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# Adventure Expedition Communication, Sponsors, and the Internet

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## Adventure Expedition Communication, Sponsors, and the Internet

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### Abstract

*The Internet and the developing capability of mobile computing have changed the way expeditioners on adventure expeditions communicate with supporters, including sponsors. In the past the traditional media has often played an important role in funding, publicising and often legitimising adventure expeditions, leading to more sponsors being attracted. However with the advent of the Internet, the development of expedition websites and the ability to communicate with them from remote locations, the publicity component of the traditional media may no longer be so important. Nevertheless it seems likely that many expeditioners will continue to seek sponsors for funding. In this qualitative study the researcher explores how expedition websites are reducing expeditioners' need for publicity in the traditional print media through the consideration of the online communications of three recent expeditions. The paper concludes that expedition websites themselves have the potential to give considerable exposure to sponsors and gives guidance to potential expedition sponsors on what to look for in an expedition proposal if a significant audience is to be attracted and retained.*

### Keywords:

Adventure, Expedition, Communication, Internet, Sponsorship.

### Introduction

The world of adventure expedition sponsorship is changing. Expeditioners have perhaps always needed sponsors, to assist with funds, to publicize the expedition and possibly to legitimize their expedition. However the Internet may now be replacing the publicizing function and possibly in some cases the legitimizing function as well. Despite the potential for the Internet to replace these sponsor roles, it will be argued that at the same time new potential benefits for expedition sponsors are becoming apparent.

In the following paper the changing nature of adventure expedition communication using the Internet is explored and the consequent changing role of some expedition sponsors.

The new territory of how expeditioners are using websites to satisfy commercial and personal interests was researched firstly through studying the way a recent expedition, a yacht voyage around the world, was able to use a website to raise significant public support for an environmental issue without any sponsorship and with no traditional media support. The learning was then applied to the design and management of the websites of two successive Everest expeditions in 2006 and 2007. Further learning was drawn from the responses of visitors to these websites, and compared to the response to a website on the same 2007 Everest expedition hosted and managed by a large Australian newspaper. The implications of the learning on the potential benefits for sponsors is then considered and drawn together into guidelines for sponsors on what to look for in terms of a proposed expedition communications plan and website.

### What is an Adventure Expedition?

An 'expedition' might be defined as any journey made for some specific purpose, as of war or exploration, (Delbridge & Bernard 1998) however for the purposes of this study adventure expeditions are considered to be journeys which in addition, extend over at least some weeks, often some months or even years, comprise an individual or small group of people (usually less than 20 and certainly no more than 50), and take the participants to remote parts of the world. Commonly the environment is demanding, the travel means uncertain, resources limited and communication with mainstream society traditionally difficult (Grainger 2006).

### Sponsorship

There appears to be no generally accepted definition of sponsorship and this may reflect the ambiguity of its nature however there is some agreement that 'sponsorship is based on an exchange between sponsor and sponsored and pursues marketing (communication) objectives by exploiting the association between the two' (Walliser 2003). The role of sponsors and the benefits they can gain from sponsorship, mainly of sports and the

Arts, has been well researched. Walliser (2003) for instance, identified 230 papers published prior to 2003 in English, French and German. Previous research has largely been from the broad perspective of the sponsor, for instance looking at its effects (Meenaghan 2001), with one study on the benefits that retailers and manufacturers can derive from sponsorship of adventure expeditions (Woodward 1994). The perspective of the sponsored seems neglected as is the impact of the Internet on sponsorship. This study explores some aspects of these neglected areas.

### **The Traditional Role of Adventure Expedition Sponsors**

Sponsorship of expeditions is not a new phenomenon. In the 1480s Columbus sought sponsorship to fund current expeditions and publicity in order to attract men and funds for future expeditions (Bradford 1973). Stanley's 1870 expedition to search for Livingstone in Africa was funded by and largely for the benefit of the New York Herald newspaper and its editor James Gordon Bennet (Whybrow 2003). In 1931 Arctic explorer Hubert Wilkins's first attempt to reach the North Pole using a submarine was funded by Hearst's newspapers (he was contracted to write and send by radio 1000 words a day from the tight, wet and cold confines of an ex WW1 primitive submarine (Nasht 2005). More recently the young Australian sailing circumnavigator Jesse Martin received much support and publicity from the Australian newspaper, the Herald Sun (Martin 2001).

It appears that a quasi-symbiotic relationship has historically developed between the media (specifically newspapers) and expeditioners (Coates 2002). Expeditioners need funds and publicity, while newspapers need stories ("news") to tell, and the public have long been gripped by tales of adventures from their countrymen in far away places, harsh conditions, and with an uncertain future. Of course it is not just newspapers that sponsor expeditions, but to sell, newspapers need stories to tell, and those of expeditioners have clearly long proved popular. Bringing the first news (in the real time of their age) proved lucrative for the newspapers, and, it is therefore not surprising that newspapers have commonly been sponsors of expeditions. From the expeditioner's perspective a newspaper has been ideally placed to give them the publicity, and the legitimacy they sought in order to attract further sponsors (Deegan 2004).

In the past, with communications slow and costly, newspapers could control the expedition's publicity channel. If through sponsorship they had bought the rights to it, they alone could report on it first hand, and tell the story in any way they chose. There was commonly time for articulate writers to make the best of it, for drama to be maximized, for whole chapters to be told in perspective. For instance even the first ascent of Everest in 1953 took 3 days to make the newspapers in Britain, time largely spent in just getting the story from the mountain to an Indian telegraph station. But time too for a skilled professional writer like Jan Morris and his editor at The Times newspaper to frame and present it for maximum effect in the same edition as the story of Queen Elizabeth's coronation (Morris 2003).

Of course, it is not just newspapers that sponsor expeditions, but the mutual commercial benefits that derive from the newspaper-expeditioner relationship is a particularly good example of those that exist between sponsors and expeditions. It is only sponsor funding that enables many expeditions to take place. But much as they require funding for the proposed expedition, most expeditioners may also be seeking publicity. Covertly this may be for egoistic or narcissistic reasons (Grainger 2006), overtly it may be to publicise a cause, enable them to attract more sponsors, sell more seats at post expedition talks, sell more books, and to attract sponsors and participants for future expeditions. Some expeditioners may also seek sponsors (and causes) to give a sense of legitimacy to their expedition. Just as the sponsor may be seeking to become associated in the public mind with some aspect of the expedition (such as conservation of an endangered species, for example), so the expeditioners may be seeking legitimacy for their expedition through association with an already credible organization.

Sponsors appear to mainly become involved for commercial gain, in order to promote themselves, their products, services or values through association with the expedition (Card 1999).

### **The Role of the Internet in Adventure Expedition Sponsorship**

The convenient relationship between newspapers and expeditions has dramatically changed in recent times with the advent of the Internet. The Internet offers expeditioners the potential of a global audience, and hence websites can potentially provide much wider publicity than a hardcopy newspaper. Moreover, expeditioners can have complete control over what is published on it and when. Updates can be published to the website even as they are happening. Updates can include sound and video files (Coates 2002). Quite suddenly it appears as if reliance on the newspaper for publicity and the newspaper's role in expedition sponsorship has gone, or at least diminished.

Expedition websites are common today, as if every expedition has to have one. They usually contain information about the purpose of the expedition, the cause if one is supported, details of the expeditioners and their past expeditions, and some sort of online diary in which they report their progress. Some have links to

online maps such as Google Earth showing the current location of the expeditioner. Many are heavily illustrated with photos of the current and previous expeditions, some have links to sound and video recordings, some seek sponsors, and others advertise sponsors. Many invite funding contributions. A few invite site visitors to send the expeditioners encouraging messages, and previously posted messages can sometimes be read. A rare few invite questions on some sort of public discussion board to which the expeditioners post replies, or reply within the body of their blog.

But of interest to this research is the consideration of how effective expedition websites are at building publicity for expeditioners. Has the Internet had such an impact that newspaper sponsorship of expeditions is no longer important to expeditioners? And can websites give legitimacy to an expedition?

### **The Albatross Voyage**

A phenomenological study into the effect of the Internet on expedition communication (Grainger 2006) has shown how a small un-sponsored expedition can utilize a website to both gain legitimacy and to capture a near world-wide audience. The researcher investigated the use of Internet communication on the 'John Ridgway Save the Albatross Voyage'. This 11 month voyage in 2003-4, around the world by a small crew (including the researcher who was both 2<sup>nd</sup> in command and responsible for communications) aboard the 57ft yacht English Rose VI, demonstrated how a privately funded (i.e. un-sponsored) expedition could effectively use the Internet to raise awareness and understanding of an important conservation issue by communicating their experience, learning and reflections in near real time to a global audience via a publicly funded website.

### **Methodology**

This qualitative research was based on an underlying social constructionist epistemology, the basic premise being that as they engage with the world individuals construct meaning by drawing on the social institutions they are embedded in or are embedded in them (Crotty 1998). This approach to knowledge seemed appropriate to building an understanding of the perceptions of the adventurer on the one hand and expedition supporters, including sponsors on the other. Clearly their perceptions are likely to be different. Upon this epistemological base an interpretivist theoretical perspective was taken. Unlike positivism which seeks to follow natural science methods using allegedly value-free detached observation and thus to *explain*, Interpretivism looks for 'culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world' (Crotty 1998) and thus to *understand*.

The use of interpretivism to focus on everyday life and to explore how meaning is constructed from the perspective of the researched is well established in educational research (Scott & Usher 1999). With a theoretical perspective established, a naturalistic inquiry approach was taken to guide the research. The naturalist paradigm, described by Lincoln and Guba, (1985) is based on five axioms that are in direct contrast to the positivist paradigm, these being; realities are multiple, constructed, and holistic; the knower and known are interactive and inseparable; only time and context bound working hypotheses are possible; all entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping so that it is impossible to distinguish cause from effect inquiry is value bound (Lincoln & Guba 1985).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) expand these five basic beliefs into fourteen characteristics that were used to guide this research and the gathering of data, such as that of conducting the research within the environment that was being researched (an expedition), the acceptance and use of tacit knowledge and purposive (rather than random) sampling.

Following the initial year long expedition and the assembling of the data, (including records of all the online planning, the use of the expedition website, logs posted to the website, an extensive personal journal, interviews, photographs and video), the researcher used a phenomenological narrative approach (Van Manen 1990) to explore the experience of using the Internet on an expedition. Phenomenology, originally based on the work of Edmund Husserl and further developed by Martin Heidegger, Hans Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur is an approach to the presentation and interpretation of texts about every day life (Sharkey 2001). From this process conclusions and important lessons were identified.

### **Origins of the Voyage**

The voyage itself was the brainchild of British adventurer and one time Atlantic oarsman (Ridgway et al. 1966), John Ridgway, together with his wife Marie Christine. The real purpose of the around the world voyage was to stop the needless killing of albatrosses by pirate long line fishing boats. With more than 100,000 albatrosses a year believed to be dying as a needless by-catch on long line hooks in the Southern Ocean, albatrosses were rapidly facing extinction. The aim of the voyage was to raise awareness amongst key public groups and to thus gain support for UN legislation that would require the use of simple mitigation measures that were known to greatly reduce the accidental bird kill commonly incurred during long line fishing.

It was planned to publicize the Save the Albatross cause by running an online campaign from the yacht as it sailed around the world in the Southern Ocean, following the typical flight path of an albatross. Online communication thus had a much more important role than simply keeping in touch with family and friends.

Long before this voyage John Ridgway had established himself as an adventurer and travel writer. Since the trans-Atlantic row in 1966, Ridgway had organized, participated in and written books about many of his expeditions (Ridgway 1972, 1998; Ridgway & Briggs 1985; Ridgway & Ridgway 1978). Sponsor support had played a role in a number of these expeditions, most notably his entry in the 1978 Whitbread Round the World Yacht Race, when the then new yacht English Rose VI was temporarily re-named Debenhams, after the supportive British furniture retail chain store. Since the '60s Ridgway had maintained something of a media profile in Britain, being periodically asked to comment on radio and TV on adventure related news items and the like. His comments themselves often provoked comment.

However in planning this voyage in 2002-3, he proposed that there be no sponsorship. He wished to be quite independent, able to start and finish when he wanted, to change his course if he so chose and to say what he liked in support of the cause, unbridled by any sponsor considerations or limitations (Grainger 2006). Still he believed he could reach a global audience. Five factors enabled him to take this rather unusual approach. Firstly he and his wife already owned the 57ft yacht (it had been in constant use at their adventure school in NW Scotland since 1978, and also on numerous expeditions. It was tried and tested). Secondly the Ridgways were prepared and able to fund the daily living costs for themselves and a small crew together with the yacht maintenance costs for the duration of the voyage. Thirdly, with the potential availability of the Internet the Ridgways decided they did not need a media sponsor to communicate with a world wide audience, but could instead do so via a website. Having insufficient knowledge of the Internet to do this themselves, they recruited the researcher who had experience of ocean sailing and had recently completed a Master's degree in virtual communication. Fourthly the Ridgway's already had a longstanding media profile in Britain as an adventurous couple, with John being perhaps regarded as a rather controversial, often entertaining, commentator. Finally they had secured the support of the eminent RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, a non-governmental voluntary agency with one of the largest memberships in Britain), and its worldwide parent body, Birdlife International.

To minimize cost and effort and to gain further legitimacy, the researcher and the Ridgways chose not to build and maintain a dedicated independent website but to create a suite of pages within the free and publicly available BBC h2g2 community website. With an appropriate domain name registered, ([www.savethealbatross.org](http://www.savethealbatross.org)) and directing website visitors to the h2g2 pages, they effectively had all the benefits of a website dedicated to the expedition, at no cost. But more, the suite of pages had an immediate audience of the tens of thousands of registered BBC h2g2 members, and the whole expedition and campaign may have gained increased legitimacy through its association with the highly respectable BBC (Ridgway & Grainger 2004).

Despite their determination to be 'un-sponsored' the Ridgways did unsuccessfully seek some assistance from the BBC towards the cost of a high speed link between the yacht and the Internet. However with this not forthcoming, it was decided to make the best of the low bandwidth available at very low cost by sending data over HF radio from the yacht, and when this wasn't available due to location or poor propagation, to resort to the expensive (and still slow) data link available through a satellite telephone.

Thus equipped, they set sail from NW Scotland in July 2003, bound for Cape Town, the Southern Ocean and the Albatross. Their voyage would take them 50,000 kilometres around the world via South Africa, Melbourne, Wellington, Cape Horn, the Falklands, the Azores, to London, and eventually back to Scotland in July 2004. On every day of the 12 month voyage John Ridgway wrote a piece for the website, which despite many trials and unexpected difficulties, the researcher sent to a shore-based contact person, who published it to the website. Visitors to the website learnt not only the latest news from the yacht, but all about the situation of the albatross and were encouraged to follow a link to a petition asking the UN to take stronger action to stop their needless killing. By the end of the voyage more than 105,000 people from 131 countries had signed the Petition. In June 2004 the Petition was presented to the UN Food and Agriculture Committee in Rome. Subsequently the RSPB and Birdlife International formed the Albatross Task Force which by 2007 had a number of official observers on fishing boats in the Southern Ocean, coaching fishermen on the use of the now mandatory measures to avoid the accidental killing of birds. Although the problem of pirate fishing still remains, the albatross may yet be saved.

### **Conclusions and Lessons from the Albatross Voyage**

Following the voyage and an extensive analysis of the data, a form of phenomenological study (Van Manen 1990) and narrative was used to draw out learning from the experience (Boud, Cohen & Walker 1993). This was focused on exploring the purpose of communication on the voyage, how the Internet shaped the voyage and how meaning was constructed (Grainger 2006).

The Albatross Voyage demonstrated that a wide international audience could be reached by an expedition using a website, with no media or other form of sponsorship. Anecdotal feedback gathered by the researcher from regular viewers of the website (Grainger 2006) indicated that contributors to the site popularity this had included:

- The expedition, its purpose and characters catching people's imagination.
- The site containing unique and detailed background information about the expedition. The importance of this on websites generally has been emphasized by Tomsen (2003) who argues that visitors to a website seek a form of value exchange. They give their time (visiting the site) in exchange for access to unique content of specific interest to them. If there is insufficient value they may not stay long or return. On the Albatross Voyage website this unique information included the purpose, why the voyage was significant, the planned and actual course of the yacht around the world, details of the yacht itself and its preparation, the participants and some background information about them, the proposed timetable, the equipment being taken and how various anticipated problems were expected to be resolved.
- The leader of the expedition and storyteller already had a media profile, and was an established travel writer.
- The story on the website was updated every day, with only a very few exceptions.
- Being told in near real time, the writer described the daily dangers and drama of the voyage. Both the story teller and readers were always uncertain of what the next day might bring.
- The style of writing appeared to enable some readers to construct an understanding of the expedition experience in their own terms.
- The institutional website host, the BBC, appeared to give some sense of legitimacy and authority to both the expedition and the reports posted to the website.

The combination of the above led to some website viewers becoming deeply engaged in the expedition. 'Nan' for instance said, "I was so worried about you. Every day I would log in to check you were OK. After a while I began to think I had to log in to keep you safe" (Grainger 2006). Similar feelings were echoed by a number of site visitors. Clearly these site visitors had become closely engaged with the expedition. To understand this dynamic more clearly it is useful to think of the expedition as a game the expeditioners were playing, with ultimately their lives at risk. Gadamer, the hermeneutic philosopher, points to the human capacity to become engaged in games, and our ability to get into the spirit of the game (Gadamer 1989). Part of the spirit of the game is that players do not know the outcome, it's undecided, but they do feel that to some extent they can influence the outcome by playing (Sharkey 2001). Thus the crowd at a football match, if they feel they can encourage their team by cheering loudly, may be feeling they can influence the outcome. They are no longer merely spectators, now they are players in the game. The harder they cheer the more chance the team they are part of has of winning. In the same way, Nan had moved on from being a spectator, to being a player. She was now a member of the expedition. She was helping in her way to keep the crew safe. In her mind she had to log in every day.

The opportunities and benefits of engaging visitors to websites through developing online communities has been explored, for instance in The Cluetrain Manifesto (Levine et al. 2000), and by Powazek (Powazek 2002). The researcher was mindful of their principles from the outset of the Albatross Voyage, and had initially attempted to more deeply engage site visitors like Nan, through creating and supporting an online discussion from the yacht as it sailed around the world following the albatross. But the cost of the needed bandwidth and lack of a base coordinator able to give the level of attention and time needed, ultimately made it impossible on the Albatross Voyage. Thus no real indication was gained of the effect that active participation might have had in engaging site visitors. However it appeared that it might have considerable potential in this regard, enabling players, in Gadamer's terms above, to participate even more directly through actually communicating with other members of the expedition. This was clearly an area for further research.

Another important learning from the Albatross Voyage was the vital role of an online communications coordinator. A shore-based site moderator had played a vital role in managing the daily updates to the website, communications with the ISP, passing messages from the website to the yacht and responses back to the website, the yacht link having insufficient bandwidth to allow the site to be viewed from the yacht, and providing general shore communications support. For instance over the 11 months of the voyage this person had resolved a number of quite unexpected communication difficulties (such as the Internet Service Provider (ISP) accidentally deleting the vessel's mailbox mid-expedition) many of which would have been extremely difficult if not impossible to resolve from the yacht.

### **To Everest in 2006 and 2007**

Following the Albatross Voyage and the subsequent development of a framework of ideas about effective online expedition communication, the researcher set out to use an action research methodology (Checkland & Holwell 2007; Kock 2007) to test them. Action research, with its multiple iterative cyclic process of diagnosis, action planning, action taking, evaluating and specifying learning, (Susman & Evered 1978) together with its integration of problem solving and research (McKay & Marshall 2007) seemed most appropriate for this study of the communication on two further expeditions.

The first iteration came with the opportunity to run the online communications for an expedition setting out to climb Mount Everest in 2006 (Adler & Adler 2006). Paul and Fiona Adler were competent, but largely unknown climbers based in Melbourne, who set up a website about their proposed climb prior to their departure for Everest in March 2006. They planned to use a PDA and satellite phone to send a periodic blog to their website, largely to communicate their progress to a relatively small circle of family and friends. The researcher took on the role of managing and moderating their online communications from a home 'expedition base' and with the Adler's strong support and keen interest, he guided their use of their website, applying many of the lessons and the evolving framework of ideas from the Albatross Voyage. These included the reliable posting of a short illustrated update on progress at the same time every day, plus a strategy to encourage visitors to publish messages and questions to the site. Each evening these were then sent by the researcher to the Adler's PDA on the slopes of Everest. The Adlers acknowledged them by answering many of the questions within their update posted to the website the following day.

In the end it turned into a gripping tale that saw Fiona reach the summit but Paul turn around just 100 vertical meters short due to the failure of his oxygen system. Both descended safely.

### **Visitor Response**

Despite the Adler's being relatively unknown, and having no legitimizing or publicizing sponsor, the audience engagement strategies appeared effective and repeat site visitors grew rapidly. During the summit attempt in May 2006, more than 14,000 visits to the site were made each day, a substantial proportion of these coming from the US and Europe, people who had never heard of the Adlers just six weeks before. These website visitors posted more than 2,200 messages during the two month climb. One of the leading Everest reporting websites, [www.mounteverest.net](http://www.mounteverest.net), commented favourably on the breadth of the Adler's reporting and its apolitical nature (MountEverest.net 2007). Another Everest commentator reported how the Adler's website had been 'flooded with comments of support, questions and praise' following Paul's decision to turn back just an hour from the summit following an oxygen mishap (Arnette 2006). This was just one of a number of dramas that appeared to engage visitors to this website. Interest in the website stimulated a 2 page feature 'Extreme Blogging' in the 'Livewire' section of a Melbourne newspaper (Molloy 2006).

### **Second Iteration - Back to Everest in 2007**

There was much data to analyse to better understand the contribution of the various facets of the expedition website and communication strategy, but before this was complete the Adlers were returning to Everest for the 2007 season, to enable Paul to make another attempt on the summit. Again the researcher took on the communications and website management role, seeing it as an opportunity for a second iteration of action research on the original framework of ideas. Meanwhile the Adlers had built a new website since returning from Everest in 2006 (Adler & Adler 2007), both to host their 2007 story, and to host the stories of other expeditioners. To support the latter the Adlers offered their online resources and new found knowledge to other expeditioners at no cost, to allow them to tell their stories in near real time as well. Four other climbers quickly took the opportunity before the Adlers departed for Nepal in early April 2007.

A prominent Australian newspaper, the Herald Sun, approached the Adlers in late March and came to an agreement whereby Paul Adler would periodically telephone a designated Herald Sun number and record an audio report on his progress. This would then be placed on a web page dedicated to the climb on the Herald Sun's website. This was supported by occasional text accounts of his progress prepared by an in-house journalist, largely drawn from interviews with the researcher. The Herald Sun encouraged readers to enter text questions, which they said would be passed on to Paul in Nepal.

Throughout April and May 2007 the Adlers reported on Paul's Everest climb, sending their own daily story directly to their own website. At the same time Paul periodically phoned in an audio blog to the Herald Sun who published a link to it on their site and sometimes supported it with a general story about Paul's progress written by an in-house journalist.

Paul successfully reached the summit on 23 May 2007.

As in 2006 many visitors to the Adlers own website posted good luck messages, comments and questions, to which the Adlers often responded in their daily progress updates. The 3 active climbers on the Adler's 'MyEverest' website recorded 109,290 reads between 7 March and 16 June 2007. Over this same period 4,678 messages were posted to the site by visitors.

For its part The Herald Sun has not shared the number of reads of the Adler pages on its website over this same period, however all the posts by visitors to the website were passed to the researcher, to be forwarded to the Adlers. There were less than 10 in total. This is in striking contrast to the 4,678 submitted to the Adler's MyEverest website.

There is anecdotal evidence of why these numbers were so different. Certainly the framework of ideas regarding the engagement of site visitors that evolved from the Albatross Voyage and was used on the Adler's websites during both Everest expeditions is not in evidence on the Herald Sun website pages devoted to the Adlers. Further research is required to better understand the difference in site visitor behaviour, but clearly something was very different.

### **What does this mean for Sponsors?**

There is much still to be learnt from analysis of the data collected while managing the online communications of these three expeditions, but some learning is proposed based on extensive reflection on the experience by the Adlers and the researcher (Boud, Cohen & Walker 1993).

These three expeditions demonstrated that the publicity role of traditional media sponsors of expeditions can be replaced to a greater or lesser extent by expedition websites. At the same time there does not seem to be any reason why expeditioners wouldn't continue to look to sponsors for funding and other forms of support. Such sponsors have usually gained publicity through traditional media channels. This may diminish as the expedition website becomes the primary publicity channel for the expedition.

But what does the expedition website environment offer sponsors? Can they be assured of the publicity they are seeking? How can they gain some assurance that an expedition's website will prove popular and give them the association benefits they are seeking? What sort of risks are there and how might they be minimized?

From the Albatross Voyage and Everest experiences there seems to be an opportunity online for expedition sponsors, but some potential downsides as well. The opportunity is for a sponsor's name, goods or services to be repeatedly exposed to a fairly specific market throughout the expedition and afterwards for as long as the website remains in place. In the past the greatest publicity for sponsors of smallish adventure expeditions (as opposed to large adventure products with naming rights such as the Volvo Round the World Race (Volvo 2007), largely focused on the departure and return, just a few days, with sporadic reports in the traditional media in between. In addition, there would have been the possibility some limited advertising through illustrations in a subsequent book (Chichester 1969). The traditional media would rarely publicize the major sponsors of an expedition unless it were themselves. In contrast, an effective expedition website, carrying sponsor promotional information, is likely to be visited every single day of an expedition, (often multiple times a day as demonstrated on the Everest expeditions) by a potentially large geographically widely distributed but identifiable audience.

Through analysis of site statistics, the viewing audience can be quantified and further analysis conducted, including what pages were viewed, for how long, the site entry pages and exit pages and more. Furthermore where appropriate, the performance of the sponsor's goods and services can be demonstrated and reported on in near real time from the expedition. These benefits for sponsors have the potential to be much greater than could be generally realized in pre-website days.

The possibilities for sponsors of expedition websites may be commercially attractive, but there are pitfalls too. For instance, because the reporting is in near real time, and expeditions are almost by definition dangerous, and the outcome unknown at the time of reporting, there is the potential for things to go very wrong, very publicly. Two examples illustrate this. Firstly the Telstra sponsorship of Jesse Martin. Martin had become the youngest single-handed circumnavigator in 1999 (Martin 2001) and used the publicity to attract Telstra sponsorship for a two year round the world expedition involving a group of his peers. They departed Melbourne with much publicity in March 2002 but by October crew relationships were deteriorating, partially it appears over the expectations of the sponsor that they regularly report and produce video footage. The voyage struggled on but was finally abandoned before Christmas 2002 (Martin 2005). A second fairly high profile on-line reported adventure expedition to 'ice-kite' across Antarctica, sponsored by Kit-Kat (Young & Cunningham 2002) was abandoned not long after the delayed start due to a lack of wind (Grainger 2006). Of course the sponsor's view of 'success' may be quite different to that of the expeditioner and Kit-Kat may not regard this sponsorship as the failure that no doubt the two man team did. Visits to the website and exposure of the sponsor, may be equally high either way, but perhaps not so long lived if the expedition ends prematurely. Interestingly an expedition to



cross the Gobi desert by kite buggy involving one of the same participants was subsequently successful in finding a sponsor and setting a record for the longest ever journey by kite buggy (Glass\_Age 2005).

Another potential drawback for sponsors is the public failure of their goods or services on the expedition. For instance on the Albatross Voyage a rigging failure mid-Atlantic had the potential to end the voyage before it even reached the Southern Ocean. In not very restrained terms Ridgway named the product on the website and described its failure. This might have been embarrassing to a sponsor. However the manufacturer decided to take a positive approach and the Managing Director flew to Cape Town to supervise repairs at no cost to Ridgway. This was an exceptional level of service that Ridgway duly reported on the website (Grainger 2006).

Expedition sponsors relying on website visits for publicity are also dependent on the site engaging the target audience. This is a significant area of risk, but one that may be reduced through the application of the learning outlined in this paper.

### **Guidelines for Sponsors**

It is proposed the three research iterations described in this paper provide the basis of guidelines for potential sponsors considering the provision of some sort of support to an adventure expedition

As always, prospective expedition sponsors need to be inquisitively sceptical about any proposed expedition. It is beyond the scope of this paper to guide a sponsor in terms of making judgments about the validity, potential risks, chances of disaster, in-house and public perception of support and association with an expedition, (although it should be noted that the risk of sponsoring individuals appears to be particularly high (Cegarra 1986)). However because the all important publicity may now largely come from online exposure, there are a number of factors that potential sponsors should find valuable to explore before making a commitment of support.

In the first instance prospective expedition members may create some sort of website before seeking a sponsor. Such websites may be replacing the traditional hard copy expedition proposal seeking sponsorship. Much can be learnt from such a site and discussion with the prospective expeditioners about how they plan to use it. Drawing on the experience of the Albatross Voyage and the Adler's Everest expeditions it is suggested that potential sponsors consider the following when examining a request for expedition sponsorship.

At the most basic level, the expedition website should demonstrate good usability characteristics. This is too big a topic for this paper, and amply covered in texts such as *Designing Web Usability* (Nielsen 1999). Of particular importance is fast download, and simple navigation.

The site should contain unique and detailed background information (Tomsen 2000) about the expedition. This should include the purpose, why it is significant, all about the region that is being visited, the participants and some background information about them, maps, the proposed timetable, the equipment being taken and how various anticipated problems have been or are expected to be resolved.

The expeditioners should have a communication plan clearly identifying the target audience and outlining the strategy to engage them, the communication channels that are going to be used, the frequency of communication, how it is going to be managed at their base, how much it is estimated to cost and how they expect to fund it. A back up plan for when the primary communication channel fails should be looked for.

The expeditioners need to be able to write well. A very important component of engaging an online expedition audience is the ability to not just survive the rigors of an expedition day, but at the end of it, while quite possibly exhausted, cold, wet and frightened, to be able to put the day's happenings in some sort of perspective that is meaningful to their audience, day after day after day. This is not something every adventurer can naturally do well as demonstrated by the many travel blogs that exist on the web. Being somewhere unusual is not enough. Both Ridgway and the Adlers demonstrated that writing a good travel log is far beyond writing an online diary of what they did that day. A potential sponsor should look for an expeditioner's demonstrated ability to write well and to build an audience

A range of writers contributing to the expedition story on the website may lead to the website having appeal to a wider audience than if it has just a single contributor. On the Albatross Voyage John Ridgway wrote the published log every day. A previously published writer, this gave continuity, and some measure of control, however some readers felt the expedition would have had wider appeal if other members of the crew had been given a turn. On the Everest expedition the Adlers broadly alternated the writing of the log. Sometimes they invited another climber to write the log for a day. Each day the writer would start with announcing who was writing, as in "Fiona here..." This and the diversity of perspectives was positively commented on by a number of message contributors. In all cases the agreed standard required no slang, no criticism of others, no political comment, no unsubstantiated information and no mis-information.

As discussed, visitors to the site need to become so engaged they effectively become participants themselves, as if in a game. Good writing alone may not be enough. The opportunities and benefits of engaging visitors in websites through developing online communities has been explored, together with the apparent power of engaging site visitors in the game, that is the expedition, through opportunities to send messages to expedition members and receive some response. In these terms expedition websites that don't allow or encourage visitor involvement (and most don't), are missing a great opportunity for themselves and their sponsors. Their self-centred websites may be no more than electronic postcards that rely on the drama of the unfolding story and their story telling skill to attract repeat visitors. It may not be enough to engage site visitors and lead them to frequently revisit.

### Coordinating Communications

Sponsors should ensure there will be a communications coordinator at base to support the level of visitor interaction they are seeking. Quite apart from the role described above, if logs are being posted directly to the website by the expeditioners, someone must check the site after each posting to ensure it has loaded correctly and for formatting, style and spelling errors, especially if the expeditioner can't see the site themselves. Even ignoring the periodic download glitches, each day's log requires proof reading and often some correction. If site visitors can post messages the site must be monitored throughout the day (and night if possible) to remove the occasional offensive posting, to edit the sometimes inappropriate and answer the occasional technical question from a visitor. Furthermore unexpected technical issues can arise which cannot always be diagnosed from the expedition (even if the expeditioners had time). Without a moderator at base to fix these unexpected problems, communication with the expedition may just cease, causing not just a reduction in publicity, but possibly safety issues as well.

### Conclusion

The study of online expedition communications is in its infancy. This paper has explored the changing role of sponsors and the new opportunities that expedition websites give them.

The development and use of expedition websites can reduce the need for sponsors to take a significant role in publicizing expeditions, a role that traditional media sponsors have often played. The legitimizing role of sponsors can be played by some websites, for instance in the way the Albatross Voyage borrowed legitimacy from the BBC h2g2 website.

At the same time expedition websites can be effective locations for sponsor advertising, with the potential for easily quantifiable repeat visitors from all over the world.

The effectiveness of the expedition website in giving the sponsor publicity partly depends on how the website is set up and used by the expeditioners. Potential sponsors should ensure the proposed expeditioners have the needed writing skills and commitment, and a demonstrated interest in two way online communication. The website should carry unique information, comply with accepted usability criteria, and should support participation by website visitors.

The expeditioners should have a communication plan and an online moderator at their expedition base.

Expedition websites telling adventure stories in real time have the potential to attract significant audiences. Moreover they have the potential to turn occasional site visitors into active expedition participants repeatedly visiting the site. Overall they offer great potential to sponsors seeking publicity particularly if the outlined guidelines are followed.

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