

Las Vegas Quill Keepers Lesson 19: Making a Great Author's Website

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The most email I've received in the last four years has the common theme of Websites. You may have seen my work on sites relating to film, comedy, writing, and even art. The reason why I am approached so often is that I had worked for years as a Creative Director for dot-com organizations. I have created nearly three dozen sites for friends, and far more for corporations. For a writer, the web offers unlimited opportunities. Even if you can't draw a circle without tracing a soup can, you can create an attractive, navigable online home.

A good website is made of several components. The first, and most important, is the Landing Page. Let's compare a website to a refrigerator. The landing page is the fridge door. Some are cluttered with notes, magnets, and shopping lists; others maintain a clean exterior, belying a mess inside. If you'd prefer, the landing page also is comparable to a book jacket.

Decide on a NAME for your online home. You must purchase this name through Domain Name purchasing services. If you are paying more than \$25 for a site name, and it doesn't include hosting, you are getting ripped off. A domain name lets the web visitors get a quick idea of who you are and what the site is about. I own CatsRats.com and GodlessGrief.com. Both titles let people know what to expect without having to even visit the site. Keep the names simple, short, and easy to remember- just like advertisers in commercials do with catch phrases. Put that website address on any business cards, or stationery, as an easy reminder for friends, associates, and possible clients. Most of the hosting services listed below offer name purchase options. They walk you through, and tell you if the name you wish is available.

The Landing Page is the first thing your readers see. It's also the first page a search robot sees. Remember when I talked about Meta Tags? These are hidden words in the web page which gives a complete idea of what your site is about. Here is an example from a site I've done. Anything in brackets is called "source code". The first words of the source code are the "tags", or commands to let the search engines know what is included in the website. The information in italics is the description of what you're viewing. Not all of these Meta tags are required, but it would help give your page a higher ranking in the search engines if similar information is included. Meta Tags belong in between the two Head tags in the code of your page.

```
<META HTTP-EQUIV="Content-Type" CONTENT="text/html; charset=iso-8859-1">
```

(This lets browsers and search engines know what kind of page this is. In this case it's a Hypertext Markup Language page, written in plain text, using a standard internet font.)

```
<meta name="title" content="Hank Garrett" />
```

(The browser is directed to place a title on the top bar of the window, that reads Hank Garrett.)

```
<meta name="description" content="This site is Hank Garrett's official home page. Hank has starred in hundreds of film and television shows, as a voice artist for GI Joe and Garfield, and is a singer, comic, actor who can be seen in the U. S. " />
```

(The tag is letting a search engine read a description which is displayed as a result when this site appears during a search.)

```
<meta name="keywords" content="actor, science fiction, comedy, music, performer, cult tv, car 54, condor" />
```

(The words that will help the search engines find this page are Keywords.)

`<meta name="language" content="US English" />` (Search engines and browsers now know this page is only written in English.)

`<meta name="author" content="CatheB" />` (*I add this on every page I produce, to ensure that not only this site, but any site I've done, gets ranked higher.*)

`<meta name="copyright" content="2002-2006 Hank Garrett" />` (*The copyright tag works as a standard year of publication.*)

`<meta name="robots" content="ALL" />` (*I want any search engine to find this page. This may change on sites that are too adult, or are set up to be used by an organization, only.*)

`<meta name="document-class" content="Living Document" />` (*This gives search engines permission to run robots to verify updated pages.*)

`<meta name="document-classification" content="Entertainment" />`
(*When a search engine classifies this page, it will consider it to be an entertainment related site.*)

The following tags reiterate information, but in a different way:

`<meta name="document-rights" content="Copyrighted Work" />`

`<meta name="document-type" content="Web Page" />`

`<meta name="document-rating" content="Safe for Kids" />`

`<meta name="document-distribution" content="Global" />`

`<meta name="document-state" content="Static" />`

`<meta http-equiv="Content-Language" content="EN-US" />`

You are not required to include Meta tags, but they do provide the internet with more information to guide people to your site. If you are going to create this with a “What you see is what you get”, (WYSIWYG),

program such as NVU, Dreamwaver, or Frontpage, you may never even see these tags.

The next thing to consider along with your fridge door, is the manner in which you place your shelving inside that fridge. The shelves are a bit like chapters of a book. You sort out specific items and place them in the areas of your site that makes the most sense. You'd place contact information on the contact area, the bits about you on the About You section, and so on.

When deciding which sections, shelves, or chapters would best suit your site, keep in mind that your viewers and readers may not have the same creative abilities, and may not understand your reasoning. For instance, one of my clients insisted that information about her animals be placed under the pages regarding her son's illness. She said, "My animals are important in our family." She received a few dozen letters from friends and family who were deeply insulted that she equated her shitzu with her boy. And, when people searched for stories regarding childhood leukemia, they were brought to a page about a dog and his toys. It was this visitor confusion that convinced her she needed to reorganize that fridge.

A smart rule of thumb is to keep Like information together. There are standard menu items which are expected by web viewers. People want to know about you, they want to know about your work, and they want to know how to reach you. Plan your navigation in a manner that is intuitive, and easy to understand.

About: The about section is often divided into subsections: About Author, About Company, About The Work—Any general topic overview.

Contact: Any method which you would like to be reached. Do not post your home phone, or address. If you MUST maintain a snail mail contact, then it's wise to rent a post office box.

Purpose Page: Why do you want a website? Do you want to have a location for your writing? Are you putting up a photo site for your friends and family? Whatever you want the website to represent should be here. For instance, My Portfolio if you are an artist, or Writing Romance if you want to tell people about your romance work— This is the shelf in the fridge for the particulars of your site.

Every other part of the website is directly related to what your readers would benefit from the most. In the Godless Grief site, I include a forum for those who want to discuss grief related topics. In NASCAR's site, the pages include statistics on drivers, tracks, and cars. Have you ever visited a web page, and just completely lost your way through the site? Were you unsure as to how you got where you did, and couldn't find a way back? This is the biggest flaw in sites: Poor Navigation.

Each page becomes easier to follow when a menu of the primary sections is included. Under each section, you need to show your viewers all of the pages by creating a submenu. If this isn't possible, then include a Site Map as part of the primary menu.

Menu Example, with sample submenus viewable when a visitor is in a particular section:

- About The Author
 - Biography
 - Public Speaking Engagements
 - Calendar of Appearances

- My Work
 - Book One: The Killers
 - Book Two: The Killed
 - Upcoming Books
- Contact
 - Guest Book
 - Special Appearances
- Site Map

You can create the ugliest online site in the world, but if it's easily navigable, your visitors will return. Below are some great resources for web site hosting. A great web hosting service gives you an ability to add tools to your site, such as blogs, guest books, and even shopping carts. The following hosting services offer these, plus allow you to use templates, so you don't have to know anything about web design. I try to envision a woman in her fifties, who has never used a computer, trying to find out about my work. With her in mind, I design my website. Why? She is probably one of my closest friends.

101Site Hosting

<http://www.101sitehosting.com>

DotEasy

<http://www.doteasy.com>

GoDaddy

<http://www.godaddy.com>