

USING THE WORLD WIDE WEB FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

CASESTUDY: drummergirl.com

By Jane Pirone

ABSTRACT

Traditionally drumming has been a male-dominated field. Mainstream drum publications have continued to ignore the existence and contributions of female musicians. In addition, they don't provide positive role models or inspiration for aspiring female drummers, and continue to reinforce negative stereotypes and prejudices against women. To overcome the under-representation of women in the drumming industry I created "drummergirl.com" in 1995 as a forum and community for female drummers. Some of the goals of the web site are to create a unified female presence in the drumming industry, document the history of female drummers, gain visibility for female drummers, and empower young female drummers. Drummergirl.com also provides access to vital industry, technical, and practical information, and resources and educational materials - all free of charge to anyone with Internet access. Evidence of the success of the site is documented by over a thousand email messages received from males and females -- young and old, amateur and professional, from Kansas to Australia -- who support what we do. Internet technology has made this possible.

KEYWORDS

Women, Drumming, Internet, WWW, Music, Web

INTRODUCTION

The World Wide Web has very distinct advantages over traditional publishing methods. Unlike printed matter or even CD-ROMs, web-sites can be updated quickly and inexpensively—there are no printing, duplication, or distribution costs. They can be changed as often as necessary and the new data can be accessed immediately—any time, day or night, from anywhere in the world. You can deliver multiple media on a web-site, including text, sound, video, and graphics. Interactivity, unique to computer-based media, allows users to hyperlink (the ability to connect to another document by clicking on a link) to other pages of information within your site or to any other site on the internet. Other interactive features (such as message boards, chat rooms, and forms) enable site visitors to become an integral part of the development of the content on and character of the site (a web publisher may allow the site to have “a life of its own” making it un-moderated or edited.) It’s a very exciting and unique environment where readers can offer feedback, ask questions, have discussions, respond to surveys or questionnaires, or add new and original content in real-time. [1] These advantages have allowed individuals and small groups (with Internet access, technical adeptness, and time) the ability to achieve a global presence. Historically, small groups and individuals could not operate beyond the local level due to the high costs of printing and distribution, making it hard to get their voice heard. This made it difficult for a small, diffuse movement, or group to reach a critical mass, especially in remote areas, where people hard to reach without traveling. As many women still feel marginalized in society [2], utilizing the web’s advantages for empowerment and social change became very appealing. With the unprecedented growth

of the internet [Add some internet stats here\[3\]](#), more and more women have used the web to make their voices heard. www.cybergrrl.com, www.bust.com, www.rockgrrl.com, www.indiegrrl.com, www.wombats.org, and www.digital-women.com are just a few examples of other women oriented sites that have made a difference and have provided high-quality information, support, and resources to women world-wide.

History of Drummergirl.com

I created drummergirl.com, in 1995 as a reaction to the negative experiences I was having in regard to being female and drumming. The experiences ranged from condescending drumstore salespeople to mainstream drum publications ignoring the existence and contributions of female musicians. In many advertisements for drum equipment, women were not portrayed as musicians, but as objects of desire. This reinforced the negative stereotypes and prejudices against women. In addition, I was unable to find any resources that provided role models of existing female drummers or stories that provided inspiration or support. For example, of the sixty-three members of the Percussive Arts Society's Hall of Fame, none are women. The magazine "Modern Drummer", which calls itself the "world's most widely read drum magazine," has only featured a woman on its cover once in its twenty-two year history. Based upon these two predominant examples, one might infer that women just don't play the drums. On the contrary, a recent Gallup poll conducted by the International Music Products Association has indicated [that ... \[4\]](#) I knew, without a Gallup Poll, that there were, in-fact, many female drummers out there. The problem wasn't whether we existed, just that nobody was *acknowledging* our existence. This is what I wanted to change!

Inspiration

I did find some solace, and more importantly, inspiration, in zines (hand-made, xeroxed publications that focused on women and music such as, Chickfactor, Bust, and Cupsize.) Over the past decade zines have become a forum for uncensored, underground writing that pushes boundaries, and tackles important issues for girls and women. [5] However, for me, they weren't enough. With my background in new media and internet technology, along with the "do-it-yourself" influence of zines, I had the ability to create and could see the benefits of publishing an e-zine (electronic zine) on the web. I began by writing a manifesto, drawing a caricature of myself to use as a logo, and coming up with the "drumnergirl" name. I created a homepage, a list of female drummers, and a contact me section that invited others to add to the list. I included pages with charted drum licks and news of drumming festivals.

Initial Response

Immediately, after I uploaded the first version of the site, I received feedback. To my surprise, a substantial number of the email messages were from men. While most of the reactions were very positive, I had not anticipated the flaming emails I received. Comments with vulgar and abusive language were received all questioning my "hatred toward men". This demonstrated a common problem among many women-oriented internet spaces where men come to dominate the discussions about women. On the Usenet newsgroup soc.women, specifically started to discuss issues about women, posts from men outnumbered those from women. A similar controversy shared by the Systems

mailing list was whether the existence of an exclusively female forum is discriminatory and negative, even though necessary to provide a safe environment where women are free from harassment. [6] My strategy, from the beginning, was to ignore negative messages and focus on the positive. Fortunately, the negative messages were few and far between, and most of the messages I receive, regardless of gender, are very supportive, encouraging, and helpful. Furthermore, drummergirl.com was not created to exclude men, just to encourage their celebration of women who drum.

Establishing the Goals & Implementing the Technology

Drummergirl.com has evolved over a four-year period. I established some very ambitious goals for drummergirl.com which I believe are necessary for the success of any site or interactive media product. I set a high standard for information, navigation, and visual design. Working with graphic designers, we created a visually appealing and easy-to-use interface so users weren't intimidated by the technology, and enjoyed their experience more. We chose a monthly, magazine style format to keep the content fresh, and continually updated. We recruited some excellent writers and photographers, to make sure the quality photos and copy were very high. Then I focused on developing the categories, or sections of the site. I focused on three overall concepts, documenting and creating a history, accessibility to education, and creating a community.

History

As Myra and David Sadker point out in their book, "Failing at Fairness: How America's Schools Cheat Girls", "Every time a girl reads a woman less history she learns she is

worth less.” By documenting the past and future contributions of women we accomplish the very important task of establishing a history of drumming that is new and different. This is a tool for empowerment. A strong history provides role models for aspiring drummers. We’ve approached this challenge in two ways. First, we created sections for Interviews and Features to be presented in a very colorful, easy-to-read way. Second, we’ve built a database of over 150 female drummers that assembles biographical information, discographies, contributions, and links to more information.

Education

Audio clips, transcriptions, reviews, tips, message-boards, primers, are examples of ways we’ve tried to incorporate education into the site. There are sections called “Reading Room”, “drum lab”, “girl talk”, and “listening lounge” that try to create a place where a women can ask simple, beginning questions and not feel intimidated. There is trove of material for self-education and many resources for searching out more formal training. Drummergirl.com also provides access to vital industry, technical, and practical information.

Community

The goal of the Events, DrumstoreDirectory, DrumXchange, Player’sClub, and Girltalk, sections of the web-site are to foster a friendly environment where the exchange of information, ideas, and communication between people becomes easy. Support happens when people can share their stories, reach out for help, and offer advice and assistance to others. The technology used in these areas are message boards that allow people to post messages to a common page, view other people’s messages, and reply to them. These

sections allow people to connect with one another to buy and sell equipment, recommend good drum stores, inform each other of upcoming gigs, festivals, and events, look for bands to play in, and discuss issues on their minds. An exceptional mechanism to extend the community and draw on the other vast resources of the web is the “links” section, which connects users to sites relating to women, drumming, and music.

What We’ve Accomplished – Measuring One’s Success

While social change and empowerment are hard to quantify, I have definitely witnessed an improvement in the social acceptance of female drummers over the past four years. Still, I need to measure the site’s accomplishments in a more structured way. So, rather than judging our success based on outside world, I turned internally to gauge our accomplishments. By doing this, I was able to define criteria by which we could benchmark our achievements, now and in the future. I have relied on four criteria for measuring drummergirl.com’s success and impact. They are growth, awards, authority, and feedback.

Growth

We measure growth using statistical counters that monitor hits and the number of visitors to a site. These tools generate different reports based upon the parameters you wish to highlight. These reports are an indication of how well your site is accomplishing its goals. As of May 1998 we are averaging over 3,500 visitors per month. That’s an increase of over 2,500 visitors per month over the past 13 months. For us, growth implies our promotional efforts are working, word of mouth is strong, and we’re reaching more and more people.

Awards

Awards are generally acknowledgement of your site's achievement from your peers. We have received numerous web awards for the drummergirl.com.

Authority

By surveying the sites you're connected to – from the outside in, you have the ability to assess what other people, groups, and organizations think of you. I refer to this as “authority”. When people refer to your site as a source of information – and that's what they're doing if they provide a link to your site, they are looking to you as an authority on the topic. Of course, who the link is from helps to determine to what degree you are considered an authority. We're linked from dozens of other sites. Of the two examples listed below, one is the Association of College and Research Libraries links to us from their site, they list us as a site that “provides resources for women drummers, includes interviews, brief biographical information, and links.’

Feedback

Drummergirl.com truly has become a forum for female drummers. We currently support five different message boards, all implemented in October of 1998. Since then, there have been over five hundred message-board posts. Additionally, in the course of a four-year period, we have received over a thousand email messages. Email messages and message board posts are a way for drummergirl.com's visitors to give us feedback. They can let us know how we're doing, and how we can improve. We learn a lot about the needs of our

visitors by monitoring the activity of the various message boards and witnessing the interactions that take place on them. The following is a sampling of some of the recent posts received on the site. Some of these examples document the inspiration this site provides, others demonstrate the sense of community and support the women feel and receive. I have left the formatting of the text as it was received, including all spelling and grammatical errors.

Posted by rogue on May 30, 1999 at 20:50:31:

Subject: rock 'n' roll, baby!

wow, im sooo glad i found this site. (im new, btw) finally ive found people who can relate to those little annoyances in life like: "You play drums?! Wow, thats so rare to find a girl drummer" god, do i ever hate that, i always have to restrain myself from punching someone who utters something along those lines. im sure that im not the only one out there that gets annoyed by that. but it is kinda kool cos you can command a certain kind of respect from boys. well, ive only been playing about two years and my set is awful crappy. but i love it none the less. i just hate getting in those ruts where you dont play for a couple weeks on end.. im not the only one like that am i? i hope not. well, i just wanted to say hi to everone. love, rogue.

Posted by kimberly on May 25, 1999 at 14:10:51:

Subject: wow, i didn't know this site existed!

this is so awesome! I have been playing drums for 10 years, i started in 4th grade. my entire carreer, until college, i was ridiculed and told my band directors that as a female in the field i was going nowhere. i am a percussion major at eastern illinois university, and now, i'm going somewhere. i'm in awe that there are so many of us female percussionists out there! please, e mail me, i want to know if anyone else has had the same experiences i have through the years. also, what percussion instruments do you play? later daze!

Posted by Noelle on May 23, 1999 at 12:58:30:

Subject: 7 months strong...survey!

hey there everyone..i'm a drummer from Singapore and i guess the title is pretty self explanatory. I've been playing for 7 months now - I receive a lot of feedback that people think that I've been playing for 2-3, sometimes even four years. I was hoping that folks like you could help me judge my standard. Could you gals like describe a little of what you were playing when you first started playing for 7 months...it would really help me a lot. Other than that, I must say that of course there's a lot of sexism in the biz - and I have been no stranger to it. A lot of guys write my playing as amateurish attempts even they haven't even heard me before. The ones that have heard me all thought i was a guy - upon clarification, I'm glad that they had the balls to admit that they were still impressed. However, time and again, I get faced with inquisitive faces peering in to the rehearsal rooms - even to watch me set up!! I hope folks out there can help me...I'd really appreciate it. Noelle p.s. If you guys are curious about how i play, you can check out my band's website to which the mp3's were recorded when I had been playing for 2-3 months. Thanks. :) [and yes, i'm taking lessons now..heh]

Posted by Barbara on May 31, 1999 at 12:31:06:

In Reply to: 7 months strong...survey! posted by Noelle on May 23, 1999 at 12:58:30:

Hi. I've been playing about 9 months, teaching myself. I've found a lot of good resources, books, videos, free lessons on the net. Right now I'm working my way through a book from the 50's called "Progressive Steps to Sycopation for the Modern Drummer". It's doing a lot for my sticking but I feel my kick is still kind of uninspired. The best learning for me is jamming with other people.

Good luck and best wishes,

Barbara

Posted by Jade on May 15, 1999 at 06:58:03:

Subject: girl power

i was wondering if anyone has any tips on a few things -how do you convince your parents that it's worth them spending \$\$\$\$ on a pearl kit? -do you have any advice on how to get a band together? -how do you stop yourself from throwing your sticks at things when you just can't play it right? if you can answer my questions, please do. :) or email me! thanks

Posted by James Sharp on May 15, 1999 at 11:19:10:

In Reply to: girl power posted by Jade on May 15, 1999 at 06:58:03:

Depends on your folks I guess. Perhaps try and sell them the undeniable virtues of playing drums. Health, spiritual & artistic growth, self-fulfillment, group participation, self discipline etc. etc. They're not just the noise machines they're commonly assumed to be! As for regulating your temper, cut out caffeine completely. You may walk round like a snail on mogadon for a few days, but you'll feel better for it afterwards. Oh, and practice, Cheers, James.

Posted by Nicki Stein on May 16, 1999 at 16:08:09:

Subject: FREE Tama Drums!

Hi, my name is Nicki, I play snare in my school band, but most of the time they just put me on cymbals or triangle or something since I'm the only girl drummer at my school. I don't own any drums of my own and I really want a set, but I don't have the money. I think U are soooo sweet to just be giving a set away and although I probably won't qualify, I won't forget the nice gesture. -
Thanx

Posted by Staci Lynn Brown aka RockGrrl on May 19,1999 at 01:41:18:

In Reply to: Re: FREE Tama Drums! ;) posted by Nicki Stein on May 16, 1999 at 16:08:09:

Hey Nicki don;t let em push ya over like that... fight for your spot on the drums... might mean a lil extra effort by practicing more and devloping even better chops then the guys... try practicing with some heavy drum corp snare sticks... then play with your regular sticks of choice... practice this summer... when school starts up again ask your band director for another shot at the drums and

show what you did all summer! ROCK their world Nicki!!! ;) Good Luck! huggers, Staci aka
RockGrrl

Future Directions

Over the next year many things need to be accomplished. First, steps need to be taken to ensure the long-term existence of the site. Simply put, funds need to be raised to accommodate the costs of growth – as our community grows, so does the need for the site to grow. I plan to apply for not-for-profit status which will make us eligible for grants. We are also implementing e-commerce on the site to sell merchandise. This will provide two benefits, generating funds for the operation of the site, and promotion of the site with the merchandise. With more funds we will be able to establish important off-line programs such as scholarship funds for young women pursuing the percussive arts as a career. Second, we need to expand the reach of drummergirl.com and increase the visibility of female drummers in the mainstream. To do this we need to become more involved with existing organizations. We need to participate in the events they host, and contribute to their publications. I'd like to create an outreach program that holds clinics run by female drummers in elementary and junior high schools. This will help to encourage young women to follow their dreams, and not be discouraged. In addition, while preparing this paper, I had difficulty finding statistics that accurately reflect our group. I plan to implement surveys and questionnaires on the site to create more substantiated statistics and demographics that will require the industry to take us more seriously.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to all the people who have contributed to drummergirl.com.

END NOTES

[1] 1998 Jane Pirone, Rob Tallia A Multimedia Primer

[2] Women's Work A survey of Scholarship by and about WOMen

[3] Internet Statistics

[4]

BIOGRAPHY

Jane Pirone is the founder, creative director, and CEO of Happy Mazza Media (www.happymazza.com), an interactive media firm located in NYC. Jane has worked on and developed high-quality, pioneering multimedia for over ten years. She has extensive experience in computer-based training including the creation of CBT programs for companies such as J.P. Morgan, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, IBM, Citibank, Pfizer, and GE Capital. Jane received a B.F.A. from the University of Michigan, and has been teaching new media in the Professional Studies department of Pratt for over 5 years.