

Building a Family Tree Website

There are excellent simple tutorials about building websites at:

<http://www.1stsitefree.com> and

http://www.webdevelopersjournal.com/columns/abcs_of_building_web_sites.html

(This site is quite old but still a useful guide.)

This article follows a 7 step process to create your website

- Planning
- Design
- HTML code
- Upload your files
- Test (validate) your site
- Promotion
- Maintain and refresh the site

The alternative is to let a professional Web design agency do it for you!

Step 1 Planning your website

Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How? are the key factors to consider at the planning stage.

Outline the purpose, goal(s), target audience, content needed and the overall style wanted.

This can have important consequences in choosing where the site is to be hosted -- free or commercial.

Try a Google search: 'free website hosting'

'Free' website hosts can be quite limited in number of people or file size or are free trials.

Planning - Goals

What is the purpose?

Vanity: Keeping up with the Jones's. To show off what you have gathered.

Family benefit: To record your information for your family and their descendants. May be best sent to the NZSG Digital Archive

For posterity: To archive your findings for future generations of genealogists. Also may be best sent to the NZSG Digital Archive or possibly lodged with the LDS (not yet available in NZ)

Information exchange: EITHER to find others with links to the same families, sharing family stories, photos, etc OR to seek help from others in getting over brick walls and/or extending your tree.

Information exchanges might best be dealt with using a site such as Genes Reunited www.genesreunited.com or via mailing lists - and there are over 30,000 mailing lists available at lists.rootsweb.ancestry.com or www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~jfuller/gen_mail.html (the same set of mailing lists but a better index).

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Planning – Target Audience

Who are your target audience?

Family and friends only.

There are site hosts that allow for private sites with others having access only with the owner's approval, e.g. My Heritage.

Other genealogists.

What's on the site that will attract their attention?

Anybody?

What will make your site come near the top of the heap in a search engine's list of results?

Can your readers follow standard genealogy charts and reports or will you convert these to more widely understood formats?

Genealogy enquiries are now No.2 topic after sex on the Internet – and you have to have one before you can have the other!

What will make your visitors return?

Regular updates to the family tree.

Other news and information.

Planning – Contents

How much information to display?

Think about **privacy** and consider blocking all information about people born less than 100 years ago. This can apply to the dead too: mother's maiden name is still often used as a means of verifying identity. (If your site is restricted to family and friends you may have their permission to disclose more.)

How much information do you have?

This can have a major influence on the choice of site host.

Planning – Hosting

Free or Commercial Hosting

To pay for the costs incurred with hosting your website, most free hosting services will display banner ads and/or pop-up advertising on each page.

Your ISP may provide some space to subscribers on one of their servers.

The average website will only require 2 to 3 MB.

(A server is the computer used to store files that are accessible via the Internet.)

Some free hosts provide extra features to help improve your website (guest books, counters, calendars, etc.) We Relate and RootsWeb WorldConnect are open exchanges that provide free hosting.

Commercial sites will provide a domain name, which may make your site easier to find.

Ancestry is useful for exchanging information – although this is limited to exchange with other subscribers. It also provides tips, suggesting links to records about people in your tree, including some resources you might not have thought about.

Links relating to Step 1

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Alternative sites for your Family Tree

NZSG Digital Archive: <http://www.genealogy.org.nz>

Genes Reunited: <http://www.genesreunited.co.uk>

Ancestry.com: <http://www.ancestry.com> or <http://www.ancestry.com.au>

RootsWeb World Connect: <http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com>

We Relate: <http://www.werelate.org/>

Private sites:

My Family: <https://www.myfamily.com/>

My Heritage: <http://www.myheritage.com/>

Family Lobby: <http://www.familylobby.com/>

Family Details: <http://www.familydetails.com/>

Review of hosting services: <http://www.upperhost.com/>

Mailing Lists:

lists.rootsweb.ancestry.com

www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~jfuller/gen_mail.html

Step 2 Designing your website

Load Speed:

No secret here. You have about 30 seconds to get something worth reading on the screen, if not have the entire page loaded. In today's design market, the use of Flash and other animations can delay the total loading of the page, but at least get something for the viewer to read on screen within the first 20–30 seconds. There are still many users on dial-up who don't wait more than 10 seconds!

Visual appearance

The first thing a visitor sees upon entering a website. The use of colors, consistency, content, graphics, navigation and Web style all work together toward creating an effective site.

Visual Impact:

First impressions are always important, and nowhere more so than on the internet where viewers can go somewhere else in seconds. Nothing is a substitute for content, but to get viewers to see that content it is important to have a site that is visually attractive so they will stay long enough to see it.

Navigation:

Viewers can't see it if they can't find it, and that's why it is important to have obvious and effective navigation. As a viewer, it is more than a little frustrating when you know a site has something you want to see, but you can't find it.

Gather ideas from other sites that you like.

Save the page, change to source code and modify the parts you like to suit your own needs.

Free page templates.

Try a Google search for 'free web templates'.

Sources: www.opendesigns.org, <http://www.openwebdesign.org/> and Open Source Web Design <http://www.oswd.org>

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There are other free tools at sites such as Bravenet <http://www.bravenet.com>

MSFrontPage was often touted as an easy web design program – now discontinued because it used non-standard code that only worked properly in Internet Explorer – and there are lots of other browsers that your intended audience might be using.

Cascading Style Sheets (CSS)

CSS is a simple mechanism for adding style (e.g., fonts, colors, spacing) to Web documents. CSS are generally used to ensure your pages all have the same overall look to develop your personalized brand (<http://www.w3.org/Style/CSS/>).

Free tutorial on html coding and Cascading Style Sheets at <http://www.html.net/>

Have a look for free stuff such as Webmaster Freebies and Graphics on <http://www.thefreesite.com>.

Some web creation software reviews are available if you're not sure how to go about it and need some technical help: <http://website-creation-software-review.toptenreviews.com>

However, these are reviews of commercial programs.

NetObjectsFusion10 <http://www.netobjects.com> is a commercial program very recently superseded by a newer version and is now available for free. It merely requires you to register as a user.

What NOT to do

Visit the checklists at <http://www.webpagesthatsuck.com/index.html>. The site also offers useful checklists for good design

Design guide at www.nzhistory.net.nz/hands/web-history-publishing/design-matters

Don't put your **email address** on the page! You will be targeted by spammers. There's a simple way, using Javascript, to hide your address yet still allow enquirers to send an email to the webmaster.

Links relating to Step 2

Web site design tools

Good and bad design: <http://wdvl.internet.com/Authoring/Design/Pages/>
<http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/hands/web-history-publishing/design-matters>

Reviews of commercial software: <http://website-creation-software-review.toptenreviews.com>

Navigation: <http://www.webdevelopersjournal.com/articles/navigation.html>

For genealogy: <http://www.phpgedview.net/>

Cascading Style Sheets: <http://www.w3.org/Style/CSS/> , <http://www.html.net/>

Freebies and Graphics: <http://www.thefreesite.com/>

Free page templates: <http://www.opendesigns.org>, <http://www.openwebdesign.org>, <http://www.oswd.org>

Other free tools: <http://www.bravenet.com/>

What NOT to do: <http://www.webpagesthatsuck.com/index.html>

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Step 3 Coding

HyperText Markup Language (HTML) is the 'Code' used to specify text, multimedia documents (graphics, video, animation) and sound. You use HTML to create hyperlinks between documents.

You don't need an expensive HTML editor to create your code, just use the Windows text editor – Notepad.

Word and Excel will now 'Save As' html files – but the coding is 'clunky'. Open Office is better.

Legacy has a web page creation utility that produces web pages from charts and reports.

If you're not sure what html involves you can have a quick overview at: http://www.arachnoid.com/lutusp/html_tutor.html

Free Software:

KompoZer (<http://kompozer.net>) is an easy web-authoring program, ideal for non-technical computer users who want to create an attractive, professional-looking web site without needing to know HTML or web coding.

Another fine editor is Amaya (<http://www.w3.org/Amaya/>). It's a project from the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) and so shines in the area of standards compliance and accessibility. Amaya lets users both browse and author web pages, which enables easy copying and pasting of information from other web pages and easy creation of links to other websites. You can seamlessly upload your web pages onto a server from within Amaya as well. Page Breeze (<http://www.pagebreeze.com/>) is another well-recommended editor, as is

1st Page (<http://www.evrsoft.com>)

Arachnophilia (<http://www.arachnoid.com/arachnophilia/>) is another very good free program – but not so easy for beginners.

How much information do you have?

For some you may have a lot, e.g. David Binns.

For others you may have little more than names and dates.

This can determine the style and arrangement of your web pages.

How much to disclose?

Information can be copied and republished by others. Errors and tentative links that are later shown to be wrong can be republished – and there is no means of ensuring that your corrected information is promulgated.

Do you wish to disclose ALL your information, including sources – or does this make your site a target for 'name collectors' rather than genuine researchers. This will depend on your Purpose and where you choose to host your information.

Links relating to Step 3

http://www.arachnoid.com/lutusp/html_tutor.html

<http://kompozer.net>

<http://www.w3.org/Amaya/>

<http://www.pagebreeze.com>

<http://www.evrsoft.com>

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<http://www.arachnoid.com/arachnophilia>

[http://www.werelate.org/wiki/Person:David_Binns_\(4\)](http://www.werelate.org/wiki/Person:David_Binns_(4))

Step 4 Upload your files

Upload your data using File Transfer Protocol (FTP). This allows you to transfer files between two computers via the Internet. When using FTP, you use a program called a FTP client.

CuteFTP Home or CuteFTPLite (Commercial) but also free software such as Filezilla (<http://filezilla-project.org/>) or FreeFTP from the Coffee Cup company (<http://www.coffeecup.com/free-ftp/>) are suitable programs for uploading your files.

Step 5 Test (validate) your site

Before you upload your Web pages you should check them against the formal standard published by the Worldwide Web Consortium <http://www.w3.org>

There is a very good checklist at Maxdesign.

Check your Web pages for broken links and identify spelling errors.

Various validation services are available free, e.g. Unicorn. Browsershots is another free service that checks your site using different browsers. You submit your site URL and the checking process should take about 30 minutes.

Links relating to Step 5

<http://www.w3.org/>

www.maxdesign.com.au/articles/checklist

<http://validator.w3.org/unicorn/>

www.htmlhelp.com/tools/validator

browsershots.org

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Step 6 Promotion

Metadata

Add Metadata to each Web page. Metadata provides details about the page, such as the name of the page, who created it and when, keywords or description of the contents.

There are two fundamental purposes for metadata on websites:

- helping end users find what they are looking for, via search or navigation

- helping authors and administrators manage the site, controlling out of date pages.

Most search engines such as Google and Yahoo no longer make use of metadata because of problems with spam or falsified data.

Add your URL to search engines to make it easy for your intended audience to find.

Also, don't forget to **promote your site off-line**.

Links relating to Step 6

Adding your URL to search engines

Google: <http://www.google.com/addurl/>

Yahoo!: <http://siteexplorer.search.yahoo.com/submit>

More at: <http://bblmedia.com/addurl.html>

DIY promotion advice: <http://selfpromotion.com/index.t>

Step 7 Maintenance

Keep your site up to date. If you want people coming back, you must add new information on a regular basis. Having a Website means your job is never done! A really active website needs to be updated weekly.

The alternative, using a professional Web design agency?

There are plenty of those around, in NZ and overseas. Check out Google – though most are aimed at developing sites for business owners rather than home users.