

Putting Your Art (or Whatever) On the Web

Consider Before you start:

- Why do you want a web site? A web site makes it easy to:

Show pictures and whatever without having to worry that the receiver can read attachments plus you don't clog their e-mail	Coordinate a group (an aside for group coordinators: see <i>groups.yahoo.com</i> for group discussion, <i>www.quickbase.com</i> for group database)
Share information	Sell a product (maybe)
and...	

Knowing *your* purpose will help focus your design.

- Who is your audience? Do they use the web?
 - What connection speed (modem or faster)? If slow, use graphics with care.
 - How fancy a monitor? Again, if low resolution monitor, take care in your graphics.
 - Older browser? may not support newer features like cascading style sheets.
 - Sight problems? Use relative fonts, no frames, alt text for graphics.
- How do they find you? Mailing to group, links from others, ads, search engines.
- Is someone else doing the same thing? Does it make sense to cross-link?
- If this is a business oriented item, what is your competition doing?
- What is your budget? Do you plan to take credit cards over the internet? If so, you need a more expensive and involved setup (see Appendix for costs of various options)
- How much time do you plan to commit to site maintenance?

Definitions of Terms:

World Wide Web: the connected network of computers sharing information, most often in the form of HTML coded “pages” or screens of information.

HTML (Hyper Text Mark-up Language): the text and pictures you want people to see surrounded by commands which tell the computer how to show it.

Browser: software which interprets the HTML code to display information on your monitor as the author intended you to see it. (Microsoft Internet Explorer, Netscape Navigator, Opera)

ISP (Internet Service Provider): also called your “dialup”. Your modem, cable or DSL (Digital Subscriber Line) account needs their computer at the other end to connect you to the web. These are the folks you pay for your e-mail account.

URL: Universal Resource Locator in the form *www.computer-workshop.com* (the *http://* in front tells the browser the language used) No spaces are allowed in a URL. The URL is also referred to as the page address. The *www* is increasingly being replaced with words like *home* or *support*.

Other high level domains: *.gov* for governments, *.edu* for education, *.org* for organization plus all the ones for countries. New high level domains are being created all the time.

Domain Name: the URL to the end of the .com, .org or whatever.

In <http://www.contemporaryquiltart.com/gallery.htm>
[contemporaryquiltart.com](http://www.contemporaryquiltart.com) is the domain name

Search engine: a device for finding information when you don't know the URL. Common ones are:
www.google.com, www.yahoo.com, www.lycos.com, www.excite.com, www.altavista.com,
www.netscape.com, www.msn.com, www.dogpile.com, www.askjeeves.com, www.hotbot.com

Site Host: the computer connected to the Web all the time which "serves" your site to those requesting it. www.zd.net lists the hosts recommended by PC Magazine; thelist.internet.com lists ISPs and services all over the world

Upload: sending a file to the server from your computer (your computer is the lowliest in the network so any computer connected to it is "up").

Download is receiving a file from the server.

Design

Let's assume you will use the cheapest site host, the "free" space you have as part of your ISP (Internet Service Provider). Your URL will be whatever your ISP assigns. usually in the form <http://www.mindspring.com/~workshop>. You need to look at their web site or call and ask. This will also tell you the procedure for uploading your pages (placing them on their computer). If you want to take money, get your own domain or look into other site hosts, see the appendix.

Web pages usually consist of HTML (Hyper Text Mark-up Language) code. You can write HTML using any word processor that came with your computer (including Wordpad or Simple Text). This is often difficult for people who aren't into computers and especially so for visually-oriented folks. www.usability.gov is a great reference for what works and what doesn't. Also see www.webpagesthatsuck.com for things to avoid

Look at what others are doing. Some conventions make displaying certain types of information easier. If you find a page you like, you can always save it to your hard drive (While viewing page choose File, Save as, Web or HTML file type) and take out their stuff and replace it with yours. Please respect their copyright: you are trying to learn from their structure, not duplicate their art.

Software for creating web sites:

Many ISPs have their own free site creation software. It is often limited and painful to use but they are getting better. Other choices include:

- Netscape Composer (a part of the free browser)
- Adobe GoLive (My recommendation if you want more, especially if you already have other Adobe products so you know how their software icons work, \$139 or \$289).
- Microsoft FrontPage (part of some versions of MS Office, you should upgrade to at least version 2000 as there are problems with the earlier versions. \$84 or \$159),
- Macromedia DreamWeaver (used by the folks who do it for a living, \$179 or \$269)

It's easy:

Open editor, type text, insert graphics, make links, save page (the first page of your site should always be named *index.html* or *index.htm*), upload to server.

Parts of a page

Header:

Title: what the search engine calls the page

Description: how the search engine describes the page

Keywords: part of how the search engine finds your page. Repeats are a no no.

Body:

You can't control exactly what the user sees (and shouldn't: see vision impaired comments under audience above). If you want control, use Adobe PDF format and include a button to download the free reader (www.adobe.com). This is good for catalogues and newsletters that people will probably want to print (the IRS uses it for their forms).

Tables, frames and cascading style sheets are ways to control placement of text and graphics: each has drawbacks. Tables are best right now but cascading style sheets are the coming method (only modern browsers support them, see audience comments above).

Graphics formats: Getting graphics into your computer can be by CD, scanner or digital camera. Use fast loading appropriate graphics. 72 DPI (dots per inch) and not larger than about 500 pixels tall and 600 wide; try not to exceed total size of 70K. Use thumbnails (75 to 100 pixel square miniatures) to link to the larger image for those who want it. JPG is the format to use for photos and GIF for drawings (although other formats are being discussed, they are not universally accepted). The software to do this often comes with your scanner or you can buy Adobe Photoshop Elements, the \$99 cheaper version of the software every graphic artist wants to play with.

Links to other URLs: make it clear when a link will take a user off your site to someone else's. Use links to "bookmarks" further down the page to make a long page easy to navigate.

Sketch out your pages and their links before sitting down at the computer.

Remember, not everyone will enter your document from page 1. You want them to easily figure out who you are and what kind of page it is wherever they enter. Beware of frames for this reason: if you use them, have a home button at the bottom of each page.

- Try for coherent design: use the same look on each page so people know they are still on your site. Be sure navigation links and cues are clear. Cascading style sheets make keeping the same "look" easy but are not supported by older browsers. Frames may cause problems with search engines and page readers for the blind. Tables are recognized by all browsers but mean changing each page individually.
- Use local references for links within your site. Make links out of your site after, rather than before, your message or open such links in a new page (but this gives the user lots of windows to close).
- Target to the taste of your audience. Keep it simple! If you are trying to impart information, the design should help and not hinder. Beware of textured backgrounds and small, light text against a dark background. Don't scatter items on the page as this leads to confusion.
- Try for fast loading graphics (bigger than 80k is too big) or make them an optional page. Use thumbnails (5 to 10 k) linked to a larger graphic for those who click. Use alternate ("alt") text for people who don't have graphics: those using a page reader or text only browsers.

- **Chunk your information:** Information overload can be a problem. But too little information per page can cause a feeling of “waste of time” and lots of scrolling.
- **Test with several browsers:** Not all browsers support all features. IE 4 and Netscape 4 are probably the oldest versions you need to test.
- Sites can quickly get stale. Put a date on pages of information which might “age” like seminars etc.

Maintenance:

- Listing with search engines
- Make sure external links have not died.
- Is your page accomplishing its purpose?
- How many hits per page? Most ISP’s will track this for you.
- Ask your audience for input.

Summary: Order of tasks

1. Decide purpose
2. Develop page layout
3. Write code
4. Test with different browsers
5. Upload to server
6. Test again, especially links and overall feel (loading speed etc.)
7. Advertise address, submit to search engines
8. On-going maintenance and evaluation to keep your site from going stale.

Appendix: Hardware, Costs and Related Issues

- Cheapest is the “free” space you have as part of your ISP dialup account (about \$20/month — you may want to use a forwarding service to this, see below). Be sure your ISP allows your use: most, but not all, allow listing business information but not actual sales on a “personal” site. If you don’t have an ISP, my clients have had good luck with the local ISPs: Seanet, Oz, Blarg, Nwlink. For those who travel, ATT Worldnet works well (but ATT cable is a mess at the moment).
- If you have e-mail through work and don’t need a dial-up, you might select a separate web host: for example *www.hostsave.com* is \$6.95/month plus \$35 one-time setup fee and prices go up from there.

If you want to take money

- Commercial site as part of your dial up account. (\$30 to \$70 to)
- Separate commercial site with shopping cart. \$19.95 on up. Remember this is in addition to the monthly dial-up fee your ISP charges to give you access to the internet.
- Hosted mall: Ebay storefront (\$9.95/month plus lots of little fees that seem to add up quickly), Yahoo (\$49.95/month for hosting, \$0.10 per item per month, 0.5% transaction fee on all transac-

tions, and 3.5% revenue share on transactions that originate on the Yahoo! Network; no startup fee and you can cancel whenever you want.). Finding all the fees seems difficult: keep your eyes open here.

To take credit cards you need an on-line merchant account; some hosted malls include this, most commercial sites from ISPs don't. *www.westhost.com* is \$19.95/month for the site and \$30/month plus 2.29% per transaction for an on-line merchant account plus \$195 in set-up fees. They submit and validate the card charges and the payment can be automatically deposited to your bank account.

www.gateway.com is \$19.95 for a 10 item store (90 day free trial is advertised). This uses credit card capture: you get the card # and process it through your normal credit card merchant account. If you don't have one, fees are about \$30 per month and 1.5 to 7%, depending on volume (those of you doing street fairs may know more about cheap sources for merchant accounts than I).

www.paypal.com and *www.kagi.com* are two ways to avoid monthly merchant account fees: They charge a higher per transaction fee but no monthly fee. You send your users to the site to make payment. Pay pal is widely used by auction buyers and noted for ease of use and integrity (2.9% +\$0.30 fee). Kagi is also well reputed and used by many shareware vendors. Kagi does a good job of returning your users to your site after payment. Their per transaction charge is \$2.50 plus a variable percentage. Normal payment to you is a monthly check. See the sites for more info.

Getting a name:

A domain name is easier to remember and remains yours even if your ISP changes.

If you get a commercial account, domain registration is usually included. If you are trying to cut your costs, use **domain forwarding**: Domain Direct (*www.domaindirect.com* and there are many other such services) can tell you if your chosen name is available and register it for you if you wish: they will provide the two name servers required to register a name and they will forward all requests for that URL to whatever URL you tell them; they will also forward 5 different e-mails (about \$35 per year). This is what I do to be *www.computer-workshop.com* instead of *workshop.home.mindspring.com* or *www.mindspring.com/~workshop*

(To find the owner of an existing name see *www.networksolutions.com/cgi-bin/whois/whois*)

