

City Internet marketing company a Web hit

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STAMFORD — If a Web site showcasing retro pin-up photography draws its share of Internet traffic, would popularity boom if the site was made more interactive?

An entertaining — and addictive — photo-hunt game that earned photographer Winky Tiki a 1,600-percent increase in Web hits and a mention in Maxim and FHM magazines proved the answer is yes.

Andrew DiFiore, Jr. president and creative director of Stamford-based online marketing and design firm answerYes Interactive, was responsible for this, and other, Web sensations.

His Lund Avenue business employs not only tried-and-true methods of marketing, but utilizes Internet technology to reach clients' target demographics through more cutting-edge viral marketing.

"Viral marketing is a form of word of mouth marketing, so you could say it's been going on forever," DiFiore said, adding that the term was born in the mid-90s, when e-mail company Hotmail began giving a way free web addresses. "The idea is, if you can get people to talk about it will spread like a virus."

Through the use of popular online networking sites like Facebook and MySpace and user-generated content pages like CollegeHumor and YouTube, "edgy or unusual" Web-based content can spread like wildfire, DiFiore said.

The biggest goal, and perhaps the biggest challenge, of viral marketing is creating "viral advocacy," encouraging Web user participation and feedback.

"You're dealing with the customer directly, this is the beauty and power of the Internet," he said.

Viral marketers strive to reach the "alphas," those who will view the product and pass it on to others.

"Before we even write a stitch of code we think about how to reach that target audience," DiFiore said.

answerYes Interactive, a more than two-year-old company, specializes not only in viral and other marketing techniques, but also in all elements of Web design.

DiFiore himself has a background in computer science and multimedia design. He worked 15 years with Prodigy, a dial-up service that was a precursor to the Internet. His background in the technical aspects of Web programming later allowed him to exercise his creativity through Internet marketing.

He was then able to hone his skills while working for information company Thomson Corporation.

"It was a natural evolution for the business — I always took a marketing approach to our Web site because I understand technology and practicality of design but I understand the ideas of marketing it," he said.

His commitment to "niche marketing" he said, allows for good conversion — a significant return on the client's investment.

"This is all about creating a brand experience, but you are also creating a relationship with [the customer]," he said.

DiFiore also lectures and helps clients create a "road map" to reach its base. He handles Web design and development and helps build collateral.

Stacey Tucker, owner of Weston-based StaceyLu Confections, enlisted answerYes Interactive to revamp the Web site for her custom cookie business.

Over a four-month period, DiFiore redesigned the site, helped develop the logo, and made her business ecommerce-ready, Tucker said.

The bright colors and Web illustrations "captured the feel" of her business more so than the original page design, she said.

answerYes Interactive also worked with Rev. Ann Emerson, an interfaith minister who serves as director of spiritual outreach program The Harmony Project.

The project, which is one facet of the Sanctuary of Sophia in Monroe, got a boost from its DiFiore-led redesign, which softened images and made more feminine a site that aims to represent the re-awakening of the divine female, Emerson said.

The 100-page Web site, which Emerson said spans 800 pages when printed, will soon be launched in ebooks. DiFiore will create the ebooks and market them virally — asking users to fill out a poll after which they'll be given a free ebook URL to pass on to three friends.

Emerson said she sought out DiFiore after hearing rave reviews from friends — whose businesses ranged from belly dancing to architecture — who had worked with answerYes Interactive.

His work on The Harmony Project gained him a new fan, Emerson said.

"He just did a profound job — the Web site, the material had been up for four years, it was kind of old-fashioned and he really brought it up to speed," she said. "Computer people often are not good at creative things, but he has both."