

Web Sight

John Nurick, Senior Consultant



Circuses

The roar of the greasepaint, the smell of the crowd, all five senses engaged: circus is a high-bandwidth experience, and rendering it in a web browser is like rendering the 1812 Overture with paper and comb.

So it's no surprise that the first result Google gives for "circus" is Circus Circus, a casino whose mission is to be "the value leader on the Las Vegas Strip" (rooms from \$29.95, special offer). This is a brightly coloured but eerily empty site, with images of deserted bedrooms, restaurants, gambling halls and theme park rides – and, if you drill down a couple of levels, the World's Largest Permanent Circus, where "the finest performers from around the globe entertain audiences twice per hour every day from 11 a.m. to midnight".

Next on Google's list is "Circus HomePage" (sic) which is Japanese and isn't about circuses. Third come Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey (The Greatest Show on Earth), who tour two three-ring circuses through America. The Ringling site has good practical information (tour schedules, animal welfare) but makes no attempt to convey the circus experience.

The next actual circus website on the list belongs to the Big Apple Circus, which tours the Eastern seaboard of the US. Its "virtual circus" is a let-down – it just shows you round the tent – but there's a good page on the history of circus. And so it continues: the typical circus site is cheap, garish and static. Like National Rail Enquiries, it tells you about the product but doesn't let you taste the experience.

The only exception I've found so far is the Cirque du Soleil, which is as different from other circus websites as the company is from other circuses. Instead of garish colours and static images the pages are dark, subtly gradated, and animated. To save bandwidth, the animation – done with Macromedia Flash – is confined to small areas but it is subtle and integrated into the design of the page. Even so, the site is barely satisfactory with a modem connection, though it works well with any broadband link.

The content of the site is different, too. The shows themselves are up front, and tour schedules, ticket prices and online bookings are tucked behind a modest link at the bottom of the home page. Each show's pages attempt to convey the style and flavour of the show, with static images, small animations, and words (some of which would fit well in Pseud's Corner). Even the schedule and ticketing part of the site lets you watch a two-minute video trailer of each show. It's not the real thing, but it's virtuoso paper-and-comb playing.



Links:

<http://www.circuscircus.com>

<http://www.nandemo.gr.jp>

<http://www.ringling.com>

<http://www.bigapplecircus.org>

<http://www.bigapplecircus.org>

<http://www.cirquedusoleil.com>

