

Currently, I am sitting on a three-legged stool, surrounded by magazines, articles that are tabbed and books that relate to the same subject all neatly organized in a small cart. The table at which I am working might be from a local discount chain, but half of it is covered with clean red flooring paper. An antique, brilliant-cut lemonade glass holds my array of pens, pencils

and yellow highlighters. My favorite mug contains the steaming beverage of the day. Mozart is playing on the stereo. The stage is set.

However, it takes all of my resolve not to glance directly to the right—for out of the corner of my eye, I see looming responsibility: all the paint cans with their customary drips, small used containers, buckets, index cards, pens, Ziploc bags, stacks of reference material, chunks of marble, cleaned brushes lining up like cadets on the floor, unfinished samples and the date of the approaching deadline.

Choosing not to be influenced nor affected by these distractions, I force my eyes to focus forward. What shall hold my interest for the next several hours is my pet project, designing and developing my Web site. Helping me accomplish this feat while being positioned with precision on my worktable is my shiny new laptop. Working tirelessly for over a year, putting in endless hours day and night including Saturday and Sunday afternoon, with no time off for good behavior, Al the Powerbook has marched on.

Like most decorative artists and faux finishers, I, too, boarded the technology train and acquired a Web

site in early fall of 2002. Seeing my portfolio in that venue for the first time was a memorable moment. It took most of that previous summer before the unveiling to get all the writing, descriptions and photos organized. Once the site was up and running, I would often click onto it and indulge myself with a private viewing. After all, how could I resist?

But I soon realized that your Web site is a vital element often requiring frequent care and attention. For me, it became quite important that the most current work be represented on the site. Often, during the initial business phone call, I would direct the potential client to my Web location. "Ah, yes, that is exactly the effect, the look or perhaps something similar," would often be the comments after they had viewed what I had to offer them. Putting it simply, once it was launched, I really used the site as way to market myself and began to feel anxious that I was not using this resource to its fullest potential. Not containing current information limits this additional avenue that could otherwise be used to promote sales. After all, you can never be too thin, rich or busy for new clients who are willing to shower you with praise.

My first Web site was unveiled sometime around September 2002. The original site was a gracious gift of someone's time. However, I soon realized that there would be no assistance with future updates: neither new photos nor press releases added to keep it current. Therefore, as the months passed and new exciting projects were finished, they were not

added to the original Web pages because of my lack of computer knowledge and technological skills. Over the course of time, I did not give my now fading star much thought. I no longer had the desire for secret private viewings. After all, there was nothing new to see. After my many quiet requests and gentle prodding for a much-needed update went unheard for two years, I decided to take mat-

Adventures of a Web Site Apprentice

ters into my own hands. Venturing into untamed, unknown and surely into wild territory—PC Country.

In the past I dismissed anything remotely technical. Hey, I felt accomplished running my external answering machine. I refused to upgrade the cell phone because I finally figured out how to use it properly. If it works, why fix it? I didn't care if it was the size of a small shoebox. A close friend tried to embarrass me because my microwave could hold a small 50-pound turkey and brought the power down at the condo complex. Given these several examples of me not having the desire to keep current, it was quite a surprise to most friends and family when I decided to invest in a sleek new, compact, state-of-the-art computer. Plus, the fact that I crossed over to join the Mac team of enthusiasts had most shaking their heads. But, I must say that before purchasing this puppy, I really did my homework.

Since I knew absolutely nothing about these curiosities, a salesperson could tell me anything and I would have been impressed. Wow, I get extra floppies with that one? No mention of memory, USB, firewire, speed, support or warranty. I definitely was

shooting from the hip, but I had to start somewhere. My final decision came after having a chance conversation with a client, who insisted that all our communication be done by e-mail. This seemingly insignificant conversation opened up my eyes and my world to the Macintosh.

Once I made up my mind to purchase the computer of choice, I had a hard time convincing the exhausted and often exasperated sales staff. Lady, hadn't you been to our store endless times before and wasted time? I asked my questions with the enthusiasm of an obvious novice while gathering the necessary important data with the style only a drill sergeant or the mother of five could appreciate.

When the day arrived to finalize my decision, sign the check and declare my formulated password, no sales associate could or would believe it. All who had tried to assist me in the past remained huddled behind the counter. However, once business was taken care of, it took both hands and all of my balancing skills to carry the numerous bags that contained the additional necessary accessories and the smart square-handled box containing the actual computer out of the store. Once home and still marveling at my savvy business sense (didn't I get the boys to throw in that cute black computer case?), I soon realized I was clueless on how to turn it on or off.

Realizing that I had to crawl before I could run, I allowed myself time to become acquainted with my new computer. Apple's excellent online support was only several clicks away, but I was unable to understand the jargon that was used for explanation purposes. Sure, a manual had been included. But even its large print and one-syllable words could not compensate for this writer's complete lack of knowledge and made translation painfully difficult. The dumber-than-dumb books seemed advanced at this stage in the game. But I refused to



The author, content with her laptop.

give up, and soon one success encouraged me on to accomplish others—but not before my share of crashes, backup failures, files that became mysteriously lost, along with hard drive complications. Could the last mishap have occurred because I had not turned the computer off in a year? Gee, nobody told me that I needed to do that. I found out the hard way—after losing ten thousand priceless photographs—the necessity of scheduling routine backups. And did I forget to mention endless service calls to Apple 911 because of printer complications? Oops...does that cord really have to be connected to something electric? Guess my mind was set on being wireless just a little too early.

Frequently calling had its rewards, though. Just saying my last name required no further identity or product information. Gosh, did I need to have a master's degree in computer science to register my new purchase? Is that the letter "o" or a zero that is required for license verification? I was so proud when I told a friend that I finally hooked up my airport wireless connection successfully without outside assistance. "How hard could that have been," he said. "It's wireless!"

Not long after the computer was out of the box, I found a non-threatening, inexpensive, beginner program that would allow internal behind-the-scenes access to the original Web pages. Once I understood it, the desired updates

could be done without outside assistance. However, soon after becoming comfortable with learning the technology, I began entertaining the idea of developing a completely new site from scratch. By late summer, I was enrolled in a class at a college two hours away. The instructor was warned about my ignorance ahead of time. I felt I owed him that. To his credit and youth, he took the challenge and encouraged me to attend. Tom soon had his six students optimizing, cropping and color balancing their photos. As the weeks passed, he slowly demystified the whole concept of Web site development. I had to be patient and pace myself to learn the various steps needed. By downloading trial versions of PhotoshopCS and Dreamweaver-MX, I could do additional work at home, perhaps speeding up my progress. Most beginners have 10-15 photos to edit. I was working with over 300 and adding after every project. As it came close for the class to end (I was no way near finishing my project), the Web Angel agreed to continue tutoring me privately.

Although months have passed and I am still working to bring my Web design project to completion, I feel accomplished and confident. My new pet will be downloaded soon—with Tom's help, of course—replacing the old, outdated visual. After this much-awaited event, updates will be done in a timely fashion, turning my computer into a potential money machine. I am excited to think that soon I will no longer be held captive by Web guys who are on their own schedules and not mine. *Ahh, how sweet and delicious is freedom?* **TPF**

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