

## Regional Arts Victoria

[www.rav.net.au](http://www.rav.net.au)

November 2003

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### Interview with Peter Matthews on using the Internet to conduct e-business

#### 1. The business

Regional Arts Victoria is the peak regional arts organisation in Victoria and one of the State Government's twelve major cultural organisations. RAV was established as the Victorian Arts Council in 1969 and since that time has provided leadership in arts administration and a range of arts and cultural development programs for regional communities and artists. RAV works with all three levels of government and a wide range of arts organisations throughout Victoria and Australia to assist its arts programs in regional Victoria.

#### 2. The idea

From a provider of theatrical presentations for the general public and schools, RAV's role has expanded from service provider to innovator, facilitating numerous, community-based arts events and projects. In 2000 a basic website was launched that provided information about RAV, but the organisation needed to promote itself more effectively and there was an obvious demand throughout regional Victoria for integrated programs and widely-accessible information.

These demands could be met very effectively through a well-designed website, and planning was undertaken during 2002. The launch in 2003 of the eRAVe website achieved the objectives of the organisation to provide extensive information about its activities in a way that could be readily accessed by the large number of arts organisations throughout regional Victoria.

RAV took the opportunity offered by the development of a sophisticated website to completely overhaul its internal management and marketing procedures, which were restructured to align closely with the e-business functions of the site.

The site includes a membership section that allows organisations to register online and receive access to particular site functions and information. Individuals can subscribe to receive the online newsletter.

The website is promoted through all marketing materials and communications. It uses the membership base and is cross-promoted with sister arts organisations.

Maintenance of the site is the responsibility of the Marketing Manager, who reviews it each week and arranges for updated information to be put up on the site in-house. This takes about half a day per week. Major work is carried out by the web developer, under a 12 month maintenance agreement.

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### 3. The e-business

No e-commerce is conducted on the eRAVe website at this stage. However, a shopping trolley segment is planned for later this year. There are no plans for financial transactions directly online in the immediate future. The principle purpose of the site is to integrate information for and about arts organisations throughout Victoria, through a vast collection of links embracing regional organisations and schools.

As the site was planned to represent organisations from school-based groups to professional organisations, access was planned at various levels, from first-time user to members. Users can select a level from the home page, enter the site, and access information appropriate to their requirements.

The site is used to inform the membership through a monthly online newsletter. Individuals can become subscribers and receive the newsletter, which is also available as a downloadable PDF file.

Links on the site include **Festnet**, to the Victorian Regional Festival Network, and **Programs**, linking to a wide range of groups and activities from schools to arts organisations. One of RAV's major programs is **arts 2 go**, the largest schools' performing arts program in Victoria. Between 600 to 700 performances take place each year, and schools that register as members can now book for performances online. From the **Coming events** link a login/password facility is provided, which gives direct access to the booking facility.

Community groups can become involved in the governance of the organisation. They receive training in the use of the website, access to information on managing funding, and can update their own information, such as their coming events. All events are linked to multiple databases on other websites, so that, through eRAVe, organisations can advertise Australia-wide.

### 4. The challenges

Raising funds for the development of the website is cited by CEO Peter Matthews as one of the biggest problems for RAV. The sophisticated site that they required was expensive and fund-raising was a challenge.

The organisational realignment that was undertaken in conjunction with the website planning led to the need to fix hardware problems, such as incompatible computers and printers. It also required a major rebuilding of administrative systems.

Some staff training was carried out by the web developer, but a recruiting drive helped, by introducing staff members trained in the specific skills required by the organisation.

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### 5. The results

The greatest benefit to the organisation has been more efficient internal management and marketing procedures and greatly improved accounting procedures. The reorganisation has reduced the number of management steps. In the Schools program, for example, there were 15 to 20 management steps before the e-business website, which have been reduced to 7 to 10 steps currently. Almost all paper transactions in this program have been eliminated. The biggest expansion has been the Festnet link on the site. It went online in late May 2003, and gained over 400 subscribers within two months.

Greater internal efficiency has resulted from the ability to point enquirers to the website, and links with members have been greatly strengthened through newsletters.

All this has led to better advertising of the organisation. Overall, the image of RAV has been greatly improved—it now has a sophisticated website, and has established itself as a leader in its field.

### 6. The future

The organisation is working continually on better ways to interact with the members. In 2004, RAV will present Meeting Place, the biennial conference of Regional Arts Australia, for volunteers, artists, and arts organisations throughout Australia. Plans are underway to create a **Meeting Place** section on the site that will link to an extensive website database, allowing such things as online registration and access to conference facilities.

RAV is also planning a membership database, to replace the current mailing list.

### 7. The advice

Peter Matthews believes that the most important element in planning an e-business website is to get the whole organisation thinking in the same way, from the Board downwards. The entire organisation must be committed to the new direction and all of its necessary consequences in terms of organisational change and personal responsibilities.

In addition, thorough research is required into the needs of the organisation and the most appropriate ways of meeting those needs through the online medium.