

# Dover Days relies on technology to get word out

## Historical festival uses Web, social networking to attract visitors

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DOVER — One of the nation's oldest annual historical celebrations is applying the advertising industry's newest technologies to ignite interest in a taste of Americana.

Dover Days, Delaware's longest running annual celebration and one of the oldest historical festivals in the country, has harnessed the Internet and adopted a fresh communications strategy for its 2010 festi-

val, scheduled April 30-May 2. In the process, event organizers are broadening its reach and appealing to new audiences in spite of tighter budget restraints.

To market its first Dover Days in 1933, festival organizers, then the Dover Garden Club, used poster board and word-of-mouth to promote the event. Seventy-seven years later, the same event and flavor are being conveyed through social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, an Internet Web site and search engine optimization.

"We've kept the flavor of Dover Days, but taken a completely fresh approach to the way we promote it," said Cindy Small,

executive director for the Kent County & Greater Dover, Delaware Convention and Visitors Bureau. "We wanted a more modern flair, while maintaining the allure of Dover Days' glorious historical past. Our ultimate goal is to double the number attending the event and increase overnight stays in the next few years."

To promote the 2010 Dover Days the bureau collaborated with Stevens & Tate Marketing/Endora Digital Solutions, a Lombard, Ill., based advertising firm, in the development, design and execution of an Internet marketing campaign to reach new

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audiences.

"Early on, it was determined that new media could effectively communicate this unique event, including all of its charm and history. First, we worked closely with the Convention & Visitors Bureau team to create a microsite with a more festive look, including a new logo for Dover Days. The site also includes event highlights, great photos from previous years, lodging packages, a schedule of events and information for vendors," said Dan Gartlan, president of Stevens & Tate. "For the first time in its history a Web site visitor gets the feeling of the event and not just the information."

The microsite is designed to be search engine friendly, or easily found online. To achieve this Endora Digital Solutions optimized the site by analyzing key search terms and phrases and then writing content that incorporates these words. "It's not just about being found by those looking for Dover Days, it's about being found by larger new audiences looking for spring festivals," Mr. Gartlan added. Ms. Small noted the new festival marketing will also help put the region on the map and attract more visitors to Delaware beyond the festival weekend. That in turn will generate more economic impact.

In addition, a Facebook fan page was launched. "An event with a strong following already will grow when the right media is used. As expected, the fan page attracted

hundreds of fans right out of the blocks," Mr. Gartlan said. "This is a social event that steps visitors back to colonial America, attracting audiences throughout Delaware and the Mid-Atlantic states."

The Dover Days Web site can be found at: [www.doverdaysfestival.com](http://www.doverdaysfestival.com) and on Facebook at: [www.facebook.com/pages/Dover-Days/366784888250](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Dover-Days/366784888250).

"Dover Days is all about First State traditions. We're proud of our heritage and make it the centerpiece of this annual event with Maypole dances, house tours, colonial artisans and period dress worn by men, women and children. With our new communications approach we capture these sentiments, convey these messages and make them accessible to a wider audience than ever before," Ms. Small said.

She added that this is being accomplished at a time when the Convention and Visitors Bureau's overall budget is smaller than it was two years ago. Faced with this reality, organizers sought a new communications campaign direction for maximum return on investment.

The strategy appears to be working. On April 7, after a favorable blog by writer Greg Coin was published by the Wilmington Examiner and posted on the Dover Days Web site, the response was immediate. "You guys must have a great social network going," Mr. Coin noted in an e-mail to the Dover Days organizers. "The article went to the top of the readership board for all 140 Wilmington Examiners in 17 minutes."