

## Consumer Generated Web Content: How to Take a Proactive Role

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The internet has many components, although most of us are only familiar with the World Wide Web (the part we see in our browsers) and e-mail. With the World Wide Web (Web 1.0), you build a website within which you present content that is totally under your control. This is relatively easy, and Web 1.0 will continue to play an important role well into the future. Just when you thought that parenting that baby was challenging and demanding enough of your resources, along comes Web 2.0 – sort of like a second child who has a mind of its own and is a bit less willing to follow the rules.

Life has suddenly become a bit more complex. Web 2.0 takes you out of the driver's seat, giving users the ability to be far more than simply passengers going along for the ride. Under Web 2.0, users are not only able – but encouraged – to generate content through blogs, review sites, bookmarking, commenting, tagging, networking, collaborating, and file sharing in what has become a far more interactive online environment. This means that, although you maintain your campground's official Web presence, you no longer provide the only definitive source of online information regarding that business. People who absolutely love your campground, people who absolutely despise your campground (and may be determined to put you out of business), and everyone in between can post reviews, photos, and personal commentaries regarding your campground on a variety of websites and blogs that might very well show up on the first page of search results for the name of your campground. Yes, that is a scary thought, but don't panic. You can take a proactive role to make this new consumer generated Web content work in your favor.

The first thing that you need to do is to know what is going on around you. As a start, do an intensive search on Google and the


other major search engines for the name of your campground, not stopping at the first few pages of results. Find out what is being said about your business and by whom. To stay on top of such postings, set up a Google Alert for the name of your business by going to [www.google.com/alerts](http://www.google.com/alerts), allowing you to be instantly notified anytime there is any new reference to your business posted on another website or blog. At minimum, you need to know what other people are reading about you. (Just as importantly, you can also monitor references to any of your competitors.) Go to [www.google.com/alert](http://www.google.com/alert) to get started.

For campgrounds, the most important of the "third party" websites are undoubtedly the myriad of campground review sites. You should know who they are and be aware of the damage they can inflict, so don't sit back and wait for the inevitable unfavorable review to materialize. Encourage the people who really like your campground to post favorable reviews, either by handing them sheets with the addresses of some of the review sites at the time of check-out (when they are commenting about how much they enjoyed their camping experience) or by sending them a "thank you for staying with us" e-mail with direct links to one or two review sites. With several positive reviews posted, any negative review will be greatly diminished in its ability to influence opinions.

You should also strongly consider using various Web 2.0 components to send additional traffic to your official website. For starters, create a blog. Share your expertise on camping, the local area, or any other topic that might interest both readers and yourself. You can get basic blogging software for free. Examples are Wordpress ([www.wordpress.com](http://www.wordpress.com)) and Google Blogger ([www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com)). A blog is an excellent tool to drive new traffic to your site. Next, set up a social networking site for yourself at MySpace, Facebook, LinkedIn,

Squidoo or similar sites. I particularly like the more business-oriented LinkedIn, loaded with networking potential. Your profile, of course, should include a link to your website (and your blog). Get started by going to [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com). Want to do more? Become an answer person at Yahoo! Answers, again sharing your expertise on camping or other topics where you are knowledgeable. Sign everything with a link to – you guessed it – your website and blog. Go to [www.answers.yahoo.com](http://www.answers.yahoo.com).

Finally, be aware of wikis – websites that allow anyone to contribute or modify content on a variety of subjects. Although your campground is unlikely to be listed in Wikipedia, unless it is amazingly unique on an international level, you should be aware of content (and capitalize upon it) that relates to your business that might very well appear on other wiki sites. One of these sites is AboutUs. Go to [www.aboutus.org](http://www.aboutus.org), enter your Web address (without the "www" prefix) in the search box, and click the "Find" button. You will probably be surprised to find a screen shot of your website's home page appear, along with a title and description that have been harvested from the META tags on your site. If not, the basic content will be spidered while you wait. Afterward, you will be able to edit and add to the listed content.

Keep in mind that all of this new content, including pages with negative reviews, that reference either your business name or Web address will serve two vital purposes. It will send valuable traffic to your site, and, as inbound links, will enhance your site's search engine positioning. All in all, do not look upon the many components of Web 2.0 (only some of which we have touched upon here) with trepidation, but as new opportunities to grow your business. 

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