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CHIPOTLE IS WEBBY BEST!

American restaurant chain Chipotle has recently won a 2005 Webby Award for the best restaurant web site. So what is this all about?

Well, Chipotle serves burritos and tacos, with a philosophy of using only the finest, freshest ingredients. The deliberately simple ingredients are fresh each day and served with an attention-to-detail that it feels sets it apart from other businesses. The company deliberately only serves a few things, so they can concentrate on doing them very well. The concept of Chipotle is to take something simple and to elevate it to something special. The company feels that this is summed up in its name. A chipotle pepper is just a jalapeño pepper that's been smoked and dried elevating it from ordinary to something "extraordinary".

Their web site too is full of interest grabbing detail that will please not only the day-to-day user but also the technical designer. A philosophy of the Webby Awards is that sites should reflect show excellence in Web design, creativity, usability and functionality. Visit Chipotle's site and listen to the restaurant music, meander down the hot plate to look at the dishes available and watch the avocados ripening "live"! Witness the office dogs chasing each other around and pity the employee who is submerged in a mountain of foil. Communicate with the top management team too.

The Ninth Webby Awards, meanwhile, were organised by the International Academy of Digital Arts & Sciences which annually gathers together "an eclectic and envelope-pushing slate of nominees". The nominees represent the best of the web, and range from Fortune 500 companies and the best-known agencies to individual bloggers and independent design studios.

Nominees fell into more than sixty categories such as Community, Fashion, Film, and Politics, as well as new categories making their debut, including Automotive, Blog, Beauty, Celebrity/Fan, Employment, Real Estate, Retail, and Social Networking.

They are hailed as "the online Oscars" by *Time Magazine*, bestowing the leading international honours for web sites and the people behind them. The awards are presented by the Academy, which is a global organization with a membership that includes musician David Bowie, Virgin Group founder Richard Branson, Real Networks CEO Rob Glaser, Oracle chairman Larry Ellison and fashion designer Max Azria.

In recognition of the web's democratic spirit, The Webby Awards also invites the public to vote for their favourite web sites in The People's Voice Awards.

The gala awards event this year was held at New York City's Gotham Hall, where the winners' are uniquely restricted to five-word acceptance speeches! Chipotle's recipient made reference to the award sculpture by saying, "*This will bring thousands on E-bay!*"

"Since the web is now so integrated into business and our everyday lives, our new categories paint a more vivid and complete picture of life today," said Tiffany Shlain, the founder and chairperson of The Webby Awards. "This year's diverse nominees provide a comprehensive tour of the best sites online, as well as a powerful sneak preview of where we are going next."

Amongst the highlights of the nominees were some who are at the forefront of breakout technologies and trends in areas such as photo sharing, telecommunications and social networking.

Out of more than four thousand entries submitted, fewer than 20% were deemed Webby Worthy.

So Chipotle did really well but what about the other restaurant nominees which were the Fox Sports Grill, Kasbah Restaurant, Low Carb Burger and the St. Elmo Steak House. All, in their own way, have content that is thought provoking for the restaurateur who wants to go online with a web site.

FOX Sports Grills offer their guests a sports and entertainment viewing environment complimented by their particular dining experience. Founded in 2002 the company set out to create a new category in the sports restaurant and bar arena that improved dining and entertainment. The grills boast an extensive menu of contemporary American cuisine highlighted with regional favourites, as well as signature items from the grill. Everyday, everything from salad dressings to pastries are prepared from scratch. Some of the restaurant's most popular items include Maryland Jumbo Crab cakes, Grilled Atlantic Salmon, New Orleans Style "BBQ" Shrimp and Grilled Carrot Cake topped with homemade vanilla frosting and candied pecans, served with vanilla ice cream. The site feels corporate but contains sufficient information to satisfy most categories of surfer.

Representing Hong Kong the Kasbah Restaurant and Medina Lounge boast a simple web site designed in luxurious deep red colours. The cuisine is based on that of the Magrheb, which originates in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. Some of the cooking takes place in a Tangine, which is a terracotta pot in which classic dishes of sweet and spiced fruit, vegetables and meat slowly simmer. Don't miss the panoramas of the bar and restaurant which give a great feel for the business.

Next is a site devoted solely to a particular dish thanks to a specific dietary change amongst a restaurant chain's customers. The Low Carb [ohydrate] Burger concept was introduced by Hardee's soon after they commenced their new menu of Angus beef Thickburgers. Staff started to notice customers removing the buns from their burgers. On investigation they discovered that the "Low-Carb Lifestyle" had arrived and the low carb burger was invented. When you visit the site don't miss the video of "Goldi's Low Carb Lunch"! Equally on Hardee's main site view the Paris Hilton TV advertisement coupled with its accompanying spoof. Both are most entertaining.

The St. Elmo Steak House originated in Indianapolis in 1902 but is very up-to-date with its web presence. There is little that is left out as reservations can be accepted and gift vouchers purchased. The menu may be meticulously examined, but don't be fooled by its simplicity. The wine list contains a remarkable selection of good bottles that will please even the most discerning of palates. For complete interactivity there is the opportunity to sign up for a regular e-newsletter and curiously, but innovatively, one is able to vote for one's "favorite server". A novel way of personalising the company's image and hospitality.

So there you have the restaurant results for the Ninth Webby Awards. Nominees aren't restricted by geography so why not submit your own site for the Tenth event! Good luck.

Links:

Chipotle: <http://www.chipotle.com>

Fox Sports Grill: - <http://www.foxsportsgrill.com>

Hardee's: <http://www.hardees.com>

The International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences: www.iadas.net/

Kasbah Restaurant - <http://www.kasbah.com.hk>

Low Carb Burger - <http://www.lowcarbburger.com>

St. Elmo Steak House - <http://www.stelmos.com>

Webby Awards: <http://ww.webbyawards.com>