

10 *Getting the Word Out and Maintaining the Site*

importance of getting the word out

It is always a good idea to use supplemental materials to advertise any online resource. This is especially relevant when reaching out to a community with lower rates of Internet access, as it is less likely that users will come across the website while browsing the Internet.

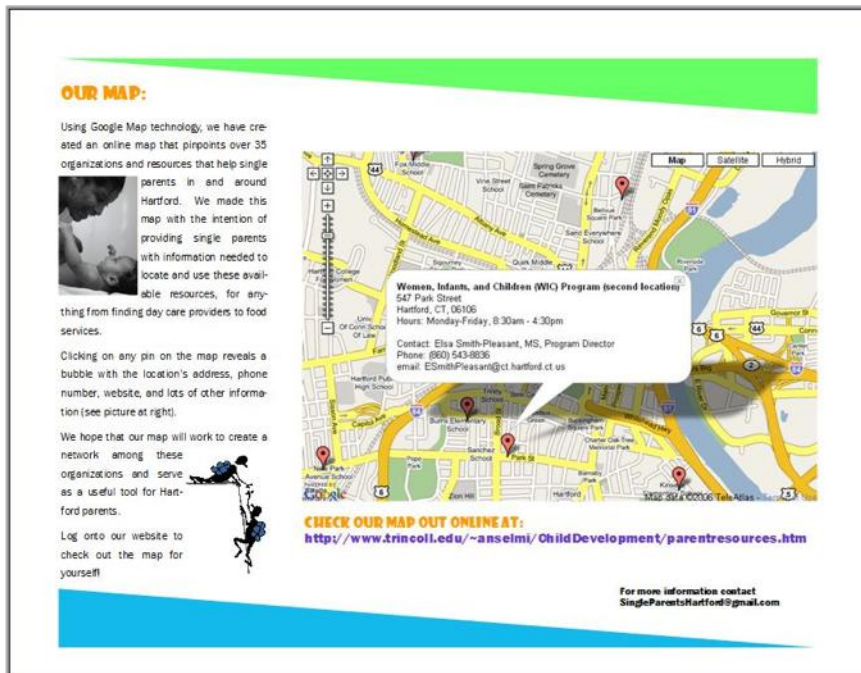
What form can such supplemental materials take? There are three primary options that serve the purpose of spreading the word about a new and useful resource.

PRINT MATERIALS Pamphlets, fliers, and other such print materials are great options for advertising a website because they allow the creators to select important information about the site and incorporate it onto a paper resource, which is a friendly and familiar form of advertisement for any member of a community. By delineating the contents of an electronic resource on paper, the site's existence is more likely to be learned about by members of a community who less frequently use computers, as well as those who do. Many individuals who are less well versed in technology experience a fair amount of anxiety upon encountering a map mashup for the first time, and a print handout can also help alleviate some of this apprehension. In short, a paper handout is a very inclusive and encouraging form of advertisement.

A print handout should include the following information:

- the website's name and URL, equally prominently displayed
- a friendly and brief but conclusive description of the site
- a picture of the map mashup (this provides an idea of what viewers should expect when they visit the site and makes the virtual map more relatable to a traditional, paper map)
- options for places to access the website (such as internet cafes, public libraries, community centers, etc.), particularly in areas where Internet access is less common

- ✓ information on how to contact the people behind the site
- ✓ if applicable, the handout should be printed in multiple languages



Tri-Fold Pamphlet Used for the Single Parents in Hartford Mashup

Shown here is the inside of the pamphlet distributed to local nonprofits to advertise the mashup of single parent resources in Hartford. The pamphlet includes a brief description, a screenshot of the map (with an example “bubble”), contact information, and the URL for the site itself. On the back panel of the pamphlet, the mashup makers also included a list of local places that offer free Internet access (Becker & Hughes, Single Parent Resources in Hartford, 2006).

It is, of course, important to provide your print advertisements in the right places so as to be noticed by members of the target audience. A few good locations for fliers and pamphlets are:

- ◆ organizations or events that serve members of the target audience
- ◆ internet cafes
- ◆ libraries
- ◆ any other high traffic areas that allow for the posting or distribution of fliers or pamphlets

WORD OF MOUTH By talking to the right people, knowledge of an online resource can be spread quickly. Pinpointing members of a community who are active, respected, and vocal can be a great way to advertise. These individuals obviously vary from one community to the next, and can often be located simply by asking around. Doing this can also gain powerful advocates and supporters of the site.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

Depending on the project's budget, it can be worthwhile to arrange for a public service announcement that publicizes the website. These may be in the form of a television advertisement, radio announcement, or newspaper ad. This form of advertisement should include the website's name and URL, a brief description, and information on the best way to learn more about the site (though this is oftentimes simply by visiting the site itself).



TV Personality Maury Povich Announces SmartChoices' Release

To advertise SmartChoices and encourage parents to become informed and make good decisions for their children, before the February 17th deadline, TV talk show host Maury Povich made a public service announcement that aired on Hartford's Fox 61 (ConnCAN, 2009).

necessary

website maintenance

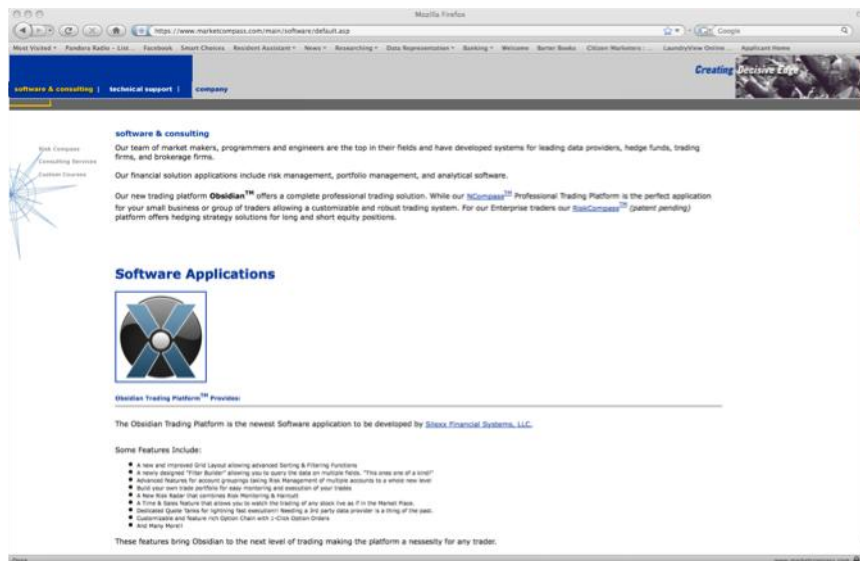
Once the website is up and running, it is critical to make efforts to keep it as up to date as possible. This is often especially true of mashup websites, which serve the purpose of providing users with relevant information. In the case of the “Problem Properties” map discussed in Chapter 2, outdated information could easily spark upset among individuals who are wrongly represented on the website as owning an abandoned property. The guidelines below will help you to ensure that your website is up to date in every sense:

UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF THE INFORMATION IT INCLUDES AND DETERMINE HOW FREQUENTLY IT NEEDS TO BE UPDATED In the case of the SmartChoices website, it is most important that the information be updated at least once a year, particularly at the conclusion of the academic year. Because of the high turnaround rate of schools and their students in Hartford, with many new schools opening, others closing, and several undergoing managerial and name changes, the information on the SmartChoices website will change dramatically year to year. Additionally, because test score and racial balance data are two key features of the SmartChoices site, and because this information has a large

impact on parents' school choice decisions, it is of the utmost importance that the data be accurate.

DESIGNATE A PERSON OR PERSONS TO BE IN CHARGE OF MAINTENANCE Diffusion of responsibility can quickly add to a website being outdated. By appointing who specifically will spearhead maintenance of the website, the processes of updating will not fall through the cracks.

MAINTAIN THE DESIGN OF THE WEBSITE A modern and attractive website created in 2001 may lose its appeal eight years down the road. Along with updating your information, it is important to update the presentation of your website.



MarketCompass.com, © 2001

This website, although hopefully updated information-wise, appears to have maintained its same design since 2001 (according to the copyright notice at the bottom of the page). Its features also indicate an outdated design: low quality, slow-loading graphics and long pages of text in an unflattering font. (Market Compass Inc., 2001)

DOUBLE-CHECK USABILITY ON NEW VERSIONS OF WEB BROWSERS As discussed in Chapter 8, it is important to make sure that your website functions properly when viewed on different browsers. Equally important is to check that your website continues to function on these multiple browsers when they update their service.