RESOURCE BIN

Creating your own web home page.

Our usual reminder here that the *Resource Bin* is now a two-way column. You can get tech help, consultant referrals and off-the-wall networking on nearly any electronic, *tinaja questing,* personal publishing, money machine, or computer topic by calling me at (520) 428-4073 weekdays 8-5 Mountain Standard Time.

US callers only, please.

I'm now in the process of setting up my new *Guru's Lair* web site you will find at (where else?) *www.tinaja.com* This is the place you go for instant tech answers. Among the many files in our library, you will find complete reprint sets for all of the *Resource Bin* and other columns. Plus a brand new Synergetics Consultant's Newtwork & lots of links to unique web sites.

You will get the best results if you have both *Netscape Gold* and *Acrobat Reader 3.0* installed. This new reader does utterly amazing things online.

Your Own Web Site

Last month, we looked into all the fundamentals of getting online. After you have your ISP and host software in place, and after you have surfed the net for a month, the chances are you might want to start up your own personal web home page.

Before you begin, though, take time to write down *all* the *exact* goals you want your site to accomplish. It *is* reasonable for a site to make others aware of you. Or to provide info on your products. It *is* reasonable for the site to focus on one topic.

But it *is not* reasonable to expect a site to generate scads of direct cash sales. It *is not* reasonable to expect thousands of daily visitors to your site. Unless you have an exceptional sole-source something to offer.

By far your three most important features that you can offer on your site are *content, content,* and *content.*

Beyond lots of content, you should also *secondarily* aim to be a *gateway site* that provides great heaping bunches of well annotated and working links to other quality web locations.

Your first and foremost rule is to study *hundreds* of existing sites to find out what does and does not work. I am not that convinced that presenting lots of highly personal information online is such a good idea.

For instance, if you are female, your personal content *will* be treated as a porno site. At least by many viewers. If you must present a resume online, better to have a short summary plus a "click here for full email version".

And spare us the drivel. I couldn't care less about your parakeet.

Unless, of course, you've trained him to program in PostScript while he quests Mount Graham tinajas.

Note also that properly maintaining a useful web site demands an *absolute minimum* of *twenty hours* of work per week. Sometimes *much* more.

You should find two types of sites: *registered* and *non-registered.*

A non-registered site is more or less free. And is simply some space your ISP leases to you. If your ISP is *aaron,*

> **NEXT MONTH: Don reviews the fundamental resources for electronic servicing.**

your home page site address will be *www.aaron/~yoursite/*

Being free is all a non-registered site is worth. Others can freely use your domain name. Getting your site indexed may be tricky. Your address is a free ad for your ISP. And if your ISP goes belly up (or you seek a better one elsewhere) you'll have to rename and repromote your site.

Instead, a registered site costs you $50 per year. This gives you exclusive use of the domain name. Your name ends in *.com* when you are a for-profit venture. Or ends in *.org* if not.

To find out if a domain name is still available, go to *www.internic.net* and use their *whois* feature. My first two choices of *synergetics* and *guru* were not available. So *tinaja*, of course, was the next logical choice.

To register your domain, you once again should contact *www.internic.net* Then follow their online instructions. Note that registration can *not* be done by mail or fax. It *must* be done online.

Next comes the home page design. While you can hire others to do this, it is fairly easy to do yourself. You also get *exactly* what you want *exactly* how you want it this way.

There are all sorts of web designer tools. Adobe's new and free beta *Web Presenter* is fairly handy, along with their *Page Mill*. But all you really need is a free copy of Netscape's *Navigator Gold*. Netscape is all I ever use.

You may have heard of HTML. It is ludicrously absurd to call HTML a language. At best this is a *crayon*. A mesmerizing awful atrocity that goes out of its way to *prevent* your end user from seeing what you really want to show in exactly those forms and fonts you wish to show them.

Adobe's great *Acrobat Amber 3.0* is infinitely superior to HTML. On all counts. It quickly and attractively lets you show *any* text and graphics and photos *any* way *you* want.

When it is properly installed into Netscape, you can instantly view files without needing a special download or changing the program in use.

That anti-aliasing Adobe calls *text smoothing* makes all text ridiculously more legible. Their magnifier feature can instantly blow up schematics and such for greater detail.

Thus a key web rule: *Use an absolute minimum of HTML on your site!* Favor Acrobat Amber instead.

Uh, you probably should pick up a

book on HTML somewhere along the way. Jeff Duntemann has lots of them at his *Coriolis Books.*

Steal The Plans

Your simplest way to build a web page is to *steal the plans.* Find a page you like on the web and select the *edit* feature of *Netscape Gold.* Which will rapidly transfer copies of all files you'll need to duplicate the site.

Replace their text copy with yours. Then change the sizes and shapes of the graphics by using suitable editors. Grab the wallpaper into a GIF or JPEG editor and shift the color and density around. Mix and match the tools from several different sites.

Finally, get into an editor and view the actual HTML text. Then eliminate anything obviously proprietary. As a final test, do make *certain* your final appearance of the site does not look even *remotely* like the original.

There are also lots of web designer programs out there that include ready to use templates. Buttons, doodads, rules, and Java applets can be found on hundreds of web sites.

Speed, Not Glitz

A few site webmasters appreciate how infuriating it is to mope around waiting for a humongous and totally useless image to download. A bored or impatient visitor is a gone one.

If you must use images, compress them with Acrobat or JPEG. *Never* use GIF! Keep the images small.

I invite you to compare the access speed of my *www.tinaja.com* against anything else on the web. To run at this speed, I first use few and small graphics on the HTML side.

On the Acrobat side, I use Adobe's new Amber 3.0. Which offers dense compression, web-friendly file order rearrangement, and (eventually when the ISP gets around to it) faster page file block downloads.

Measuring Visits

How can you tell how many people are visiting your site?

You may have heard the term "hit". The *hit* is an obscenely bloated and a totally misleading measure for the popularity of a web location.

You see, a person does not really "visit" a web site. They instead ask for small *packet* bits and pieces.

In random order.

For instance, a visit to a home page may return the page itself in a single packet, an image or two in additional packets, and possibly a few artistic rules, buttons, or selected gimcracks. Dozens to hundreds of site "hits" may be involved in one access.

On top of that, some visitors arrive by mistake, take one look and leave. Yet others are those spiders and the tireless net crawlers from the index services. Some visitors may promptly return in a few minutes for one reason or another. Is this one hit or two? What if they return in an hour? In a day? In a week?

Instead of the "hits", you should be worried about how many important and key files of yours are getting fully downloaded. Say your catalog. Or a hot and unique new reprint.

There is one standard way to sort all of this out: Your ISP has two files related to your site called the *log file* and the *error file.* You should make arrangements with your ISP to gain routine access these files.

Your log file line entry describes every access by who made it when. Repeated entries tell you how long the visitor stayed, which pages they accessed, and how they left. The error file is particularly useful to spot any internal links you have that are not working. Or to spotlight ISP traffic problems. Sadly, the error file can *not* spot a bad *external* link.

Once transferred to your host, these are plain old text files in a standard format. You can snoop around with any old word processor or editor. Or enter them into any spreadsheet or data base progam.

What if you really want to know how many left handed Brazilian cat fanciers visited your site at 2 am on Tuesdays? My own preference here is to stash the log file on my PostScript printer's hard disk. And then use PostScript as a super power general purpose computer language to extract and present useful results. But you'll find lots of *web tracking* software out there. The free *Webtrac* site analysis software from *www.lds.com* is an older but more or less typical code.

A pair of quick-and-dirty rules of thumb: To approximate your actual number of useful visitors, divide your hits by 60. Or log characters by 4500.

There are also "odometer" visitor number services. But I feel that this is *odometer* as in *odious.* I'm not all that convinced that these web counters are useful or desirable.

Especially when they stick and give you obnoxious error messages. Or if they spill Java all over your screen.

Besides, an odometer reading less than 50,000 or so will loudly proclaim that "this site sucks". Which strongly suggests adding 52,761 to your web count before you display it.

Promoting Your Site

So, once you get your web site up and running, how do you get anyone worthwhile to visit it?

Firstoff, it is probably *not* a good idea to promote your site too early. For what you think you are going to have and what you really are offering are usually wildly different.

It is a good idea to have your site up for *at least* six weeks before you aggressively promote it. Before any promotion, it is also a good idea to already have so much content on your site that it *can't be covered in one visit.*

Second, you might not want just anyone visiting your site. Instead, you will probably want to focus all your promotion efforts upon those who are likely to share your views. Or those who may buy something from you.

Traffic for traffic's sake makes no sense whatsoever.

At any rate, your first promotion effort should be to link to the *index services.* Start with *yahoo.com* and use their *add url* service. Then use Yahoo's links to reach the other indexes.

Better yet, you might go check out *www.2com.com/~upfront/launch/* This free service can link you up to the top twenty or so index services.

Next, go to a really great site that wins lots of awards and boasts of it. The *Science Hobbyist* site you'll find at *www.eskimo/~billb/* should work out just fine. Then mine their hot list of award issuing sites.

It is also a good idea to register your name and email address with such services as *www.whowhere.com* Along with your site domain. And, of course, be sure to have a hot site link *inside* your email signature file.

But your most important and most useful traffic builder is the *exchange link.* You first provide a hot link to somewhere. And then ask them to give you one back.

Threads in the web.

You'll have the best luck by cross linking sites that are the same size as yours or somewhat smaller. *Always provide their link on your site first.*

The chances are that if you have a personal interest in a site, others will too. It is better to focus on stuff you can genuinely use.

And don't just provide a link. Tell your users *what* this link is and *why* you like it. Avoid using any text-only links. Instead, provide a button or some larger graphic to make for easier mousing around.

By the way, if someone provides you with a free link, netiquette leaves you with two and only two options: Quickly give them a hassle free link in return. Or else send them an annual check for $30,000.00.

Don't forget *non-web* resources in promoting your site. All the printed web magazines are always looking for new sites to review. So suggest yours. Several times. Any time you see a list of web sites anywhere, figure out how to contact the listee.

Of course, you should prominently mention your site in any printed ads you may be running. And don't forget the power of the *advetorial.* Especially when it's combined with some subtle

mention to visit my own web site found at *http://www.tinaja.com*

Unpromoting Your Site

What if you receive *too much* site traffic? So much sheer volume that it is overloading your ISP? Or causing dropouts, delays and other problems to those you really want visiting?

First, make sure your home page keywords are tightly focused. If you put *sex, drugs*, or *rock and roll* in your keywords, you'll be generating a lot of worthless traffic. As will getting yourself on a porno filter blacklist.

For every porno "bandstop" filter, you can also find a porno "bandpass" filter elsewhere on the net. These essential services clearly complement each other.

For every dry spot, there's a wet spot. Yin and yang.

Your ISP can install software *filters* for you that restrict unneeded traffic. These are sometimes called *JavaScript applets.* Or else use a *CGI*, short for *Common Gateway Interface.*

If, as I do, you are unable to offer any foreign sales or service, there's no point at all in welcoming any non-US country codes. If you are not busily ripping off the government, then a block of *.gov* domains might end up a good idea. To avoid non-buying students, block *.edu.*

Those indexing web crawlers can have a stick run through their treads by proper use of a *robots.txt* file.

Certain traffic problems can be ISP caused. This can be the case if a lot of *send timed out* or *read timed out* errors appear in your log file. The solutions here are to complain loudly. Or to pick a better ISP.

Your email traffic can be very much reduced by ignoring most of it. And, above all, not unleashing a pen pal by repeated responses. I use this criteria as an email filter: *Is there a ten percent probability of a ten cent net positive cash flow as a result of my answering?*

If not, flush them.

The surest methods to *dramatically* reduce your visitors is to require use of passwords or charge an access fee. Which brings us around to…

Showing A Profit

Very few web sites generate a net positive cash flow. But it is possible. If you are in it for the long term. If you give lots away to sell a little. If you use *pull* advetorials rather than *push* advertising. If you are more seeking indirect results (referral, awareness, contact) than any immediate hard cash sales. If you have totally unique products offered at a fair price.

And, above all, if *and only if* you have great heaping bunches of useful and unique site content.

There are four main ways to fund a site: By use of sponsors, advertisers, cash-and-carry, or subscription.

A sponsor pays you for a portion of your site. To offer their catalogs or to save webmastering hassles. Or else because they believe in what you are doing. Or have some vested interest in your content.

Ferinstance, on a community site, you would provide all the upcoming events and the local school lunch menus (including the knockwurst ala king and the butterscotch pudding au jus) for free, but charge the businesses $12 per month and churches $5 per month for their listings and content.

An advertiser simply pays you for a billboard on your site. The fees range from $5 to $40,000, depending on your site popularity. Or sometimes paid on a per-visit basis. There are also net co-op advertising exchanges.

With cash-and-carry, a user pays so much per download or per hour so he can access your premium material. A patent file, technical reprints, or a map repository are examples.

With a subscription, the user pays a flat fee for unlimited site access over a given time period. I personally feel a single time long term charge makes more sense than by the month.

Your users will not view this as an ongoing obligation. And the payment hassles are few and far between. $25 for six month's access sounds about right to me. You must, of course, have both a "free" and a "fee" area.

Reliable and secure electronic petty cash isn't quite here yet. But you can certainly expect it within a year. For now, visa-over-voice-phone or use of fax still seems the best route.

Subscription or cash-and-carry, you will have to provide lots of no-charge stuff, including free trials. Make it completely obvious *exactly* what *all* of the charged stuff is all about. Through annotated descriptions or abstracts.

All-of-the-above combos can be used. As might cooperative zero cash exchange promotions between sites. While zero net cash, these can very much boost your relevant traffic.

This Month's Contest

I've once again summarized some web resources for you in this month's sidebar. Many of these services and links mentioned can also be reached at my *www.tinaja.com* Last month's column appears as file RESBN55.PDF on the *Resource Bin* library shelf.

Bunches more on smaller scale tech ventures in general can be found in my *Incredible Secret Money Machine*. Per my nearby *Synergetics* ad.

As our contest this month, just tell me a webmastering trick or technique I am not yet aware of. Or else tell me about your web experiences.

There will be a largish pile of my new *Incredible Secret Money Machine II* books going to the dozen or so better entries, plus an all-expense-paid (FOB Thatcher, AZ) *tinaja quest* for two that will go to the very best of all.

Send all your *written* entries to me here at *Synergetics*, rather than to *Nuts & Volts* editorial.

Let's hear from you. ❖