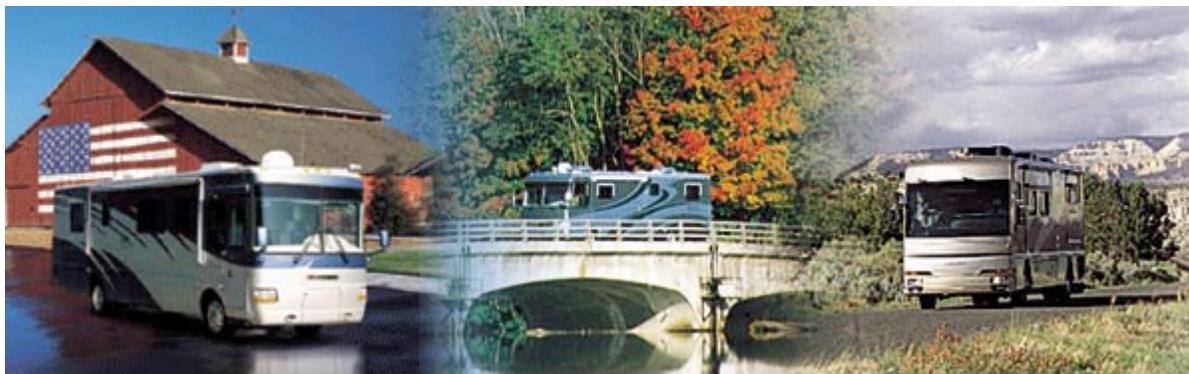


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Marketing News for RV Parks,  
Campgrounds & Services from  
the TRAILER LIFE DIRECTORY

# eHighway

## In This Issue:

April 2009

RVgeeks Peter and John return again to explain how to make your website more effective in enticing campers to come and visit your park. There's more on Go RVing's tie-in advertising program, and finally, a preview of RV advertising that will air on sports TV for the next several months.

## RV Park & Campground Websites 101

Have you ever wondered just how well your website does its job of attracting customers to stay with you? What do RVers look for when deciding where to visit and where to stay? What should you know about having a website? Do you even have one yet?!

As much as we all love the RVing lifestyle and our fellow camping enthusiasts, those of us "in the business" know that if a park isn't profitable, it won't be around for long. Doing something we love for a living doesn't mean that there aren't still bills to pay.

That's where marketing comes in. And there is no better bang for the advertising buck today than a well-designed website that not only looks great, but actually does its primary job well — bringing in customers.

There is no magic formula for designing a website. There is no one particular "right way" to do it. But we do recommend following a few basic guidelines, most of which adhere to the KISS Principle (if you aren't familiar with that one, you'll have to look it up). ;-)

## In This Issue:

[RV Park and Campground Websites 101](#)

[GoRVing Offers More Local Sales Tools](#)

[Go RVing Coalition Targets Sports Fans](#)

**Enjoy this month's installment of Trailer Life Directory's eHighway!**



So what exactly constitutes a great website? What design elements work and which ones don't? Without giving away too many of our "trade secrets" here, we'll try to give a general overview of what we (and our customers) have found to effectively increase their business.

First and foremost, things have to *work!* That may sound obvious, but you've probably seen your share of websites where the navigation doesn't go anywhere, or where clicking a thumbnail photo brings up another identical tiny photo. There is no faster way to lose a customer than to have the functionality of your website fail. It reflects poorly on your entire operation when a potential customer's first interaction with you causes frustration.

Simple, well-designed navigation is a must. It can be horizontal, vertical, contain sub-navigation, or be highly styled, but it simply has to work, and it should stay put in one place. If your navigation is intuitive and clear, visitors to your site will quickly see how it works, and be more inclined to use it to learn more about your park. Clear, logical and functional navigation & design provide a rewarding user experience that reflects well on you and your business.

Since we've all become used to instant gratification on our computers, it's more important than ever to create a great first impression. With millions of websites out there, visitors won't spend much time exploring yours if it doesn't "hook" them right away. One of the reasons we use so many bold images on our sites is that people are more influenced by what they see than what they read. We live by our motto - "a picture is worth a thousand words." Make that home page really "pop" to catch potential customers' attention and make them *want* to visit you.

Besides the gorgeous photos of the lake or the mountains, what about the more mundane things... like the bathrooms? Our rule of thumb is to showcase the finest attributes of a park. If you've got a couple of those "9.5\*-rated" restrooms that show well in photos, show them off! If not, no problem... just use your photo space for something else.

What about getting people to find you in the first place? "Search Engine Optimization" (or SEO for short) has become a cottage industry all to itself. SEO is not the mysterious black art that many make it out to be. Nobody can magically make a website come up #1 on searches. The truth is that the single best way to achieve high search rankings is by creating thorough content that honestly expresses who you are and what you do, and not through some secret trickery.

"Thorough" includes a lot of things you can't even see when you look at a website, such as alternate tags, meta-tags (also called keywords), and well-chosen titles for images and graphics. We also arrange to have other related websites linked (or "pointed") to yours, as another factor in high search rankings. We have terrific results getting even the smallest campground to come up high on searches.

Even though you want to be thorough in creating content, you need to keep in mind that there is only so much a viewer will read. Endless pages and overwhelming amounts of text will leave potential customers without a clear idea of your core message. We recommend you keep things concise, use bullet lists for clarity and emphasis, and get your most important points across first.

What about hit counters? We're not really fans, since they don't tell you what you need to know about your site visitors, and there's no reason to publicly announce what your business is doing. More effective is a behind-the-scenes analysis of your monthly site statistics, including what country, state and city your visitors came from, which web pages they viewed, how long they stayed on your site, and (maybe most important) exactly how they found you, and much, much more. Call it a kind of "super-duper hit counter on steroids." Our customers love it, and we offer it as an option on every website we design.

After your customers find you online, make sure that they can actually find your park for real. How many RV park websites have you seen that have such poor maps and/or directions that you can't tell exactly where they are? Zoom-able maps with accurate interactive directions are so important that there is no excuse for campers being unable to find you with ease.

Let's not forget to think about customers' real motivation for visiting your area in the first place. As much pride as you take in your park, the most likely draw isn't the campground, but the area attractions. It's important to include a well-researched list of things to do in the area. Without that, RVers won't have much reason to stay for more than a night or two, if they even come at all. Including area information also helps with those all-important Google searches for people looking for camping near a major attraction.

Another great use of your website is to help manage your time. If you spend the day trying to juggle the phone while greeting customers at the front desk, include a reservation form on your site. Now you've shifted a percentage of your phone traffic onto your computer, where you can handle it on your own schedule – during a lull at the front desk, or later in the evening when everything has quieted down for the night. Customers at the counter shouldn't have to compete with customers on the phone for your time.

Rules and regulations are one item that we generally recommend leaving for check-in day. We view a website as pure marketing, and positive, sales-oriented messaging is what it's all about. Everyone knows they have to pick up after their dog, but putting that rule in your primary ad (your website) will do nothing to attract new customers. We suggest handing campers the park rules in person when they arrive.

Even though your customers need to be able to contact you through your website, don't allow your e-mail address to become a source of spam. Posting your address leaves it open to "bots" (short for "robots") to find it, and then fill your in-box with junk mail. A well-designed contact form prevents bots from doing their dirty work, while still allowing your customers to reach you.

Lastly, just how flashy should an RV park website be? While we sometimes incorporate small, tasteful moving images or some Flash animation, we generally recommend clean, functional designs that clearly convey your message. The last thing we want to do is annoy a viewer with distracting animation or sounds. Flashy sites have their place, but often demonstrate your *web designer's* abilities while distracting from *your* abilities. A website should never overshadow the product or business being promoted.

A well-designed website will help build your business by creating a truly distinctive first impression. And we all know that you only get to make one of those.

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*Full-time RVers Peter & John design beautiful and effective custom websites for RV parks and campgrounds. Learn more at [www.rvgeeks.net](http://www.rvgeeks.net)*