A Web Site to Call
Home

by Mark Navin

The World Wide Web is an ever-expanding pool of information. It has around eight billion pages that are being added to even as you read this. Since its birth more than a decade ago, the Internet has become an integral part of modern life.

Last month I explained the process of getting your own little piece of the Web and tagging it by registering a domain name. This installment is for the brave souls who have taken the plunge, visited the likes of **www.bigfuji.com**, and now want to put together their own Web site. I am not a Web designer and it's a specialized field that combines artistic flair and technical know-how. Having said that, there's no reason why an average computer user can't produce an interesting Web site.

Assuming you have decided to register the domain name with a company that gives you hosting and e-mail, what's the next step? First, you should endeavor to read as much as you can about "publishing" Web sites. A good place to learn Web terminology and requirements for building a site is **www.htmlgoodies.com/**.

Web Developer's Journal is a useful site, particularly for those who want to be walked through the process, having pitfalls pointed out to them (**www.webdevelopersjournal.com/columns/abcs_of_building_web_sites.html**). The Journal has a range of resources from free downloadable tools to explanations on using graphics. Another good way to glean information is through the FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) on IT sites, or even at the free online encyclopedia Wikipedia (**http://en.wikipedia.org**). Discussion forums are also excellent places to meet like-minded people and ask questions.

The original coding language developed to view Web pages through a Web browser was HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language). Designed by Tim Berners-Lee at a particle physics laboratory in Switzerland in the late 1980s (**http://public.web.cern.ch/Public/Welcome.html**), HTML is concerned with the presentation of information. The current version is HTML 4.01, but in some areas is being replaced by XHTML.

HTML has a simple, yet elegant coding format: tell the computer to do something; insert required information; then tell

the computer to stop doing it. To see this in action, open Notepad (the free text editor in Microsoft's Operating System) and type in some text. Save the file then change the suffix from .txt to .html and click on the file. The file will be opened by Internet Explorer (the browser) and you'll see your original text displayed. In effect, you only need a text editor to produce the necessary code for Web pages, but the method is clearly laborious. The language has developed considerably since its inception.

One of the big tech fears or misconceptions held by a lot of people wanting to start their own home page is that they'll have to grapple with masses of computer code in order to get their holiday snaps online. But an interface removes the average user from the time-consuming encoding process. So instead of learning coding, you'll have to study how to use an application that can *produce* the coding.

Some popular Web page design software includes Hotdog (**www.sausage.com/products.html**), Adobe GoLive CS (**www.adobe.com/products/golive/main.html**) and Macromedia Studio MX 2004 (**www.macromedia.com/software/studio/**). A quick search for HTML editors at **www.download.com** reaps 138 possibilities, 23 being free. What you finally choose will depend on what you want to do with your Web site and how comfortable you feel with the software.

If you're not entirely sure how you'd like your Web site to look, help is at hand in the form of templates. Many Web hosting sites offer templates for free or a nominal price. These are already formatted in terms of design, layout and color. All they require is for you to add the relevant information. There are hundreds of Web sites dedicated to free or pay templates, but **www.freewebtemplates.com/** will give you a good rundown of what's

available. You can also check out template possibilities and Web applications at **http://office.microsoft.com/frontpage**.

Web pages using only HTML are referred to as "static" Web pages and for many sites this is sufficient. This is, however, very much the tip of the iceberg. Web sites are becoming increasingly dynamic, using a variety of software. The current Club Web site (**www.tokyoamericanclub.org**) uses some of these. The front-page logo and menu navigation use an application called Flash (**www.macromedia.com/software/flash/**), which is added to the browser (the plug-in is free) and the content is managed by scripting language software called PHP (**www.php.net/**). Both are applications that allow people to develop interactive Web pages quickly and easily. The level of complexity of your site will determine the suitability of different software. Adobe has a suite of applications that makes it easier to combine the various components of its products such as Flash.

When building a Web site, it's also worth bearing in mind that while Microsoft Internet Explorer has become the standard browser after the bruising war with Netscape, it's no longer the only browser out there. Wikipedia has a comparison of browsers currently available at **http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison_of_web_browsers**. Just as Web pages appear slightly differently on a Mac from in Windows, there might be variations depending on the browser used as well.

While all this might seem daunting, the result can be a pleasing corner of the Internet for your family and friends to share. The only limit is your imagination and the time you spend on it. How much time was spent on this new version of Star Wars at **www.asciimation.co.nz/**, and isn't it fun? □

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