

Online scrapbook fair creates long memories for those short on time

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Associated Press

Cheryl Mankoff has an undying love of scrapbooking, oodles of photos of her young family and mountains of the assorted supplies — papers, glues, glitters, ribbons — associated with her favourite pastime.

What Ms. Mankoff doesn't have is time to devote to her hobby.

"When you've got two young boys active in sports, it's sometimes hard to find time to do this," says the stay-at-home mom from Chicago, who has put together 10 books for her boys in the last three years.

"Ironically, I'm doing this for my family," Ms. Mankoff, 43, said. "But going to scrapbooking trade shows for ideas and inspiration takes me away from my family."

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Enter the Scrap-A-Faire, the first and only online scrapbooking expo that offers busy scrapbookers a chance to learn new techniques, swap ideas and connect with other enthusiasts without ever leaving home.

For a US\$5 registration fee, participants can log on to scrapafaire.com and participate in the five-day seminar, from Feb. 28-March 4. Once registered, they can "attend" \$15 seminars like Digital Scrapbooking 101, Creative Epoxy Embellishments and School Albums in a Snap! There are also chat rooms to mingle with other visitors, and vendors offering the latest in the industry.

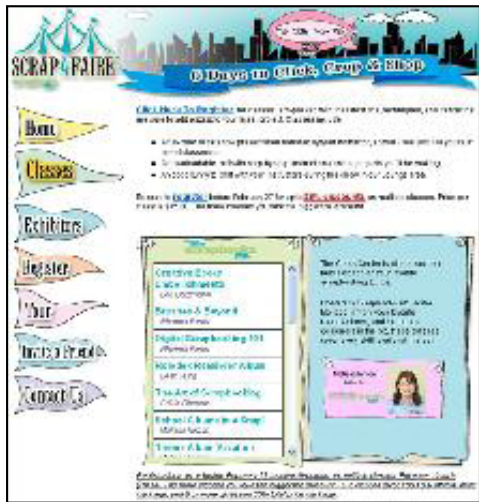
So far, organizers say more than a dozen vendors have signed up, with thousands of participants expected to enroll from across the globe.

"It really is revolutionary," noted Jeff Myers, general manager of specialty interest media at Meredith Corp., one of the co-sponsors of the event along with InXpo. "We're really giving people access to scrapbooking without the cost and hassle of travelling." Or taking time off work. Or hiring a baby sitter.

That's good news for Melissa Inman, editor of Scrapbooks Etc., who has been to more than her share of traditional scrapbooking trade shows, and who will also be leading three of the 22 offered seminars.

"At traditional consumer shows, you've got to travel, you've got to be able to go that weekend, between 9 and 5, in that specific classroom. And that means you have to find a baby sitter," said Inman, who is also mother to a kindergartner.

"The Scrap-A-Faire gives you an opportunity to do all the things you'd like to do at a consumer show, but in your pyjamas, at 2 a.m. if you'd like."



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Screenshot of Scrap-a-Faire homepage



The online expo is not a new concept. Just a few years ago, traditional trade show producers fretted that online expos would edge them out, the same way e-commerce vendors spooked brick-and-mortar stores when they first hit the scene.

Tradeshow Week senior editor Heidi Genoist said those fears turned out to be unfounded. While many trade shows now offer a supplemental online component, she could only think of three that were held exclusively on the Internet.

But physical attendance at trade shows is now down for the first time since 2003, according to data compiled by Tradeshow Week, so the scrapbook fair organizers wanted a new way of reaching the public, especially since scrapbooking has become big business. According to a 2005 study by the Craft Hobby Association, the industry is estimated at US\$3.7 billion, with one in four households having at least one scrapbooker.

While an online expo offers convenience, attendees may miss some of the physical experience of attending a trade show in person, Ms. Genoist said.

"For some people, it's difficult to evaluate the quality of a product without engaging the human senses, without being able to touch it or smell or see it," Ms. Genoist said.

But participants in the fair see it as a way to attract new devotees.

Jim Rudolph, president of Cincinnati-based adhesive company GlueArts (rolling out the latest in "instant mounting adhesives" at the fair), predicts the Scrap-A-Faire will help bring in men, for example.

"What we're seeing out there is young men getting involved in this," said Rudolph, who doesn't scrapbook but who has a wife and daughter who do. "I think it's because that someone special in their lives enjoys this and they want to get involved.

"This is an opportunity for men too embarrassed to sign up for a class to get online, go to a class and nobody ever knows."

On the Net: Scrap-A-Faire: <http://www.scrapafaire.com>, Feb. 28-March 4. Registration fee: \$5.