

Beware of Web Tedium

Web owners who maintain small web sites have the advantage of changing or moving their web site more economically than those with large web sites.

The size of the website will effect future bid proposals.

With this in mind, the web owner should look at their website's portability if they want to make sweeping changes.

I consider a small website to contain between 1 and 20 pages. More pages are simply more work.

On occasion I am asked to update a large website that contains many hundreds of pages. I have to consider labor costs to handle every page and that can cause the estimate to be high.

Many web owners refuse to believe that a simple design change to their website should cost so much. They exclaim, "IT IS JUST CUT AND PASTE".



The action itself is not time consuming unless you factor in doing it a hundred or even a thousand times. Then it becomes very time consuming.

I call this cost variable "**Tedium**". A tedious task repeated many times.

Many websites start small and over time may grow to contain many pages. However, it is not just pages that can cause tedium. There are other tedium traps.

People love to put photos on their website. While there are many automated ways to post a photo gallery, the images still need to be handled or prepared with color correction and cropping before pushing the "Make Photo Gallery" button.



Many website photo galleries are constructed manually with custom navigation and layouts because the web owner had a strict design criteria that could not be produced in an automated fashion.

Even with automated photo galleries reproducing an automated gallery may become impossible because of software changes.



Tedium can effect eCommerce websites as well. This is not a problem with web owners who are only selling 1 to 20 items. For those selling 50, 100 or 1000 items the concept of making a sweeping change can be cost prohibitive.

Imagine the time it takes to input product name, price, description, shipping weight and photo. Let us say that it takes you 10 minutes to complete one item. Then 100 items would roughly take 16-17 hours.

There are actually a lot of people employed to input huge amounts of data due to aggregation criteria or technical problems with software.

Static vs Dynamic

A static web page has no connections to a data source. In order to change it you must load it into an authoring program, make your change, then save it and upload it to the server.

A dynamic web page gets its data from a database where the information is stored until being called upon.

To illustrate how a dynamic web page works you have to imagine a page template that displays information according to an identification variable.

Let's call it "ID". If we tell a page called "articles.php" that we want to see the article on "How to Make a Denver Omelette", we send it a variable "ID=23". This tells the code on the articles page to retrieve the record from the database where the article ID is 23.

We can't avoid the labor involved to input data the first time but if you make the data portable at the start, migrating information from one website to another would be practically instantaneous.

Dynamic pages are restricted by the way they are designed. They display information one way but the advantage is they can show an unlimited amount of page data through one actual page file. This file contains program scripting that interacts with a database.

To design a dynamic website a lot of planning will be involved. Your cost will be heavy on the front end of your website project but your early investment and planning can save you time and money later on.

The Future

Database driven web sites are becoming more common than ever before.



As an example, if you have a MySpace account and are updating your page you are in effect inputting data into a database. Your page is called by an identification variable and is not an actual physical file. The id is buried in the MySpace address for your account.

Other examples are CMS websites like [WordPress](#) or [WebSiteTonight](#) accounts. They are database driven.

The advantage of these websites is that the data is contained separately from the “look” of the site. This enables you to change templates out with a click of a button.

Most eCommerce websites are dynamic or database-driven. The product thumbs are displayed based on your search criteria. When you click on a product thumb you are then sent to a detail page for that product. It is always the same page physically but the information changes depending on the link you click. Each link sends a different identification variable. Getting geeky huh?

The point is that if you plan to contain your web page information in a database format you will be able to re-purpose that information more easily.

This also means that your web pages will need to be scripted in a way to allow for template and format changes.

This is where the web is going. Information that exists in a static state like a PDF document or regular HTML page will always be subject to tedium if it is to be used in a different way.

Conclusion

Many webs sites are built with static web pages. There is nothing wrong with that approach if you accept that sweeping changes to a large site will bear the cost of tedium.

Seeing your website as two components, data and template, is the way of the future and to portability.

Posted on November 24th, 2007 by Karl Knelson