

EPICon

March 12, 2004

Author Websites 101

by

Rick Sutcliffe

Arjay Enterprises
(Author, Web Services)

About
Author Websites 101

- ◆ Who is Rick Sutcliffe?
 - professor of computing science, Trinity Western University
 - lives in Bradner, BC, Canada
 - computing columnist since 1983
 - textbooks on computer programming and ethics

- ◆ Why can he talk to authors about hosting?
 - on the network since the mid 1970's
 - author of three SF novels (pub. Writers Exchange ePublishing)
 - owns and operates Arjay Web Resources
 - WebNameSource.com (domain registration)
 - WebNameHost.net (hosting company)

Author Websites 101 - Overview

- ◆ Your Own domain
- ◆ How the domain system works
- ◆ Why “free” hosting isn’t
- ◆ Picking a host
- ◆ Creating a web site
- ◆ Maintaining a site
- ◆ Promoting a site

Your Own domain

Your Own domain-Why?

- ◆ You want to advertise your books with your own (or a pen) name.
- ◆ You want the URL (Uniform Resource Locator) to talk about you.
- ◆ So, whose name is up front at your Web Site?
- ◆ Typical "free" service, space provided by ISP (telco or cable company) has their name or number first in an URL, then your user name (not your full writing name)
<http://www.123.217.101.123/freesites/wretchedscribes/~allycat>
<http://www3.sk.sympatico.ca/inkboy/>
<http://www.cpinternet.com/~tellymom/>
<http://members.home.net/mary106/index.html>
- ◆ Some do a little better, allowing your actual name in the URL:
http://www.geocities.com/jsmith_1000/
<http://www3.sympatico.ca/bjonson/>
- ◆ But both are cryptic and lacking in name recognition value.

Your Own domain-Why?

- ◆ Well-known affinity groups are useful, if related to your works:
<http://www.sff.net/people/teaston/>
- ◆ And of these, subdomain hosting is the best, at least putting your name first
<http://www.mistijackson.bizhosting.com/>
- ◆ But compare all these to:
<http://www.lillieammann.com/>
<http://www.patriciacrossley.com/>
- ◆ and on most professional systems, the following works:
ricksutcliffe.com (i.e. no "http" or "www")
- ◆ Put your name up front, where you want it.

Your Own domain

What To Buy?

- ◆ The standard for most domains remains .com

.net is OK, but is really intended for net service providers

.info is a good alternate choice

.org is for organizations

.edu is reserved for schools in the United States

- ◆ All two letter top-level registries (.ca .us .ie) are for specific countries. Most require you to be a citizen of or be doing business in the country in question in order to register. Others allow anyone to register, but all these have recognition problems.

- ◆ NOTE: .ws does NOT mean "Web Site" It means "Western Samoa". Prices for this registry have gone up sharply in recent years without warning, and it should be avoided.

Your Own domain

The Cost

- ◆ .com .net .org .us .info
 - Pay no more than \$12.00/year for premium tools and service
 - Pay under \$10 for "bare bones" registration

- ◆ .ca
 - Pay no more than \$17 US or \$24CDN

- ◆ other two letter country domains (.tm, .tv):
 - can be over \$100 per year. (Ouch!)

- ◆

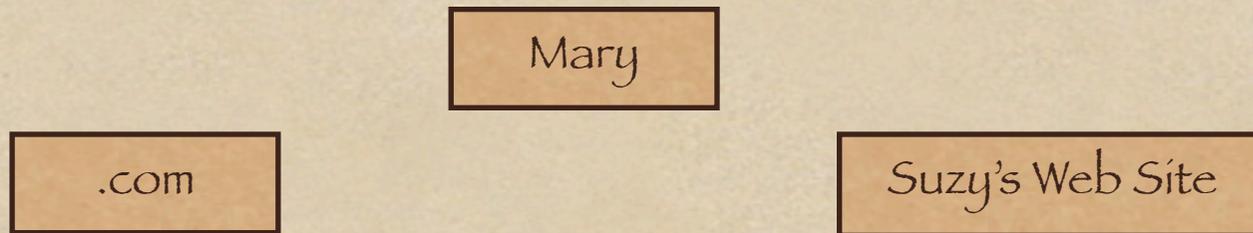
- ◆ Some registries may require you to register for two years at a time
- ◆ Most registries do not allow you to register for more than ten years
- ◆ You cannot register others' trademarks or two-letter domains

How the domain *system* works

How the domain system works

Mary Doe, looking for writer Suzy Schloss, finds her web page URL on a brochure, business card, or letterhead.

1. Mary types SuzySchloss.com in her browser



2. Mary's computer queries the .com registry database
3. The .com database locates a listing (DNS entry) for SuzySchloss.com
4. There, it finds one of two things, depending on how it is set up
 - the name of her "real" site <http://www.geocities.com/~szsc> (in which case, it has to look this up in the DNS, too)
 - the address of the system hosting her site: 123.321.111.156
5. The registry tells Mary's computer the numeric address
6. Using this, Mary's computer connects to the web site, gets and displays its content.

How the domain system works --making it work for you

So if you at least have your own domain, you can

1. keep your "free" or affinity site and direct your domain there,
2. change to a new provider and continue to advertise your domain, just redirect it to the new location.

This not only is better advertising, but much superior to changing your advertising ever time you change providers.

But, it is not a complete solution...

Why "free" hosting isn't

Why “free” hosting isn’t

1. Free hosts never stay that way long

(What follows is taken from an actual provider's site.)

Attention: HyperMart Free Hosting Customers

On March 1st, 2004, HyperMart discontinued free Web hosting plans. If you had a free hosting account and did not upgrade, your account has been taken offline.

To upgrade to a paid account and retrieve your account and associated Web files, please visit:

http://www.hypermart.net/hypermart/upgrade_plans2.bml

2. Free hosts plaster your site and your eMail with ads.

- They become the main beneficiaries of your site, not you.
- Porn and gambling ads (most common) detract from your content
- Browsers at your site get annoyed, leave, don't return

Why "free" hosting isn't

3. Free sites are hard to find because

- Search engines "know" the free providers, and sometimes will not index their sites,
- Some forwarding systems from the DNS to your site (ones using frames) do not permit the search engines to see and index your real site.

[Note to techie dweeb folk: The Meta tags are not accessible.]

If no one can find your site in a search engine, no one will go there. Your site will be a nicely decorated haunted house.

The Bottom Line:

"Free" can be costly.

Picking a Host

Picking a host

The hosting platform

- If you hire a professional site designer, let her pick a host.
- If your web site uses .asp (you don't need to know what that is) you MUST use a Microsoft server platform.
- BUT, the most common hosting (75%+) uses BSD UNIX or Linux

Be sure you get:

- a consumer level control panel (e.g. cPanel, Webmin, HSPHERE)
- the ability to add eMail accounts and forwarders yourself
- 24/7 access to your files via FTP
- secure (encrypted) access (ask for secure control panel, POP, SMTP and FTP) Otherwise your password might be captured and your web site taken over.
- 24/7 customer support is nice, but not really necessary. You just need a response to a trouble ticket within 24 hours (less costly business).

[Example: cPanel provides all the above amenities.]

Picking a host

Cost

Web hosting is priced by

- the amount of storage space you need for your files
- the amount of traffic to and from your site (bandwidth)

Picking a host

Cost--Space

A typical author's web site needs room for a few dozen pages, including graphics, and one to five mailboxes.

10-50 megabytes (i.e. million characters of text) is plenty of space, even if you put whole novels on the system.

Examples:

- Several authors on WebNameHost each use less than 10M total space.
- *bookbabes.net*, which is a consortium of seven authors sharing one site uses 6M of storage space
- *ceauthors.com*, the Canadian e-Authors site we host, uses 87M
- *ArjayBooks* (my author site) uses 294M, but has over 1500 pages, two entire books, many files for downloading, and a mailbox that handles up to 1000 messages a day.

Picking a host

Cost--Traffic

- A typical beginning author's site sees less than 25M of traffic a month, some as little as 2M a month.
- Busier sites like *ceauthors.com* may see 1G (one billion) bytes a month
- *ArjayBooks*, a larger well-established site with many links in and thousands of pages gets 4000 visits a day and 3G+ of traffic.

Small sites suitable for authors with 10 mailboxes, 50M of storage and 250M of traffic per month are readily available from *WebNameHost* and many other companies for no more than \$60/year or \$5 a month. (Note that you usually pay annually for low cost accounts to save credit card processing fees, as there is very little profit in such accounts.)

Some hosts may charge extra to support Front Page, Flash, Java, extra scripts, more than one eMail account, statistics, or other features that most web hosts include for free.

Know what you are getting, but do not overpay for apace and bandwidth you do not need.

Picking a host

Other Considerations

- Reputation
- Longevity
- Expertise
- Physical location
- Industry Standard
- Quality of Bandwidth: • Inclusions

Creating a Web Site

Creating a web site

Quick, Cheap, or Dirty Methods

- ◆ 0. (For the free and some other systems) Use the host's web site creation package to build up to ten pages free.

NO NO NO!

Always build your web pages on your own local computer. Test the look and feel of the site before buying space and going public. BACKUP BACKUP BACKUP

- ◆ 1. Create a file in your word processor, save as .html

NO NO NO!

- ◆ 2. Use Microsoft's Front Page

A workable solution for many.

- ◆ 3. Use a web page creation package such as Dreamweaver

A common solution.

Creating a web site

The Best Way

- ◆ 4. Learn HTML coding and use a text editor with web tool extensions

Recommended. You have complete control over what your site looks like and the benefit of knowing how everything actually works. This does take some time, but it is worth it.

A text editor designed for building web sites has many short-cuts to help you enter the code quickly and correctly, but gives you total control of the editing process.

But

Always keep yet another backup!!

Creating a web site

From your computer to the Server

This requires a program that can do FTP (File Transfer Protocol)

Web creation packages like Dreamweaver and Front Page, even editors like BBEdit have FTP built in.

Otherwise, use an FTP package like

- on Windows: Cute FTP
- on the Mac: Fetch or Interarchy

But use the secure FTP method called SFTP so your password and files travel encrypted and cannot be read by a casual observer.

Editing and Maintaining a Site

Editing and Maintaining a site

Don't

- ◆ overdo the graphics, especially the large ones
- ◆ use counters "this site has been visited ... times" (amateurish and irrelevant)
- ◆ make a page that has nothing but graphics
- ◆ use guest books (they get more spam than actual visitors)
- ◆ play music of any kind on your site. It drives people away.
- ◆ put webrings, awards, affinity link graphics on the front page
- ◆ allow commercial advertising (banners, etc.) on your front page.
- ◆ get involved in Multi-level marketing schemes to supplement your income.
- ◆ put your eMail address on your site except in the form
ruth at ruthschwartzenger.com
- ◆ write your password down or give it to anyone else
- ◆ open eMail attachments you did not specifically request
- ◆ ever think of your site as finished
- ◆ ever put an "under construction" note on your site

Editing and Maintaining a site

Do

- ◆ scale your graphics to the right size for the site, even if this means creating several versions of the same graphic (speed of loading)
- ◆ include actual text content on every page (search engines don't pay much attention to graphics per se)
- ◆ use a form (needs some work) to allow communication with you.
- ◆ ask your friends to check your pages using other browsers and/or platforms than the one you have
 - Macs and PCs use different spacing and colours
 - code that works in one browser may not in another
 - some set monitors to high contrast or brilliance
 - not everyone has the same fonts installed
- ◆ That is, what looks good to you might look terrible on another person's desktop. In general
 - use dark print on light background or the reverse
 - keep colour contrast and brilliance moderate
 - write so that you don't depend on precise spacing
 - design so you don't depend on the look of a specific font

Editing and Maintaining a site

More advanced techniques

- ♦ ensure that every graphic tag has an alt = "message with keyword" tag contained in it
- ♦ have pages that offer information of value to the reader, more than just how to buy your books
 - links to other authors
 - industry information
 - writing tips
 - your biography
 - maps of your settings

and other reasons for them to come back to your site for information they cannot get directly from your books.

- ♦ become an affiliate marketer for bookstores carrying your books (extra percentage to you for the traffic) This is not MLM.

Promoting a Site

Promoting a site

The Title Tag

```
<TITLE>Non-Fiction and Christian SF by Rick Sutcliffe</TITLE>
```

This code goes near the top of the file inside the
<head>
</head>
section.

It determines:

- the title displayed on the top of the window whenever your site is browsed
- how your site is filed/classified by search engines

No matter what tool(s) you use to create your site, this tag **MUST** be present in the file.

Promoting a site

Required Meta Tags

These are piece of HTML code in your web site file that don't display on your site, but are visible to search engines. The name says the kind of tag, and the content what it consists of.

```
<META NAME="description" CONTENT="Christian SF with Irish and Canadian themes by Rick Sutcliffe, Modula-2, Ethical & Social Issues in Technology">
```

```
<META NAME="keywords" CONTENT="christian sf, alternate history, science fiction, sciencefiction, christianfiction, celtic, irish, canadian, arjay enterprises, rick sutcliffe, science, christian, speculative, futuristic, ethics, ethical, issue, issues, fiction, sf, csf, interregnum, timestream, literature, christianity, christians, ireland, ... snip...">
```

These two tags are essential, and must be present inside the <head> section of your code in order for a search of a web directory to find your site by subject.

Promoting a site

Required Meta Tags--Making Keywords Work

Note the part that begins:

```
<META NAME="keywords" CONTENT="christian sf,
```

The first few words in this section are the ones you want people to find you under at a search engine. But it isn't enough to put them into your keyword list.

They need to be sufficiently unique so there is some hope of your page being in the top twenty or so from a search.

"eBook", "romance", "fiction", and "author" won't cut it (millions of pages answer the bell).

You need a brand, a unique phrase that will get your page in the first few. This may be your own name "Roberta Dogbert" or your subject "Christian SF" or something else you expect people will search for when they want your kind of story.

Your selected keywords should appear in your title and in a number of places on your page.

Get this all set up before listing your site on a search engine.

Promoting a site

Other Meta Tags

Some tags are common but optional, and may improve your search engine standing.

```
<META NAME="author" CONTENT="Rick Sutcliffe">
```

```
<META NAME="revisit-after" CONTENT="60 days">
```

```
<META NAME="robots" CONTENT="index">
```

```
<META name="copyright" content="2000-2004 by Rick Sutcliffe and  
Arjay Enterprises">
```

```
<META NAME="publisher" CONTENT="Arjay Enterprises">
```

Yet other tags are for very specific purposes, such as engines that find sites bases on where you or your business is located:

```
<META NAME="geo.position" CONTENT="49.1181;-122.4239">
```

```
<META NAME="geo.placename" CONTENT="Bradner, British  
Columbia">
```

```
<META NAME="geo.country" CONTENT="CA">
```

Promoting a site

Which Search Engines

The majority of traffic comes from search engines and directories.

You need to get your site listed on:

Google
Yahoo
MSN
AOL

and you can do these yourself. Go there, and enter the information and suitable keywords by hand. Google is the most important, but other engines will accept non-commercial sites free.

Should you pay to be listed?

No, unless you are in a big hurry and it costs less than \$5. See

ineedhits.com [\$2.50 for 300 search engines]

selfpromotion.com [by donation]

Some Web Site control panels have a free submission function.

eMail offering to guarantee you top listing for a fee is junk. Discard it.

Promoting a site

Cross Links

All other things being equal, when someone searches for "historical romance" "american revolution" the sites that come at the top are those a search engine deems most relevant. This means not only content relevant to keywords, but that other similar sites regard it as important enough to link to.

The more links in to your site from others having the same key words, the higher your ranking. So,

- have a link page and offer to trade links with other sites
- but don't use "free-for-all" links or similar link farms as the search engines are trained to ignore these

This takes hard work and dedication, and you won't notice much improvement in your site standing for months, but it will pay off.

e.g. If you type "Christian SF" or "Irish SF" into almost any search engine, you'll get Rick Sutcliffe's pages several times in the top ten, but this ranking took years to attain.

The End
(of the beginning)

Author Websites 101 - Overview

- ◆ Your Own domain
- ◆ How the domain system works
- ◆ Why “free” hosting isn’t
- ◆ Picking a host
- ◆ Creating a web site
- ◆ Maintaining a site
- ◆ Promoting a site