Using Yahoo Groups

The staff at Patron Saint Productions has been using Yahoo's "Groups" features for years, with very good results. It's surprising to see how much money companies will spend duplicating capabilities Yahoo gives away for free. If you get adept at using Yahoo Groups, you can improve the efficiency of many book publishing operations while reducing your costs. Let's take a quick tour.

Mailing Lists and Newsletters

Yahoo Groups <http://groups.yahoo.com/> is the end result of several acquisitions by Yahoo. Most of the site is the reincarnation of eGroups, a service that allowed people to set up free mailing lists. The term "mailing list" is confusing in the extreme. A mailing list is an online discussion group where messages sent to the group address get *mailed* to every member of the group.

Yahoo also purchased a service called OneList, which allowed people to create free online newsletters (sometimes called *e-zines*). For the technically-minded, they're called *list servers*. If you offer a newsletter through your web site, chances are you're using list server software to manage subscriptions and deliver the newsletter.

When you think about it, the working processes of a mailing list and an online newsletter are identical — people subscribe and get sent e-mail messages — although mailing lists tend to foster discussion and newsletters are used to distribute a document. Yahoo merged these two online communities into Yahoo Groups and added other nice features, such as chat facilities, a calendar, polling capabilities, and file storage.

Public Uses

You can create a Yahoo Group as the backbone for an online seminar. For example, if you want to sponsor an author seminar on tax preparation tips your group might be called *Tax Tips*, the e-mail address for the group would be *taxtips@yahoogroups.com* and the address for subscribing would be *taxtips-subscribe@yahoogroups.com*. You can then create a subscription box for the seminar and distribute it to partner sites, such as personal finance web sites, to solicit registrations for the seminar.

It is sometimes easier to go through Yahoo Groups to create a list server than to go through your own IT department — and it can be cheaper if your department is subject to internal billings for IT services. One nice benefit of using Yahoo Groups is that you can make it appear to subscribers that they are joining a group hosted at your own site. You can substitute your own logo and brand name for Yahoo's on promotional materials. Below is the promo button offered by Yahoo Groups, along with our substitute for a John Wiley & Sons seminar:

Yahoo takes care of all the list administration, working 24 hours a day, 7 days a week on your behalf. You can conduct the entire seminar with almost no one aware that the show is being run through Yahoo.

One problem with using Yahoo Groups is that messages sometimes carry ads, and you have no control over the advertisers. Yahoo used to sell a "no-ads" option for $60/year, but they have discontinued that service.

Another strategic way to use Yahoo Groups is for book companion sites. It is impractical for publishers to build web sites for most books — especially when Yahoo Groups offers free, full-featured sites that are easy to maintain. You can save thousands of dollars a year using Yahoo Groups for book companion sites and making authors responsible for maintaining

them. Many authors will prefer this arrangement to a publisher-hosted site.

Private Uses

Patron Saint Productions has begun setting up an access restricted, private Yahoo group for every client. We have a distributed workforce, and so do most of our clients. The group gives us a central place to store documents where they'll be available to all members of the team at any time of the day or night.

The Yahoo group helps us avoid common problems facing distributed teams: not everyone getting sent every document, or interim documents confused for final drafts. The group also gives us a place to chat. There are some circumstances where online chat is preferred over a conference call.

Using Yahoo groups this way is an experiment for us, and we'll report back on the benefits and drawbacks as we put these groups to the test. By using the group, we are building skills that will pay off as more people work in distributed teams. That education comes with a very low price tag; there is no charge to use any of the features of Yahoo Groups described in this article.

Online PR Chat Series

The *Introduction to Online Publicity* Chat Series continues at the Online Publicity Group at Yahoo through April 11. This free program is hosted by Steve O'Keefe and runs every Thursday afternoon at 4 p.m. Eastern Time at the group home:

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/onlinepublicity

So far, attendance for the chat series has been light, but discussion has been intense. Please join us to try out this new form of learning. Topics covered in the coming weeks include:

Feb. 7: Content Syndication
Feb. 14: St. Valentine's Day - No Chat
Feb. 21: E-Mail News Releases
Feb. 28: Online Newsletters