desire to forward information to their friends, family and peers. A good Internet marketing strategy would include elements that support the pillars of the Internet marketing process.

The Internet marketing environment continues to challenge public radio groups that face limited budgets and human resources due to the uncertain economy. Faced with this situation, MPR Marketing continues to look for Internet marketing experience in its job applicants and offer Marketing staff Internet-related professional development activities.



## **Appendix A: Internet Marketing Resources**

### **Overall good resources with lots of links**

[www.searchenginewatch.com](http://www.searchenginewatch.com)  
[www.wilsonweb.com](http://www.wilsonweb.com)  
[www.emarketingassociation.com](http://www.emarketingassociation.com)  
[www.emarketer.com](http://www.emarketer.com)  
[www.emarketingassociation.com](http://www.emarketingassociation.com)  
[www.internet.com](http://www.internet.com)

### **Internet Information**

[www.internettrafficreport.com](http://www.internettrafficreport.com)  
[www.cyberatlas.com](http://www.cyberatlas.com)  
[www.iconocast.com](http://www.iconocast.com)  
[www.statmarket.com](http://www.statmarket.com)  
[www.squirrelnet.com](http://www.squirrelnet.com)

### **Advertising/PR**

[www.businesswire.com](http://www.businesswire.com)  
[www.internetwire.com](http://www.internetwire.com)  
[www.prnewswire.com](http://www.prnewswire.com)  
[www.xpresspress.com](http://www.xpresspress.com)

### **Search Engines**

[www.searchenginewatch.com](http://www.searchenginewatch.com)  
[www.allsearchengines.com](http://www.allsearchengines.com)  
[www.payperclicksearchengines.com](http://www.payperclicksearchengines.com)  
[www.searchability.com/](http://www.searchability.com/)  
[www.netmechanic.com](http://www.netmechanic.com)

### **General Web Design Resources**

[www.creativebase.com](http://www.creativebase.com)  
[www.commarts.com/CA/resources](http://www.commarts.com/CA/resources)