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ShowUp.com Launches New Look: State-of-the-art website for collaborative arts marketing

Four years ago, Phoenix area arts and culture organizations came together with the singular idea to jointly build audiences for their events, venues and cultural destinations. The resulting 150-member Alliance for Audience created ShowUp.com, an innovative website for connecting people with arts and culture.

Now, just this month, ShowUp.com has launched a new site with a new look and new capabilities that provide audiences with new kinds of interaction and ways to get involved. Now ShowUp.com is squarely in the so-called Web 2.0 world where website users are totally in control of their online experiences.

“We’ve seen how rapidly audiences have embraced this technology and the services we provide,” said Matt Lehrman, executive director, Alliance for Audience. “It was as if there was a huge thirst out there and we’re providing the Big Gulp.”

Word of mouth is key

The fundamental idea behind the ShowUp.com upgrade is that word of mouth is the most powerful tool to build audiences. There is no substitute according to Lehrman for audience development than creating authentic person-to-person buzz. ShowUp.com is full of energy—and buzz.

- An improved calendar enables visitors to find and search more easily the region’s thousands of event listings.
- The new site gives audiences a chance to enter their own comments and post reviews.
- The site generates a top 10 list of which current and upcoming performances and events audiences are most excited about.
- And a Video Center allows site visitors to “taste and feel” the arts and culture experiences through interviews, video clips and feature productions before they actually go.

“ShowUp.com is not just a vehicle for broadcasting information out but for fostering meaningful dialogue between all kinds of people,” Lehrman added. “People need to feel close to the arts and culture community and the new site helps them get even closer. This is technology powering a high-touch capacity, getting people even closer to the arts and culture they enjoy and appreciate.”

Alliance for Audience has been able to forge strong partnerships with the local media such as Google, Cox Communications, AZ Weekly, Channel 8 and Channel 3. The local media outlets have embraced the services of ShowUp.com and provide information to their own audiences. The collaborations have had a big payoff for the arts and culture partners. “If 150 arts and culture organizations went individually to each of these media outlets and asked for coverage, there would be 150 rejections from each one,” Lehrman said, “but ShowUp.com asks just once on behalf of all 150.”

Idea for collaboration

The arts and culture community started talking about collaborative ticketing and marketing as part of overall audience development earlier this decade. A series of dialogues about the challenges of ticketing became a Ticketing Tactics Task Force. The group recognized a greater need for an online presence with a mission of growing audiences for the whole arts and culture sector.

In the summer of 2003, the task force presented a business plan to Piper Trust. The Trust funded the Alliance for Audience initiative and its principal product—ShowUp.com.

And ShowUp.com will continue to meet the needs of its growing audience of users—7,500 per day right now.

Lehrman concluded, “We’re going to keep seeing new technologies that allow users to find information that’s impactful and meaningful to them, and help them not only find information they’re looking for, but to help them find other people that have the same interests and connect with them.”

Additional Questions and Answers with Matt Lehrman:

Piper Bulletin: ***How do you update your information on ShowUp.com?***

Lehrman: Arts and culture organizations can submit information directly. We also contract with a firm whose job is to make sure the calendar is current and accurate at all times. We search for a great deal of information ourselves because we are accountable to the public. Someone coming to the site deserves to find up to date and accurate information.

Piper Bulletin: ***How did you decide what new features to include in the new site?***

Lehrman: Over the years, we've gotten feedback from audiences and site visitors and tabulated what we've heard and kept close track all along. We've worked with Artsopolis, from whom we license this technology, to incremental changes previously; but this was the right time to do a massive overhaul, which has taken a year in planning and production.

Piper Bulletin: ***What is the future of technology and the arts?***

Lehrman: Arts organizations themselves are going to become more sophisticated in their ability to communicate who they are, what they're all about and what they offer. It'll be in text, photos, video and technologies that we can't even imagine right now—new ways organizations and audiences can connect with each other. The whole power of the Internet is to put power in the hands of the user—rather than the pushers of information. We'll keep seeing new pull technologies that put Internet users in the driver's seat.

About Alliance for Audience

Alliance for Audience is a nonprofit arts marketing service organization incorporated in September 2003 to serve as a “convention & visitors bureau for the arts” with a mission to engage new audiences while dramatically raising awareness of the breadth of the region's arts and cultural offerings. Today, Alliance for Audience is a national pioneer in arts and cultural marketing, powered by a regional collaboration comprised of more than 150 participating arts organizations and cultural destinations.