

Code of Points for Gymnastics Marketing

By Michael A. Taylor

In the "Gymnastics Marketing Code of Points," value part of "A" would be given to black and white descriptive brochures and business card institutional ads placed inside church newsletters. A "B" value includes professionally-produced color brochures and newspaper advertising. Regularly appearing advertising in special interest magazines, strategically placed TV ads, and Yellow Pages box ads warrant a "C" value. The highest value, "E," of course, is awarded to positive word-of-mouth from happy customers! This article will focus on internet web sites, which generally receive a "C" value--but a "D" value is possible with a quality designed site.

USA Gymnastics went "online" in February 1996 and by now many of you have probably accessed the web site at <http://www.usa-gymnastics.org>. If you were one of these people, perhaps you were looking up a professional or athlete membership number. Maybe you checked the results of a recent competition or the Safety Certification Course schedule for a class in your area. For whatever reason you went to USA Gymnastics Online, you experienced how valuable a web site can be. Checking the web site probably gave you the information you were looking for and saved you the time of making a telephone call. You may have even sent an immediate email message to the USA Gymnastics staff rather than sending a letter. You were probably impressed with the incredible number of features available and explored some of the various highlights of the site.

Many gym owners, directors, and gymnastics entrepreneurs have recognized the value and cost-effectiveness of a web site. Web sites give legitimacy to their businesses, are accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year and can contain more information than any television or print advertisement. Web sites can be dynamic, with the ability to change content almost immediately. (Good luck trying to change your Yellow Page ad after it has been published.) To achieve "full value" for your web site, with no deductions for execution errors, is a skill indeed.

First of all, answer for yourself the WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE and WHY for your web site.

WHO will you be targeting with your pages? You probably want to attract new customers, current customers you wish to keep informed, parents and children.

WHAT do you want to say to those individuals visiting your site? You probably want to tell them how to find you, what you have and what you've done.

WHAT type of site do you want to create? Your choices are a couple of pages of simple information or a comprehensive site (USA Gymnastics has more than 8,000 pages) complete with user interactivity and response forms.

WHEN do you plan to maintain your site? On a regular basis or only occasionally?

WHERE will you host your site--on one of the "free" sites (cheap but limited in options and cluttered with third-party advertising), as a virtual domain on someone else's server (i.e. www.gym.net/yourgym) or as your own domain (i.e. www.yourgym.com). Another

important WHERE to answer is WHERE will you promote your site? Creating a web site is only the beginning. You must also include your web address in all correspondence and advertising and register with all available search engines and web directories. Try to link/return link with other gymnastics sites and do everything possible to announce your web address.

Finally, WHY you create a web site is important as well. Rarely are web sites, in and of themselves, revenue-producing. If you have realistic expectations for your internet presence you will be much happier. WHY you should design a web site is to stay current and remain competitive.

I believe that we are on the verge of another communication revolution in our society and that, just as every business now has a telephone, every business will, within the next five years, have an internet web site. Hopefully after reading this you will go back to the USA Gymnastics Online site and read more about creating a web presence for your gym (<http://www.usa-gymnastics.org/mogo>) or check out some of the many resources available. We have evolved from two-piece switch phones to rotary dial phones (remember party lines?) to touch tones, faxes and cell phones. In the very near future we will all communicate via the internet. If your competitor is working on their "D" marketing skills, you need to as well. It's almost an event requirement with an up to .20 deduction for failure to include the internet in your marketing routine.

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