

Creating Your Own Space on the Web: A Primer

By Cheryl Lemmens

Marketing a business in the Internet age means more than just the traditional advertising methods of years past; the use of a Web site is now considered almost essential to publicizing your skills and remaining competitive in your field. Putting up that Web site, however, is another matter. For one thing, there's a new language – Hypertext Markup Language, or HTML – with which to become familiar. And there are design conventions to learn, some based on print standards and some unique to the Web. All in all, however, creating a Web site to promote your indexing business should be a user-friendly and enjoyable experience. Keeping it simple is the key.

Web Site Content

Your Web site should provide specific content about you and your indexing business. These topics, both essential and optional, are discussed briefly below:

- *Educational Background, Work Experience, and Professional Memberships.* This information is particularly relevant if you wish to highlight higher education in a specific field, or work experience related to indexing (e.g., in library and information science). You should also include information on specialized training (e.g., the USDA Basic Indexing course) and any other skills you bring to your work (e.g., proofreading, fluency in other languages).
- *Personal Interests* (optional). Although it may seem out of place, information on personal interests such as hobbies is perfectly legitimate. If you list gardening as an indexing subject, great – if you actually grow orchids or are a member of the Canadian Rose Society, even better. Making reference to this type of involvement in a personal interest establishes your expertise in that field, and may lead to very rewarding indexing projects.
- *Types of Subjects Indexed.* Of particular importance to potential clients, this content details the subjects you are most familiar with, through education, work, or interest. Your list should be specific; rather than including the general term “English literature,” for example, you would want to indicate a particular genre, period, or author.
- *Books Recently Indexed.* Basically a list of your recent projects. If any indexes you created were shown via Amazon.com's “Look inside this book” feature, you could create a link out of each book title.
- *Your Rates.* Information on your fees (e.g., per-page, per-entry, flat rate). Any additional information – e.g., how expenses such as courier costs are handled – should be included.
- *Sample Indexes* (optional). Some indexers include indexes they've created for books that were published without indexes. This can be done in various ways – by turning a Microsoft Word document into a PDF (Portable Document Format) file, for example, or by creating the sample index in HTML. Every sample index, however, adds pages to your Web site, so this is strictly an option you may want to consider later on.
- *Published Articles and/or Conference Presentations* (optional). Pretty much self-explanatory. Optional, although – like professional memberships – such information shows your involvement in, and contributions to, the indexing profession.
- *Testimonials from Clients / Complimentary Reviews / Awards.* It is very important to show the recognition you have received for your work, both from your day-to-day clients and from your fellow indexers. This information would certainly be appropriate on your home

page; if you had won the H.W. Wilson Award, for example, you would want to showcase that at the very first opportunity. Kudos your indexes have received from book reviewers, or complimentary feedback from readers (e.g., on Amazon.com), should also be included on your Web site.

- *Contact Information* (discussed below).

As well, it is recommended that some content be included about the benefits of hiring (i.e., being willing to pay for the services of) a professional indexer. This is particularly important at a time when the profession of indexing is being undermined on several fronts – by clients who think that cheaper is better, for example, or by publishers that provide either poorly written indexes or no indexes at all.

Finally, you may want to make note of any organizations or resources of interest to your clients. The most common of these include indexing societies such as IASC / SCAD and the American Society of Indexers (ASI), as well as related organizations such as the Editors' Association of Canada (EAC). Links to these resources can be included on a separate page.

Your Home Page

As the page that welcomes visitors and potential clients to your business, it should make a good first impression. But it doesn't have to be fancy – in fact, it shouldn't be. As Web usability guru Jakob Nielsen notes in his *Alertbox* column "Homepage Real Estate Allocation" (February 10, 2003): "A homepage really has two **main goals**: to give users information, and to serve as their top-level navigation for information that's inside the site."

Your home page (and, in fact, your Web site) can consist solely of text – a brief statement about yourself and your indexing experience, as well as contact information. The home page will also contain links to all of the other pages on the Web site (the "navigation" portion of the page). And, of course, your name (and the name of your business) will be prominently displayed at the top.

How much contact information you provide depends on your comfort level. If you are reluctant to provide an address, setting up a post office box is a good workaround. Phone and fax numbers are usually provided, but essentially all that's needed is your e-mail address. Publishers who wish to contact you can still view complete contact information in the print *Register of Indexers Available*.

Working With HTML

Once you've organized and ordered your content, you're ready to begin creating your Web site. Putting up anything on the Web entails at least a rudimentary knowledge of HTML, and although you can use software to do so without learning any coding, it is highly recommended that you become familiar with the basics of HTML, either by taking an introductory course or by using one of several good books available.

Writing or WYSIWYG?

HTML can be written "from scratch" without software, simply by typing everything – coding and text – into a document on your computer's Notepad feature, saving the file with an "htm" or "html" extension, then viewing the document by opening the file in your browser. If you've learned to write HTML from scratch, you can also use software that allows you to enter the code without typing it in manually, and to view the code as you work with it. HomeSite, a developer-friendly software originally produced by Allaire, is now offered by Macromedia.

The most popular forms of HTML software, however, are WYSIWYG (“what you see is what you get”) editors such as Macromedia’s own Dreamweaver, Microsoft’s FrontPage, and Adobe’s Go Live. Such software allows you to create a Web page while viewing the result of your coding on screen. The resulting code, however, is far from elegant; WYSIWYG editors add a lot of extraneous (i.e., sloppy and unnecessary) elements that would not appear in a properly hand-coded document. In addition, not all WYSIWYG editors recognize new or non-standard HTML coding; some even eliminate legitimate tags that they don’t understand.

Although using a WYSIWYG editor is certainly not the end of civilization as we know it, there is really no substitute for not learning the basics of HTML, and how to create a Web page with a variety of elements (headers, lists, and a simple table, for starters). Once you have gotten the introductory bit down pat, you’ll find that coding can be an enjoyable exercise (really!).

Cascading Style Sheets

HTML was originally intended to be a formatting tool, not a design tool – in other words, to control only the structural parts of a document, such as paragraphs, headings, lists, and tables. Early versions of HTML attempted to accommodate design elements such as font style or colour through the use of specific tags.

Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) were later developed to introduce style elements into HTML. It is now an accepted convention that style sheets should form part of each HTML document. Style sheet tags, which are inserted at the top of the HTML document between the <head> tags, allow you to exert greater control over your Web page by specifying design instructions that apply to either the whole document or selected portions of it. For example, here are some style sheet declarations from this author’s own Web site:

```
SPAN.LOGO { font-family: Garamond; font-size: 20pt; font-style: normal;
font-weight: bold; color: #069; margin-left: 5px }

SPAN.COPY { text-decoration: none; font-family: Times Roman; font-size:
12pt; font-style: normal; font-weight: normal; color: #000 }

SPAN.TOP A:LINK { text-decoration: underline; font-family: Arial; font-size:
10pt; font-style: normal; font-weight: bold; color: #036 }
```

The “SPAN.LOGO” declaration sets up a logo in 20 point Garamond, in “normal” style (as opposed to italics), and in boldface. The colour is a medium blue (#006699, or #069 in CSS). The logo always appears 5 pixels from the left margin.

“SPAN.COPY” sets up the style for all body text – that is, text outside of the navigation bar: 12 point Times Roman of normal style and weight, in the colour black (#000000, or #000 in CSS).

“SPAN.TOP A:LINK” sets up the style for “Back to Top” links throughout each page. They are underlined, and appear in 10 point boldface Arial, in a darker blue than the logo (#003366).

One thing to keep in mind is that with the advent of style sheets, HTML itself has changed. Tags such as and have been phased out of HTML 4.0. It is highly recommended, therefore, that once you have mastered basic HTML, you add CSS to your skill set. There are several resources available to learn more about CSS, but a good way to get started is to visit the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) *Core Styles* page

(<http://www.w3.org/StyleSheets/Core/>). Here, you can pick one of eight style sheets to add to your HTML document. Although you cannot view the actual coding, this exercise enables you to see instantly how different styles can transform the same piece of text in very different ways.

Web Design

When it comes to Web design, keeping it clean and simple is the rule: this is no time to get fancy. The information on your Web site should be easy to read, understand, and navigate.

An important concept to keep in mind is that Web pages are viewed, and read, much differently than a print publication such as a book or newspaper; a 17-inch monitor makes for a reading experience unlike that provided by *Time*. As Jakob Nielsen has pointed out in one of his classic *Alertbox* columns, “How Users Read on the Web” (October 1, 1997), “People rarely read Web pages word by word; instead, they **scan** the page, picking out individual words and sentences.”

Discussed below are principles essential to good Web design.

Clear Separation of Navigation and Content

The navigation portion of each page – i.e., the portion containing links to other pages within the site – should be clearly separated from the body text. Left-hand navigation has been fairly well established as a Web convention, probably because most world cultures read left to right, although some indexers place their links at the top or bottom of each page.

A navigation column can be easily set up by creating a simple HTML table on each page. Shown below is an approximation of how part of a “Subjects Indexed” page might look. A two-column table provides left-hand navigation and a substantial right-hand area for content. Note that the navigation bar provides links to all other pages on the site *except* the one currently being visited.

Excelsior Indexing: Subjects Indexed

Home	Canadian Literature
Subjects Indexed	• Fiction of Western Canada (particularly Grove, Ostenso, and Salverson)
Books Indexed	English Literature
Rates	• Fiction Before 1832 (particularly Richardson, Fielding, and the Gothic novel)
	Back to Top

Legibility

Users should be able to read your page easily, without having to squint, blink, or lean close to the screen. The following issues affect legibility:

- *Font Style.* A good choice of font (typeface) is essential – but, again, Web conventions need to be approached differently from those of print. Serif fonts are considered easier to read in print than sans-serif fonts, sans-serif fonts to be more readable on screen. Times Roman, a serif font developed by Stanley Morison in 1931, is considered the most successful and perhaps most readable typeface ever created. On the Web, however, the sans-serif font Arial has become the typeface of choice for many designers, while Verdana, a sans-serif font designed for Microsoft in 1994, is also widely used.

Serif fonts are “serious,” providing a formal look, while sans-serif fonts are more informal in appearance. Comic Sans MS, which evokes the cartoon-style lettering of comic strips such as *Peanuts*, is a relaxed, almost whimsical choice for Web material, but should be used with caution, and probably avoided on a professional Web site. Below are samples of some well-known typefaces:

Serif	Sans-Serif
Bookman Old Style 10 point	Arial 10 point
Century Schoolbook 10 point	Comic Sans MS 10 point
Garamond 11 point	Franklin Gothic 11 point
Times New Roman 11 point	Verdana 10 point

- *Font Size.* Although it may seem self-evident, the importance of font size cannot be stressed enough. Body text of 12 points or higher is recommended for easy viewing by all users, including senior citizens. A major problem with specifying type size, however, is the fact that users can set font sizes independently to their own comfort level, thus skewing the Web designer’s original intent. Patrick J. Lynch and Sarah Horton, co-authors of the Yale University *Web Style Guide*, suggest using CSS to set font size in pixels, because text so defined “will be the same size regardless of the browser’s default font size and resolution settings.”
- *White Space.* White space makes your pages more elegant, and your content infinitely more readable. As Web designer Bob Baxley notes in *Making the Web Work: Designing Effective Web Applications* (Indianapolis, Ind.: New Riders, 2002), “leaving an appropriate amount of ‘air’ and white space is a welcome relief to users. By reducing the visual density of text and tables, the impression made by the page is less cluttered, less overwhelming, and more inviting.”
- *Contast.* The most readable combination of text and background colour – that providing the highest contrast – remains black text on a white background. Black text on a light colour such as grey is generally readable, but less so. Even less readable is light-coloured text on a dark background (such as yellow text on royal blue). Incidentally, an early Web readability study conducted in Texas (<http://hubel.sfasu.edu/research/AHNCUR.html>) found that the least readable combinations were red on green and – understandably – fuchsia on blue (!).

- *Justification.* Left-hand justification is generally the most readable text format on the Web. As Lynch and Horton note, “left justification requires no adjustment to word spacing; the inequities in spacing fall at the end of the line. The resulting ‘ragged’ right margin adds variety and interest to the page without interfering with legibility.”

Placement of Content

One of the most important carryovers to Web design from the print world is the concept of keeping important information “above the fold” – derived from the practice of folding broadsheet newspapers in half so that only the top portion, containing the headline story or photo of the day, is visible through the window of a sidewalk box.

On the Web, the “fold” is the point at which the user can no longer view information without scrolling downwards. Just as with its newspaper counterpart, therefore, a Web page must provide all of its important information above the fold – at or near the top. And, if a page necessitates scrolling, it is helpful to insert “Back to Top” links (``) at regular intervals.

Web-Safe Colours

While you should keep your Web design clean and simple, it certainly shouldn’t be just black and white – you will probably want to use colour in some way. Not all Web colours, however, are created equal; some will appear differently in various browsers or platforms than they were originally intended to.

You should make your selections from the group of 216 Web-safe colours chosen for use in both Windows and Macintosh environments – also known as “non-dithering” colours because they don’t “dither” or fluctuate, no matter where they are viewed. All of these colours have accompanying hexadecimal (“hex”) codes representing different combinations of the numbers and letters 00, 33, 66, 99, CC, and FF. White, for example, is represented by the hex code FFFFFFFF, while black is 000000. Keep in mind that only hex codes using the two-number and two-letter combinations above – such as basic red, FF0000 – are Web-safe. Tomato red, which has the hex code FF6347, is definitely not!

The *HTML Goodies* Web site provides both a chart of all 216 Web-safe colours (http://www.htmlgoodies.com/tutors/non_dithering_colors.html), as well as a chart that includes many non-safe, but interesting, colours (<http://www.htmlgoodies.com/tutors/colors.html>).

HTML vs. Graphics

Finally, the use of graphics should be avoided (or at least minimized) if possible to keep the “weight” of each Web page down. Graphics, especially large ones, cause pages to load more slowly, which may not be a concern to users with high-speed Internet access but a real frustration to those with dial-up access.

Even your logo can be created without having to use graphics software, simply by using good old HTML. An elegant typeface such as Garamond, presented in boldface in, say, 20 points, and in a striking Web-safe colour such as #003366 (a very nice dark blue), makes a beautiful – and fast-loading – logo. It’s the perfect way to present yourself and your indexing services to the world.

Resources

General

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), led by Web inventor Tim Berners-Lee, is the motherlode of information about industry standards and specifications, and ongoing work and research. Its Web site (<http://www.w3.org/>) is very large and complex, but it is highly recommended that you take some time to browse through the various sections. A page for first-time visitors, *Finding Your Way at W3C* (<http://www.w3.org/2002/03/new-to-w3c>), is helpful, as is the alphabetical site index located at <http://www.w3.org/Help/siteindex>.

HTML – Books

- Elizabeth Castro, *HTML 4 for the World Wide Web*, 4th ed. (Berkeley, Ca.: Peachpit Press, 1999). Part of the popular Visual QuickStart series.
- Ian S. Graham, *HTML 4.0 Sourcebook* (Toronto: John Wiley & Sons Canada, 1998)

HTML – Web Pages

- *HTML Goodies* (<http://www.htmlgoodies.com/>). Wide-ranging Web site with primers and tutorials on a variety of subjects.
- National Center for Supercomputing Applications (NCSA), *A Beginner's Guide to HTML* (<http://archive.ncsa.uiuc.edu/General/Internet/WWW/HTMLPrimerAll.html>)
- Dave Raggett, *Getting started with HTML* (<http://www.w3.org/MarkUp/Guide/>) and *More advanced features* (<http://www.w3.org/MarkUp/Guide/Advanced.html>). Two user-friendly tutorials on the W3C site.

Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) – Books

- Håkon Wium Lie and Bert Bos, *Cascading Style Sheets: Designing for the Web*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1999)
- Eric A. Meyer, *Cascading Style Sheets: The Definitive Guide* (Sebastopol, Ca.: O'Reilly & Associates, 2000)

Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) – Web Sites

- World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), *Cascading Style Sheets Home Page* (<http://www.w3.org/Style/CSS/>) and *W3C Core Styles page* (<http://www.w3.org/StyleSheets/Core/>)
- Dave Raggett, *Adding a touch of style* (<http://www.w3.org/MarkUp/Guide/Style.html>). Tutorial on W3C site.

Web Design and Usability – Books

- Patrick J. Lynch and Sarah Horton, *Web Style Guide: Basic Design Principles for Creating Web Sites*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 2002)
- Jakob Nielsen, *Designing Web Usability: The Practice of Simplicity* (Indianapolis, Ind.: New Riders, 1999)
- Jakob Nielsen and Marie Tahir, *Homepage Usability: 50 Websites Deconstructed* (Indianapolis, Ind.: New Riders, 2001)
- Jared M. Spool et al., *Web Site Usability: A Designer's Guide* (San Francisco: Morgan Kaufmann, 1998)

Web Design and Usability – Web Sites

- Jakob Nielsen, *Alertbox: Current Issues in Web Usability* (<http://www.useit.com/alertbox/>). Bi-weekly column by noted Web usability expert.
- Patrick J. Lynch and Sarah Horton, *Web Style Guide, 2nd Edition* (<http://www.webstyleguide.com/index.html?/contents.html>). Online companion to their book, listed above.
- User Interface Engineering (<http://www.uie.com/>). Web site of Massachusetts-based usability consulting firm headed by Jared M. Spool. Their article “Why On-Site Searching Stinks” (<http://www.uie.com/searchar.htm>) is still one of the best studies of its kind – not to mention an excellent argument for including traditional alphabetical indexes on Web sites.