

Revamped Cup website does it in a canter

By **JESSE HOGAN**

WHEN Victoria Racing Club completed an audit of its online strategy more than four years ago, the club's marketing chief Stephen Silk was distressed to find it did not own the website rights to its most prestigious event — the Melbourne Cup.

Claiming the rights to domain names like melbournecup.com and themelbournecup.com was easy — legal letters of demand helped that — but the hard part was fixing what Dr Silk admits was a collection of mini-websites that were "complex and not user-friendly".

"The motivation was to (condense) about nine or 10 different (website domains) that were separately connected all down into one central location," he said. "You don't get customer confidence if they think they're off on another site, so everything had to come under the look and the feel of the brand image of the VRC."

The latest website, released in the lead-up to the start of the eight-day Melbourne Cup Carnival, is divided into three broad sections: the cup carnival and its history, Flemington Racecourse as a venue, and the VRC itself.

"One of the challenges that the website faces is that you've actually got Flemington as a venue that houses a club that has 25,000 members, and what we want to be able to do is extend the value of that membership... not just on the course but online," said Peter Noble, whose web design company Citrus led the online overhaul.

Almost 40 per cent of the VRC's annual online traffic occurs in the fortnight surrounding the Melbourne Cup.

Dr Silk said a challenge was ensuring the revamped website catered for local and inter-



Off and running.

ILLUSTRATION: LOUIE DOWNS

national racing fans, through the use of archived race replays, as well as those attracted to the social aspect of the carnival.

"It is the definitive racing history of the Melbourne Cup for the racing enthusiast, and the other side is the social and entertainment side; that is the fashion, the fashions on the field... the

events registration and the entertainment component."

Online merchandise sales had already increased 100 per cent compared with last year thanks to the new website, Dr Silk said.

Meanwhile, the official betting pools for Cup Day will be boosted by the inclusion of totes

from New Zealand and South Africa.

Almost \$18 million in win bets alone were placed on last year's Melbourne Cup in the SuperTAB pool across Victoria, Western Australia, Tasmania and the ACT, but this year's pool will also include New Zealand-based punters. South African tote oper-

ator Phumelela Gaming has reached a similar agreement with Tabcorp and the VRC, and will offer betting on every race on Tuesday — except the main one (its wagering system is unable to cope with the 24-horse field).

LINK
 ▶ www.melbournecup.com