

MICAH STEVENS, 9250X.COM

Angela: Describe 9250x.com.

Micah: <http://www.9250x.com> provides online tools to help people promote and find out about happenings in the Inland Empire. Most of the ZIP codes in this area start with the four numbers "9250," so that's where I got the name.

[The website] is focused on the arts community, but I support just about anything as long as it's Inland Empire-centric. Well, okay, once in a while I'll post other things, if it interests me. But that's my goal at least.

Angela: Why and how did 9250x get started?

Micah: I spend a lot of time online, and I've noticed that the Internet is great for raising perspective to a national, or global level. It has this incredible ability to link up people with specific interests from around the world that has always fascinated me. There are quite a few examples of very small groups of people with a common interest existing and sharing information simply due to the existence of the Internet. Without that they would be just individuals, due to their very distant geographical proximity. In some ways it's a curse as it's harder to evolve creatively in a close community, but it also opens many doors.

Surprisingly to me, the Internet is usually very lacking for small geographical communities. Several of the early website metaphors were geographically based, such as the online shopping mall, the "Main Street" idea, but these got passed up because it just didn't fit well. The local geographical community sites (as opposed to a community of interest) are pretty shabby as a rule. The better ones often only exist due to big expenditure of money supported by advertising. I wanted to see if I could do better. I figured if it was designed well, the website would run itself, for just the costs associated with hosting, and not so much content management, as that would be run by the very people it was helping.

Angela: What was your vision? Has it changed?

Micah: I created 9250x.com with the idea that a site, properly designed, could provide online tools for people to promote themselves and to find out about other events and places in the Inland empire. I designed it with a database backend that would allow other sites on other servers to share the same set of calendar and link data. So not only would 9250x.com as a website provide an interface, but it would support other sites as well with the data it was able to collect.

It was to provide a community calendar that is controlled by the user base, message boards, free email accounts, link database, and even small free webspace areas for those that didn't have much money to spend on a web host account.

Unfortunately, after initially creating things, and putting a second version out, I have gotten very busy with other projects and have seriously neglected [9250x.com]. I only spend a few hours a month on it, mostly to enter some items into the calendar and to update the front-page news.

This has been very depressing on a certain level, as I have quite a few ideas to make it much better, just no time to accomplish them. Hopefully this summer I will release a new version of the site that will be much easier to use and provide more and better tools for the users.

Angela: How has the community influenced 9250x?

Micah: Well, without the community actively influencing it, there would be no 9250x. Its very existence as it was conceived as was not a site where I run around and post things about what I found out. Instead, it was to be almost entirely run by the community itself. So without that influence, it's pretty much worthless.

An interesting thing has happened. As I started spending less and less time on it, I expected the visitation to slow and the site to start to stagnate. I figured that without active promotion, by me telling people about it, and passing out flyers at shows, and things like that, people would forget. Much to my surprise, as I've made all the tools usable by the users directly, local artists, and promoters have continued to add content to the site and it's continued to be a resource, separate from me. It's kinda nice to see that happen. It has suffered a little, but not nearly as much as I had thought it would.

I've been able to observe how people use it, and as a result I've had some ideas on how to make it better. I can't wait to get the new version done to see how it does. My own skills have increased and as a result I can make a much smarter website.

It has always intrigued me that a website can be much more than just an electronic print format, which unfortunately is all most websites are. Computers' ability to enable the format to respond to the user makes the possibilities very interesting.

It's still not nearly as popular as I would like, but it does get 20,000 or so hits a month, which isn't bad considering how much time I've put in lately. I've been thinking about investing in some print ads about it once I get the new version going. Perhaps an ad in *Skinny Magazine*, or something trendier in the area, would get some more influence going.