

Introduction

Many years ago (we're talking last century), after having meandered around the web's nooks and crannies for quite a while, I got this sudden urge to have my own website. *Sheesh*, I thought to myself, *all these people are doing this wild web stuff that just seems so, well, cool. I want in!* So I scoured the web and bookstores for information on creating a website. What I found were a bunch of highfalutin manuals written in a turgid style that made website creation sound like some esoteric business best left to people with advanced engineering degrees.

When I was done, however, one thing was blindingly obvious: creating a website is actually pretty easy! So why were there no books out there shouting this from the rooftops? I resolved to take matters into my own hands and write just such a book. The result was the first edition of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Creating a Web Page*, which saw the light of day back in 1996.

Sounds great! But why are you calling me an idiot?

Well, when it comes to producing content for the World Wide Web, a “complete idiot” is someone who, despite having at least the normal complement of gray matter, wouldn't know HTML from H. G. Wells. This is, of course, perfectly normal and, despite what many so-called Internet gurus may tell you, it does not imply any sort of character defect on your part.

So I might as well get one thing straight right off the bat: the fact that you're reading *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Creating a Website* does *not* make you an idiot. On the contrary, it shows that ...

- ◆ You have discriminating taste and settle for nothing less than the best. (And it shows you don't mind immodest authors.)
- ◆ You have a gift for self-deprecation (which is just a fancy-schmancy way of saying you don't take yourself—or any of this Internet malarkey—too seriously).
- ◆ You're determined to learn this HTML thing, but you don't want to be bothered with a lot of boring, technical details.
- ◆ You realize it doesn't make sense to learn absolutely everything about HTML. You just need to know enough to get your web page up and running.
- ◆ You're smart enough not to spend your days reading 5 bazillion pages of arcane (and mostly useless) information. You do, after all, have a life.

In this book, I teach you how to create beautiful websites in no time flat. I understand that the very idea of trying to create something that looks as good as what you see on

the web sounds like an intimidating challenge. However, it's my goal in this book to show you that it's really quite simple and that *anyone* can build a website with their bare hands. We even try to have—*gasp!*—a little irreverent fun as we go along.

You'll also be happy to know that this book doesn't assume you have any previous experience with website production. This means you start from scratch and slowly build your knowledge until, before you know it, you have your very own tract of web real estate. All the information is presented in short, easy-to-digest chunks you can easily skim through to find just the information you want.

How to Use This Book

I'm assuming you have a life away from your computer screen, so *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Creating a Website* is set up so you don't have to read it from cover to cover. If you want to know how to add a form to your website, for example, just turn to the chapter that covers working with forms. (Although, having said that, beginners will want to read at least Chapter 1 before moving on to more esoteric topics.) To make things easier to find, I've organized the book into five more or less sensible sections:

Part 1, “Building a Website with Your Bare Hands,” helps you get your website labors off to a fine start by showing you everything you need to know to get a site up and running. First you learn some solid basics and move on to learn how to create interesting site designs using tables; how to spruce up your site with lists, news feeds, and free content; and how to enhance your site with e-mail links, forms, chat rooms, and forums.

Part 2, “Designing Your Website,” takes your website from good to great. You learn how to design a nice site, set up your site for easy and sensible navigation, and be sure people with mobile web browsers can access your site.

When your site is up to scratch, it's time to get it on the web, and **Part 3, “Publishing Your Website,”** helps you do just that. You learn how to check your site for errors, publish your site to the web, run your own web server, and let the world know that your website is open for surfing.

Part 4, “Automating Your Website with JavaScripts,” shows you how to add tiny little programs to your website to give your pages that interactive boost. I start with this JavaScript thing everyone always blathers on about. I also give you quite a few examples of scripts you can plop right inside your pages. I also show you a bunch of other examples that do all kinds of amazingly useful things.

Most Web welders are happy just to put up their pages and leave it at that. But a few want to generate some extra cash from their hard work, and that's what I show you

how to do in **Part 5, “Turning Your Website Skills into Cash.”** You learn how to get started as a professional web designer, make money from festooning your site with ads, earn cash by adding links to affiliate programs on your site, and set up a store to sell things.

Finally, at the end of the book, I’ve included a glossary of Internet, World Wide Web, and HTML terms that should help you out if you come across a word or phrase that furrows your brow.

About the CD

The book’s major bonus is the CD that’s glued onto the back cover. This little plastic Frisbee contains tons of website-related knickknacks, including all the examples I use in the book, some sample website templates, and lots more.



Extras

Happily, there’s more to this book than 17 chapters of me yammering away. To round out your website education and make your site publishing adventures a bit easier, I’ve included a few other goodies:

Webmaster Wisdom

These boxes contain notes, tips, and asides that provide you with interesting and useful (at least theoretically!) nuggets of web page lore.

def•i•ni•tion

This type of box defines words and phrases every budding webmaster needs to know.



Page Pitfall

These boxes contain cautionary tales that warn you of web page traps to avoid and hurdles to jump over.

Acknowledgments (The Giving Credit Where Credit Is Due Department)

English essayist Joseph Addison once described an editor as someone who “rides in the whirlwind and directs the storm.” I don’t know if that’s true for editors in some of the more sedate publishing nooks (novels and cookbooks and such), but I think it applies perfectly to the rigors of computer book editing. Why? Well, the computer industry (and the World Wide Web in particular) is so fast paced that any kind of editorial (or authorial) dawdling could mean a book will be obsolete before it even hits the shelves.

The good folks at Alpha Books avoid premature book obsolescence by subjecting each manuscript to a barrage of simultaneous edits from a number of specialists (I call it “gang editing”). So a process that normally might take months is knocked down to a few short weeks. This means you get a book that contains timely and relevant information, and a book that has passed muster with some of the sharpest eyes and inner ears in the business. My name may be the only one that appears on the cover, but tons of people had a big hand in creating what you now hold in your hands. Of those I worked with directly, I’d like to extend warm thanks to Acquisitions Editor Tom Stevens, Senior Development Editor Christy Wagner, Production Editor Kayla Dugger, Copy Editor Amy Borrelli, Technical Editor Don Passenger, and Software Specialist ??.

The members of the editorial team aren’t the only people who had their fingers in this publishing pie. Flip back a few pages and you’ll find a list of the designers, illustrators, indexers, and other professionals who worked long and hard to produce this book. I tip my authorial hat to all of them. I’d also like to thank the thousands and thousands of readers who have written to me over the years to offer compliments and suggestions. Your couple of cents’ worth is always appreciated.

Special Thanks to the Technical Reviewer

The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Creating a Website was reviewed by an expert who double-checked the accuracy of what you’ll learn here, to help us ensure that this book gives you everything you need to know about creating a website. Special thanks are extended to Don Passenger.

Don has been a reader of Paul’s books for many years in addition to his official title of technical editor on many of his tomes. Don’s site, htmlfixit.com (developed with a fellow McFedries reader), is a great resource for aspiring website creators. He offers domain hosting and site design services through bestfoot.com.

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