

## **“How to Build a Web Site (When you don’t have a clue!)”**

by Dianne E. Butts

With my first book nearing publication, I wanted to use the internet to promote it and make it available. I wanted a web site, but I didn’t have a clue how to build one.

I did know I needed a “host”—an internet provider who would store my site making it available for viewing. My husband, Hal, knew our internet provider could host my site. He visited their web site and printed pricing information: \$20 a month, \$40 to “register my domain” for two years, a \$40 set up fee, though the current special waived that.

Normally, I don’t start something until I know how to finish it. But I knew I needed a web site—whether I learned how to build one myself or hired someone. So I took a leap of faith and signed up with the provider for a site, even though I still had no clue how to build it. Our internet provider e-mailed saying [www.DianneEButts.com](http://www.DianneEButts.com) was available. I connected and found a screen with nails, hammers, and an “Under Construction” sign.

Unsure of what to do next, I began asking friends if they knew how to build a web site. None of them did, however my friend, Jan, said her employer had sent her to a web site building seminar at her local college. I called my own local college but they weren’t offering any such seminars.

“Do you have any students that might want to build a site for me?” I asked the woman at the college. I had no clue how much it might cost, but the thought of learning all I might need to know so seemed daunting. And I didn’t know how long it might take me to learn how to build a site myself. *Should I go ahead and hire someone to build my site?* I wondered. If I did, at least I’d have a site up and running.

“Sure,” the lady said. “I’ll have someone call you.”

Meanwhile, I kept searching. *Lord, I prayed, You know how to build web sites. Show me what to do.*

When the contact from the college called, we discussed my needs. If I supplied the

written copy, she could build me a page for my book, a bio page, and an order form for... several hundred dollars! That seemed pretty expensive. Definitely more than my budget could handle.

*Besides, I thought, I'd have to pay her every time I wanted to add to or update my site. And how long will I wait for her to make changes?* I didn't like being dependant on someone else nor the unknown future costs.

Then I remembered my book editor had her own web site. I e-mailed her. "That's way too much to pay someone to build a site," she said. "Why don't you buy Microsoft FrontPage and create your own?"

### Discovering Site-Building Programs

#### Microsoft FrontPage?

Hal and I shopped electronics and office supply stores that sold software and discovered several programs available for building web sites. We bought FrontPage for \$180, less than half the cost the web designer quoted me. I prayed it wouldn't be too hard nor too time-consuming to learn.

Hal installed the program on our computer and I set aside three days to begin learning it and designing my web site. Wednesday morning I opened the program for the first time. When the program came to life, the screen looked familiar. *It's by Microsoft, silly, I thought. Of course the menu bar would look just like Microsoft Word!* I tossed the little book included with the program aside and opened "Help" on the menu. Before long I had created a new web site, added pages, and learned how to navigate between them. Now all I needed was content to fill those pages.

I had already written my "back cover blurb" for my book and a sales flyer. I soon discovered I could simply "copy" and "paste" the material from my book file into my web pages. I had scheduled three days to begin learning the program. In less than three hours, I had built a web site!

#### Options

I also discovered I could choose a "theme" and the program would create coordinating

colors and graphics on my wallpaper, buttons, bullets, and more throughout my site. I could add header banners, and footers that showed the date when each page was updated. Browsing through the menus I found a wealth of options I could learn about and implement later.

### Uploading

Next I consulted “Help” to learn how to “publish” my site. With the password furnished by my internet provider “host” handy, I clicked the “publish” icon and by early afternoon I was uploading my beautiful new web site.

I e-mail a few friends asking them to check it out to make sure it worked. Soon a friend called. “Wow! I’m impressed!” she said.

*Me too!* I thought.

### Adding and Updating

Since those first simple pages, I’ve added more pages to my site, built an order form for my book, and added some links to other sites. When *Light and Life* magazine put my bio on their web site to accompany my article they were publishing, they scanned my photo into cyberspace. I discovered I could “copy” it from their web site and insert it into mine. I’ve also added photos taken by digital cameras, including one of me with my book at a signing.

### Free Site Building Tools

Through building my site, I learned some internet providers offer free web site hosting, but usually only for non-commercial sites. I also discovered web site building tools are available for free, some from my “host.” Nevertheless, I don’t regret purchasing a web development program. A program makes creating and updating my web site so easy. I can add a page, update information, or insert a feature like a “hits counter,” publish it to the internet, and be back to my current writing project in less than an hour.

Duh! Here’s your clue...

How one builds a web site without a site building program is still a mystery to me. There are programs available to help us amateurs build sites. That fact probably should have been a, “Duh!” But at least I’ve been clued in to these programs now. If you’d like to shop around for

other programs, go to an online store or a brick and mortar store and search for “web development programs.” And now if you want or need a web site to promote your writing, you, too, have a clue how to do so.

This article appeared in the January 2004 issue of *SpiritLedWriter.com*. Please note Microsoft discontinued FrontPage as of March 2007, replacing it with Expressions Web. (An update is available for owners of any previous version of FrontPage.) Also, I have found companies who register domains and provide hosting for far less than I quoted in this article. Please see the Resources page on the “For Writers” section of my web site for more information about where to find Expressions Web and my recommendations for your domain registration and hosting at [www.DianneEButts.com](http://www.DianneEButts.com).