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Intel Parallel Advisor 2011: The advanced threading tool for Microsoft Visual Studio* C/C++ developers planning to add threading to serial or parallel applications. Learn more here.

Do-It-Yourself Social Network with Ning

By [Tyme](#)

What is Ning? Ning is a Web application for building a social networking hub – one that can be private or shared. It is not a full-featured, highly customizable content management system (like Drupal) but more a social network kit, geared toward the not-so-techies. That being said, you can customize your Ning site in many ways, through the user-interface options and through good ole fashioned CSS. And, there is advanced flexibility for Web [developers](#).

Ning.com teases the potential architect with the idea that you can have your site up and running in less than 60 seconds. Well, I'd say that is a stretch; but with the user-friendly design interface, it is quick to set up a basic site with one of the 50 pre-built templates.

Just point and click to add a theme, change a theme, add site features and bonus applications. If you love the whole app craze, you'll like Ning. It's the Golden Corral of [Web applications](#).

Here is a peek at my Ning test site styled with the core options and CSS:

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Intel Parallel Advisor is a threading assistant tool for Microsoft Visual Studio C++ developers that helps identify where to add parallelism to existing source code. It guides developers and architects through the process of exploring parallelism, identifying those areas with the greatest parallelism potential. [Simplify, Demystify, and Speed Threading Design](#)
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(You can click around this test site live: <http://brevardoutdoors.ning.com>.)

Managing Your Site

Ning makes managing your site easy through a Dashboard, which lists all of your options for site building. Customization is made through the use of form fields (checkboxes, radio buttons, drop-down selections) and drag-n-drop controls. If an option is not available on your plan, an icon of a padlock will appear beside the menu option or will be grayed out, in other cases.

Dashboard

Members

	Pending Approval	Past 10 Days	Total
Members	0	0	1

Content

	Pending Approval	Past 10 Days	Total
Photos	0	0	14
Blogs	2	0	4
Forum	-	1	17

Leaderboards

Category	Count	Member
Top Content	This Leaderboard is empty.	
Top Members	1	Tyme
Top Photos	This Leaderboard is empty.	
Top Blog Posts	This Leaderboard is empty.	

Adding menu items ("tabs") is straight forward and allows the site creator good flexibility.

Tabs

+ Add New Tab

- Video
- Invite
- Webmaster
- Blogs
- Forum
- Photos
- My Network

Tab Information

Tab Name: Video

Target Page: Use Existing URL

Make Tab Visible: Everyone

Sub-Tab Menu Colors

- Text Color: Red
- Text Color on Hover: Black
- Background Color: Checkered
- Background Color on Hover: Orange

Save Tab Settings | Reset to Defaults | Cancel

Features

The basic plan ("the Mini") lets you add blogs, forums, photos, embedded video, as many as 2 add-on applications, and 1 RSS feed. The "Plus" and "Pro" plans offer many more features, including: groups, videos, branded badges, Twitter and Facebook integration, online chat, custom CSS, analytics, and more. The higher level plans also allow a greater volume of storage, bandwidth, members, groups, RSS feeds, etc.

See full plan details: http://about.ning.com/plans/?xg_source=www.ning.com

APPLICATIONS

Additional features, through add-on applications, are available on all plans -- the number of which is determined by your plan. (The basic plan allows only 2.) Simply drag-n-drop features to add them, or from the applications page click the link to add.

These mini apps add extra functionality to your site, including integration with other 3rd party applications.

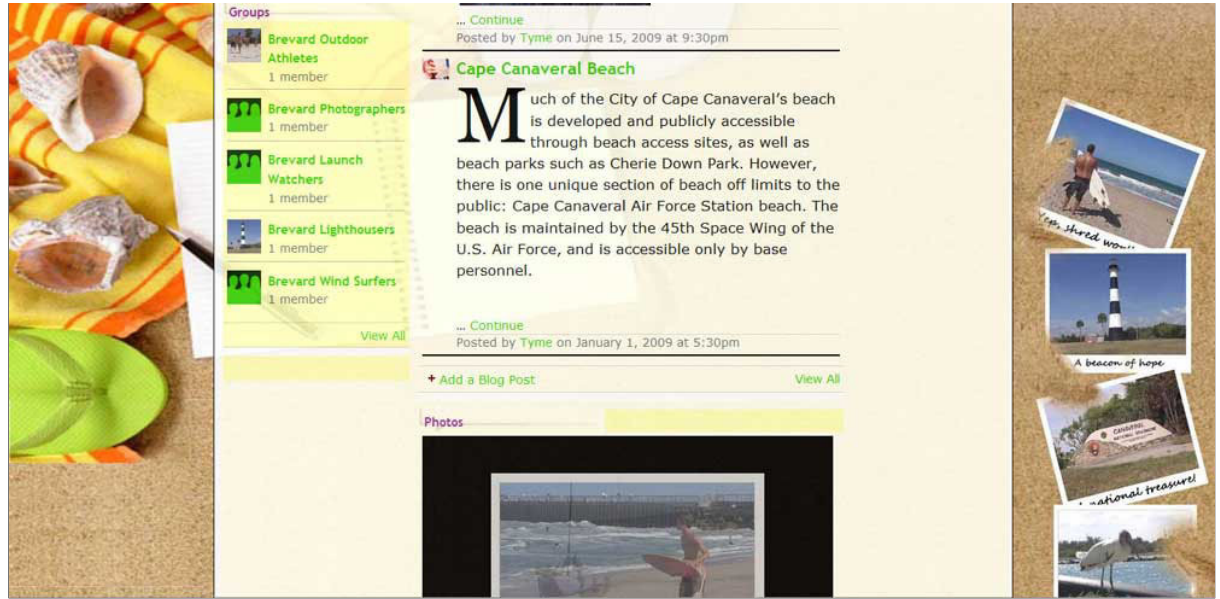
<p>FEATURED</p> <p>STAFF PICKS</p> <p>COLLABORATION</p> <p>COMMUNICATION</p> <p>E-COMMERCE</p> <p>FUN AND GAMES</p> <p>FUNDRAISING</p>	<p>GOOGLE DOCS</p> <p>This App allows posting Google Presentations on Ning profiles</p> <p>+ Add To My Network</p>	<p>TOKBOX VIDEO CHAT</p> <p>Enable your members to video chat with each other via TokBox</p> <p>+ Add To My Network</p>	<p>ZORAP</p> <p>Add a chat room to your social network, equipped with video chat and rich-media sharing. Get a room on Zorap, and you'll be able to hang out with oth...</p> <p>+ Add To My Network</p>
	<p>MINDJOLT GAMES</p> <p>Play over 500 games. At MindJolt Games you can play any of the Arcade, Puzzle, Strategy and Sports games we offer for free. Challenge your friends...</p> <p>+ Add To My Network</p>	<p>OFFBEAT GUIDES</p> <p>Allow your members to build a customizable travel guide. Powered by Offbeat Guides.</p> <p>+ Add To My Network</p>	<p>DAILY SUDOKU WITH J2PLAY</p> <p>Play this fantastic puzzle game that is taking the world by storm - New puzzles every day! This game has J2Play which allows you to chat with friends...</p> <p>+ Add To My Network</p>

While the basic plan offers limited features, more in keeping with a blog, the higher plans offer features to make a true social network hub. A few standouts are Groups,

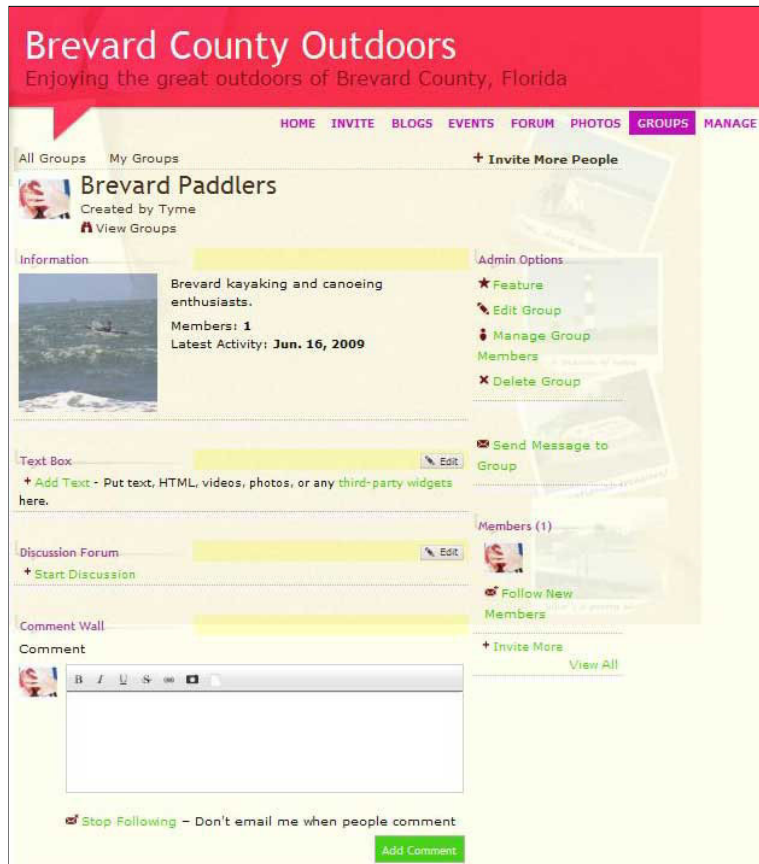
Events, Chat, User options.

GROUPS

One hubbicious feature is Groups – individual communities within your site that users can join to share with like-minded souls.



Screenshots: Groups as they appear on public side.



Screenshot: Groups access as logged in user. (Admin features appear on the right only for those who have been assigned the admin role.)

Each Group has its own discussion forum, text box and comment wall, RSS reader, and privacy settings. Group creators can choose the features and privacy settings they want for their group. The site admin ("Network Creator") determines which users are allowed to create or moderate the various groups.

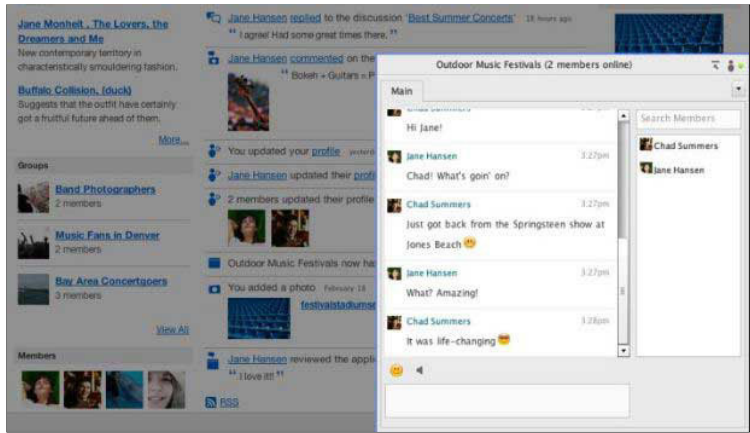
EVENTS

The events calendar is a popular feature, and includes RSVP option with admin tracking of the RSVPs.



CHAT

The Chat feature is one of Ning's nicer advantages. It allows users to participate in a live, real-time network-wide chatroom or conduct private chats with other members of your Ning Network.



USERS

A site admin can create a user profile template with custom questions for capturing demographic information about users and helping users find others by those fields. And, users can customize their own profiles, create their own blogs, and share media (photos, videos).

Dashboard

Members

- Moderation
- Invitation
- Profile Questions
- Message Broadcast
- Management
- Controls

Content

- Moderation
- Activity Feed
- Message
- Controls
- Archive

Settings

- Network Details
- Terms of Service
- Email
- Privacy
- Appearance
- Features Layout
- Tags
- Language Editor
- Features

Tools

- Search Bots
- Flickr Integration
- Facebook Integration
- Twitter Integration
- Custom Code
- Google Webmaster
- Siteman

Profile Questions

These are the questions that your members will answer when they join your Ning Network. The default questions are location and gender.

You can remove these questions at any time. If you select 'required', members will have to answer the question to join. If you select 'private', the answer will only be visible to you and other administrators.

Question Title Gender Required

Answer Type Gender

Add to Advanced Search

[X Remove](#) [+ Add Another Question](#) [★ Feature](#)

Question Title Location Required

Answer Type Location

Add to Advanced Search

[X Remove](#) [+ Add Another Question](#) [★ Stop Featuring](#)

Question Title Required Private

Answer Type One Line Answer

Add to Advanced Search

[X Remove](#) [+ Add Another Question](#) [★ Feature](#)

[Save](#) [Cancel](#)

Summary

Ning offers a nice "out-of-the box" product for those who do not have the money or inclination to build a powerhouse social website. This would be a good option for local clubs and community sports teams. For those who need fine control over theming, e-commerce solutions, or expandability, they would be wise to also consider the more robust content management systems (Drupal, Joomla, Wordpress, etc.).

The feature-packed version once was free. So, if you had an account previously, you'll need to get out your wallet to reactivate your site. [Now](#), Ning offers a free trial and 3 different plans with varying levels of features. Subscription pricing ranges from \$2.95 per month to \$49.95 per month, with discounts for yearly subscriptions.

Tyme is a freelance writer and multimedia specialist of many years. She likes walks in the park, cotton candy, and baby ducks. To learn more: [MultimediaByTyme.com](#).

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2 Comments ([click to add your comment](#))

By Nhoel October 1 2010 8:15 PMPDT

*this has been an awesome share.
thank you very much for this.
very useful !*

[Reply to this comment](#)



By Tyme October 3 2010 1:09 PMPDT

Thank you! I'm glad that you enjoyed it.

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