

Article Sep 2003

7 Essential Online Tools for Non-Webmasters
by Jinger Jarrett ©Copyright 2003

I've built and edited all of the web sites I use to run my business. I wish I could take credit for the look, but I can't.

I purchased a nice business template I liked, to use as the basis for all of my sites. You don't have to do that though.

Even though I continue to maintain my sites myself, I couldn't do it if I didn't have some great tools that make it easy to do.

There are some really terrific tools you can get, for free, that can help you build and maintain an eye catching web site. You can even communicate with your customers or create interactive sections on your site that will continue to drive traffic to your site over and over.

All of the tools offered here are absolutely free to use. Bookmark them and save yourself a ton of money and time.

1. Templates

If you're really ambitious, you can design your own web site from scratch.

Unfortunately, creating and designing a web site from scratch can be time consuming and expensive. I have yet to find a free graphics editor that will help you create the kind of stunning graphics you will often see on the Web.

There are plenty of free web site templates available, even for business, and you can often use them by simply leaving a link to the site designer at the bottom of the page.

Free Site Templates (<http://www.freesitetemplates.com>)
This is my favorite. I once used their templates before I bought my own. You'll find hundreds of designs here, and no annoying pop up windows while you are browsing.

This site has recently undergone a redesign of its own and is very easy to navigate.

Free Web Templates (<http://www.freewebtemplates.com>)
This site offers hundreds of free designs you can use. There are also links to other resources, including graphics, newsletters, and affiliate programs.

2. Sales Page Template

Pertinent
(<http://www.pertinent.com/tools/letter-builder/sales/index.asp>)

This nifty little tool is one I stumbled across by accident while surfing the Web looking for something else. I haven't seen a template like this anywhere else.

It allows you to type in your information for your sales letter. You can preview what you've created first.

You definitely want to bookmark this site. The webmaster is constantly adding new templates like this you can use for your business, and they're all free to use. If you have a newsletter, don't forget to add it to the directory while you are here.

3. Banner Creators

You'll find plenty of debate on the Web about whether or not you should use banners on your web site. However, a banner creator can serve another purpose for you: you can use it to create an original and unique header for your own web site design.

Free Online Banner Creation

(http://www.total-harmony.com/promotion/banner_creation.html)

Rather than give you one or two links to some banner creators, you can go to this site. It offers several different places where you can find banner creation tools. Also includes a description of each site.

Cool Text (<http://www.cooltext.com>)

If you are looking to create a text banner, this is a great place to start. You can also make logos for your business.

4. Graphics Editors

Graphics are definitely not my strong suit. I find graphics programs to have a steep learning curve, and since I don't use that many graphics on my web site, I don't have a graphics program on my computer anymore.

Even if you don't use that many graphics on your web site, occasionally you may need to change the size, or add text to a graphic you are using.

You'll find online graphics editors much easier to use than software. You can quickly crop your graphics or add text to them and have them done in a few minutes.

Gif World (<http://www.gifworks.com/>)

This site has a complete graphics program online you can use to edit graphics or add text to them. It's very easy to use. The only format is gif though.

You'll also see numerous links to graphics sites where you can find plenty of well designed, and free, graphics to use.

Image Majik

(<http://studio.imagemagick.net/MagickStudio/scripts/MagickStudio.cgi>)

You can use this online graphic editor to edit both jpeg and gif

formats. It's also very easy to use.

JPEG Wizard Online Optimizer! (<http://www.jpegwizard.com>)

Since some graphics files can be quite large, causing them to load slowly, you can use this tool to optimize all of your jpeg files so they load quickly.

Spin Wave (<http://www.spinwave.com/>)

Offers both jpeg and gif optimization and compression.

There's also another type of graphic editor you can use online if you need ebook covers for your web site. Below are two places I recommend.

Ortiz (http://www.oritsfree.com/Free_Ebook_Covers.html)

Free Ebook Covers (<http://freeebookcovers.homestead.com/covers1.html>)

5. Interactivity (Javascript and CGI)

Ever wonder how webmasters create those cool special effects on their web sites, or are able to offer message boards, chat, classifieds etc.?

They use scripts.

There are two types of scripts I would recommend you become familiar with: javascript and cgi.

Javascript is very easy because it usually only requires that you cut and paste the script into your site. Javascript can be used to create mail forms, tickers, popups, etc.

Cgi scripts perform more complex operations. They can be used for anything from members areas to classifieds, message boards and more advanced chat.

If you can read and follow instructions, you can easily set up your own killer applications on your web site.

How do I know this? Because I learned how to use javascript and cgi by reading and following the instructions.

Certainly, not all scripts will be that easy. Start with the simpler ones and learn how to use them. Once you feel comfortable with the easier scripts, try using more complex ones.

The most important thing to remember when using scripts, particularly cgi, is that, you need to make sure you upload the files in ascii mode. Otherwise you can get some really nasty 500 internal server errors that can be difficult to solve.

JAVASCRIPT

Java (<http://www.jars.com>)

This site bills itself as the #1 java resource online. You'll find plenty of scripts for your site.

Java Boutique (<http://javaboutique.internet.com/>)

Offers a number of applets and scripts including games. Very easy to use and set up.

CGI CGI Extremes (<http://www.cgiextremes.com/>)

Searchable list of hundreds of cgi scripts.

Free Scripts (<http://www.free-scripts.net/>)

Hundreds of CGI scripts nicely organized by category.

6. Customer Support

Providing support for your customers and affiliates is one of the most important things you can do on your web site.

At one time I used Human Click (<http://www.humanclick.com>) on my web site. All of the top marketers recommended it.

Human Click changed to a pay model, and that left Bravenet (<http://www.bravenet.com>) as the only provider of free support.

A few weeks ago, when I was updating the messenger services on my computer, I stumbled across ICQ Panels.

ICQ Panels (<http://www.icq.com/panels/>)

Allows you to have a complete messaging system on your web site for your customers. This includes a place where customers can send you email, as well as chat with you in real time over the ICQ network. Customers can also easily page you, no matter where you are.

I found it much easier to use, and ICQ has so many features that you can have a complete messaging system for your business without shelling out any money.

You can see a live example on my site:

(<http://www.smallbusinesshowto.com/pcc.html>)

7. Web Site Promotion

Sooner or later, once you have your web site set up, you'll want to attract new visitors. Unlike the baseball field in "Field of Dreams", you have to do more than just build it to get customers to it.

Once again, I am recommending ICQ. It offers you an opportunity to promote yourself in many different ways. Here is a list:

Promote Yourself and Your Homepage on ICQ

Join or Start an ICQ Ring

Join the ICQ Banner Exchange

Post Your Special ICQ Site

Post Yourself on Popular Search Engines

ICQ (<http://web.icq.com/webtools/pageme-distribute/>)

Building a web site can be a time consuming and expensive process. Without the right tools, you can end up with a web site that looks like a Picasso painting, instead of a professionally designed virtual business presence.

Use these tools, and you'll have an established web presence that will keep your visitors coming back for more.

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Jinger Jarrett is a former newspaper reporter and public relations specialist who now runs her own online businesses. She will show you "How to Really Start Your Business in 30 Days". Get her free ecourse now. <http://www.smallbusinesshowto.com>
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