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From CompuServe To The Web

If you're one of those who still believes that "content is king," perhaps you should listen to what Michael Bolanos has to say on the subject.

Bolanos, the founder, president and CEO of CompuServe Corp.'s eDrive, one of the most successful entertainment-based areas on any of the commercial online services, says there's something more important to making a site successful... and that's people.



Andy Marx

"Content is not king," Bolanos says matter-of-factly. "It's community. It's getting the people involved in your area, not just reading an online page and moving onto something else. We are definitely a fan area, and that's what we feel makes an area a success."

And perhaps Bolanos ought to know. Since launching the eDrive area on CompuServe in 1994, it has grown to more than 1 million paying

customers a month.

The area was the first to offer online fans live access to the Academy Awards and was also the first new media outlet to make digitized film clips available for downloading. And while it could be argued that the eDrive area is filled with a little too much studio-driven puffery, it does continue to offer its users a real sense of community, something that Bolanos feels is important in making a successful online area.

For example, Bolanos, whose CompuServe area was one of the first to offer live celebrity interviews, says stars now are finding that online chats are a normal part of the publicity process when it comes time to promote a product, whether it's a film, TV show or record.

Of course, when eDrive was first launched this was not the case, as publicists didn't know what their clients were getting into when they agreed to online chats.

"The publicists were really wor-

ried about the control factor," Bolanos admits. "With hundreds of people typing in questions to their clients, it was not the same as an interview with a journalist who they could control."

But according to Bolanos, it was precisely that aspect that turned into an advantage as celebrities were finding out what it was like to communicate with their fans by computer.

"Celebrities like the fact that they aren't getting asked the same questions by the same reporters that they see at every press junket," Bolanos says.

"The publicists are now getting savvy about online and are now including it in their publicity plans. We've grown so quickly that we now have a lot of leverage with the studios."

And that fact is apparent, since almost every studio is represented on the eDrive area, with everything

from press kits to video clips from movies.

Not surprisingly, Bolanos is now set to try his ideas, albeit slightly modified, on the World Wide Web with his eDrive Web site. Bolanos says the same sense of community found on CompuServe will help popularize his Web site.

"We've learned from our experience that the site should be fan-driven," says Bolanos, who wants to have a total of 10 million subscribers on his CompuServe area and Web site by early 1997. "We've got to make it an entertaining site that people will go back to. A lot of money has been lost so far by a lot of people on a lot of the entertainment Web sites."

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