

WEB DESIGN MADE SIMPLE FOR LANGUAGE PROFESSIONALS

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Abstract: The World Wide Web is an excellent way to get your message out and can be a useful tool to reach potential clients. If you have never created a Web page before or want to know how to best market yourself on the Web, this is the session for you. We will introduce you to the process behind building a professional site to advertise your translation or interpreting services. A well-designed Web site may not bring you a lot of work directly, but it is your virtual business card.

INTRODUCTION

The World Wide Web is an excellent way to get your message out to anyone and can be a useful tool for reaching potential clients. There are many different kinds of Web sites (private, news, entertainment or professional). If you have never created a Web page before, it is generally a good idea to create a personal Web page before creating a professional site. However, this presentation will introduce you to the ideas behind building a professional site to advertise your translation or interpreting services. A well-designed Web site may not bring you a lot of work directly, but it is your virtual business card and shows a potential client what you can do. A poorly designed Web site may not cause you to lose a job, but leaves a lasting impression that may not be so easy to shake.

1. PLANNING YOUR WEB SITE

A Web site takes a considerable amount of planning, and you should spend some time thinking about the overall layout of your site. Decide whether the site should be monolingual, bilingual or even multilingual. Think about who your target audience will be. Most of us want to attract new business, but perhaps you could also include information for colleagues or people starting out. You might also want to offer information for people interested in another language or country. The sky is the limit. You need to think about the content of the site, then you can plan out what features you want to include in the site, what pages you'll have to create to implement those features, and how the pages will fit together.

It is generally a good idea to map out which pages will link to each other and give some thought to how visitors will navigate through the site. One good way to plan a Web site is to sketch a simple diagram or outline (sometimes called a "storyboard") on paper or use sticky notes on a large piece of paper to represent all the pages on the site, with arrows or lines showing the links between the pages. You can be as detailed or as vague as you want. Good planning is reflected in the navigability of your web site. A site proves useless if the visitor gets lost and does not know how to find the information he/she is seeking.

Keeping your target group in mind is imperative. Decide who will visit your site and design with their needs in mind. Even a purely professional site can include a touch of personality. There was a discussion on a major mailing list last year about whether or not Web sites should include anything personal. Most participants felt that a translator's Web site should be businesslike and professional and not include any hint of a translator's personal life.

However, I believe that a touch of the translator's personality should certainly be allowed to shine through.

1.1 What to Include on Every Page

Although every Web page should contain unique and useful information, all Web pages should contain the following three elements:

Title: Be sure to have a title at the top of every page. A specific title on each page is important because some visitors may not enter your site through your home page. Instead, they may go directly to one of the content pages on the site. After all, who among us has not found a great site through Google or AltaVista?

Although the title can be simple text, many Web sites use an attractive graphic banner to display the title. The banner creates a distinctive look for your pages. It is a good idea to use the same style, format, or elements throughout your site to create a cohesive look.

Web pages also include a title that appears in the top bar of your browser. This is separate from the title that appears at the top of the page. Most beginners will probably want to worry about this later, but it is a nice touch because that will be the name under which the site will be bookmarked in the browser.

Navigation links: All the pages of your Web site should have a consistent, cohesive set of navigation links that are easy to use. At the minimum, you should provide a link to your home page on every page in your site. You may also want to include links to the major sections of your site on every page. This helps the visitor navigate around the site. Place the navigation links in a consistent location on each page in your site. The two most popular locations for displaying navigation are beneath the title or banner and in the left margin of the page, but I have also seen them at the bottom of a page. This is only a good idea if the page is so short that the visitor does not need to scroll down.

Author/copyright information: Every page should also include author credits and a copyright notice. Because visitors can enter your site by going directly to any page, placing the authorship and copyright notices on only the home page is not sufficient. This information is usually placed at the bottom of the page.

It is also common to include an e-mail link on each page. That way, visitors can e-mail you to tell you how wonderful your site is or (more likely) to let you know about problems with your site.

1.2 What Kind of Pages to Include In Your Site

You can include anything you want in your site. However, there are certain common elements on most Web sites.

Home page: The home page generally serves as an entry point into the site. It is the first page most visitors see when they visit your site (unless you include a cover page, as described next). Because of this, be sure to devote considerable time and energy to ensuring that your home page makes a good first impression.

Remember that most visitors have to scroll down to read all of your home page. However, they will see the top of the page first, so you want to make sure that the title is immediately visible. Try to keep the home page to 640 pixels across and 460 pixels down if you can for visitors with smaller monitors.

Here are a few other optional ideas to include in your home page:

- An indication that new content that is available on your Web site (although if you do include this, you should make sure you update your Web site fairly regularly.)
- The date your site was last updated. This helps your visitor quickly decide if it is worth another visit.
- A copyright notice. You can include a link to a separate copyright page where you spell out whether others can copy the information you have placed on your site, or you may decide your name and copyright on the bottom is sufficient.
- A hit counter. If visitors see that a few thousand people have visited your site, they automatically assume that it must be popular. On the other hand, if they see that only three people have visited, they may yawn and leave quickly. Hit counters can be manipulated by hitting the refresh button, but you may decide it simply is not worth your while. You can find companies that offer hit counters by doing a simple search in Google, or your Internet service provider (ISP) may offer one.

Avoid placing a lot of graphics (especially animated graphics or graphics that are extremely large) on your home page. Your home page is the first page most visitors see. If it takes more than 15 seconds for your page to load, visitors may lose patience and skip it altogether. A simple test is to try holding your breath while your home page downloads. If you turn blue before the page finishes downloading, the page is too big.

Cover page: A cover page is displayed temporarily before your home page is displayed. Cover pages usually feature a flashy graphic logo or an animation. In most cover pages, the visitor must click the logo or some other element on the page to enter the home page. Or the page can be programmed so that it automatically jumps to the home page after a certain amount of time (usually 10 or 15 seconds but less if it is a simple graphic) has elapsed.

Many visitors are annoyed by cover pages, especially those that take more than a few seconds to download and display. Think carefully about whether the splashy cover page actually enhances your site or is more of an annoyance. If your cover page has a lengthy animation, it is a good idea to also offer a link that allows impatient visitors to bypass the cover page and go directly to your site.

Contact information: Be sure your site includes information about how to contact you or your translation company. You can easily include your e-mail address as a link directly on the home page using the <mailto:> tag. When the visitor clicks this link, most Web browsers launch the default e-mail program and allow you to compose a message with your e-mail address already filled in.

If you want to include your complete contact information such as your address and phone number or if you want to list contact information for several individuals, you may want to place the contact information on a separate page that can be accessed from the home page.

FAQ: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) are among the most popular sources of information on the Internet. You can organize your own FAQ page on any topic you want.

Simply come up with a list of questions and provide the answers. This is a great way to educate your visitors on the difference between a translator and an interpreter or common grammatical errors. Be creative and keep it fun and informative.

Links: Links pages are among the most popular page on a web site. You can offer a list of links to related sites about translation, interpreting, a link to the ATA web site or your local chapter, etc. As the compiler of your own links page, you can do something that search engines cannot. You can pick and choose the links you want to include, and you can provide your own commentary about the information contained on each site. You can also view your links page as your personal bookmarks, for example, so you do not have to continually search for translation sites such as Eurodicautom or The Translator's Home Companion. One very important tip: avoid the "here" pitfall. Choose descriptive words for your links and avoid linking the word "here" (as in "Click here for...").

Be sure to check your links regularly to make sure they still work. Web sites are extremely dynamic, and pages often disappear or are moved during a redesign. Little irritates a visitor more than clicking on a link and finding that it is broken.

Web log: A web log (or "blog") is a discussion group that adds interactivity to your Web site by allowing you or your visitors to post ideas or articles that can be read and responded to by other people who visit your site. You can find a lot of information on blogs by visiting www.blogger.com or doing a search on Google. Blogs are fairly new to the Internet scene but can really liven up your site.

Site map: If your site has a lot of pages you may want to include a site map. A site map is a detailed menu that provides links to every page on the site. By using a site map, the visitor can bypass intermediate menus and go directly to the pages that interest him or her. However, most sites by language professionals only consist of a few pages, so a site map is not as important as if you were a big translation company – and in that case you would not be attending this session but would have hired a professional Web designer.

Pages to sell yourself: You can include anything you want on your site, but your main objective is to advertise your services and reach out to the global community. There are a variety of different pages that are unique to our industry that you can use such as a Toolbox featuring your favorite tips and the tools you use, a Biography or Resume listing your accomplishments and achievements, a list of References (such as quotes from clients) or a Client list (but only if you have worked directly for that client: if you have worked for the clients through an agency, the agency may not be too keen on your taking credit for the client), a page listing your Rates and Services, and anything else you may think of.

1.3 Deciding on a Domain Name and Host

You need to find a server to host (store) your web pages. Your ISP may allow you to store your web site for free, so be sure to ask. Ask colleagues who hosts their sites. Call a local web designer and ask if they can recommend anyone. The cost of hosting a site varies. There may be a setup fee or you may have to pay depending on your site's network traffic (the number of published bytes and/or visitors). Ask how much space you get, how many e-mail accounts (if any) are included in the fee, and whether you will be able to update the site yourself from home. It is a good idea to ask several ISPs for a quote and compare services

and fees. It pays to shop around. If you want your own domain name, it will cost you, but that cost may be tax deductible.

Domain names ending with .biz, .com, .info, .name, .net or .org can be registered through several authorized companies ("registrars"). All domain names are publicly available and you can easily look up whether the domain name you want is available at any of these registrars' sites or InterNICs "Whois" database at www.internic.net/whois.html. Each registrar sets the price it charges for registering names, and the costs vary significantly. Some companies offer discounted or free registration services in connection with other offerings, such as web hosting. Again, it pays to shop around and visit the sites of various registrars. You can find a list of registrars at <http://www.internic.net/regist.html>. You can also register your domain name yourself. You need the pertinent information from your host to register, or your host may even offer to register it for you.

2 CREATING YOUR WEB PAGES

2.1 Choosing The Tools

When you are ready to start creating Web pages for your site, you will need to decide which Web page editor to use. There are many different alternatives to choose from. Some of the most popular are:

FrontPage is a popular Web page editor that is part of MS Office, although it ships only with certain editions. FrontPage is like a word processor for creating Web sites. It includes a WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) Web page editor that lets you type information the way you want it to appear without worrying about knowing how to express it in HTML and a mode that lets you work directly in HTML. FrontPage also offers an FTP function that allows you to upload all or some of your pages to the server as you see fit and a global search and replace, which allows you to make a change without opening each individual page.

If you have absolutely no experience with creating Web pages, FrontPage is a good place to start. However, the more you learn about Web development and HTML, the more FrontPage may end up frustrating you because of its limitations. When that happens, you may want to move on to a more advanced Web development tool such as HomeSite or Dreamweaver.

Macromedia's **HomeSite** is often referred to as *the* Web editor for hand coders. Macromedia HomeSite is included with Macromedia Dreamweaver but can also be purchased as a stand-alone editor. HomeSite offers some very compelling features, including XHTML and CSS support. HomeSite also offers an FTP function. It is a good solution for the serious web developer and hand-coder; however, it is not a WYSIWYG solution and does not offer the click-and-drag environment of FrontPage or Dreamweaver.

Dreamweaver, also from Macromedia, is considered by many developers to be the best tool for developing Web pages. It includes a sophisticated WYSIWYG editor, but also lets you work directly with the HTML. And it includes many powerful features for creating advanced Web sites. Dreamweaver is not a simple program to learn, and it is not cheap (\$373 on Amazon as opposed to HomeSite, which was \$89.99 on Amazon as of September). But if you are going to invest a lot of time developing Web sites, investing in Dreamweaver may be a good idea.

Notepad is the free text editor that comes with Windows. Because HTML pages are nothing more than text files that contain special HTML codes intermingled with text, it is possible to build even complicated Web sites using nothing more than Notepad. Notepad is the tool of choice for many die-hard HTML developers, but you should use Notepad only if you have learned HTML inside and out. With Notepad you have to type every bracket and backslash of HTML manually. You will not find out if you have made a mistake until you display the page in a Web browser.

Once you get a firm grasp of HTML you may want to experiment with more advanced Web features. **TopStyle** allows you to work with XHTML and Cascading Style Sheets. Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) are a simple mechanism for adding consistent style (e.g. fonts, colors, and spacing) to Web documents. When you use CSS, all you have to do is change one setting on the CSS instead of opening each document and making the changes by hand. You should consider using style sheets once you have a firm grasp of HTML. You can find more information on TopStyle at <http://www.bradsoft.com/>.

Some other HTML editors include **Netscape Composer**, **NetObjects Fusion**, and **Adobe GoLive**, to name just a few. Try some demos as well as the free tools, ask your Web-savvy friends and colleagues which they prefer and why, and decide which one is right for you.

Other tools you may need

Besides an HTML editor, you will need some other software tools to develop a Web site.

- A graphics program such as Adobe Photoshop, CorelDraw, or Paintshop Pro. You will need a graphics program to create the graphics that appear on your Web site, but there is no law against hiring a graphic designer to produce a much more professional graphic than what most beginners would produce. Another idea is to use the plethora of free ClipArt available on the Web. **Do not steal graphics from other sites** because that is just wrong.
- The two most common Web browsers: Internet Explorer and Netscape Navigator (to test your pages). Each browser displays web pages slightly differently. Be sure to test your page on both browsers to make sure it is presentable.
- If you want to create downloadable documents in the popular PDF format, you will need Adobe Acrobat or some other program that can convert files to PDF format.

2.2 Tips for Creating a Successful Web Site

How will you measure the success of your Web site? By the number of visitors? By whether you get inquiries from new customers? By comments you receive from people who say they like your site?

There are a number of ways to measure the success of a Web site. But however you choose to evaluate your site's success, the following pointers give you some ideas on how to make your site appealing.

- **It is ok to hire a professional to do your code and layout or graphics.** If you do not have the time or inclination to do it yourself, by all means hire someone. However, you need to have at least a rudimentary grasp of what designing a site is all about so you can tell the professional what you want.

- **Look around the Web and check out the competition.** Visit sites that are similar to your own and decide what you like and what you do not like. If you find a feature on a site that you would like to imitate in your site, by all means click on the “View Source” option in your browser (in Netscape it is in the menu under View-Page Source and Internet Explorer it is under View-Source) and see what makes it work. That is the best way to learn. Borrowing materials from another site is ok for basic HTML formatting, but remember it is illegal to use copyrighted material. If you are not sure if the material is copyrighted, you should contact the Webmaster for permission to use a specific graphic or feature.
- **Offer something useful on every page.** Too many Web sites are filled with pages that do not have any useful content. My original site was filled with fluff. It took *The Non-Designer’s Web Book* to make me realize how much extraneous material I had on the site. I learned to concentrate on one or two key focal points and delete the rest. Avoid creating pages that are just steps along the way to truly useful information. Instead, strive to include something useful on every page of your site.
- **Make it look good.** No matter how good the information at your site is, visitors and customers will stay away if your site looks as if you spent no more than five minutes on design and layout. Substance may be more important than style, but an ugly site turns people away while an attractive site encourages people to return. One of the keys to making your pages attractive is a uniform design. Let your personality shine through your site. Avoid the default gray background and choose a background or attractive color. Most patterned backgrounds are too busy, but if you choose it well they can also lend interest to your site.
- **Proof it carefully.** As translators we know that even the most discriminating eye can overlook a typo or misspelled word. However, misspelled words make a very bad impression, especially in our line of work. Several misspelled words could turn off potential customers, which is definitely not the intent. If your HTML editor has a spell-check feature, use it. Proof your work carefully before you post it to the Web, and have someone else (or better yet several people) proof it for you.
- **Keep it current.** Visitors will not frequent your site if it contains out-of-date information. Make sure that you frequently update your Web pages.
- **Do not tie it to a certain browser.** It is only natural to want to show off what you know, but do not use the cool new features of the latest and greatest Web browser at the expense of visitors who may be using an earlier browser version or using Internet Explorer when you prefer Netscape. Some people are still using browsers that do not support frames or have turned off Java or cookies for privacy reasons. Offer options to allow these people to enjoy your content as well.
- **Do not make hardware assumptions.** Remember that not everyone has a 21-inch monitor and a high-speed Internet connection. Design your Web site so that it can also be enjoyed by the lowest common denominator, such as my parents with their 12-inch monitor and 28K dial-up modem.
- **Publicize it.** Most people will not stumble across your site by accident. If you want people to visit your site you have to publicize it. Make sure that your site is listed in the major search engines such as Google and Yahoo. Most search engines offer a little button on its main page to register or submit your site. It may take several days or weeks for the site to add you though, so be patient. Also, resubmit every time you redesign the site. Submission services are a waste of money. Why pay someone to register you when you can do it for free? Offer to add a link on your site for a colleague if they add your URL to their site. You should also promote your site by

putting its address on all your advertisements, correspondences, business cards, e-mail, etc. Remember, your site is your virtual business card. It may not bring you a lot of work, but it can be a valuable tool to allow potential customers to learn about you and your services.

- **Make sure your graphics load quickly.** There are several tricks to make graphics load quicker. You can find some tips in *The Non-Designer's Web Book* or other graphic design books.
- **Try to avoid sound and animated graphics.** Nothing is more irritating than having to listen to "The Wind Beneath My Wings" over and over again while you are trying to read something or having eight animated graphics competing for your attention.
- **Keep your navigation clear, consistent, and transparent.**
- **Choose an appealing color scheme.** Do not use clear or white text over a dark background, because if your visitor decides to print it out, all he or she will get is a blank printout.
- **Following file-naming conventions.** Use all lowercase letters to name your files. It is a good idea to get in the habit of keeping file names short. Also, editors and browsers do not allow you to use empty spaces in file names like you can in Microsoft Word. If you want to delineate between words, you should use underscores (_) or hyphens (-). All web pages must end in .htm or .html

3 GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS

Creating a Web page involves a few steps that are the same no matter which tools or techniques you use. The first step is to decide on the content of HTML file and format it accordingly. You then need to collect or create graphic images you plan to use on your page and link the graphics into the HTML text file as you would like them to appear. Next, preview the page on your computer. Since different browsers display pages differently, it is an excellent idea to preview them using Internet Explorer and Netscape (the two most common Web browsers). Once you are pleased with the page's appearance, transfer the HTML file and graphics files to the host server using FTP (File Transfer Protocol) software (some common FTP clients are CuteFTP, WS_FTP or the FTP functionality in a Web editor such as FrontPage or HomeSite.). Even though you may be feeling overwhelmed at this point, I can assure you that this software is easy to use for even the most software-illiterate.

Upload the files to the Web server and check if the Web page meets your approval. These steps are usually simple if you want to create a basic Web page. Things can become more complicated if you want a multi-page Web site or you want your Web site to have some bells and whistles such as Java script, Flash, or fancy programming languages. Remember that less is usually more. A site with lots of jumping graphics takes an eternity to load and most visitors will not have the patience to wait to view a graphics-intensive site or an introductory video that uses Flash. Keep the design simple at first. You can always improve on it later as you learn more about Web design.

Let us get technical now. HTML is a specific way of adding descriptive tags to regular text so that all the formatting, linking, and navigational functions needed for a Web page are contained in the same file with the regular text. When a browser displays the HTML file, the words and formatting appear, but not the tags (the information between angle brackets [$\langle \rangle$]). A file with HTML-tagged text is called an HTML file and usually has the extension .htm or .html at the end of the file name. We will be providing a handout of some HTML tags during

the presentation. There are also plenty of informative Web design books on the market that address this issue.

However, there are several basic HTML rules. Most HTML tags come in pairs. One starts with a change and the other ends it with a "/". For example, makes a text bold and returns the font back to normal. It is a good idea to write HTML tags in ALL CAPS. It is not a hard and fast rule, but it helps the tags stand out from the text that they are embedded in. Here is a hint: stick with the basic tags to avoid unexpected surprises. HTML ignores paragraph symbols and tabs in your text. Instead, it relies on paragraph tags (<P>), break tags (
), and block quote (<BLOCKQUOTE>) tags. Two other important tags that define the World Wide Web are the image tag () and the link tag (text). These are all standard tags, but some other tags do not work on some browsers.

I encourage you to read a few books on HTML and Web design. The *Dummies* books and *Complete Idiot's Guides* are helpful and informative, as is the *Teaching Yourself Visually* series. It is wise to start simple and build on your knowledge. I find it is much easier to design when you understand what the tags stand for rather than letting a Web editor do the work for you. However, you may decide it is easier to rely on the Web editor. Do an Internet search on Web design and see what resources are out there. Visit <http://www.webpagesthatsuck.com/>. Vincent Flanders offers examples of bad design and lots of tips to his visitors. Buy a book or two on Web design. I have amassed a sizable library of Web design books that I use as a reference when designing a site. Once you have mastered the basics, another book I find extremely helpful is *The Non-Designer's Web Book*. The book offers examples of poorly designed Web sites and provides simple hints to separate the wheat from the chaff. These hints make a huge difference, since a site that forces you to scroll sideways never makes a good impression.

This should give you a general overview of Web pages and what they do. Do not expect your Web site to attract a lot of new clients. But if you acquire even one new customer from your Web site, it will be well worth it. Plus, designing a Web site is a lot of fun. Take a deep breath and jump in.

RECOMMENDED READING:

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