

## **One day conference to launch Open Studios Network**

at Warwick Arts Centre, Warwick University, Coventry

Thursday 10 April 2008, 9.30 to 5pm

### **Internet Use by OS events.**

#### **Bill Crumbleholme's Notes.**

These notes are issued by speaker, Bill Crumbleholme, after the conference for reference by delegates and others. Additional notes have been added to include feedback received on the day and to provide URLs of some of the sites mentioned. Bill is happy to receive more feedback and suggestions, so he can build on this list.

### **Introduction to SWOS [www.southwestopenstudios.org](http://www.southwestopenstudios.org)**

I am the current chair of South West Open Studios which was set up with ACE SW help to serve the needs of organisers in the SW region of England. We offer support and encouragement mainly through our website and e-bulletins. We promote and advocate OS and AT events. We are about to apply for more funding from ACE and hope to develop our mutual self-help by offering "toolkits" and audits of events. We are also hoping to start a regional survey of feedback from participants and visitors, following on from the work done with DAW – which indicated a massive impact on the local economy – over £2m additional spend.

### **Dorset Art Weeks – Economic Impact Reports**

These reports can be found at these links :

2004 report – on Dorset County Council website :-

<http://www.dorsetforyou.com/index.jsp?articleid=368789>

2006 report – On Dorset Visual Arts website :-

<http://www.dorsetvisualarts.org/index.php/dva/news/109.html>

Those reports give the format of the questions asked – which have been replicated in part by some the other events in the SW of England.

### **Use of Websites by OS Events**

So today I would like to discuss the use of the internet with you. It would be helpful to share your opinions and I hope later you will come and talk to me on an individual basis and give me your comments.

I will mainly be offering ideas that I have picked up from SWOS members and a recent SWOS training session and also during my research for other projects. I hope to minimise technical jargon. I apologise if the comments are bit disjointed – but that is the nature of collective suggestions!

I will start by saying that the internet is constantly developing – often in strange ways – it is becoming an essential part of life for a growing majority of people in this country. This is maybe a bit sad and worrying, but we cannot deny that within a decade it will be even more important.

Our "new audiences" will have grown up using it and will expect us to use it – and provide good examples of it as well, after all we are creative people! The nature of what we as event organisers do with the internet will develop in line with that demand – or we will be left behind – with the other traditional methods of promoting art and craft.

Is there a danger the internet will be used by some as a form of entertainment, doing away with the need to actually visit the artists and buy their work? But if well thought out, it can be used to increase the desire for people to actually meet these artist folk and buy their work.

Please bare that in mind when planning the content and appearance of your websites. The days of the old printed Yellow Pages approach to websites are numbered – how exciting can you make browsing a telephone directory compared to a good magazine? Indeed they have reinvented themselves : look at what yell looks like online : [www.yell.com](http://www.yell.com)

When considering your own websites, put yourselves in the viewpoint of your potential visitors and clients, what do they want to see? What do they need to know? What will make them visit you?

Beware of information overload, by all means have searchable listings, but make the website sticky – interesting and useful and easy to navigate, with good images (including links to artists and a description in the Alt box which pops up when the mouse hovers over it)

Your website designer/programmer cannot provide that content for you – you must provide good text and images.

Now I want to ask you for some feedback - a show of hands to gauge your collective opinions on certain issues. Please raise your arm as a positive response and wave it about if very positive. Or I want you to shout out short answers. This will also get your blood flowing a bit better!

Your starter for Ten : Multiple choice !

How many of you run events that have a dedicated website just for your event? (about 80%)

How many use a website hosted by another organisation? (about 20%)

How many have no significant website. (none)

So it seems most/all events understand the need for a website.

How many of you are planning a major rethink of your internet use? (75%)

Perhaps after my half hour today you will think again!

Your first Bonus question :

Why do you have a site?

Promotion to the public of the whole event and of the individual artists participating. Reminder and reinforcer for existing clients. Information for new clients. Online forms to collect information from Artists.

The door to door salesman pitch was not "Do you want to buy anything", but "Which of these many goods appeals to you most?" They sold the goods by offering a good range, making it easy to understand the benefits and making it simple to see what the client was interested in, making a sensible selection and then closing the deal, by getting the client into the frame of mind to take action.

I guess E-Bay and internet shopping has taken over from the door to door salesmen, so we need to investigate how online purchasing works and use similar systems ourselves to flog our gear to people who are used to that way of operating.

Internet shopping now extends into lifestyle and holidays, a good website should provide enough encouragement to persuade browsers to visit the event, by setting out what is on offer and helping them to make choices and decide on action and then nearer the time reminding them to visit.

OS events are a great product. There is a great deal of interest and good will toward them, from established art lovers and new younger audiences who seek creative people and their work.

But, there are many other leisure activities people could choose instead of visiting an open studio event, and many other things people could spend their money on, so look at that competition and try and beat it! Highlight the delights of visiting OS events and owning or commissioning original artwork. Help to demystify the art world for newcomers. A good analogy is to expect an artist to cope with going into a bookmaker to place a bet – dealing with the odds and procedures.

We can use the internet to turn all those people with the good intention of visiting an event into people fired with enthusiasm and motivated to actually make the effort to visit our events.

I will be suggesting a variety of possible internet activities, you may not feel all of them apply to you yet, but please keep an open mind as organisers and perhaps find some of your artists willing to give them a go – encourage them and feature them on your main website, which will thus improve your content.

Take a look at and learn from some of the other iconic internet businesses and organisations, the BBC website [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk) is a respected world leader, HM Revenue and Customs [www.hmrc.gov.uk](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk) , Business Link [www.businesslink.gov.uk](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk) , Facebook [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) , YouTube [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) , E-Bay [www.ebay.com](http://www.ebay.com) , Skype [www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com) Google Maps <http://maps.google.com/> .... why and how do people use them?

Individual participants can easily use popular tools like YouTube and Facebook to post up information about themselves in a digestible fashion that new audiences can relate to, the event websites should feature these bits of added content. Venues that try that bit harder are likely to get better publicity and higher footfalls and develop new clients, rather than relying too heavily on existing traditional buyers – who are, after all, gradually dying off!

Not all artists are driven by the need to sell – get them to express themselves and provide educational content, create debate.

The cost of printing large numbers of full guides is probably the most expensive item in the event's budget? How many are used effectively, how many just sit at venues? How easy is it for someone from outside the area to get hold of one? So offer website alternatives - consider offering downloads of the individual pages or batches of pages and maps – either straight from the print design or compiled from the data stored on the website.

{One small event organiser reported they are considering only using downloads, with no printed version being distributed!}

Events which cover a wide area geographically should consider how people use modern technology to find their way about.

SatNav needs postcodes or map references, OS events are an opportunity for letting the lads play with their new toys, while the sensible art loving passengers get a tour round the venues.

Tools like Google Maps can be used to pinpoint venues on printable maps. A good website could provide a set of maps with overlays showing different types of venue – coded to sort by artform – today let's see just the Potters, tomorrow just the stone carvers!

How about providing suggested routes? Google Maps has a feature where you can set up a variety of maps and routes and annotate them with text, images and even videos, you save this and can put the URL as a link from your own website, or embed it in an invitation email. Take a look at the Google Maps site and watch the how to use it video.

<http://maps.google.com/help/maps/mymaps/add.html>

How about providing Podcasts from event websites – a simple interview with organisers and participants or a complete guided tour – like those in Museums, you could even do foreign language versions.

Feature good images as graphic content, change them – automatically from a selected list – link them to artists pages, give space for artists to make statements about the work – a hook for further browsing.

How about live video streaming, which I aim to set up for our demonstration sessions during the next DAW.

Blogs are used by many artists as a way of expressing themselves in a positive sociable way, links to blogs are a powerful added value.

Maybe artists could use a Wikipedia format section of a site to provide some "background reading" for visitors – a user friendly area where they can gain a better insight into the art world and what motivates people. Content could include peer reviews, celebrity interviews.

RSS feeds offer news and updates from sites, requested by interested browsers, these need to be pushed much more and explained to the public (and the event organisers and artists!)

### **Use of Internet for Management and communication.**

Now I want to mention what the internet can do for event organisers in terms of helping them cope with the management and co-ordination of events.

Improve communication between organisers and participants and their fans and the media :

How many of you have a dedicated website area for artists, with password access? Dealing with text for printed guides etc - How many of you have to input text from written forms?

That is a task you can speed up by using digital forms – simple emails or Word documents.

Please do not use pdf files – they look pretty but people cannot type into them and save them, so you will have to type out hand-written replies.

How many of your websites can gather information through online forms – text and images - inputted by artists (10%)?  
for both website and printed materials.

Do you use your website to provide proofs for artists to check before printed materials are produced?

Now a quick plug for Yahoo Groups – a very neat solution to helping people communicate and exchange information.

<http://groups.yahoo.com/>

They are free and easy to set up, members have to be invited and then set up their own Yahoo users access, which may take them some effort, but once in the will find a very useful and easy way to store documents and image files and the calendar feature is particularly useful. The groups can be closed, so that only people invited and granted access can use them, that prevents unwanted messages and ensures some privacy. Emails are sent out through the system alerting members to new information - they have links direct back to the item involved.

How do your management team communicate and swap documents? Your website could provide that hidden feature, but perhaps you just need to set up a Yahoo Group for yourselves as co-ordinators? Documents can be uploaded and always kept up to date for everyone to use and view. Use the calendar to plan and set deadlines for the tasks team members have to carry out.

Help your artists to keep in touch with each other, networking is so important, starting with pre-event negotiations about shared venues and taster events. Set up a Yahoo Group for the artists to use as a networking tool. The event calendar feature is great for reminding people about meetings and deadlines.

This could help facilitate opportunities, such as exchange visits between artists from different events/regions/countries – either fact finding tours or actual guest appearances.

Google provide a similar tool

<http://groups.google.com/>

Do you send out email bulletins to alert participants to news and opportunities? Keep them in the loop, remind them about deadlines, confirm details of proofing, delivery of printed materials.

Do you issue email acknowledgements and receipts for forms and payments received?

### **Communicating with the public.**

How many of you use E-mail lists compiled for contacting interested people, who have asked to be sent details? Do you send out emails to those fans? Are they smart and presentable, or are they filtered as spam?

Have you got dedicated email addresses for event organisers?

Do you use forms on your websites, rather than mailto links which provide rich pickings for robots looking for email addresses to sell for spammers to use.

Do you encourage your artists to use emails to contact their clients? Do you provide them with event logos and advice about how to use them?

Viral emailing can be effective, if managed and targeted and personalised – a modern worth of mouth recommendation.

Individual emails sent out to remind fans and ambassadors that the event is coming up are very effective, especially if they are asked to pass the message on to their friends.

Do you give information for media people to browse, follow up and use in the press. If a media person is given a webpage to look at for press releases and images they are more likely to follow up the story. Make sure you have a procedure to quickly deal with providing high resolution images that can be emailed in response to enquiries – make sure they have the details of the artists and copyright etc attached. Encourage your participants to provide their own press releases that can be accessed from the press pages.

Does anyone use SMS text messaging yet?

How many of you use your websites to actively promote participants outside the period of your event?

Is that worth doing, in terms of providing a directory for clients to use when wanting to find an artist or place a commission.

Finally how many of you attempt to raise revenue by the selling of banner space to sponsors or advertisers?

It may be easier as websites become seen as better ways of reaching target audiences than traditional magazines.

A quick little earner may be referral fees from links to sites such as Amazon <https://affiliate-program.amazon.co.uk>

– where Amazon pay a small percentage of any sales made after a browser is sent to their site by a link from your site.

Affiliate schemes work on the same basis for a wider range of businesses.

[www.webaffiliate.co.uk](http://www.webaffiliate.co.uk)

Thanks for listening and I look forward to your comments and observations – please come and talk to me when you can or send me an email.

Bill Crumbleholme

[chair@southwestopenstudios.org](mailto:chair@southwestopenstudios.org)