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Las Vegas' MySpace marketing might

BY BEN TINSLEY

An increasing number of local businesses and area aficionados are taking their enthusiasm and excitement about Sin City to the Internet.

Their self-appointed task is attracting tourists and promoting local industry on their respective MySpace pages. And they're doing it with great gusto.

The result is an interconnecting, massive, and quite lively community on the World Wide Web dedicated to helping the city thrive and grow.

Welcome to Virtual Las Vegas.

"Whether people are in the hospitality industry or are part of a typical business, they are getting more and more into things like MySpace to get their products and services out there," said Cara Roberts, Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce spokeswoman.

MySpace is primarily a social networking Web site, but it has hundreds of millions of subscribers who have access to an International network of profiles, blogs, photos, music and videos.

This Internet community is a public relations dream -- providing tremendous opportunities for marketing, promotion and networking, Roberts said.

And joining is free.

Las Vegas resident Joel Rosales runs the "Leaving Las Vegas" MySpace page, which circulates information and promotes the city's heritage. It gets as many as 300 hits a day.

He said MySpace is a tremendous resource for this virtual community of people who adore the 24-



COURTESY AARON AUXIER
Auxier with Mark Adams, who runs VegasTodayandTomorrow.com, at a local restaurant working on their MySpace pages.



COURTESY AARON AUXIER
Luxury condo consultant Aaron Auxier is interviewed in September by Jane Wells of the cable television business channel CNBC. Auxier runs the 'Vegas Condo Scene' site on MySpace.

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hour city.

"It's definitely going to grow here as a source for marketing and promotion," Rosales said. "It's a great way to network and connect and have everyone come together in a friendly rather than a competitive way."

Rob O'Keefe, who manages marketing for Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, said the online Vegas buzz is effective because it has developed on its own rather than being forced.

"There is a natural, organic development of positive chatter about Las Vegas, people comparing experiences, and it's very positive," O'Keefe said. "People are excited about Vegas, talking about it and sharing. This is a very good thing for us."

Richard Wilk, senior director of the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino, said he started his "Vegas Connection" MySpace page because it's a great way to network, reaches millions and is free.

"I'm not sure how many people visit my site but I have a lot of friends for not being a celebrity," Wilk said in an e-mail.

A MySpace representative could not be reached to comment, but city officials say MySpace and numerous other Web sites like it are changing the cultural landscape of tourist attraction in cities like Las Vegas.

While there are many Vegas sites that promote friendships and connections, quite a few local businesses are using MySpace purely for advertising, O'Keefe said. The LVCVA debated getting a site but decided against it because there are many people who use the site who are under 21 and the LVCVA didn't want to be perceived as marketing to them, O'Keefe, said.

"The LVCVA doesn't necessarily have to be on there, but it's something that we can keep an eye on," O'Keefe said.

Aaron Auxier, 34, likes to use MySpace as a bully pulpit to correct mistaken news reports. He describes his job as a celebrity high-rise consultant with the Luxury Realty Group.

Auxier, who runs the "Vegas Condo Scene" MySpace site, often sends out letters to area media urging them to join him in his efforts to help the public better understand the Strip. Auxier said he gets 100 friend applications on his MySpace page each week.

"The key to the whole thing is original content," Auxier said. "It's a full time job. If you're not constantly providing updated and new information, people aren't going to pay attention."

One site, simply dubbed "Las Vegas" is run by an individual who only identifies himself as "Mr. Vegas." It's credited with having 100 views a day.

"I started this page for the general information of the world," Mr. Vegas said in an e-mail. "There was no MySpace page at all that answered questions about the past, present and also some future things. I thought it would be fun to do a page here for people."

Some of the groups online exclusively promote nightlife. A representative of one group, dubbed the Las Vegas "Superheroes Of Nightlife," or "S.O.N.S." said their page started as an insider resource but evolved into a popular gauge for Sin City activities.

Career
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Patrick O'Brien, who runs the "Las Vegas Sign" site, said a lot of MySpace pages are trying to push products and commodities -- links to hotels, limo services, travel sites and the like. That's not what he wanted to do for Las Vegas.

O'Brien said he wanted a community-driven site, a map to show what city people are from, and photo albums of locals and tourists in front of the Las Vegas sign on the Strip.

"Locals and tourists alike put a smile on their face when they see the sign," he said.

The public definition of community has changed over the years, Roberts said. In the past, one's community generally consisted of friends, neighbors, and people from Church or school. Today -- especially for people who fall in the Generation X or Generation Y age bracket -- that concept of community has drastically changed, she said.

"Today your neighbors may well be the people you connect with online," Roberts said.

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