

Site Tools to Make Your Site Interesting

By Aaron Turpen

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Once you have a website built and you begin to market it, you start to wonder if you should expand that website to make it more interesting for your users. Many websites use simple tools and techniques to expand the interactivity of their users' experience. If used correctly, these additions can be a great boost to traffic and return visitors.

Free Tools Galore

For a huge menagerie of free (and cheap) webmaster tools to do simple things like polls, hit counters, and more to your website, Hits For Me is a great place to start. Don't have CGI access? They host most of these scripts too! This is the best way to get started on your road to site interactivity:

<http://www.qksrv.net/click-1357406-342333>

Bulletin Board/Message Board Systems

Have you ever been to About.com, Yahoo!, or another message system and wondered if you could put one of those on your website? If you have enough traffic to support one, a bulletin board (message board) system is a great addition to any site. Although fairly time-consuming to set up on a site, they can be well worth it once visitors begin talking and coming back regularly to keep talking! They are a lot of fun and a great resource for return visitors. I recommend vBulletin as the system of choice because it is scalable, robust, and easily fits into a current website's design:

<http://www.qksrv.net/click-1357406-1163318>

Branded Screensavers

Screensavers, while not really a website tool, are a great way to "brand" your business, website address, etc. and can be given away for free from your website. This allows users to install it on their system and see your business every time their screensaver kicks in. A great place to make your own screensaver at a very decent price is See You Again Screensaver:

<http://www.qksrv.net/click-1357406-5643780>

Interactive Photo Albums

For many, interactive photo albums are a big draw for their site. If you have a community of users, an interactive gallery is a great amount of fun. Large galleries of photos are also hard to manage. For tools to manage these types of problems, I usually use and recommend PhotoPost:

<http://www.qksrv.net/click-983614-6308411>

Animated Graphics

Do you have a fun or children-oriented website? Animated graphics are a great way to add a splash to those sites! Warning: too many of these or inappropriate use of them can make a good site ugly. That said, they are a lot of fun! There are a lot of free animated graphics to be found online. One of my favorite places to start is the Animation Factory:

<http://www.qksrv.net/click-1357406-10283154>

Site Search

Do you have a lot of information on your website and want to add one of those search tools that searches only your website? There are a lot of free tools out there to do this, but most are ad-driven and post a lot of ads in front of your users. I recommend Fusion Bot as the best site search tool for regular websites and best of all, their basic search tool is FREE! Try them out:

<http://www.qksrv.net/click-1357406-5902056>

Links Management

A link exchange is a fun way to create visibility and link-recognition for your website (getting you higher ranks in search engines to boot). I rarely recommend a full reciprocal-link system as they tend to look ugly on websites and rarely garner quality links as they usually degenerate into free-for-all madhouses. It's always better to do them "by hand" and get better links to sites that are complimentary to your own. Setting up, checking, and managing those links is a lot of work, though, so I recommend Links Manager as a good tool to automate some of the more tedious aspects of it:

<http://www.qksrv.net/click-1357406-5439514>

Traffic Analysis

Read Craig's article below if you have access to your web logs. If you don't have access to them or you want more comprehensive, real-time statistics, you will need an online solution for analyzing your website's traffic. I recommend Index Tools for that:

<http://www.qksrv.net/click-1357406-5789026>

So start planning on your site's expansion today! Well-used and thought out interactivity is a great way to make a website fun for its users and, more importantly for you, more heavily visited!

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Aaron Turpen is the proprietor of Aaronz WebWorkz, a full-service company catering to the needs of small business online. Aaronz WebWorkz offers consultation, development, hosting, and much more to help your business succeed! www.AaronzWebWorkz.com

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