Web sites

Katherine Cornelius and Allen Harrison

For relatively little money, anyone with access to a networked computer can produce a Web site, zine, or blog and connect with people all over the world. This chapter will introduce you to publishing your own content in a simple Web site, from pre-planning to design to the basics of HTML and other technologies.

Make a Plan

Before you turn your computer on, sit down with a pencil and paper and plan your Web site. This will save you time and energy in the long run and will lead to a more enjoyable experience.

GOALS AND AUDIENCES List the top three to five goals of your Web project, in order of importance. Your main goal may be to sell your artwork, share your opinions, build a photo gallery, or promote an event.

Next, describe the intended audiences. Are they young or old? What Web sites do they visit? What is their typical connection speed to the Internet? How much time will they spend on your Web site?

These exercises will keep you focused throughout the Web development process. When you are deciding to add a new feature to the site, refer back to your goals to check the relevance. Use your audiences to make decisions such as the placement of content, font size, and use of bandwidth-heavy technology.

SITE ARCHITECTURE Diagram the hierarchy of your content. You can do this on the computer, as we did in our example, or with pencil and paper. Connect the main topics to the home page, then connect the subsections to the main topics. These connections will be links, or pathways for users to reach the content.

When completed, think as if you were an end-user. How quickly can you find certain content? What information needs to be linked to the home page? Keep in mind how your audience will use the information. What will they be looking for? What will interest them?

FILE STRUCTURE When designing your site, always remember that a Web site is a collection of files. Every page on the site is a file, and so is every graphic or movie. Each file has its own name and location (address). The browser reads all those names and addresses and builds a page on your screen. Your site architecture is a blueprint of the way the files will sit on your hard drive and on the server. Use this blueprint when you are creating HTML files.

To explain the Web process, we created several examples of home pages for an imaginary Web site. Listed below are our goals and audience for our fictional site.

OUR GOALS	OUR AUDIENCES
1. Create a visual tutorial and useful tool about Web design.	1. Technically savvy people who may not be trained as designers.
2. Create designs that are fun and engaging.	2. People with a general interest in design.
3. Present examples that do not require a lot of technical knowledge.	3. People who want to grasp the power to publish in their own hands.

Site architecture diagram:

- **HOME**
  - **MAKE A PLAN**
    - GOALS & AUDIENCES
    - SITE ARCHITECTURE
    - FILE STRUCTURE
    - RESEARCH
    - COLLECT MATERIALS
  - **BUILD IN HTML**
    - FILE STRUCTURE
    - HTML
    - HTML EDITORS
    - TABLES
  - **SET-UP THE SITE**
    - DOMAIN NAME
    - REGISTERING A DOMAIN NAME
    - PURCHASE WEB SERVER SPACE
    - FTP
    - E-COMMERCE
  - **PROMOTE THE SITE**
    - SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMIZATION
    - MARKETING

SITE ARCHITECTURE
1. Group together sections that pertain to each other.
2. Try not to have more than seven main navigation pages.
3. Don't bury your content.

RESEARCH Find Web sites that you like and ask yourself why they are successful. Look at the design and placement of navigation elements and the use of colors and typefaces. Look for Web sites that are similar in audience, subject matter, or look and feel to your future Web site. Look for simple sites that are not too far beyond your technical ability.

COLLECT MATERIALS AND CONTENT Transfer photos and art work to digital format. Save graphics as JPEGs and GIFs. Gather these materials before you start the design process so that you can use them in your design or as inspiration.

You also need to assemble your written content early in the Web process. Delays are often caused by missing content. Save the copy in text documents; you can copy and paste into HTML later in the process.

Design

SKETCH On paper, sketch several layouts for your home page and interior pages. Try different placements of the logo (or header), navigation, and content. Plan how the navigation will change on the interior pages.

TAKING YOUR DESIGN TO THE COMPUTER The standard image-editing software for building a Web site is Adobe PhotoShop. Use it to make shapes, choose colors, crop images, type content, and save files for the Web.

Start by creating a document that is 750 pixels wide x 480 pixels high. This size will fit into the standard Web resolution of 800 x 600 pixels and will allow users to print the pages of your site. Next, place the design elements in the locations indicated in your sketch.

COLOR Choose a color scheme that matches the feel of your site. It could be serious or fun, warm or cool. Use contrasting colors to highlight certain features. It is important that your image files are saved in RGB, since this is the format computer monitors use to read colors.

TYPE There are two main ways to display text on the Web: HTML text and graphic text. HTML text is written in an HTML document. There are only a handful of fonts that are displayed on all platforms. Common HTML typefaces are Times, Arial, Helvetica, Verdana, Courier, and Georgia. Graphic text is created in an image-editing software tool such as PhotoShop and is displayed as an image.

Use HTML text for large bodies of copy and text that you want to download quickly. Use graphic text when you want to use a specific font or integrate type with an image. Navigation and header images are commonly in graphic text. Text is best saved as a gif file.

HTML LAYOUT AND THE GRID The designs that you have created on the computer will be broken down into components of an HTML page. As you work, think about how the design will translate into HTML. Most HTML layouts use tables with rows and columns. If this is your first Web site, you may want to design using a simple grid.

OPTIMIZING GRAPHICS FOR THE WEB Web professionals use programs such as Adobe ImageReady (companion to Adobe PhotoShop) and Macromedia Fireworks to optimize and save images. These programs allow you to optimize multiple images at a time and save them to your images folder. This is especially helpful for rollover navigation images.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE
The plywood, hands, pencil, and ruler are part of a background image created with a digital camera. The title and navigation were produced in PhotoShop and saved as optimized gifs. The body copy is HTML text.
Design: Katherine Cornelius

diy: web site

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1 — make a plan
2 — create a design
3 — build in html
4 — program further
5 — set-up the site
6 — promote the site
7
8
9
10
12