

On Websites

This is not intended to be a discussion of the mechanics of setting up websites. That is covered - briefly - on the Webmaster Says website and - in more detail - on the Adult Learner website. Here we consider the uses of websites and, in particular, how they can be used to help solve a variety of problems, both big and small. Webmaster hopes, that providing a number of examples, he can educate those who have not used websites as to just how useful they (the websites) can be.

Of course the major purpose of any website is to 'send a message' to anyone reading the website. [Obviously, one either hopes - or has reason to believe - that the website is in fact being read by the person(s) to whom the webmaster is 'sending the message'.] The message may be very simple (e.g. I Am Webmaster, here are my websites, and this is why i maintain them) or it can be very complex (e.g. here is why we should not allow Costco to build a gas station in an inappropriate location and here is how the argument about the legal process in this case - S-2863 - has played out). Which is to say that websites are ways of conveying information, information intended simply to inform, information to 'set the record straight', information intended to convince the reader to buy some goods and/or services, and so forth. All websites are examples of communication via 'the media', which brings up the obvious issue of the form vs. the content (unless one believes that 'the media is the message'). That is, how effective the website is in finding the most effective balance between content ('just the facts') and the form (how pretty - i.e. 'eye catching' is the website?). Webmaster has always preferred 'plain jane' websites (perhaps because he is a scientist and deals - for the most part - in facts) and has cautioned others not to set up 'fancy' websites that, while they make look nicer, will require a more skilled webmaster to maintain them. [The changes that were made to the BIC website and the MCEF website are illustrations of the effects of changing from the 'plain jane' approach to the 'fancier' approach. While Webmaster can certainly appreciate the 'prettiness' of the newer versions, he knows how difficult it is to make changes to the newer MCEF website - because he was asked to do so, but could not, probably because he had not 'written' it and did not know the language that had been used. And, while this is obviously a matter of opinion, he feels that new version of the BIC website has far less useful content than did his original 'plain jane' version.]

What many who look at websites do not fully understand is how valuable and flexible websites are; how many things one can do with a website. In fact, simply having an account with a website hosting service is of considerable utility. *[Disclaimer: Webmaster presently uses Hostmonster and is quite pleased with their hosting services, but he receives no monetary reward for his comments about Hostmonster.]* Having such an account (and 'renting' one domain name) enables one to create multiple Email accounts and to open/close them at will. And to arrange for the Emails received in the account(s) to be forwarded to another account. And more. All of which enables a webmaster (even before s/he has

created a single website) to make a dent in dealing with the enormous amount of nuisance Email which is sent to anyone using the Internet. [[There are, of course, various filters - both within operating systems and within anti-spam software programs - that block unwanted Emails, or at least sentence them to the junk pile - but none of these is 'perfect', so having an additional level of control (and a rather inexpensive one at that) is extremely helpful. In fact, Webmaster spent much of the end of 2014 dealing with problems of nuisance Email [including that generated by a lawyer who was tormenting him because the lawyer (and/or his client) did not like some of the content of the Tanner Creek CA and the Gooding Reach websites]. And he was able to make some progress in frustrating the lawyer/client harassment.]]

Another very useful tool presented by having a website account (and having rented at least one domain name) is that one can create storage bins that do not 'show' on the website (once it is constructed) unless the webmaster wishes the material to be 'seen' by the casual visitor to the website. In essence, the webmaster then has his/her own "cloud" for storage of files, pictures, etc. The 'cloud' belongs only to the webmaster and not to some corporate Goliath - whose attention to the protection of the material on the cloud may be less than the webmaster may wish. Of course *anything* on the WWW can be hacked, but Webmaster doubts that most hackers are as likely to find/hack what he has stored on his private cloud as they are to hack material on a cloud such as is maintained by Apple or Microsoft. Obviously another example of an extra level of protection - redundancy! Webmaster has used this 'private cloud' principle many times and, because he believes it is extremely useful, he provides two examples, one trivial, the other less so.

As a trivial example, Webmaster has, for many years, maintained files on one of his websites that has detailed directions to his house(s). He uses the files to help visitors find his house(s). Of course such visitors can use any of a number of WWW sites that help one get directions to a given address. But those services are not 'personalized'. They do not tell the visitor (as Webmaster's instruction file does) where to park if the parking area in Webmaster's property is full. And his directions are NOT based on GPS tracking, which may yield a cumbersome routing (or an erroneous one): the directions Webmaster provides are personalized - they tell the visitor how Webmaster finds it best to get to his house, park, etc., not how some 'eye in the sky' computer might think is the best way to get there!

As a less trivial example, Webmaster will describe - briefly - how he used one of his websites to help members of the Opposition in the Stop Costco Gas battle. The Applicant had hired a number of so-called experts to 'help' the Hearing Examiner understand how they had reached their 'expert' opinions. One so-called expert (on air quality and environmental impact) had perfected the technique of providing his 'helpful' material in the form of a series of folders and files that were nearly impossible for many to navigate (a veritable tangled web!). And if/when the person wishing to examine a specific file managed to find it - and if it was not

prepared using 'proprietary' software (so no one could open it unless they had that software) - it often turned out that common means of transferring the file (in the case of the Costco hearings, this was often done by Email communication via a 'cloud' location that was less than efficient) did not work particularly well. So Webmaster often used his knowledge to get the recalcitrant file, determine if it could in fact be opened by software that members of the Opposition had, and - if so - placed it on his website and provided other members of the Opposition with the appropriate URL and an indication of the download time they could expect. In some instances, providing this file management service allowed other members of the Opposition to determine that the file in question did not in fact have the information it was purported to have.

Webmaster could extend this essay quite a bit, but that would violate his rule of keeping all these pieces manageably short. So he chooses to make the following overall statement about the less-well-known value of websites without providing specific examples. Websites, properly designed and managed provide a enormous amount of information in readable format. And they are flexible. One can provide the information briefly and can use links to other sites to help the visitor get more information (to the extent that s/he wants it) by, in essence, guiding them through the maze of information available on the internet. Since the available (and 'important') information is constantly changing, the webmaster can - if s/he keeps abreast of the changes - quickly re-route the visitor to the most current/accurate information source (or actually update the content of his/her website to reflect the changing information realities.) Without going into details, one way Webmaster made use of this website flexibility factor (WFF) was to constantly refine the Tanner Creek CA website in an effort to help the aforementioned lawyer understand why his assertions were wrong. Webmaster only stopped making the refinements when he was forced to recognize that the lawyer in question was NOT an Adult Learner and was, in fact, using the knowledge being provided to create problems, rather than to solve them.