



Online branding

An effective way to promote your race team and sponsors

As racers, it is our responsibility to do all that we can to entertain the fans in attendance at each event. Without their passion and commitment to our sport, we would not be able to pursue our own aspirations from behind the wheel. It is the loyalty demonstrated by a large base of dedicated supporters that attract sponsors to our sport. A website is a simple communication channel that all teams can benefit from by allowing them to reach out to race fans and potential sponsors.

The racing community requires the support of the local media to keep racing fans informed, provide additional exposure to our sponsors, and to showcase the personalities of each competitor. Although racing is the fastest growing spectator sport in North America, local grassroots racing has not enjoyed the same media spotlight that shines brightly on the professional ranks.

Despite the best efforts of speedway Promoters, niche radio programs and racing publications to showcase local talent and the drama, action and excitement of weekly racing, the Motorsport community still requires traditional media to educate potential fans. Although the case for local coverage is clear, you will rarely find your neighbourhood reporter at the track looking for stories each week. As a result, the onus is left to the race teams to raise their own profile and to educate the public about local grassroots racing. But how do we do it?

The demand of fielding a competitive team leaves little time to work the phones to convince the media to start covering your races. But there is a simple, cost effective way to begin increasing each team's profile, as well as the awareness about sponsors, tracks and fellow competitors.

The information highway should represent more to teams than a source for directions to the track. But, before hiring the student next door to create an online presence, extensive planning must be done to ensure that it is effective.

The first step toward creating an effective website is to begin thinking of your team as a brand. Creating a brand is more than picking out some colours for your race car and selecting a fancy font for the driver's name. Each team can be defined by the image that it projects, both on and off the track. Every effort should be made to ensure that the team's image matches the brand that they wish to represent.

Each team must live their brand and developing it as a single, marketable entity will help to strengthen relationships with sponsors and race fans.

Raising each team's profile will also become much easier once an identity to promote has been firmly established.

The next step is to educate the audience about the team's brand and a website is an effective tool for achieving this goal. But, what makes an effective website?

A website should be an extension of the identity that each team has built on the race track and must be dynamic and interesting to all audiences. Even with frequent updates, if the site is not presented in a professional manner with simple, easy-to-use navigation, visitors won't read what has been posted or return to the site. There is a delicate balance between the information that visitors crave and having too many words and not enough pictures. Remember when choosing what to post, the intent should be to extend the excitement from the track directly to the screen.

The information highway should represent more to teams than a source for directions to the track.

Browsing the Internet will help to identify common characteristics across the best sites, as well as strategies that should be avoided. Infrequent updates have the potential to decrease the credibility of the team as an organized, professional entity. Posting the current points standings should be avoided, as this often creates a dependency on the speedway or series where the team competes. Although a message board will make the site more interactive for race fans, the extra traffic that it generates may not be worth giving up control over what gets posted. Using



the site to blindly plea for new sponsors will never be effective and is sure to irritate existing partners.

First and foremost, sponsors and fans wish to learn about the progress of their favourite team. News, race results and a schedule of appearances are essential. Profiling team members will help race fans to develop strong ties as they become more familiar with them. It also provides the opportunity for each team to recognize the dedication and support that each member has contributed to the success of the team.

A media-rich site that includes photos or video will help to reinforce the team's identity and if updated frequently, will drive traffic back to the site. Special attention must be paid to ensure that each sponsor is featured positively in a prominent location on the website. Visibility on their team's website can become a powerful advertising tool, appealing to the race fans who routinely demonstrate loyalty to those companies that support the Motorsport community. Linking to other sites is a form of networking and is an effective means for increasing the number of visits. The team's contact information must also be included to ensure that it remains accessible to race fans, current and potential sponsors.

Although the lack of support from the local media is disappointing, race teams are not powerless in their attempts to educate the public about their team and the excitement of grassroots racing. Developing a website is an effective way to communicate the brand that each team has worked hard to develop. ♦