

2009 IWLA Group Project

Websites Made Easy: Template for Watershed Groups

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Watershed groups may have similar needs for a rudimentary, functional website to store and present information for stakeholder engagement. Requirements for websites for many watershed groups are that they require a limited amount of funding for design and hosting, low maintenance and facilitate an easy entry point for nontechnical users.

This project provides:

1. Answers to Frequently Asked Questions;
2. Content and components common to most projects;
3. Design tips for a user-friendly and appealing site;
4. Easy-to-use templates for simple website design; and
5. Suggestions for web hosting options.

Content for Typical Watershed Website

- Introduction and invitation to join the project
 - Location including major towns and highways (maps)
 - Mission statement / purpose of project
 - Source(s) of funding
 - Invitation to participate: how can they contribute; how will they benefit
 - Photos from local activities
- More detail for interested stakeholders
 - Events calendar (update as needed)
 - Survey or comment form to gather input
 - Timeline for project completion
 - List of partners and sponsors
 - Links to related resources
 - Contact Us - email and phone for coordinator; list of steering committee members
- Store and present information
 - Dates for past and future meetings
 - Agenda for the next meeting
 - Notes and presentations from past meetings and events
 - Data results (graphs) and interpretation
 - Draft plan for public review (post as pdf, compress as small as possible)
 - Implications for best management practices

What to post

- Information that is up-to-date
- Recognition of volunteer & sponsor contributions (logos with permission)
- Key messages for stakeholders
- Photos of events & accomplishments

What not to post

- Information that is quickly out of date
- Personally identifying information
- Photographs of poor management practices that identify a potential participant or stakeholder

Examples of watershed websites

The following watershed websites illustrate effective ways to achieve key communication functions for internet resources that support stakeholder involvement.

- Busseron Creek Watershed (Do It For the Shrimp!)
<http://www.busseron.org/Index.htm>
- Eagle Creek Watershed Alliance (data and interpretation)
http://www.cees.iupui.edu/Research/Water_Resources/Eagle_Creek_Watershed_Alliance/index.htm
- Wildcat Creek (stakeholder involvement)
<http://www.wildcatguardians.org/>
- Bean Blossom Creek (simple but action-oriented)
<http://www.monroe.iaswcd.org/Bean%20Blossom%20Project/Master%20Page.htm>
- Lower Fall Creek (plan posted in manageable sections)
http://www.hhrcc.org/LFC/w_lfc_index.html
- White River Watershed Project (education information)
<http://whiteriverwatershedproject.org/>
- Central Indiana Watersheds (blog links to several watershed web pages in the region)
<http://indywatersheds.wordpress.com/about/>

Program guidelines from IDEM 319 and DNR LARE

- LARE Online program manual
<http://www.in.gov/dnr/fishwild/3302.htm>
- IDEM Section 319 program manual
<http://www.in.gov/idem/5225.htm>

Frequently Asked Questions for How to Build a Website: A Step by Step Process

- A. How do I register a domain name?
- B. What domain name should I choose for my site?
- C. How do I set up a website?
- D. Webpage Templates...
- E. Do's and Don'ts of Website Design...

A. How do I register a domain name?

Registering your own [domain name](#) gives your website a unique name throughout the Internet. Domain name registration is the act of staking out "mycompanyname.com" or something similar as your own.

Domain name registration prices vary, but should be \$35 per year or less (the best deals are much lower, but read the fine print; make sure you will legally own your domain name).

Godaddy.com is one of the cheapest domain name registrars available. GoDaddy will strongly encourage you to purchase your web hosting service from them as well. And there's nothing wrong with their web hosting service. But keep in mind that you *do not* have to purchase domain name registration and web hosting from the same company.

Many web hosting companies can handle domain name registration for you in order to speed things along. They often offer the best deals on registration because they are counting on you to sign up as a hosting customer as well. For more information about web hosting, see how do I set up a website?

B. What domain name should I choose for my site?

When you set up your web site, you'll need to register a domain name. Registering a domain isn't hard, but choosing one can be. There are several top-level domains to choose from, including .com, .org, .net, and .biz. There are other top-level domains for specific countries and special types of organizations.

A few simple rules make it easier to pick a good domain name for your business. You may not be able to pick a name that fits all of these, because most of the really obvious names have long since been taken. So I've put these in order, with the most important rules first:

- Register your domain name in the .com domain, even if this makes it difficult to follow the rest of the rules. The .biz domain, unfortunately, has a seedy reputation. It is viewed as a "bargain" version of .com and people generally don't trust it or see it as necessary. .net is for ISPs and web hosts, not for general business purposes. You can register .net names, but they don't sound "right." A similar objection applies to .org which is intended for nonprofit organizations. Your business should have a domain name that feels as "real" as possible.
- Keep the name reasonably short and easy to type. A 20-character domain name is too long.
- Spell the domain name correctly. It is much easier for users to remember it correctly if they don't have to remember a "clever" spelling. Since so many good names are taken, this isn't always possible. When you must use an alternate spelling, make sure it sounds "fun" rather than illiterate. Run your choice of name by a few friends. Make sure their reaction is positive.
- When possible, don't use a hyphen to separate words. Just run them together. This isn't always possible but bear in mind that an existing site with the same name, minus the hyphens, is bound to get a lot of your traffic.
- Don't make someone else's trademark part or all of your domain name. You could lose your domain entirely in court and be forced to start building your name recognition all over again.

C. How do I set up a website?

Next, you must choose a web hosting company to host your site for you. Hosting prices vary from \$5/month on up depending on the nature of your site and the amount of traffic you expect; extremely popular sites can expect to pay for a more expensive plan, or to pay extra bandwidth charges.

[Web Hosting Talk](http://www.webhostingtalk.com/) <http://www.webhostingtalk.com/> offers well-established forums in which to discuss the quality of various web hosting providers.

Third, you will need to create your website's content. In most cases you will already own one or more programs that can be used to save web pages in the World Wide Web's HTML format. For instance, both the 100% free OpenOffice <http://www.openoffice.org/> suite and Microsoft Office offer a "Save As..." HTML capability in their word processor software. [Creating a web page](http://www2.web.com/diy-website-design/index.html?plan=bsl&ctyle=1s1110&pid=110&bid=1144&aid=CD15&opt=&refcd=KT000114) <http://www2.web.com/diy-website-design/index.html?plan=bsl&ctyle=1s1110&pid=110&bid=1144&aid=CD15&opt=&refcd=KT000114> with these tools is much like writing any other document, with the addition of the ability to make links to other pages and sites. But how exactly do you make a link from one page to another? In OpenOffice, this is very easy to do:

1. Select the text or image in your document that should become a link.
2. Pull down the "Insert" menu and choose "Hyperlink."
3. In the "Target" field, enter the URL of the page you want to link to. If you are linking to another page in the same folder on your own website, you can just enter the filename, such as aboutus.html. That's all. This isn't hard— just keep it simple and don't second-guess yourself into getting it wrong! You don't want to enter a complete filename with drive letters and slashes here. Just the name of another page that you plan to put in the same folder one you move your pages to your website.
4. Click "Apply." This is important.
5. Click "Close."

You can name the rest of your web pages anything you like, but be sure to name your "home" page index.html. Web servers understand that index.html is the file to give when the user doesn't specify a particular page. So when a user types in or clicks on a link to www.example.com, the page they get is index.html. If you don't provide an index page, users will see a directory listing or an error message— not professional.

You will also need to create graphics for your site, of course. Your graphics must be in GIF, JPEG or PNG format to be used effectively on the web; please do not put BMP files on the web as they are very, very slow to download and do not work with every browser. All Linux users, and Windows users who are willing to take the time to master a somewhat confusing interface,

will want to use GIMP, which is free and very powerful. Windows users should consider the very affordable and user-friendly Ultimate Paint; many features are available without restriction even without the \$39.95 registration. Macintosh users and high-end graphics mavens swear by Photoshop.

Fourth, you will need to upload the pages and images you have created to your new web space. Your hosting company will provide instructions for this. Often your hosting provider's instructions call for moving files via FTP or Secure FTP (SFTP). Windows users can do that with FileZilla, a free, open-source, noncommercial FTP and SFTP "client" program. MacOS X and Linux users have command-line FTP built-in, but MacOS X users will probably prefer the user-friendly Transmit program.

Once you've uploaded your files, your site is up!

Professionals and others with a significant budget should also look at Macromedia Dreamweaver, currently the most reputable high-end tool for creating web pages.

D. Web Page Templates...

There are many tools available on the World Wide Web to help you get started by providing a website template for free or for purchase. Both have a lot to offer your organization to get started. These online easy-to-use website building sites provide an affordable solution to creating a website. Anyone can build a website from these templates in just a few hours. Typically the process includes choosing a Website Design, Customizing it, and finally Uploading it through their sever service. It really is that simple! In addition to having a premade website, they also provide technical support for a minimal monthly fee.

Listed below are several links to online Website Template providers for your convenience. These are just a few suggestions, but there are hundreds of providers to chose from.

Wild Apricot - Wild Apricot provides a free website for non-profits that is easy to set up and provides valuable solutions such as e-mail blasts, member registration, member networking, and donations. I have used this service and recommend it based on its cost, user ability, and overall value. If you find that you need more membership capacity you can upgrade your system for a minimal monthly fee.

<http://www.wildapricot.com/web-page-templates.aspx>

Memberclicks - This company is a provider of website solutions that offers nonprofit organizations solutions.

http://www.memberclicks.com/products/nonprofit_website.html?gclid=CNfWoon4rJoCFRINDQodSxwubg

OSWD Open Source Web Design

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

Tip Top Website.com

http://www.tiptopwebsite.com/website.php?id=free_websites_google

Homestead

http://www.homestead.com/?s_cid=GC23039

E. Do's and Don'ts of Website Design...

DO'S

Use more text where you can: photography sites are naturally image-heavy, but search engines rely on text to index and rank your site. They can't "see" images. So, don't skip opportunities to use text. Links, for example, should be text-based and not images. Use the "alt" tag. If you're posting a photo, include some text that describes the photo (subject, location, your thoughts on it, etc) All of this makes for a more informative and useful site too.

Size/quality of images: Make sure your photos are adjusted using a calibrated monitor and optimized for web displays. Double check to make sure that the background color does not clash/distract from the photo.

Cross-browser compatibility: test out your site on multiple browsers. What works on Internet Explorer will not necessarily work on Firefox.

Edit your text: Most people who use the web only scan through text and don't actually read every word on a web page. Remember to spell check. Break up large chunks of text into discrete paragraphs that each communicate a specific point (and highlight or bold it.)

Link out: Include some links to other sites/sources of info - a lot of people will stumble across your site because they're looking for that other info. If your site becomes a good source to find other info, users are more likely to visit your site again. Also outgoing links will improve your site's search engine rankings.

Use ALT tags for all graphics, especially navigation graphics.

Use black text on white background whenever possible for optimal legibility.

Use either plain-color backgrounds or extremely subtle background patterns.

Make sure text is in a printable color (not white).

Place navigation in a consistent location on each page of your website.

Use a familiar location for navigation bars.

Keep the design from scrolling horizontally.

Use one axis of symmetry for centered text on a page.

Encourage scrolling by splitting an image at the fold.

DON'TS

Flash: Minimize the use of Flash. It can do some fancy presentation tricks, but in most instances these tricks can also be done with plain html/css. Also, excessive flash can hurt search engine rankings and slow down your website for visitors.

No splash pages: splash pages are the introductory or opening pages to your site, which typically consist of an image plus a little "Enter" link.

Galleries: should be easily navigable.

Text vs. Background contrast: It's fashionable to make text color and background colors roughly the same - thus making it impossible to see the text easily. Add contrast between the text and the background. Or, if you're using a background tiling image, make sure it isn't too "busy" so as to overwhelm the text on the foreground. On the other hand, don't overdo the contrast.

Links: It is fashionable to remove the underline from links - thus making sure that a link is indistinguishable from normal text on your site, and so minimizing the chances that anyone will actually click on a link. You could add a hover effect - an underline or a change of color that appears when your mouse hovers over the link. Choose your color scheme/layout and be consistent about it across your site; don't switch link colors on different pages.

Don't use too many colors in your web site:

Allow ALT tags to get clipped (especially an issue for small, fixed width images).

Display static text in blue or underlined.

Use boldface or ALL CAPS for long pieces of text. These slow down reading.

Leave too much white space--reduces scannability.

Make the user scroll to find critical information, especially transaction buttons and navigation links.

Use horizontal rules to separate chunks of content.

Alternate too frequently between centered text and left-aligned text. Most text should be left-aligned.

Fix pages at larger than 800 x 600 pixels. Larger pages may force users to scroll horizontally.

http://www.homestead.com/?s_cid=O40354

<http://www.boutell.com/newfaq/creating/>

Template examples

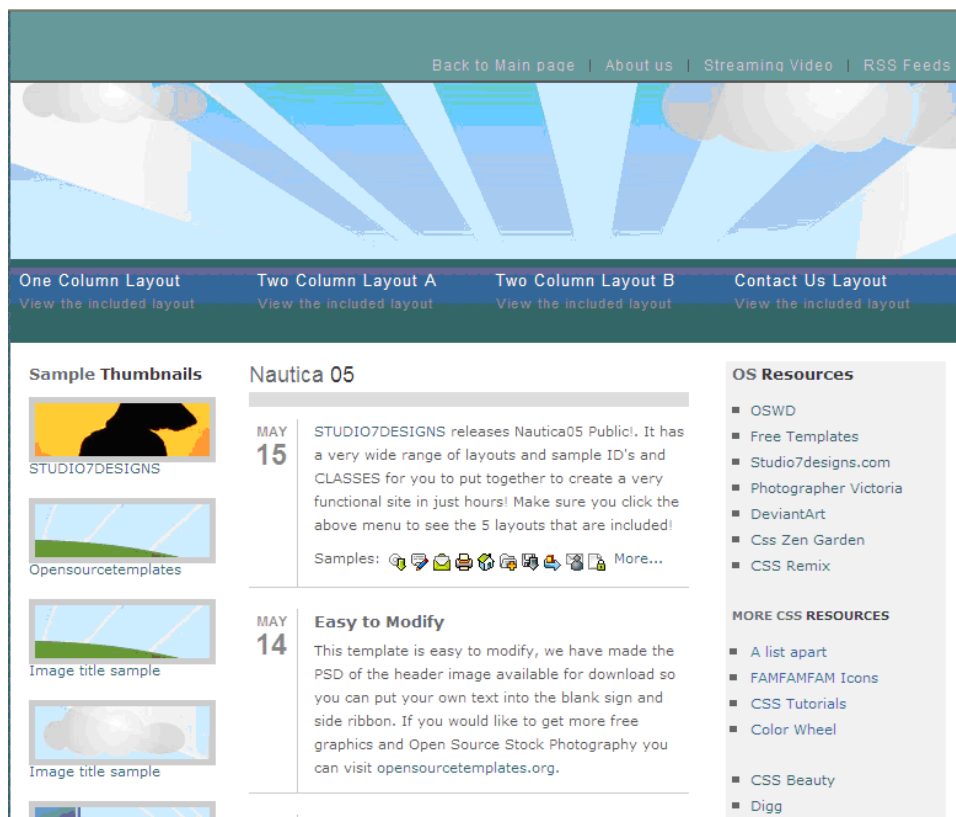
There are a number of sources on the internet for website templates.

These pages are set up so that the user can produce information and drop it into location on the template page.

An example is from the following internet resource:

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

Example of a home page template (top right).



Example of a related page with calendar information (bottom right).

