ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

Editing and Maintaining a Web Site

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It is hard to imagine today's world as it would be without the World Wide Web. E-mail and e-commerce have become a way of life for many people, and scientific publishing is quickly establishing more efficient means of disseminating information, advertising, and recruiting through the use of Web sites. Timothy Roy, a senior analyst and experienced Web designer, outlined the basics of starting a Web site and illuminated the small details that one should consider before "uploading".

Roy discussed three basic steps: thinking about the Web, basic decisions, and, of course, getting started (the nuts and bolts of establishing a Web site). Thinking about the Web forces the Web-site editor to study methods of communication. Basic decisions that need to be made before uploading include a domain name, who will host the site, performance capabilities or expectations, and the site's content. Getting started will make use of people, materials, specific tools, and time.

When thinking about the Web, site editors must consider the purpose of their site. To whom should the site deliver information, and is the information relevant to that audience? Knowing the receiver will give the editor an edge over competing sites. This edge is essential and can be honed by providing appropriate links and updated information and by using the most current technology.

Securing a domain name is not expensive, but it can be difficult to find an appropriate domain name not already in use. Once the editor finds a domain name (by searching *www.networksolutions.com*), Roy recommends securing all three suffixes—.com, .net, and .org—to prevent confusion.

Three options exist for hosting a site:
1. "Free" Web hosting (such as Yahoo! GeoCities). This method will not allow you to use your own name nor will it allow the highest performance.
2. Your Internet service provider (ISP). This option is not free but will allow the use of your own identifying name and can provide better service.
3. Hosting the site yourself. This is the most expensive option and, as Roy said, "not for the faint of heart". This option allows total control, but it also forces you to deal with all the associated problems. It requires a dedicated line and a large bandwidth if the site is to function efficiently.

Web-site editors must also consider the availability and performance of their site when choosing a host. Although 100% availability might not exist—because of outages, maintenance, and connection losses—the editor should aim high. Free sites offer almost no control over availability, and self-hosting can be very expensive because you must pay for backup equipment. When forging a hosting agreement, ask the potential host about downtime and get it in writing before signing an agreement.

The performance of a Web site depends on the decisions that were made earlier. Use of "free" hosting, for example, will not allow the editor to control the bandwidth (that is, the pipe). If the editor expects a high number of page views, a larger pipe should be used. Do you pay for a large pipe that gets limited use, or do you maintain a smaller pipe and risk limiting the effective viewing of the site?

Now, you are ready to start creating. After making the important planning decisions, a Web-site editor must make use of people, materials, tools, and time. Necessary people include the project manager (the person with the authority), editorial and production staff, marketing personnel, and technology experts. Materials that will influence production of the site include any use of data from existing sites, technical specifications, and marketing plans. Tools used during production should include such basics as sketch pads, but you should also consider using diagramming software and a means for review, such as an intranet.

Finally, use your time wisely. Roy recommends planning a 6-week creating period; but never underestimate the importance of the planning process.