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# Creating a Website

**the missing manual**<sup>®</sup>

The book that should have been in the box<sup>®</sup>

Third  
Edition



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Matthew MacDonald

# Creating a Website: The Missing Manual, Third Edition

*Matthew MacDonald*

## **Editor**

Peter McKie

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# The Missing Credits

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## About the Author



**Matthew MacDonald** is a science and technology writer with well over a dozen books to his name. Spreadsheet fanatics can crunch numbers with him in *Excel 2010: The Missing Manual*. Data geeks can follow him into the dizzying world of databases with *Access 2010: The Missing Manual*. And human beings of all description can discover just how strange they really are in *Your Brain: The Missing Manual* and *Your Body: The Missing Manual*.

## About the Creative Team

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Finally, I'd never write *any* book without the support of my parents, Nora and Paul, my extended parents, Razia and Hamid, and my wife, Faria. (I'd probably write many more without the challenges of my two lovable daughters, Maya and Brenna.) Thanks everyone!

—*Matthew MacDonald*

# Introduction

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These days, it's all but impossible to find someone who *hasn't* heard of the Internet. Companies create websites before they make business plans. Political activists skip the debates and trash-talk their opponents online. Even formerly technophobic grandmothers spend hours emailing old friends (and selling the odd family heirloom on eBay). The Internet has even changed our language: *Google* and *friend* are now verbs, for example, and *tweet* has nothing to do with birds.

As you no doubt know, you can establish a web presence in many ways. You can chat with friends through a Facebook page, share pictures with like-minded photographers on Flickr, put your home videos on YouTube, or write short diary-style blurbs on a blog hosted by a service like Blogger. But if you're ambitious enough to have picked up this book, you're after the gold standard of the Web: a bona fide website to call your own.

So what can you accomplish with a website that you can't do with email, social networking, and other web-based services? In a word: *anything*.

Is your personal website just a permanent place to stash your résumé or the hub of an e-commerce warehouse that sells personalized underpants? (Hey, it's made more than one millionaire.) The point is that a website of your own gives you the power to decide exactly what it is—and the control to change everything on a whim. If you're already using other web-based services, like YouTube and Facebook, you can make them a part of your website, as you'll learn in this book. For example, why not put the YouTube videos of your cat playing pool right inside your website, next to your personalized cat merchandise?

Of course, with great power comes great responsibility—meaning that if you decide to build your own site, it's up to you to make sure it doesn't look as hokey as a 1960s yearbook portrait. That's where this book comes in. With this book by your side, you'll learn how to:

- **Create web pages.** HTML (HyperText Markup Language) is the language of the Web. Over the last decade, a modernized version HTML, called XHTML (*Extensible* HyperText Markup Language), gradually eclipsed HTML, and now is joined by another new version known as HTML5. In this book, you'll sort through these standards and learn how to write the most up-to-date, reliable web pages.
- **Make pages look beautiful using CSS (Cascading Style Sheets).** CSS picks up where HTML leaves off, adding formatting muscle that can transform the drabest of sites into a family of coordinated pages that look like they were professionally designed. Best of all, once you understand the *right* way to use CSS, you'll be able to apply a new look to your entire site by tweaking just a single file.
- **Put your website online.** The world's greatest website isn't much good if no one sees it. That's why you'll learn how to choose the best web hosting company, pick a *domain name* (like *www.HotToTrotHorses.com*), and get your masterpiece online. Don't panic—plenty of cheap web hosting companies are ready to show off your site for pennies a day.
- **Attract visitors.** You'll learn how to make sure people can find your site using popular search engines and how to build an online community that encourages repeat visits.
- **Get rich (or at least earn some spare change).** The Web is a linchpin of retail commerce, but even ordinary people can make money hawking their favorite merchandise (through Amazon), selling their own products (using a payment service like PayPal), or displaying ads (with Google).



You'll learn how to get in on the action.

- **Pile on the frills.** Every website worth its salt has a few cool tricks. You'll learn how to dazzle visitors with cool buttons, slick menus, and other flashy elements, courtesy of JavaScript. You'll even learn how to (shudder) serenade visitors with background music.

## What You Need to Get Started

This book assumes that you don't have anything more than a reasonably up-to-date computer and raw ambition. Although there are dozens of high-powered web editing programs that can help you build a website, you *don't* need one to use this book. In fact, if you use a web editor before you understand how websites work, you're liable to create more problems than you solve. That's because, as helpful as these programs are, they shield you from learning the principles of good site design—principles that can mean the difference between an attractive, easy-to-maintain web creation and a disorganized design nightmare.

Once you master the basics, you're welcome to use a fancy web-page editor like Microsoft Expression Web or Adobe Dreamweaver. In this book, you'll get an overview of how these two leading programs work, and you'll discover a few great free alternatives (in [Chapter 4](#)).

### NOTE

Under no circumstances do you need to know anything about complex web programming technologies like Java or ASP.NET. You also don't need to know anything about databases or XML. These topics are fascinating, but insanely difficult to implement without some solid programming experience. In this book, you'll learn how to create the best possible website without becoming a programmer. (You *will*, however, learn just enough about JavaScript to use many of the free samples you can find online.)

## About This Book

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No one owns the Web. As a result, no one is responsible for teaching you how to use it or how to build an online home for yourself. That's where *Creating a Website: The Missing Manual* comes in. If the Web *did* have an instruction manual—one that painstakingly details the basic ingredients, time-saving tricks, and impressive embellishments every site needs—this book would be it.

# Macintosh and Windows

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One of the best things about the World Wide Web is that it truly is worldwide: Wherever you live, from Aruba to Zambia, the Web eagerly awaits your company. The same goes for the computer you use to develop your site. From an early-model Windows PC to the latest and greatest Mac, you can implement the tactics, tools, and tricks described in this book with pretty much whatever kind of computer you have. (Of course, a few programs favor one operating system over another, but you'll hear about these differences whenever they come up.) The good news is that this book is usable and suitable for owners of computers of all stripes.

# About the Outline

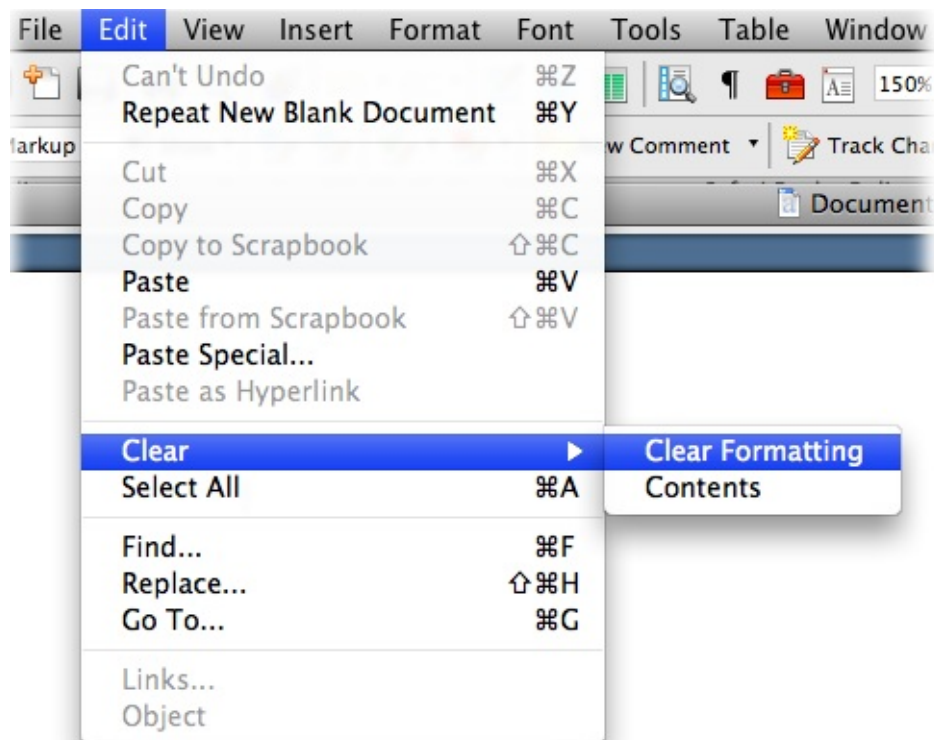
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This book is divided into five parts, each with several chapters:

- **Part One: Welcome to the Web.** In this part of the book, you'll start planning your website ([Chapter 1](#)). You'll learn the basics behind HTML, the language of the Web ([Chapter 2](#)); and you'll put your pages online with a reputable hosting company ([Chapter 3](#)). Finally, you'll look at how you can simplify your life by using web-page editing software ([Chapter 4](#)).
- **Part Two: Building Better Web Pages.** This section shows you how to add essentials to your pages. First, you'll learn your way around the CSS standard, which lets you specify fancy colors, fonts, and borders ([Chapter 6](#)). Next, you'll add pictures to your pages ([Chapter 7](#)) and create an entire website made of linked pages ([Chapter 8](#)). Finally, you'll master some slick layouts ([Chapter 9](#)) and learn how to standardize them throughout your site ([Chapter 10](#)).
- **Part Three: Connecting with Your Audience.** The third part of the book explains how to get your site noticed by search engines like Google ([Chapter 11](#)), and how to reel in web traffic ([Chapter 12](#)). You'll also take a look at *blogs* (short for *web logs*) and the free software that helps you create them ([Chapter 13](#)). Finally, you'll learn how to get on the path to web riches by displaying ads or selling your own products ([Chapter 14](#)).
- **Part Four: Website Frills.** Now that you can create a professional, working website, why not deck it out with fancy features like glowing buttons and pop-out menus? You won't learn the brain-bending details of how to become a hardcore JavaScript programmer, but you'll learn enough to use free JavaScript mini-programs in your own pages to perform basic tasks (Chapters [Chapter 15](#) and [Chapter 16](#)). You'll also dabble with movie clips and add an MP3 music player right inside an ordinary web page ([Chapter 17](#)).
- **Part Five: Appendixes.** At the end of this book, you'll find two appendixes. The first gives you a quick reference for HTML. It explains the essential HTML elements and points you to the appropriate chapter of this book for more detailed discussions. The second appendix lists a pile of useful links that can help you learn more, get free stuff, and sign up for useful services. Don't worry—you don't need to type these web links into your browser by hand. It's all waiting for you on the Missing CD page for this book at [www.missingmanuals.com/cds/caw3](http://www.missingmanuals.com/cds/caw3).

## About → These → Arrows

Throughout this book, you'll find sentences like this one: "To remove Word formatting controls, choose Edit → Clear → Clear Formatting." That's shorthand for a much longer instruction that directs you to open three menus in sequence, like this: "Open the Edit menu by clicking Edit in the menu bar. In the Edit menu, click Clear to open a second menu. In *that* menu, click Clear Formatting to complete the process." **Figure 1** shows a closer look.



*Figure 1. In this book, arrow notations help simplify folder and menu instructions. For example, "Choose Edit → Clear → Clear Formatting" is a more compact way of saying "From the Edit menu, choose Clear; from the submenu that appears, choose Clear Formatting," as shown here.*

# About the Online Resources

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As the owner of a Missing Manual, you've got more than just a book to read. Online, you'll find example files as well as tips, articles, and maybe even a video or two. You can also communicate with the Missing Manual team and tell us what you love (or hate) about the book. Head over to [www.missingmanuals.com](http://www.missingmanuals.com), or go directly to one of the following sections.

## The Missing CD

This book doesn't have a CD pasted inside the back cover, but you're not missing out on anything. Go to [www.missingmanuals.com/cds/caw3](http://www.missingmanuals.com/cds/caw3) to download examples of web page designs mentioned in this book and additional information. So that you don't wear down your fingers typing long web addresses, the Missing CD page offers a list of clickable links to the websites mentioned here.

### TIP

If you're looking for a specific example, here's a quick way to find it: Look at the corresponding figure in this book. The file name is usually visible at the end of the text in the web browser's address box. For example, if you see the URL `c:\Creating a Website\Chapter 2\popsicles.htm` (Figure 2-2, page 21), you'll know that the corresponding example file is `popsicles.htm`.

## Registration

If you register this book at [oreilly.com](http://oreilly.com), you'll be eligible for special offers—like discounts on future editions of *Creating a Website: The Missing Manual*. Registering takes only a few clicks. Type <http://tinyurl.com/registerbook> into your browser to hop directly to the Registration page.

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## Errata

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# Chapter 1. Preparing for the Web

The Web is an exciting place. Every day, it processes millions of financial transactions, serves up the latest news and celebrity gossip, and provides a meeting place for every type of community from political anarchists to vampire-show fans.

Since you're reading this book, you've probably decided to move in and join the Web. Congratulations! Just as you undertake some basic planning before you find a home in the real world, you need to do some preparation before you make the move to your new online neighborhood. In this chapter, you'll get a good look at how the Web works, and learn what ingredients you need to build your own website.

## Introducing the World Wide Web

Although it doesn't show its age, the Internet is older than you might think. The computer visionaries who created it began developing the idea in the early 1960s. In 1969, the first transmission over the Internet took place, between a computer at the University of California at Los Angeles and one at the Stanford Research Institute. As far as pioneering moments go, it wasn't much to brag about—the computer crashed when it reached the G in the word “LOGIN.” Still, the revolution was underway.

The early Internet was traveled mostly by academic and government types. It flourished as a tool for research and collaboration, letting scientists everywhere share information. In 1993, the first web browser hit the scene. In the following years, new types of people colonized the Internet, including book shoppers, news junkies, hobbyists, and a lot of lonely computer programmers.

### NOTE

History buffs can follow the saga of the early Internet in much more detail at [www.isoc.org/internet/history](http://www.isoc.org/internet/history) and [www.walthowe.com/navnet/history.html](http://www.walthowe.com/navnet/history.html).

Of course, the early Internet doesn't have much in common with today's Internet. In 1969, the Internet community consisted of four computers, all of them beastly machines that no one but a government lab or academic institution could love (or afford). In 1981, still fewer than 200 mainframe computers populated the Internet, and most of the people using them were computer experts or scientists going about their day-to-day work. Today, well over 100 million websites—and many more web enthusiasts—are online. It's no wonder you're getting so much junk email.

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION: THE WEB VS. THE INTERNET

*Is there a difference between the Web and the Internet?*

Newscasters, politicians, and regular people often use these terms interchangeably. Technically, however, the concepts are different—and confusing them is likely to put computer techies and other self-respecting nerds on edge.

The *Internet* is a network of connected computers that spans the globe. These computers are connected together to share information, but there are a number of ways to do that, including emailing, instant messaging, transferring files through *FTP* (short for File Transfer Protocol), and downloading pirated Hollywood blockbusters through peer-to-peer programs (which, of course, you don't do). The *World Wide Web* is one of the many ways to exchange information across the Internet. And how do people tap into this information? You guessed it—they use special programs called *web browsers* to visit websites and web pages spread across the globe.

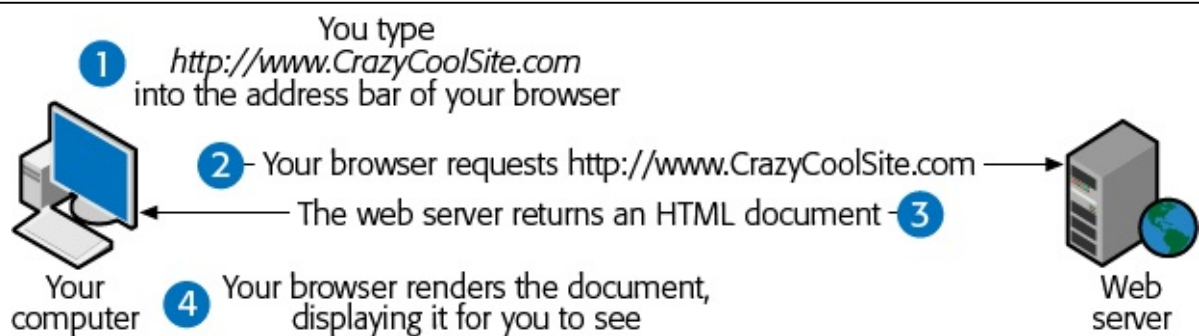
## Web Browsers



As you no doubt know, a web browser is a piece of software that lets you navigate to and display web pages. Without browsers, the Web would still exist, but you wouldn't be able to turn on your computer and take a look at it.

A browser's job is surprisingly simple—in fact, the bulk of its work consists of two tasks. First, it requests web pages, which happens when you type in a website address (like [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)) or click a link in a web page. The browser sends that request to a far-off computer called a *web server*. A server is typically much more powerful than a home computer because it needs to handle multiple browser requests at once. The server heeds these requests and sends back the contents of the desired web pages.

When the browser gets those contents, it puts its second skill into action and *renders*, or draws, the web page. Technically, this means the browser converts the plain text it receives from the server into a display document based on formatting instructions embedded in the plain-text page. The end result is a graphically rich page with different typefaces, colors, and links. **Figure 1-1** illustrates the process.



*Figure 1-1. A web browser is designed to do two things really well—contact remote computers to ask for web pages, and then display those pages on your computer.*

## Choosing your browser

Depending on your personality, choosing a web browser is either a) a bore or b) an important expression of your character, individuality, and overall computer savvy. If you fall into the latter camp, you've probably already settled on a favorite browser. But if you're searching for something a little different in a browser, or you're curious to see what else is out there, the following quick overview sums up your browser options.

Even if you're not interested in changing your browser, it's a good idea to be familiar with the most common ones out there (see **Figure 1-2**). That's because when you design your website, you need to prepare for a wide audience of people with different browsers. To make sure your nifty pages don't turn funky when other people look at them, it's a good idea to test your own site on other computers, using other screen sizes and other web browsers.

## A Snapshot of Browser Market Share (2011)

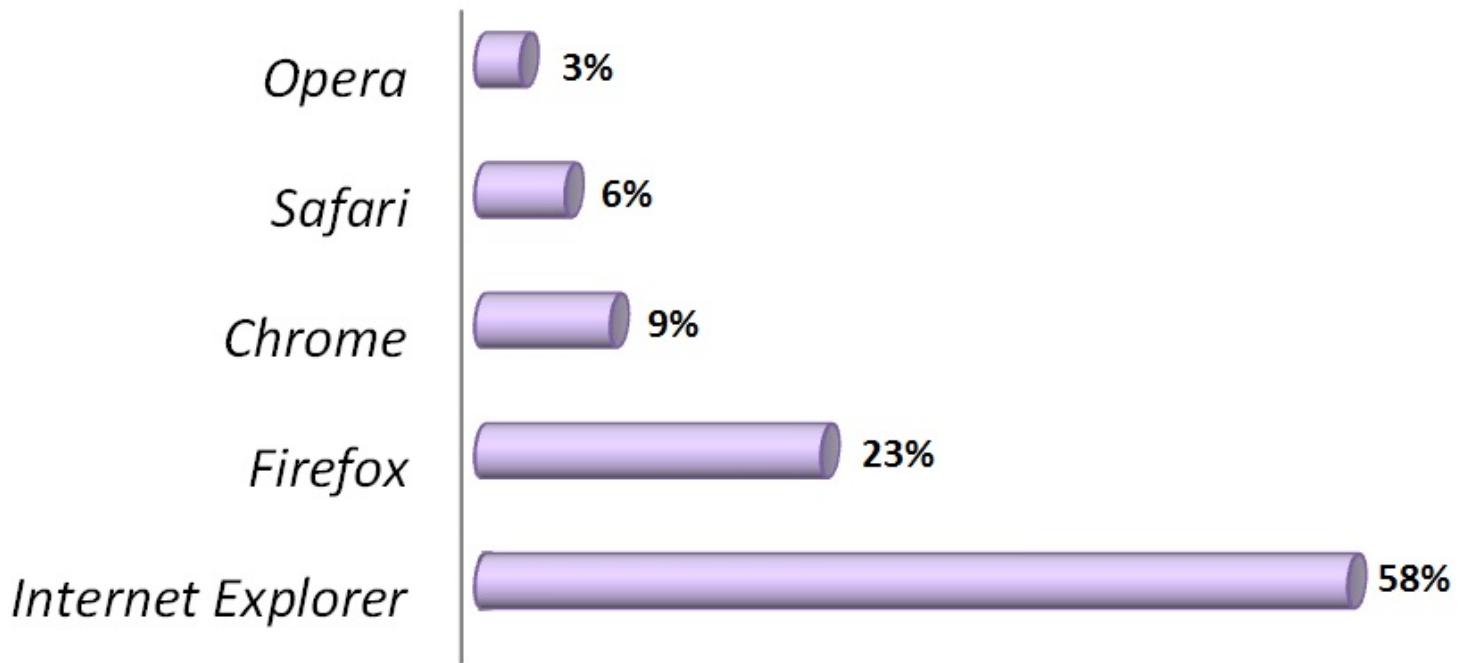


Figure 1-2. Browser usage statistics, which estimate the percentage of people using each major browser, vary depending on what sites you examine and how you count the visitors, but at the time of this writing, this is one reasonable estimate. Just as important are browser trends, which show Firefox, Chrome, and Safari steadily creeping up in popularity at Internet Explorer's expense. (For current browser usage statistics, check out [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Usage\\_share\\_of\\_web\\_browsers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Usage_share_of_web_browsers).)

### TIP

At a bare minimum, all website creators need a copy of Internet Explorer, Firefox, and Google Chrome, by far the most commonly used browsers today. By using them to check out the web pages you build, you can see what your hard work will look like to 90 percent of the world.

The following list describes the most popular browsers of today:

- **Internet Explorer** is still the world's most-used browser. For better or worse, it sets the standard that other browsers need to follow. The clear advantage of using Internet Explorer (IE for short) is that you'll never run into a web page you can't read—with a market share of near 60 percent, IE is simply too successful for site creators to ignore. The downside is that Microsoft is slow and cautious in updating IE, which means that new features often appear in other browsers first and aren't incorporated into IE until many months—or years—later.

To download an updated version of Internet Explorer, visit [www.microsoft.com/ie](http://www.microsoft.com/ie).

## NOTE

Although Microsoft experimented with a Mac version of Internet Explorer for years, they finally put it out to pasture when Apple created a built-in browser named Safari. So if you're a Mac owner, you'll need to borrow a friend's Windows PC to see what your pages look like in Internet Explorer. On your own computers, you'll probably use Safari or Firefox, the most popular Mac browsers.

For an extensive list of browsers for Macs, including those that work with older operating systems, see [www.knutson.de/mac/www/browsers.html](http://www.knutson.de/mac/www/browsers.html).

- **Firefox** started its life as the modern response to Internet Explorer. It's a web browser that's lean, secure, and more than a little hip. Firefox pioneered several innovative features long before Internet Explorer caught up, including tabbed browsing (so you can look at multiple web pages in different window "tabs") and pop-up blocking (to stop those annoying pop-up ads). Firefox is still ahead of the game with its incredibly flexible *add-ons*, tiny programs that other people develop to enhance Firefox with extra features, like a web mail notifier and thumbnails of the sites that show up in a Google search results page. Firefox currently enjoys a cult following among computer geeks and a growing number of disillusioned Internet Explorer veterans. Best of all, an army of volunteer programmers keep Firefox rigorously up to date.

Give Firefox a go at [www.mozilla.org/firefox](http://www.mozilla.org/firefox).

- **Google Chrome** is the new kid on the block. Although it didn't wink into existence until the end of 2008, its market share has already soared to third place, making it the fastest-growing browser on the planet. Although its user interface is a little rough around the edges, tech-savvy web fans love the way it runs JavaScript (the snippets of code that power interactive web pages) with blistering speed.

Experiment with Google Chrome at [www.google.com/chrome](http://www.google.com/chrome).

- **Safari** is an Apple-designed browser that comes with current versions of the Mac OS X operating system. Apple products like the iPhone, iPad, and the iPod Touch use the Safari browser. It's quick, elegant, and sports a set of useful features, like spell-checking when you fill out online forms. Although Apple originally developed Safari exclusively for Mac computers, you can now download a Windows incarnation. Safari is still far more popular on Macs, however.

Go on Safari at [www.apple.com/safari](http://www.apple.com/safari).

- **Opera** is a slimmed-down, easy-to-install browser that's been around for well over a decade, serving as an antidote to the bloated size and pointless frills of Internet Explorer. For years, Opera was held back by an unfortunate detail—if you wanted an ad-free version, you needed to pay. Today, Opera is free and ad-free, too, just like the other browsers on this list. It has a small but loyal following, but runs a distant fifth in web browser standings.

Check out Opera at [www.opera.com](http://www.opera.com).

Internet Explorer is still the world's most popular browser, and by a solid margin. But its grip on web fans is steadily loosening.

When the first edition of this book was printed (in 2005), Internet Explorer held a staggering 95 percent of the browser market. Web page designers rarely bothered to think about any other browsers. Three years later, when the second edition of this book hit the streets, IE's market share had slid to a still-respectable 80 percent. Today, Internet Explorer commands less than 60 percent of the web audience, and all signs suggest that this downward trend will continue.

Interestingly, browser-share results change depending on the web surfer's country and the type of website. For example, in Germany, Firefox is the top browser with 60 percent of web surfers. In Belarus, Opera wins the day with a 49 percent share. On the TechCrunch website (a popular news site for computer nerds), 27 percent of visitors use Firefox and another 27 percent use Chrome, while barely 16 percent use Internet Explorer.

Another variable is the type of device you use to browse the Web. The previous statistics reflect ordinary personal computer usage, but smartphones and tablets use their own specialized browsers. For example, people using hot Apple products like the iPhone, iPad, and iPod Touch almost always do their surfing on Safari. Similarly, if Google OS (Google's operating system for netbooks and other web devices) catches on, the number people using Chrome could soar.

All these details boil down to a simple fact: Odds are, your web pages will be viewed with a variety of web browsers. So, keep these two pieces of advice in mind:

- **Stick to web standards.** To make sure everyone gets a good viewing experience, write solid, standards-based HTML and ensure that every web page includes a *doctype*, as described in [Chapter 2 \(The HTML Document\)](#).
- **Test your website in different browsers.** Before you roll out a hot design for a new site, create a test page and try it out in the most popular web browsers (right now, that's IE, Firefox, and Chrome). That way, you won't unwittingly create web pages that accommodate your favorite browser's quirks. Once you lock down your initial site design, you can scale back your testing to just two browsers: IE and either Firefox or Chrome (as page rendering is usually consistent in Firefox and Chrome).

## Web Servers

When you type a web address into a browser, a web server receives the browser's request and sends back the correct web page. For a busy website, this basic task can require a lot of work. As a result, web servers tend to be industrial-strength computers. Even though the average Windows PC with the right setup can host a website, it's rarely worth the effort (see the box on [Becoming a Web Host](#)). Instead, most people get a commercial company, called a *web host*, to give them a little space on one of their servers, usually for a monthly fee. In other words, you need to rent some space on the Web.

Sometimes, you can rent this space from the same company you use for Internet access; they may even include server space as part of your Internet connection package. But the most straightforward approach is to use a dedicated web hosting company. Either way, you're going to copy your newly built websites to some far-off computer that will make sure a worldwide audience can enjoy your talents.

In [Chapter 3](#), you'll learn more about how a web browser navigates the Web to find a specific page. For now, keep focusing on the big picture so you can start planning your first website.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION: BECOMING A WEB HOST

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*Can I run a web server?*

In theory, you definitely can. The Web was designed to be an open community, and no one is out to stop you. In practice, it's not at all easy—no matter how many computer-savvy relatives you may have.

Several monumental challenges prevent all but the most ambitious people from running their own servers. The first is that you need to have a reliable computer that runs 24 hours a day. That computer also needs to run special web hosting software that can serve up web pages when browsers request them.

The next problem is that your computer requires a special type of connection to the Internet, called a *fixed IP address*. An IP address is a number that identifies your computer on the Web. (*IP* stands for Internet Protocol, which is the super-successful standard that lays down the rules that govern how different devices communicate on a network.)

In order to have your computer run a website and make sure others can find it, you need to make sure your IP address is fixed—in other words, you need to lock it down so it's not constantly changing. Most ISPs (Internet Service Providers) randomly assign new IP addresses as they're needed and change them at a whim, which means most people can't use their computers to host a permanent website—at least not without special software. If you're still interested, you can call your ISP to ask if they provide a fixed IP address service, and at what cost.

# Planning a Website

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The last thing you need before you start building a website is to be buried under an avalanche of theory. However, every new web author can save time and effort by doing a little bit of planning beforehand. In the following sections, you'll consider some quick guidelines to get you on the right path.

## Types of Sites

You don't have much chance of creating a successful site if you haven't decided what it's for. Some people have a very specific goal in mind (like getting hired for a job or promoting a book), while others are just planning to unleash their self-expression. Either way, take a look at the following list to get a handle on the different types of websites you might want to create:

- **Personal** sites are all about you. As the world gets more web-savvy, it seems everyone is building online homes. Whether it's to share pictures of Junior with the relatives, chronicle a trip to Kuala Lumpur, or just post your latest thoughts and obsessions, a personal website is the place to do it.

When you design a personal website, it's up to you how ambitious you want to be. If all you need a hub to chat with friends or a place to share pictures, you can save yourself a good bit of trouble by signing up on a social network like Facebook ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)). Or, if you want a diary-like site to chronicle your life, work, or obsessive hat-collecting hobby, a personal blog may suit you fine (see, for instance, [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com), which is discussed in [Chapter 13](#)). If you're a bit more ambitious (say you want to chart five generations of family history), or you want complete design control (forget Facebook blue), or you just need a single web home to gather together several interests, then a customized personal website is the mark of an individual with true style.

- **Résumé** sites are a specialized type of personal site and a powerful careerbuilding tool. Rather than photocopy a suitcase full of paper résumés, why not send emails and distribute business cards that point to your online résumé? Best of all, with a little planning, your online vita can include more details than its tree-based counterpart, like links to former companies, an online portfolio, and even background music playing “YMCA” (which is definitely not recommended).
- **Topical** sites focus on a particular subject that interests you. If you're more interested in building a website about your favorite music, art, books, food, political movement, or *American Idol* contestants than you are in talking about your own life, a topical website is for you.

Before you set out to create a site, consider whether other people with a similar interest will want to visit it, and take a look at existing sites on the topic. The best topical websites attract others with the same interest. The worst websites present the same dozen links you can find anywhere else. Remember, the Web is drowning in information. The last thing it needs is another *Megan Fox Fan Emporium*.

- **Event** sites aren't designed to weather the years—instead, they revolve around a specific event. A common example is a wedding website. The event hosts create it to provide directions, background information, links to gift registries, and a few romantic photos. When the wedding is over, the site disappears—or morphs into something different (like a personal site chronicling the honeymoon). Other events you might treat in a similar way include family reunions, costume parties, or do-it-yourself protest marches.
- **Promotion** sites are ideal when you want to show off your personally produced CD or hot-off-the-

presses book. They're geared to get the word out about a specific item, whether it's handmade pottery or your own software. Sometimes, these websites evolve into small-business sites, where you actually sell your wares (see the "Small business" bullet below).

- **Small business (or e-commerce)** sites show off the most successful use of the Web—selling everything from portable music players to prescription drugs. E-commerce sites are so widespread that it's hard to believe that when the Web was first created, making a buck was far from anyone's mind.

Creating a full-blown e-commerce site like Amazon.com or eBay is far beyond the abilities of a single person. These sites need the support of complex programs and computer genius-level programming languages. But if you've come to the Web to make money, don't give up hope! Innovative companies like PayPal and Yahoo provide services that can help you build shopping cart-style sites and accept credit card payments. You can also host Google ads or hawk products from Amazon's website to rake in some cash. You'll learn about these great tricks in [Chapter 14](#).

Once you pinpoint your website's *raison d'être*, you should have a better idea about who your visitor will be. Knowing and understanding your audience is crucial to creating an effective site. (And don't even try to suggest you're creating a site just for yourself—if you were, there's no reason to put it on the Internet at all!)

## The Lifespan of Your Site

The Web constantly changes. Today's Web isn't the same as last year's—or even the Web of 15 seconds ago.

Here are two valuable truths about website lifetimes:

- **The best websites are always improving.** Their creators add support for new browser features, tweak their look to match new style trends, and—most important of all—constantly add new content.
- **When a website stops changing, it's on life support.** Many great websites have crumbled through neglect.

Think about your favorite sites. Odds are, they change daily. A good website isn't one you consult once and leave behind. It's a site you bookmark and return to periodically. In a sense, a website is like a television channel. If its creators aren't adding new information, the site is showing reruns.

Creating a website is hard enough, and keeping its content fresh is even more taxing. Here are a few tips that can help you out:

- **Think in stages.** When you put your first website online, it won't be complete. Instead, think of it as version 1, and start planning a few changes for the next version. Bit by bit, and stage by stage, you can add everything you want your site to have.
- **Select the parts you can modify regularly, and leave the rest alone.** There's no way you can review and revise an entire website every week. Instead, your best strategy is to identify sections you want to change regularly. On a personal site, for example, you might put news on a separate page and update just that page. On a small-business website, you might concentrate on the home page so you can advertise new products and upcoming specials.
- **Design a website that's easy to change.** This is the hardest principle to follow, because it requires not only planning, but a dash of hard-won experience. As you become a more experienced web

author, you'll learn how to simplify your life by making your pages easier to update. One method to separate information into several pages, so you can add new content without reorganizing your entire site. Another is to use style sheets to separate page formatting from your content (see [Chapter 6](#)). That way, you can easily insert new material without having to format the content from scratch to match the rest of your page.

## Practice Good Design

Every year, hundreds of websites “win” awards for being abjectly awful. Sometimes, the profiled sites have spinning globes and hot pink text on a lime-green background. Other times, they have clunky navigation systems and grotesque flashing backgrounds. But no matter what the design sins, websites that are bad—hideously bad—are strangely common.

Maybe it's because creating a website really isn't that hard. Or maybe it's because we all have an impulse to play with color, texture, and sound, and fancy web tools encourage our ugliest instincts. For a glimpse at some of the all-too-familiar mistakes, go to [www.angelfire.com/super/badwebs](http://www.angelfire.com/super/badwebs) (see [Figure 1-3](#)). You can also visit [www.worstoftheweb.com](http://www.worstoftheweb.com), which profiles new offenders every month.



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