

Excerpt From the Book

This excerpt presents the entire Chapter 1 – Introduction as well as the complete Table of Contents and Index from the book. This excerpt will be useful to anyone thinking of creating a genealogy website and it presents a comprehensive introduction on how to proceed.

This excerpt may be freely distributed.

Getting Started on Your Genealogy Website

**A practical guide from
www.genealogyhosting.com**

**By
Thornton and Marty Gale**

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Preface

The purpose of this guide is to give genealogists the necessary technical knowledge and confidence to develop their own genealogy website. We at www.genealogyhosting.com hope this guide will inspire genealogists to jump in and get started on a website project. After reading this guide, genealogists will find that developing a genealogy website is definitely challenging but also very satisfying. It is also very feasible from a cost standpoint. Compared to other forms of publishing, putting your genealogy research on a website is downright cheap and by far the most effective way to share your information with your family (now and in the future) as well as your fellow genealogists.

What We Hope to Communicate in this Guide

It is our sincere hope that the average reader will get the following major ideas from this guide:

- First, we hope to communicate that a genealogy website is not easy but doable (and it's a heck of a lot easier and cheaper than all the other forms of publishing genealogy research such as a book!)
- While a genealogy website may be hard at times, we hope to point out that the expertise required to create a genealogy website exactly matches the expertise that genealogists have in spades: 1) good expertise in computers, 2) project management, 3) writing, and 4) general organizational skills not to mention 5) genealogy expertise.
- We hope to impress on the reader that following a system development methodology is very important. A methodical, disciplined approach to the project will insure the success of the genealogy website.
- We want to emphasize that the genealogy website's information structure is the most important and neglected design task facing authors of genealogy websites. Authors must make a special point of first understanding then mastering the use of the multilayered structure in the design of their genealogy websites.
- We want the budding genealogy website author to take heart in the fact that a genealogy website project can be organized just by properly structuring the website. That is, the underlying structure of a website can be used as a project management

tool in which the author works on the website in short sessions and can even set the project aside for extended periods then pick it up easily.

- We want the reader to understand that a genealogy website, like any networked-computer-based project, fosters and encourages collaboration between people in various geographic locations. The website is an ever improving product that everybody who is involved can instantly see and to which they can fine tune their evolving contribution.

Contents of this Guide

We have divided this guide into four major chapters and a series of technical appendices:

Introduction

We start by discussing the traditional (pre-internet) forms of genealogy publishing and their limitations which are overcome entirely by the genealogy website. Then we give an overview of the various types of genealogy websites. We state the specific reasons why genealogists would want, in fact need, a genealogy website. We give an overview of what is needed to actually build a genealogy website. This chapter concludes with an overview of our website development methodology – our systems development methodology for developing a genealogy website. We have created and perfected our methodology through the years at www.genealogyhosting.com to develop our own genealogy websites and can vouch for its effectiveness.

The What: Define the Requirements

In this chapter, we present the details of the first phase of our website development methodology -defining the requirements of your genealogy website. By carefully defining “The What” of your genealogy website, you will get your project off to a great start. This chapter shows how to focus on the wants and needs of the visitors to your genealogy website (and you will be the major visitor) in order to identify the actual requirements of your website. This chapter then gives some guidelines to help you identify your success factors for your genealogy website. We conclude the chapter by helping you answer the basic question: is it feasible for me to do a website? Can I really do it?

The How: Design It

This chapter presents the details of the second phase of our website development methodology – its design. The design phase will answer “The How” of the genealogy website and will proceed once “The What” of the previous requirements phase is substantially completed. We show you various design strategies to give a structure to the information content of your genealogy website. The structure of the information content should make use of a multilayered structure to design the genealogy website. We also show you the very important idea of the organizational metaphor to provide an instantly recognizable structure for your genealogy website. We discuss the contents and structure of a generic genealogy website and present several useful ideas and

guidelines for the design of the genealogy website. We also show you the contents and general format of each type of web page of a genealogy website.

Building the Genealogy Website

In this chapter, we present the details of the third phase of our website development methodology – building the website. We discuss the services you will need to purchase from a web hosting company, such as *www.genealogyhosting.com*, to provide the plumbing for your website. We present an overview of the website authoring applications and other tools you can use to build your genealogy website. We show you a strategy to actually construct the website by focusing on its structure. We conclude this chapter with an explanation of several functions and features that will be needed in any genealogy website.

Appendices

We have concentrated most of the details of website technology and the finer points of creating one into a series of technical appendices. These appendices are referenced from the main text to provide the detailed technical information of a topic. In this way, the reader does not have to get bogged down in technical minutia and can pick and choose the topics for which they would like more in-depth explanations or information.

Appendix A: Websites

This appendix presents in-depth explanations of various topics of website technology as well as definitions of terms used in website technology. This appendix is not intended as a primer of website technology but rather presents the specific topics referenced from the main text with which the author of a genealogy website would have to be familiar.

Appendix B: Multilayered Structures

This appendix presents the multilayered structure, a design strategy that will be very useful in designing a genealogy website. In a multilayered structure, the information elements of the website are classified into categories each of which contain the same type of entity using a classification criteria. The categories can then be organized into a stack much like one would place a set of bricks into a stack. In this way, the entire website is given a logical and understandable structure.

Appendix C: Organizational Metaphors

This appendix presents an explanation of the various organizational metaphors that can be plugged in to help design a genealogy website. An organizational metaphor is an information structure that is generally understood by the public and the genealogy website is designed to mimic the metaphor. An organizational metaphor is ideal for making a complex structure such as a genealogy website into an understandable and predictable arrangement which a visitor can navigate easily.

Appendix D: Types of Genealogy Websites

This appendix gives a detailed explanation of the types of genealogy websites, their purpose, description, and structure. Any of these types can be used as a jumping off point for designing a specific genealogy website.

Appendix E: The Generic Genealogy Website

This appendix discusses the idea of a generic genealogy website – a universal website structure that most genealogy websites would resemble in design more or less as a subset. A generic genealogy website could be used as a template – a starting point for any genealogy website project.

Appendix F: Website Authoring Applications

This appendix presents detailed information on the two website authoring applications we recommend, Microsoft Word and Microsoft Publisher, and how to use them to create a genealogy website. A website authoring application creates the HTML files of the website. Also, the website authoring application should be capable of producing, in a straight-forward project, the genealogy book from the genealogy website. “The Book” as it is called in this guide is the traditional product of genealogy research and the dream of many genealogists.

Appendix G: What Hosting Services are Required?

This appendix presents the details of both the mandatory and optional hosting services you will purchase from a web hosting company, such as www.genealogyhosting.com, for your genealogy website. First, you will need some basic plumbing, including a domain name and a web hosting plan. Then there are several optional services you could purchase that will make life a lot easier in building and using your genealogy website.

Appendix H: Getting the Most From Your Hosting Services

This appendix shows you how to get more value from the hosting services you purchase at www.genealogyhosting.com. We show you how to implement the free features you get such as an e-mail account, an ad-supported website and an ad-supported blog web site. We show you how to set up a family e-mail system so that people in your extended family can have an e-mail account based on the genealogy domain name (a name of which they share a common heritage). This will give them a permanent e-mail address and eliminate the e-mail chaos when they change their internet service provider (ISP). We show you how to have several websites share one hosting plan. This would allow members of a family or a genealogy club to tryout a genealogy website at a very low cost.

Appendix I: Visitor Input to the Website

This appendix discusses the technical topic of HTML FORMS, the website technology to have visitors submit information to the web server. The major use of HTML FORMS is to have visitors submit their contact information such as their name and e-mail address. This appendix explains in detail how to design and install a contact page in a genealogy website. This appendix also shows another use of an HTML FORM – to set up a search capability on the content of the website. By taking advantage of one of the many free

search engines, a search capability can be installed easily on a genealogy website in return for allowing the vendor to display some advertising on the search results page.

Appendix J: Working with Images on Your Genealogy Website

This appendix presents the essentials of images for the genealogy website. Images are used extensively on a genealogy website. For example, scans of historical documents should be included in most genealogy websites to support the statements being made. This appendix is not intended as a primer on images nor even an overview but rather a description of the process that images on a genealogy website will undergo in their life cycle.

Appendix K: Maintaining Your Genealogy Website

This appendix presents several technical topics related to maintaining a genealogy website. These activities relate to the files and folders on the web server and how to implement new versions to the website (a process called publishing the website) as well as how to keep them in good working order so as not to impact the current visitors to the website. This appendix also covers the details of how to backup the website to guard against disasters.

Back Matter

There are the two standard finding aids in the back matter of this guide: a glossary and an index. We have spent a great deal of time making these comprehensive and usable tools so the average reader can get the most value out of this guide.

Glossary

The glossary contains definitions of the terms used in this guide especially those that represent material new or unique to this guide. A glossary entry may refer to other glossary entries as indicated by the term being **bolded** in the text of the definitions.

By the way, the inclusion of these **Navigational Links** (see glossary) imbedded in the text of the glossary entries is an example of **Hypermedia** (see glossary). Hypermedia is a way to present complex ideas in books, articles or other non-fiction literary works, and, as we will cover thoroughly in this guide, genealogy websites. Hypermedia is a modern invention made feasible by the computer in which the view into the content of the work can be repositioned easily. Also, hypermedia works fairly well in some non-computer applications such as its use in the static text of a glossary such as the one in this guide.

Index

We have spent considerable time building a thorough index to this guide. For each heading of the index, we have attempted to decompose it into task-oriented subheadings that the average reader would find useful in creating a genealogy website. Many of the index headings will also have a corresponding glossary entry which is indicated by the subheading *“*glossary*”* under the heading for the topic. The glossary definition is usually a good place to start when looking up a topic in the index since it gives a quick definition of the term.

Organization of this Guide

The four major chapters and the series of appendices of this guide have been organized as shown in Figure 1. Take a careful look at Figure 1. This type of organization is called a “multilayered structure” in this guide. A multilayered structure is a way to organize the presentation of any complex information including a genealogy website. In a multilayered structure, information is organized from the most general to the most specific. Also, general topics on the upper layers make reference to the more specialized topics on the lower layers to provide details and support.

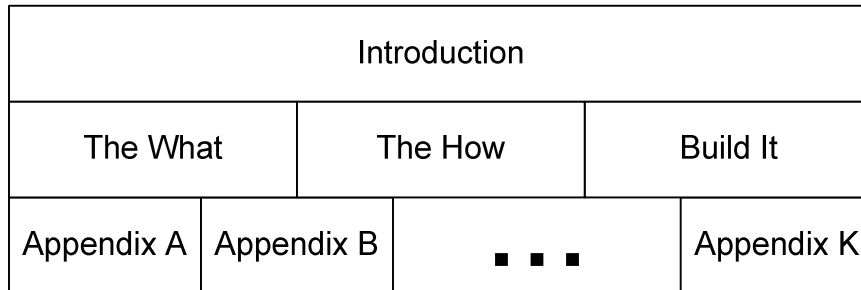


Figure 1 - Organization of this Guide

A multilayered structure is used often to organize a non-fiction book such as this guide. That is, this guide is complex and the multilayered structure is a way to organize it so it is accessible to the average reader. We will make extensive use of this idea of the multilayered structure in the design strategies we propose for genealogy websites. That is, later in this guide, we will use the idea of the multilayered structure as the basis for a number of different design strategies that can be used for a genealogy website.

For now, the multilayered structure is being used for a completely different purpose - to present the organization of this guide. To get a head start on this important concept spend a moment looking at Figure 1. Notice the following:

- There are three layers: a top layer, a middle layer, and a bottom layer. Each layer represents a different information level and contains different types of information. The layers are arranged from the general to the specific.
- The top layer is general and contains an introduction to the entire topic – in this case an introduction to this guide and an overview of how to create a genealogy website. The top layer summarizes the information in the middle layer and the bottom layer.
- The middle layer is a synthesis layer. It is much more detailed than the top layer and consists of the presentation of the various phases to create a genealogy website – the bread-and-butter topics of this guide. It draws on and synthesizes the detailed topics of the bottom layer to make its points.
- The bottom layer contains the appendices, the detailed, objective articles which provide the technical explanations of various topics. The appendices each stand on their own and could be consumed as independent articles if desired without reading the middle or upper layers which refer to them. However, the reader would not understand them as a coherent set if he or she embarked on a sequential reading of them. That is the purpose of the middle layer – to show what they are for - to synthesize them.

The point to take away from this exercise is that a multilayered structure is a design strategy to organize any complex presentation of information. We will make use of multilayered structures to design the complex information contents of a genealogy website. We will discuss frequently various aspects of the multilayered structure throughout this guide. As we will see in this guide, a multilayered structure is a useful design strategy for both the organization of this guide as well as a genealogy website.

Meet Margaret Schmidt, Genealogist and Budding Website Author

In this guide we will describe the development of the surname website of Margaret Schmidt, www.schmidt14.org. Margaret is a fictitious character but she is a composite of many genealogists we know. We imagine Margaret as a very experienced genealogist and a recognized authority on the genealogy of both the Schmidt surname as well as her home town of Springville, (also fictitious). We imagine her as a person who feels deeply about her Schmidt heritage and has decided to embark on her Schmidt surname website. In this guide, we will describe the steps she goes through as she develops her www.schmidt14.org website.

About the Authors

Thornton and Marty Gale are avid genealogists. They started the hunt about 20 years ago. Marty's genealogy has been very difficult. She has had to do basic discovery of every little fact. Every line of her "Big-8" (her 8 great-grand parents) had to be independently discovered for the most part. All of them originated in the "old country" and immigrated to the United States during the 19th century. Prior to Marty's research, there was no published genealogy information on most of them. Not only did she have to overcome the language difficulty but also numerous other problems such as doing Norwegian research or the general problem of record destruction in World War II.

On the other hand, Thornton's genealogy has been relatively easy. The families of seven of his "Big-8" were in the United States prior to the year 1800. His genealogy has always flowed rapidly from discovery to discovery in a fairly straight path.

After working in professional careers, Marty, a teacher, and Thornton, a software engineer, they retired to focus on their driving force – genealogy. About the same time (around 1995) something very powerful started happening to genealogical research: the functional equivalent of switching on a light, the start of the golden age of genealogy, yes, you guessed it – the internet.

Marty's difficult mission suddenly became much more achievable with the advent of the internet. While still very difficult, she has been able to take advantage of the ever growing number of high-quality online resources, such as the US Census coupled with the extensive use of e-mail. Thornton's research overnight went from a steady trickle to a flowing stream.

About the year 2000, both Marty's and Thornton's genealogy research started to reach the point where it was ready to be published. Since Thornton had spent his career in computer technology, they naturally turned to websites as the media of publication for their genealogy research.

Then it occurred to them – other genealogists would be in the same situation – ready to publish. They realized that what genealogists needed was a really good web hosting company where they could cheaply implement a starter website which could then grow into an extensive and comprehensive genealogy website. This was the beginning of their web hosting company www.genealogyhosting.com.

www.genealogyhosting.com is a full-service web hosting company specializing in genealogy websites and the general use of technology in genealogy. Marty and Thornton are dedicated to helping genealogists get their genealogy website up and running by providing extremely high quality web hosting services at very affordable prices.

- *www.genealogyhosting.com* offers a complete web hosting product line including domain names, hosting plans and much more.
- *www.genealogyhosting.com's* is a discount web hosting company and we pride ourselves on offering products at the cheapest possible prices. You will see that any serious genealogist can easily afford the small yearly fees for a genealogy website especially when compared to the incredible value they receive from it.
- Thornton and Marty Gale are active genealogists themselves with deep experience using technology in genealogy and they use all the products, methods, techniques and recommendations discussed in this guide everyday in their own life-long pursuit of genealogy.

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Introduction

Margaret Schmidt is a genealogist. She has spent decades producing a vast repository of carefully researched and synthesized genealogy information. Now, after all these years, it's starting to look good. She's completed the genealogy of all of her "Big-8" (i.e., her 8 great-grand parents) with good documentation on all their progeny. She's identified all her "Big-16" (i.e., her 16 great-great-grand parents) and most of her big-32 (i.e., her 32 great-great-great-grand parents) with names and dates for most of the marriages, births, and deaths of her direct line and also a lot of their siblings. She's proud she's pushed the bulk of her family history back past the year 1800 with fairly complete coverage and good documentation in most cases. A few of her lines even go back further to the 1600's and one to 1557.

Margaret is proud of her family heritage, especially her Schmidt ancestors. She has a burning passion to tell the Schmidt story to the world – how her Great-great-grandfather Frederick Schmidt came to America penniless from Germany in 1842. He took up a homestead near Margaret's hometown of Springville. He became an American citizen and two of his sons fought in the Civil War. Margaret makes a point of driving by the old family homestead when running an errand in that direction on the outskirts of town. She remembers as a little girl playing under the big oak tree in the front yard with her Grandfather and how her Grandmother used to spoil her with pieces of apple pie. She visits their graves in the Schmidt family plot in the old pioneer cemetery every memorial day. She looks at the graves there – the small, worn tombstones of her Great-great-grandfather Fredrick Schmidt and her Great-great-grandmother Helga Schmidt – the letters barely readable after all these decades. She is deeply moved by her heritage and wants to express her feelings in some sort of permanent record.

There are two major roads Margaret's genealogy research can travel and do so at the same time: Both roads involve the idea of publishing. Publishing means putting her research in a presentable form for release to her family, her fellow researchers, and the general public:

- First, she can endow her genealogy research to her family members, both existing and future ones, whose ancestry is being documented. Sharing with family members, many of whom are not themselves genealogists, also means publishing her genealogy research (i.e., putting it in some form presentable to the public).

- Second, she can share her genealogy research with other genealogists. She's already done this many times but not on the grand scale she knows she needs for really communicating with all those potential fellow researchers out there. In this way other genealogists can improve their own genealogy research which will in turn help her. Sharing her genealogy research with other genealogists means publishing it (i.e., putting her genealogy research in some form presentable to the public).

So publishing is in Margaret's future for her genealogy research. This isn't surprising. If she wants people to see it, she will have to publish it!

Traditional Forms of Genealogy Publishing

The traditional way genealogists published their genealogy research has been in the form of a book. Books might be bound or at least spiral-bound. We've all seen dozens of these works in libraries as we do our own research. We've always wondered how they did it? With publication dates like 1917, or 1938, or 1962 and without computers, we can only imagine the dedication of the authors who produced these often beautiful, always impressive works. In this guide, we call a genealogy book "The Book" since it is the dream of many genealogists to produce such a work. Genealogy as a subject fits the book format especially well both as a presentation and as an accomplishment. These works would normally fall into one of two major types depending on their purpose:

The Surname Book

The first type of the traditional genealogy publication was the *surname book*. The purpose of the surname book was to present the genealogy of all the people with a given surname. This type of publication would often be a bound book available in libraries. The surname book would often start with a family coming to America led by a patriarch of the surname. There often would be major sections of the book for each of the patriarch's children. Each chapter in a section would present the children downward to modern times with classic genealogy information (i.e., birth, death, marriage), and other known information.

The Family History Book

The other type was the *family history*. The purpose of the family history was to celebrate the family – its traditions, heritage, stories, travails, successes. This type of publication would present the genealogist's family often starting at the grandparent level (i.e., the "Big-4") and include information and pictures of all the aunts, uncles, cousins - the progeny of these grandparents. Marriage certificates, WWII army discharge papers, newspaper articles on family members, baby's baptism certificates, 4-H awards, etc. would be included along with text describing each family unit and people in that family, personal memories, as well as photos of the people, houses, marriages, family reunions, high school graduations and so forth. The family history book would often be given to the children or grandchildren as a gift from a loving grand parent.

Problems with Traditional Genealogy Publishing

The fundamental problem with publishing a book of genealogy is updating it!

- The information in the book will change as the author discovers corrections to the myriad of details.
- Because of this, many genealogists delay their book project until they are certain of all their facts. Often they never get around to the project because genealogy is uncertain by nature.
- If a major discovery is made after the book is published, then the book contains invalid or incomplete information and must be republished at great expense.
- The sheer bulk of the work to be published makes the book not only very expensive but also very difficult from a project standpoint.

Other Traditional Forms of Genealogy Publishing

The surname book and the family history book are personal projects taken on by highly dedicated individuals. These are not the only forms of publishing genealogy information. Another form is the local history book. But first, a little background.

The Historical County History Book

One of the first sources the budding genealogist encounters in his or her research is the county history book. Starting with the centennial of 1876, these books remained popular until well into the 20th century. They contained chapters on the history, the government, and the towns of the county. But the bulk of the county history book was allocated to the biographies chapters. Here each willing citizen living in the county at the time would write a biography of themselves which usually contained a history of their family. These county history books were for-profit ventures and were funded by subscription in which people paid to have their biographies included.

The family histories contained in the old county history books are often very useful to genealogists but, as has been pointed out many times elsewhere, were primarily vanity pieces, often filled with laughable flowery descriptions of the customers who paid to have their biographies included. However, the family histories often contain very important clues to the history of the family such as places where the family lived prior to settling in the county or the maiden name of the family matriarch.

The Modern Local History Book

With the 1976 bicentennial, there was a resurgence of interest in the production of county or city histories. These modern reincarnations of the above Victorian “mug books” are much more factual while retaining the general contents of history and biography. The purpose of the modern local history book is to present a picture of the locality for posterity. It contains chapters on the history of the locality, its economic activity (both farming and business), its towns (if a county), its organizations (religious, fraternal, educational) and of course the biographies of the citizens in the locality.

Unlike the for-profit old-time county history books, inclusion of a biography in the modern local history book is a much more democratic process. This is because the modern local history book has a completely different funding model. The modern form does not rely on funding by subscription but rather is usually produced by the local

historical society or a mutual effort of several local historical societies. Historical societies can often obtain a grant from the city or county that is the topic of the book to help fund the project. In addition, the book can be sold in the local book stores to help the historical society break even on this non-profit project. Any family which is included will most likely buy one or more copies of it.

Problems with Local History Book Publishing

As with other hard copy publications, the local history book is extremely difficult to produce. The project is taken on by a volunteer committee of the historical society who must make a commitment to a difficult project which could take more than a year to complete. The committee will typically use a distributed production model in which each chapter is farmed out to a subcommittee specialized in the topic of the chapter. Each subcommittee then meets to plan and produce their chapter. However, the subcommittee in charge of the biographies must, in turn, farm out the production of the biographies to the individuals themselves. The biography subcommittee also has another difficult chore: editing. Since the local history book will be limited in length, and since the bulk of the book will be the biographies, each biography must often be edited to shorten it. This isn't easy and hard feelings can result.

The bottom line is that the production of the modern local history book is a monumental problem of coordination. Towards the end of the project when the publication cut-off date is looming, the book must be assembled from literally dozens of people each with their own sense of commitment. These problems of coordination and scheduling often makes the project unfeasible for the already busy volunteers of the local historical society!

What is a Better Solution? The Genealogy Website

But now there is a new, utterly efficient, totally feasible, significantly cheaper, and much simpler way to publish genealogy information: a genealogy website. A genealogy website is a wonderful thing. It harnesses one of the most far-reaching innovations in human history, the internet, and allows genealogists and local historical societies to publish to the world with their own style of choice. We're talking about The World. Think of it! Genealogists and historical societies can publish their works to basically everybody on earth at very little cost! Incredible power! Unbelievable empowerment! Nothing like it in human history!

So What Exactly is a Genealogy Website?

A genealogy website is a non-fiction literary work. That is, it's a creative work in which the medium of creation is, for the most part, words and images. In short it is a large, complex writing project which fulfills the author's inner-drive of presenting his or her family heritage. Later, we will focus on this creative side but for now let's look at the physical and technical aspects of a genealogy website.

The genealogy website, like all websites, is made up of a series of computer files, in effect a "confederation" of files, housed on a computer called a web server provided by a web hosting company such as www.genealogyhosting.com located in a distant city (Scottsdale, AZ). The web server is a specialized computer that is connected to the vast

world-wide network known as the internet. Thus, anyone in the world that has access to the internet can access any website.

The computer files of any website are a "confederation" because each is independent, often created by different people, and created at different times, much like the books on a shelf in a library. The books on a library shelf may have the same or similar topic but they are independent units, written by different authors, can be checked out individually, may use each other as references, and may even be written in different languages. Anytime the word "website" is used, it means this confederation of files.

Website technology is covered in some detail in "Appendix A: Websites" on page 129. For now we will just summarize the basics of web technology so we won't get bogged down in technical minutia.

Dynamic Change

A genealogy website matches the work flow of the genealogist. The genealogy website is always a work in progress, always being perfected. As the genealogy research is continually changed and improved, so is the genealogy website.

On the other hand, the work cycle to produce a book is completely sequential. To even start a book means the underlying information is at an advanced state of refinement. A chapter of a book can only be started after comprehensive information has been collected and synthesized to form meaning. The author of a book is locked into a sequence: first thorough research, then synthesis to form meaning, and only then the creation of the manuscript of the chapter. Then the book is published. At that point, the book has been removed from the control of the author who can no longer correct it, update it, or improve it. It's gone.

Not so with a genealogy website! With a genealogy website, the author can publish preliminary information almost immediately as long as high standards of information sourcing and integrity are observed. At first, the information on the website will be incomplete, even simplistic, but it will be correct as of that point in time. Then through time, the author can build on the foundation.

In other words, the author of a genealogy website creates the website then perfects it in an unending cycle of change matching the ever growing and improving body of genealogy research. Through the months and years, the website gets better and better. Its contents are improved; its errors are corrected. It grows and improves as the knowledge of the author grows and improves. It is never complete!

This ability to change the website is because the website is made up of a confederation of files stored on a computer that is universally accessible to the world. The author can modify the computer files anytime and republish them to the website to make them available to the world. Unlike a book, the latest information becomes available instantly to fellow genealogists who are monitoring the website. In other words, the fellow genealogists will be expecting the information to be undergoing transformation and perfection continuously. With a book, the information must be perfect at the sole point of publication. This requirement for perfection means most authors will never get around to publishing their book!

Roles and Responsibilities

There are two distinct roles required in the creation and support of a genealogy website: the author role and the webmaster role. Most of the time, one person such as yourself will be responsible for both of these roles but it's possible to divide them for example between two (or more) family members:

- Author Role:

This is the creative role – the creative force that creates the website. This role also continually provides the inspiration for its progress. This role is responsible for determining the requirements, designing then building the genealogy website. The expertise required for the role of the author is that of writing, page design, complex document creation, project management, not to mention genealogy.

- Webmaster Role:

This is the computer technical role. This is the role that maintains the website and keeps it running smoothly. The webmaster administers the web hosting services accounts and sets the various options of the accounts. The webmaster performs the updates to the website and keeps the files of the website in good working order. The webmaster is always on duty and responds to trouble on the website implementing any required corrections quickly. The expertise required for the role of webmaster is that of computer technology.

A Word on Expertise

So creating a website requires special expertise that many people don't have. Not only is there the need for genealogy expertise but also design expertise, writing expertise, computer technology expertise, project management expertise, all very specialized and difficult skills.

But not to worry! By a fortuitous alignment of skills, the expertise required to create a website exactly matches the expertise that genealogists have in spades: great expertise in computers, project management, writing, and general organizational skills not to mention genealogy expertise.

Let's face it: every active genealogist regularly manages a large, complex, multiphased project requiring extensive use of the computer and they stay organized as they produce their genealogy research in a sea of information and clutter. This is exactly what is required to create a website! So if you're a genealogist, you do have the expertise to have your own genealogy website!

Adding Value

A website is created by the author and maintained by the webmaster (most likely one person) so that people can obtain information from the website. This is essentially a vendor - customer relationship. The result of genealogy research is a large body of information which can be called the "genealogy product." A person has decided to make use of your genealogy product on your website, in effect "buying" it from you. The person regards you as a vendor. In turn, you must regard the person viewing your website as a customer.

So what exactly are you “selling” when you create a genealogy website? You, like all vendors, are selling “added value.” This is a term used frequently in the world of business that applies to genealogy websites as well as most other human commerce. Adding value means taking a base entity as a starting point and enhancing it so that a customer will benefit not only from the base entity but also from your enhancements to it – the added value. The idea is that while other vendors can provide the base product, only you can provide your unique added value.

The process of adding value in a genealogy website is to start with base genealogy information, then synthesize it. That is, the author of the genealogy website takes genealogy information and combines it, consolidates it, integrates it, or abstracts it, finding its meaning. This synthesis, the increment of added value, is the reason a fellow genealogist would “buy” your genealogy product from you. Any genealogists can collect the base information but they lack the insight and experience to understand it. On the other hand, you have been working for years with the base genealogy information and understand its meaning. It is this sophisticated point of view which you record in your genealogy website that you are “selling.”

It's About the Quality of Information

Sounds a little cold, right? But it's the truth. You as the vendor must always treat your customers with great respect, giving them only the best. This means that your genealogy website must contain extremely accurate, high-quality information. Don't forget that genealogists are pursuing an information-intensive avocation and will expect a very high level of perfection in your website information. As the vendor, you should keep your website up-to-date and working perfectly. There's nothing more irritating than encountering a website that hasn't been updated since November 17, 2003 or some of its hyperlinks don't work. Your customers will expect the same quality that you expect when you go to a genealogy website!

Website Plumbing

Now let's start talking about the actual technology of a website. First, a website requires some technical services which must be purchased from a web hosting company, such as *www.genealogyhosting.com*. These services can be thought of as website “plumbing.” We explain in detail in “Appendix G: What Hosting Services are Required?” page 295 exactly what you need but for now here is a brief introduction.

First, you will need a domain name. For example, our fictitious character Margaret Schmidt's surname website is *www.schmidt14.org* (the creation of which will be covered in detail in this guide). The domain name in this case is actually “*schmidt14.org*.” You purchase a domain name by registering it with a web hosting company such as *www.genealogyhosting.com*. For a small yearly fee, you remain the owner of the domain name. A domain name is an asset. It is equivalent to owning any other asset and can be sold or passed down to your heirs.

The other website plumbing service you'll need for a genealogy website is web hosting. Web hosting means housing the confederation of files that makeup your website on a web server and providing the network access to them via a web server system. You purchase web hosting services from a company such as *www.genealogyhosting.com*. In this guide, our fictitious character Margaret Schmidt has purchased the “Economy”

hosting plan from *www.genealogyhosting.com* for her surname website (much, much more later).

HTML (HyperText Markup Language)

The files of a website (i.e., the confederation of files) contain what web developers call “content” which the author creates. Most of the files of the website are encoded using a specialized coding system called HTML (HyperText Markup Language). The HTML codes are inserted within the content and cause the web page to be formatted for display on the screen by a web browser. A web browser is an application to view web pages or other files of a website. The two most common web browsers are Internet Explorer and Netscape Navigator. The author doesn’t have to work in HTML directly and can use one of the many fine website authoring applications. This genera of applications includes such stalwarts as Macromedia Dreamweaver, Microsoft Expression Web, Microsoft FrontPage (which has been replaced by Microsoft Expression Web but is still popular), Microsoft Word or Microsoft Publisher. Also, note that as we’ll explain throughout this guide, other file formats besides the HTML format can be placed on a website.

Web Pages

Thus, the confederation of files of a website can be made up of a variety of different types of files but the most common file type is the HTML file. The HTML files of a website are called “web pages.” Web pages contain the literary content of the website and are the creative focus of the author. Web pages are designed by the author and can contain not only words but also images, sounds, and movies. This means the author can be very imaginative and make use of other forms of media besides words. Web pages are given an extension (the last node of their file name) of “htm.” This extension identifies them as HTML files. For example, a web page will have a file name of the form “xxxxx.htm.” Actually, they can also have a last node of “html” and a file name of the form “xxxxx.html” but we’ll just use the “xxxxx.htm” form throughout this guide to keep it simple.

Folders and Files on the Web Server

The confederation of files and folders of a website are located on a web server (Figure 2). Thus, while the website is physically located on a web server, the website is really no different from any other set of files and folders for example on a person’s home computer. A website is contained in a folder on the web server called the “root folder.” Thus, the root folder is equivalent to the website and represents its physical implementation. The root folder, in turn, contains all the files and folders of the website.

Home Page

Each website contains a home page, a special web page that is first loaded when the website is opened (e.g., in a web browser). The home page has a special file name of “index.htm” (Figure 2) that the web server will load automatically. So when, for example, a URL of “*http://www.mywebsite.org*” is accessed, then the file “index.htm” which is located in the root folder of the website is opened. This would be equivalent to specifying the complete file name in the URL: “*http://www.mywebsite.org/index.htm*.”

Hypermedia

HTML has a much greater purpose besides the formatting of the content of the web page – the implementation of hypermedia. This is a completely different way to organize and consume information. The information on a website is not read in a linear fashion like a book. Rather, web pages are interlinked together by hyperlinks. A hyperlink points to another web page (i.e., another “.htm” file) or another place on the current web page. For example, Figure 3 shows the web pages of Figure 2 as they are interlinked by hyperlinks. Also, hyperlinks can point to files in other file formats (i.e., besides “.htm” files such as “file5.jpg” or “file7.pdf” in Figure 3).

The reader can jump from point to point in the website or to other websites (such as “xxxxx.htm” in Figure 3) by merely clicking a hyperlink. This introduces a whole new design paradigm in the ancient craft of publishing and the ancient art of writing. The website becomes a dynamic document and this technology is ideal for presenting complex information such as genealogy information.

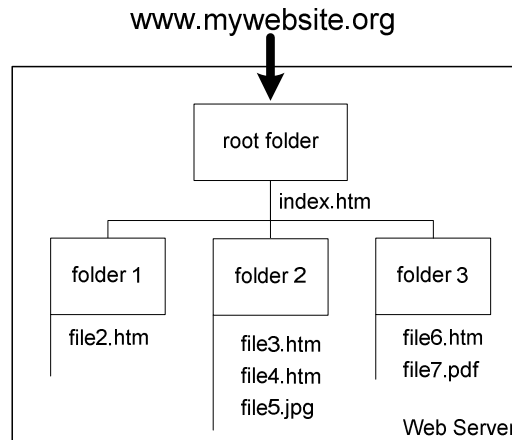


Figure 2 - A Website is a Set of Files and Folders Located on a Web Server

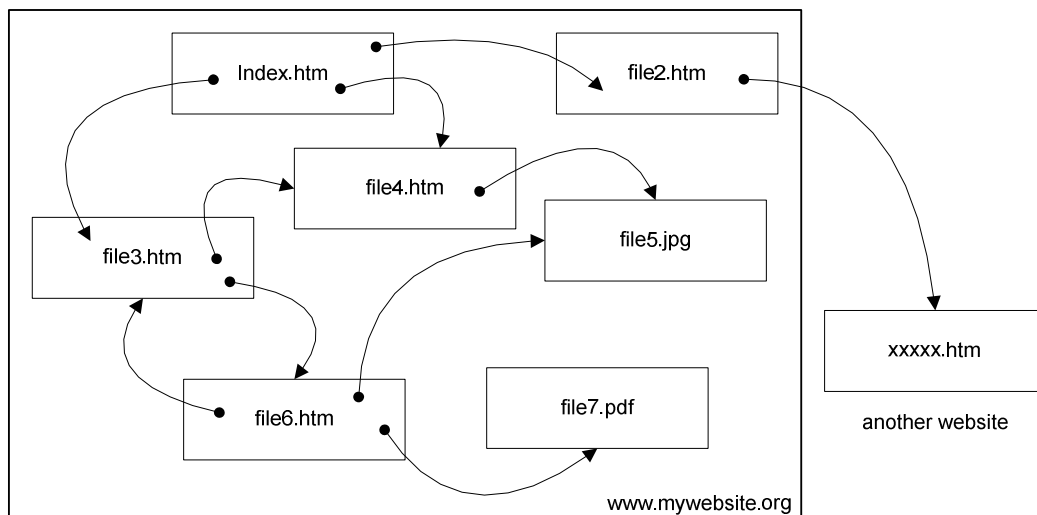


Figure 3 – A Website is a Hypermedia “Document”

URL (Uniform Resource Locator)

A hyperlink is created using HTML (i.e., via the website authoring application) and contains a pointer to a file that will be opened when the hyperlink is clicked. This pointer to the file is called the file's URL (Uniform Resource Locator) and is the web address of the target file. A URL can also be entered in the address bar of the web browser in addition to being the object of a hyperlink to open the target file (Figure 4). While most of the time, the target file will be another HTML file, it can also be one of many other file formats such as a Microsoft Word file, a PDF, a JPG image, a movie, or a text file.

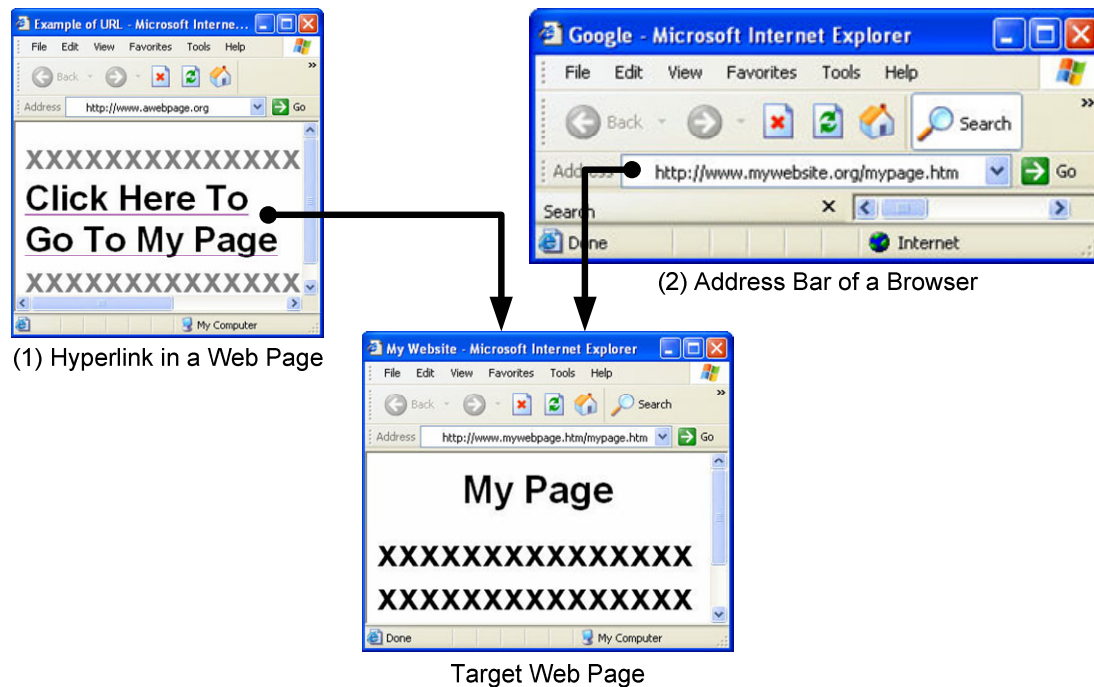


Figure 4 - URLs can Either be (1) Embedded as Hyperlinks or (2) in the Address Bar

For example, in Figure 4, the URL of the file “mypage.htm” of the website *www.mywebsite.org* is *http://www.mywebsite.org/mypage.htm*. This URL can be embedded as a hyperlink in the content with appropriate surrounding text (Figure 4, left) or entered directly in the address bar (Figure 4, right). The “*http://*” part of the URL is the protocol that the web browser will use to talk to the web server (a protocol is like a language with words and grammar which two computers use to communicate).

The Hyperlink Model

The collection of hyperlinks of a website has a very important role in the design of a website. In this guide, we call the collection of hyperlinks the “hyperlink model” of the website. A hyperlink model is a view of the information of a website as well as the mechanism for accessing the information. The hyperlink model is implemented as a configuration of hyperlinks of the website to organize the various sources of information into a meaningful structure presented to the visitor.

The hyperlink model is one of the primary products of the design phase of a website. The individual hyperlinks of the hyperlink model will be distributed in the content of the various web pages of the website. Thus, the content serves two purposes: as the actual information of the website and as a carrier of the hyperlinks of the hyperlink model. While the hyperlinks are spread in the content of the various web pages of the website, the hyperlink model is a single, logical structure that is purposefully designed by the website author.

But the hyperlink model is more than a product of the design phase of the website. The hyperlink model is, in fact, the way the visitor will perceive the information structure of the website. The hyperlink model can be thought of as a mental construct that a visitor to the website will have. The word "model" in "hyperlink model" relates to the visitor's perception of the website's information structure – his or her "model" of it.

In this regard, the visitor's hyperlink "model" is formed and perfected in the visitor's mind as he or she browses the website. That is, when visitors first encounter a website, they will form an initial picture in their minds of its information structure, an initial understanding of its hyperlink model. Then as they continue to browse and use the website, the hyperlink model will be improved in the visitors' minds. The quicker and more efficiently visitors form and perfect the hyperlink model in their minds the better. This is where the design of the information structure comes in.

A good design of the hyperlink model means visitors will quickly adapt to the organization of the website even if the underlying topic is complex like it is in a typical genealogy website. Good design means visitors will quickly grasp the hyperlink model and can anticipate the structure of the website even before they experience it. In this guide, we will show several design approaches which the author of the website can plug-in to create an effective hyperlink model (see "The How: Designing the Genealogy Website," page 53).

Website Abstraction:

A very important aspect of the hyperlink model is that it is an abstraction mechanism. The word "abstraction" mean drawing out the essential meaning of a topic and discarding, for the time being, the unessential parts of the topic. The hyperlink model abstracts the web, draws out its essential parts, for the current topic, and presents the information as a coherent whole to the visitor (Figure 5).

What a visitor sees is determined by the collection of hyperlinks of the hyperlink model regardless of where the files actually are. Hyperlinks allow web pages to be located literally anywhere on the web. That is, the hyperlinks of the hyperlink model of the website refer not only to files of the local website but can refer to any other file in virtually any of the millions of other websites on the internet.

A website with its hyperlink model is, in effect, a window into the vast world of the entire web. The most pertinent information will be provided within the current website for the topic at hand but information on other websites can also be harnessed by the website author. That is, the website author provides (and controls) the primary information (i.e., on the local website) but also relies on the entire web as a possible resource for information about the topic as shown in Figure 5.

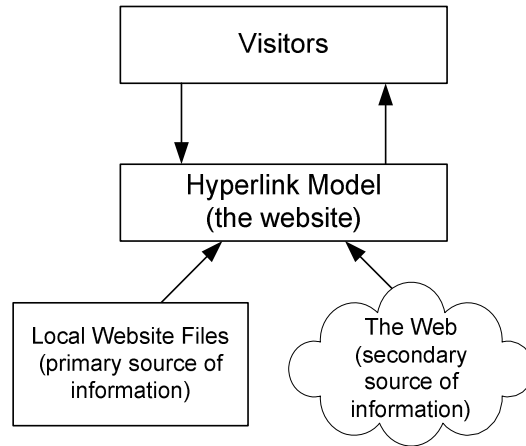


Figure 5 – Hyperlink Model as an Abstraction Mechanism

Example of the Abstraction Power of a Hyperlink Model

Let's take a somewhat impractical example of a hyperlink model that demonstrates the power of hyperlink models. This example is not intended to be realistic. Figure 6 shows three websites with their various files and folders. Websites 1 and 2 already exist and are somewhere on the web. A website author has decided to use some of the contents of websites 1 and 2 on a new website 3 which she is designing. Websites 1 and 2 may or may not belong to the author. That is, Websites 1 and 2 are independent from each other and can belong to unknown people or businesses. The website author of website 3 makes use of the contents of website 1 and 2 by creating a hyperlink model (Figure 7). The hyperlink model consists of hyperlinks arranged in the content of website 3 to portray the desired, new information structure. In other words, the hyperlink model repurposes some of the information of website 1 and website 2 into a new, integrated information structure of website 3 as shown in Figure 7.

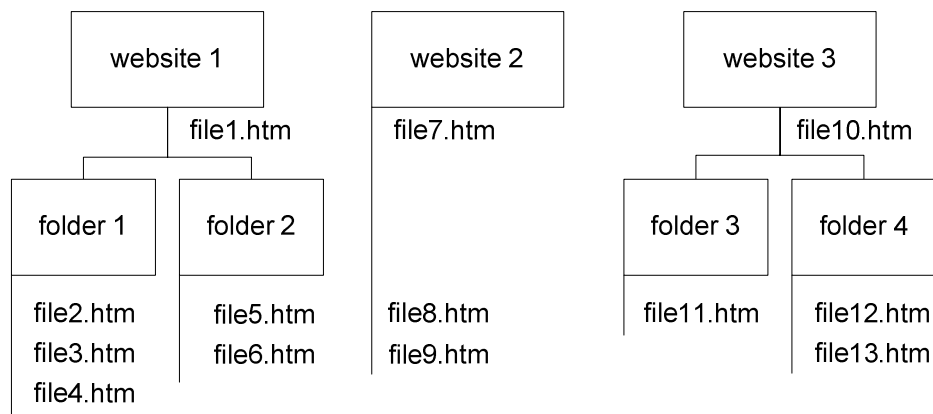


Figure 6 - Physical Structure of Files and Folders

website 3 (file10.htm)

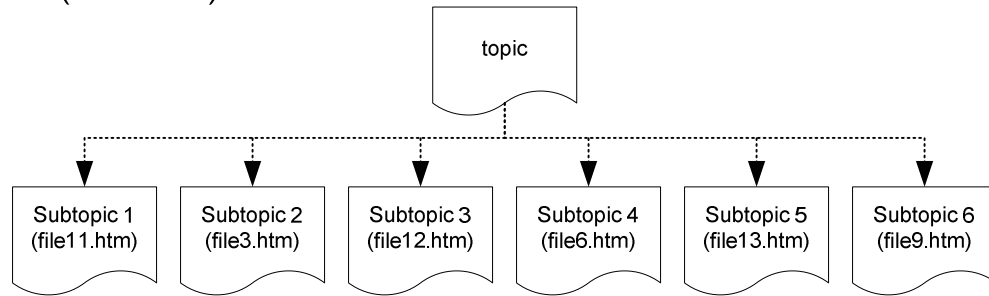


Figure 7 - Hyperlink Model of Website 3 (Figure 6)

Of course there is a liability in doing this which reduces the practicality of this approach of repurposing content from other websites. First, the author has no control over the contents of website 1 and 2 but she depends on their content as part of the information she is presenting in website 3. Second, the author has no control over the format (colors, fonts, styles, general look and feel) of website 1 and 2. In other words, the presentation of the information as structured by website 3, while logical, could appear disjointed because of possibly different formats between the three websites.

However, the point is that a hyperlink model abstracts physical web pages presenting a coherent view to the visitor and in the process possibly repurposes the contents of referenced web pages or files. In this way, websites can be complex, interlinking hypermedia "documents" (Figure 3) that are very effective at drawing together and integrating disparate information - much more effective than linear hardcopy paper.

This also means that the website author does not need to duplicate information that is provided by other websites. For a genealogy website, this means the local website does not have to repeat genealogy research available elsewhere on the internet except to provide a hyperlink to it, or summarize it, or point out errors and discrepancies in it, or just site it.

One Website – Multiple Hyperlink Models

A website can have multiple hyperlink models each presenting a different view of the information content of the website. Also it's common that major sections of a website will have their own hyperlink models. For a website with multiple hyperlink models, the hyperlinks of each hyperlink model tend to be concentrated in just a few web pages (instead of the usual practice of distributing the hyperlinks through several web pages of the website) to avoid confusion. Figure 8 shows an example of a website with three hyperlink models.

- Hyperlink Model "A": This hyperlink model encompasses the entire website. The hyperlinks of "A" are contained in web page "A.htm"
- Hyperlink Model "B": This hyperlink model encompasses the contents of "folder 1" and "folder 2." The hyperlinks of "B" are contained in web page "B.htm"
- Hyperlink Model "C": This hyperlink model encompasses the contents of "folder 4." The hyperlinks of "C" are contained in web page "C.htm." By the way, "folder 4" with its local hyperlink model "C" is an example of what we call in this guide a

“mini-website.” This is because “folder 4” with its hyperlink model “C” is independent of the other parts of the website, and could be used on its own as a website. For example, “folder 4” could be copied to another website and used as is. In other words, it is a self-contained “mini-website” isolated to one folder.

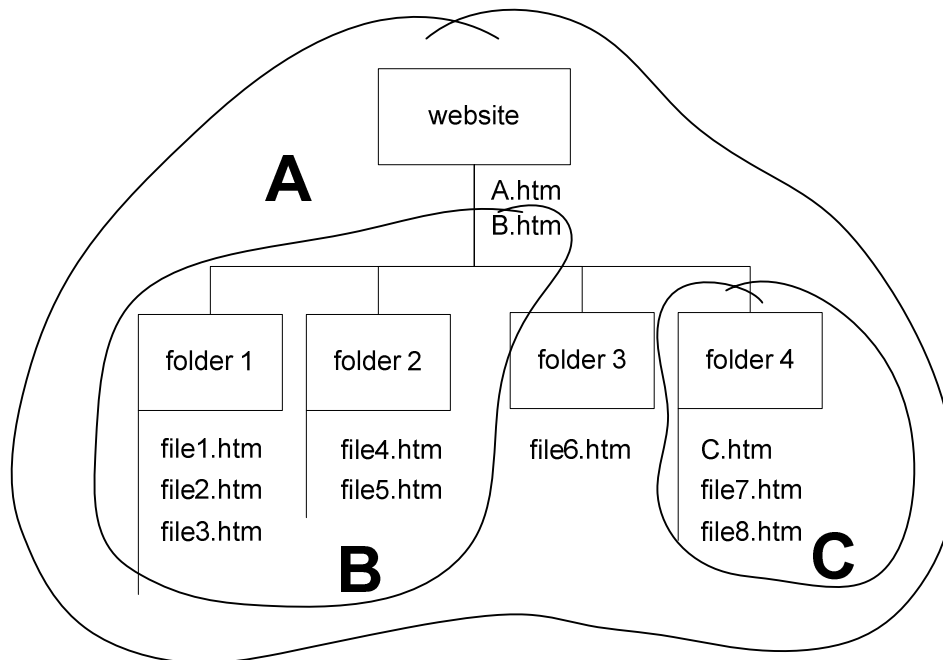


Figure 8 - One Website - Multiple Hyperlink Models

The Hyperlink Model as a Separate Literary Work

The author of the website then has two creative tasks: 1) not only the creation of the content of the website, but also 2) the creation of the hyperlink model(s) which interconnects its content. In many ways, a hyperlink model of a website is a separate literary work in its own right.

The author is giving the visitor expertise – not only expertise in the information provided on the local website but also expertise in the creation of the hyperlink model(s) – how the information ought to be perceived by the visitor. The author knows how the information should best be organized and presented. The visitor is able to take advantage of this expertise of the website author to consume the information of the topic at hand. Also, the author knows about other websites on the internet to harness which will be useful to the visitor for the topics.

Both Receiving and Submitting Information

Much of the effort to design a website is concerned with presenting information to visitors effectively. In fact, most of this guide is concerned with how to organize and present genealogy information on a genealogy website.

However, website technology includes the ability to go the other way, to allow the visitor to submit information to the website. The ability to submit information is another of the many functions of HTML. The author makes use of a series of HTML tags

called an HTML FORM. Using an HTML FORM, the author creates an input form consisting of input fields and a “submit” button. We have a detailed description of the HTML FORM and its use in “Appendix I: Visitor Input to the Website” on page 341.

In summary, the visitor types their information into the input fields then clicks the “submit” button. This causes the information to be sent to the web server. What happens to the information on the web server depends on the processing the author has built or specified. The simplest processing and the one used in most genealogy websites would be to have the web server e-mail the submitted information to the author.

This capability of HTML FORMS will be used in genealogy websites for a contact page (Figure 9) in which visitors submit their contact information (e.g., name, e-mail, comments, etc.). Virtually every genealogy website should have a contact page since communications is one of the major purposes of it. The author can easily set up the contact page so that the submitted information is e-mailed to the author. In this way, the author can build a contact list of fellow genealogists and family members who are interested in communicating on the topics of the website.

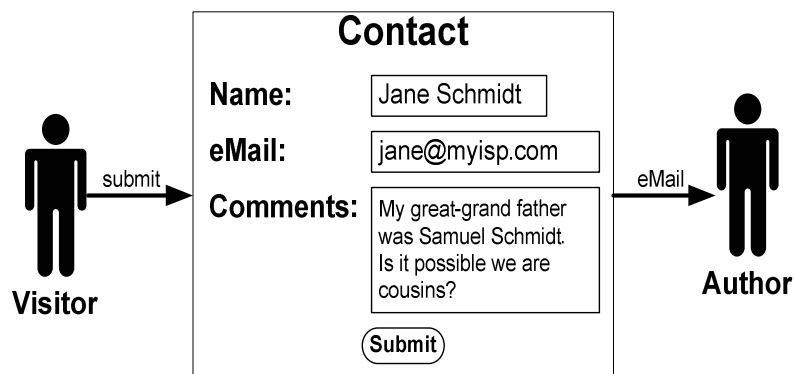


Figure 9 - HTML FORM Used to Submit Contact Information to the Author

Types of Genealogy Websites

We’ve all seen genealogy websites on the internet, each very unique and different. This is because genealogists are not only very creative but also very dedicated. While there are many different genealogy websites we see everyday on the internet, they generally boil down into ten different types of genealogy websites which we summarize below. We have a detailed presentation of the different types of genealogy websites in “Appendix D: Types of Genealogy Websites” on page 187. We will summarize them in this section. A genealogist may have several of the websites listed below since each of them solves a different genealogy publishing need:

- Surname
- Family History
- Local History

- Local Genealogy
- Descendant
- Pedigree
- Elusive Ancestor
- Noteworthy Ancestor
- Tickle Site
- Genealogy Workbench

Warning: Always Protect Privacy

The contents of several of the types of genealogy websites described below logically extend to modern times and could present information on living people. You have to be very careful about putting information on the internet of living people. With the possibility of identity theft in our modern era, it's best to just not put any information on the internet about living people unless permission is obtained. This will not be a real problem since genealogy research is generally focused on ancestors, people living 75 years or more ago (1930's back).

- Always ask living people if you can put their information on the web.
- Never put any information on the web about living children, no matter what.

Surname Website

The surname book introduced above has evolved into the surname website. This is the type of website that our fictitious website author Margaret Schmidt has decided to develop. The purpose of a surname website is the same as the book – to present genealogy information of ancestors with the surname. Often this means every person discovered with the surname whether interrelated or not. Surname websites are often sponsored by family associations dedicated to the research and the presentation of information on the surname. However, a surname website like the surname book must necessarily be limited in scope and often starts with the family patriarch and matriarch immigrating to America and working down from there (i.e., and avoiding for the time being going back further than that).

The surname website starts in the past and extends to modern times. Thus, the hyperlink model of the surname website resembles a pyramid with the family patriarch and matriarch at the apex and extending downward into modern times. However, when performing surname research, it is common to encounter more than one line of people with the surname that at first don't seem to be connected but the author suspects they are somehow. In this case, multiple "sub-pyramids" may be necessary to capture their information too. Also, during research on one surname, another completely different surname may emerge that has an equivalent intensity of interest to the author. Ancestors from the two surnames may be intertwined often living in the same area, and sharing the same history. In this case, another surname website should be started to capture their information too to take advantage of common research.

Family History Website

The family history book introduced above has evolved into the family history website. The family history website, like the book, typically focuses on the big-4 (grandparents) and all their progeny. Thus, the hyperlink model of the family history website resembles a pyramid with the grandparents at the apex and extending down through the families. This type of website is where web publishing really shines. There is no practical limit on how big or how much or when as there is with the family history book. The group of people featured in the family history website are for the most part contemporary and thus the author must obtain their permission to put their information on a family history website. However, usually this is not a big problem and the website will be very interesting and pertinent to the family members who will visit the site with enthusiasm.

Local History Website

The local history book introduced above has evolved into the local history website. The local history website is normally sponsored by the local historical society often working under a grant from the city or county that is featured in the website. Like the book, the local history website will present the history and description of the locale, but the bulk of the local history website will be the biographies of the citizens. Each citizen that wishes to participate can submit their picture and biography using the electronic application provided by the society. The hyperlink model of the local history website decomposes the locale into various topics of history and description and extends downward into groupings of people and the biographies of people.

Local Genealogy Website

The local genealogy website specializes in presenting local genealogy topics as well as information on genealogy resources of the locale. The best examples of local genealogy websites are the hundreds of websites of the USGENWEB project (www.usgenweb.org). Often the local genealogy website is a close ally of the local history website above but notice they have different purposes.

The local genealogy website will be a creation of the local genealogy society(s) and contains the results of their research projects. Transcriptions of local property records or vital records are examples of the contents of a local genealogy website. In many ways, the local genealogy website takes over the genealogy contents of the society's newsletter and makes the genealogy content both much easier to publish and much more timely. The local genealogy website will also contain instructions on how to do research in the locale as well as descriptions of local genealogy resources. Also, the local genealogy website can contain society news and other features normally published in the newsletter. The hyperlink model of the local genealogy website is focused on the topics with sections on local genealogy and sections on local resources.

Descendant Website

The descendant website presents information on all the descendants from one ancestral couple. That is, this website starts in the past and works forward. Unlike the surname website, the descendant website presents everybody whereas the surname website presents just descendants with the surname (and their spouses).

The scope of the descendant website is important to limit since the numbers of descendants can mushroom rapidly. A reasonable starting point would be a couple from the great-grandparent level. This would produce around 150 – 200 people counting spouses which is a manageable number to focus on in a descendant website. The hyperlink model of the descendant website would be a pyramid with the great grand parents at the apex spreading downward.

Pedigree

The pedigree website is the most common type of genealogy website and the contents matches the genealogy research of the author. The pedigree website presents information on all ancestors of a person (i.e., normally the author of the website). That is, this website starts in the present and works its way back in time. Thus, the pedigree website is a perfect addition to the genealogy research of the author and grows and improves as the research progresses. The hyperlink model of the pedigree website is an inverted pyramid with the author at the apex spreading upward into the past.

Elusive Ancestor Website

The elusive ancestor website focuses on one ancestor whose genealogy is very problematic. The elusive ancestor website presents all the known facts of the ancestor in question then attempts to draw conclusions about the ancestor. The elusive ancestor website encourages fellow genealogists to contribute any scraps of information they have on the elusive ancestor. The hyperlink model of the elusive ancestor website is the statements of theories which are then explained and proved referring to various synthesis and facts presented in the website.

Noteworthy Ancestor

The noteworthy ancestor website focuses on one ancestor, a person that the author admires and wants to tell the world about. As genealogy research progresses, it's common to have a particular ancestor emerge as the favorite of the author. The author tends to pay attention to this favorite ancestor when researching always collecting information when the opportunity arises. The result is a rich body of information about the noteworthy ancestor which the author can use to create an interesting and informative website. The hyperlink model of the noteworthy ancestor website is the decomposition of the life of the ancestor including photos and scans of primary documents from the ancestor's life.

Tickle Site

The tickle site is primarily a round-table discussion on specific genealogy topics which harnesses the internet as the communication infrastructure. The tickle website can be implemented using one of the social networking applications such as a forum or a blog website. In a forum, a community of people join the forum and discuss and debate an ever evolving set of topics of mutual interest. In a blog website, a person creates a running set of his or her opinions then invites visitors to make comments. Visitors to the tickle site are challenged and encouraged to participate in the discussion; hence, the name "tickle site." Anyone in the world can participate in the discussion.

The tickle site is used especially in the early stages of researching a genealogy topic such as a surname or locale where ancestors are clustered. The tickle site is used to collect

and consolidate the current items of information on the topics and to organize and present the analysis of those items. The subject matter of the tickle site is typically a set of one or more genealogy topics in the early stages of research. For example, a cluster of ancestors living in a specific locale might be the subject matter of the tickle site.

Genealogy Workbench

The genealogy workbench is a tool for genealogy research rather than a container of genealogy research. The genealogy workbench contains the internet work environment of the author. That is, the genealogy work bench contains all the hyperlinks used regularly by the author as well as reference information. Since most genealogy research involves the use of the web to visit research websites, the genealogy workbench consolidates the researcher's internet resources into one handy website. The genealogy workbench is continually updated by the author as new websites are discovered and their hyperlinks added to the genealogy workbench. The genealogy workbench also contains reference material – facts and mind joggers that the author uses in daily research.

The ideal domain name of a genealogy workbench is to register a “.name” domain. so that the genealogy workbench is reached by *www.yourname.name*. Then the genealogy workbench can become the author's personal genealogy communication hotspot which contains several channels for visitors to communicate with the author. Communications is one of the main reasons to have a genealogy website. For example, the genealogy workbench will contain a contact web page and a guestbook web page. Also, an online forum could be housed in a genealogy workbench. In this way, a visitor will have multiple channels of communication with the author of the website. The genealogy workbench is usually a handful of web pages with various sections for each type of internet resources or communication channel used.

As an experienced genealogist, why do I need a website?

Why should the average genealogist go to all the trouble and expense of having a genealogy website? The reason is basically in the nature of information. Genealogists spend their lives collecting, storing, synthesizing, protecting, using, and presenting information. The big picture of the global flow of genealogy information is a vast network of genealogists and information sources such as research libraries, county archives, databases or any other useful repository of genealogy information (Figure 10).

The genealogists consume information from the network then store their subset of information in their local store. The “local store” is a term used to describe the physical repository of information within the work space of the genealogist. Notice that it is irrelevant for purposes of Figure 10 exactly what medium (e.g., paper, computer disks, etc.) are used to actually store the information in the local store – just that it is in fact stored and that the information can be retrieved from the local store to be used in the pursuit of genealogy.

Also, notice that we haven't stated that computers are involved in the network. Figure 10 could be from 1937 or 2007. The only difference in the global genealogy information network between 1937 versus 2007 is the huge increase in the nodes (the genealogists

and information sources), the infrastructure of the network (the lines representing communication channels) as well as a huge increase in the traffic (the messages) on the network.

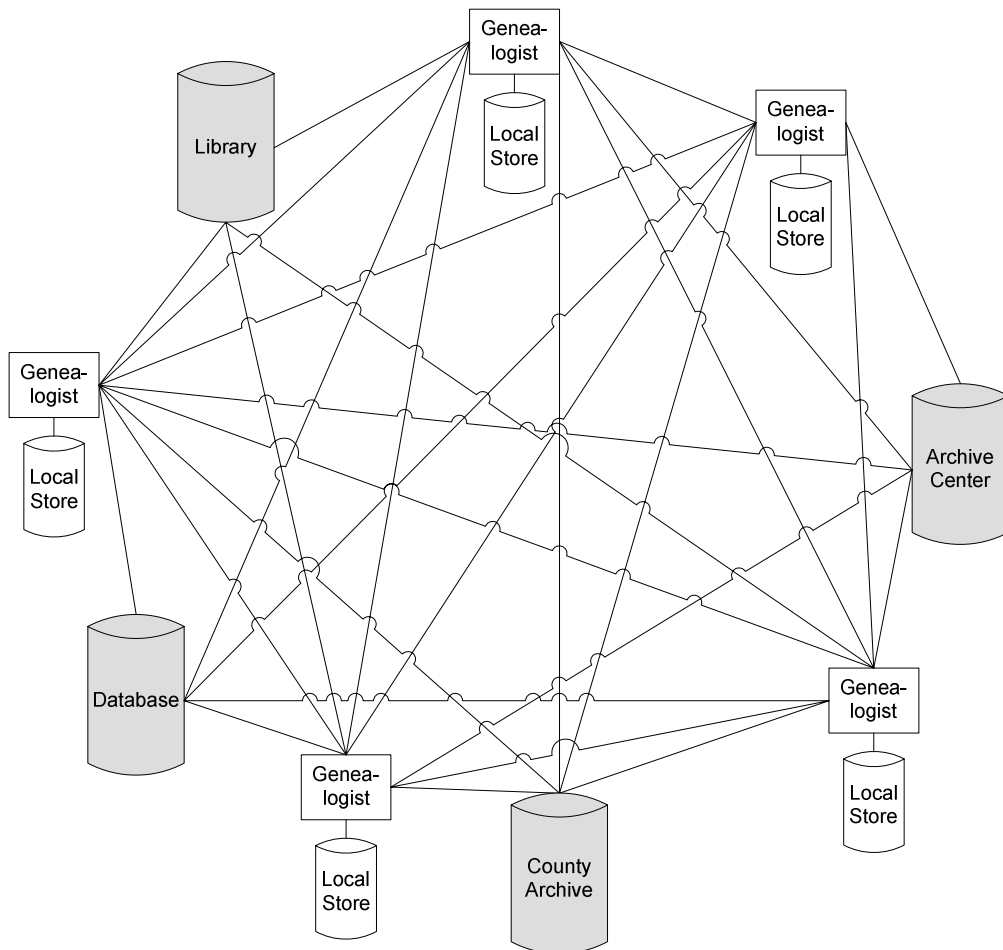


Figure 10 – Global Genealogy Information Network

The information on the network comes from other genealogists or the various information sources on the network. Once stored (i.e., in the genealogist's local store), the genealogist synthesizes the information into meaningful generalizations, continually improving those generalizations as new information is received. The genealogists frequently send information back and forth on the network as information is synthesized and insights are revealed which is, in turn, picked up by other genealogists or information repositories.

The global genealogy information network of Figure 10 has many requirements which relate to information flow and storage. The better these are, the better the global genealogy information network works. As we'll see, a genealogy website addresses each of these requirements head-on. First we'll list the requirements of the global genealogy information network then we'll explain each:

- Collaboration – the need for the ability of several genealogists to work together on a common effort.

- Synthesis – the need for the capability to abstract detailed information into meaningful generality.
- Collection – the need for the efficient accumulation of genealogy information.
- Control – the need to retain authority over genealogy information so that it preserves its integrity.
- Currency – the need to present the latest, most up-to-date information.
- Presentation – the need to format and produce genealogy information for public consumption.
- Storage – the need to store genealogy information and to retrieve it once stored.
- Protection – the need to protect and secure genealogy information from physical destruction or corruption.
- Recognition – the need for public acknowledgement of a genealogist's expertise and mastery of a body of genealogy information.
- Sharing – the need for the free distribution of genealogy information.

The value of a genealogy website is that it completely solves the above requirements of the global genealogy information network. In fact, a genealogy website is the most efficient and effective way possible to solve these requirements. Here's how:

Collaboration

A genealogy website provides a natural structure for family members and fellow researchers from around the world to collaborate on a genealogy project. The genealogy website consists of web pages which are in effect buckets for storing information as it comes in. A genealogy website can be built so that there is always a bucket for each topic and more and more buckets can easily be added as the work progresses. In effect, the genealogy website is always structurally "complete" as of that point in time with a place for each new piece of information. The genealogy website encourages collaboration as people, especially family members, spread around the world see a place for their contribution. The family members and fellow researchers would send their contributions to the author who would make the corresponding updates to the website.

This idea of the genealogy website as a series of buckets to be filled is very important. It puts an interesting twist on collaboration – it means you can collaborate with yourself in the same way described above in which people separated in the world can collaborate on a website. In this case, collaboration is with yourself separated in time. This is possible because the structure of the website is a project management tool. The author has carefully designed the structure of the website and has continually kept the structure up-to-date. The structure always reflects the current status and automatically points to what needs to happen next. This means you could set aside the website project for a period of time, for example during the holidays when you are busy with other responsibilities. Then in January, it would be easy to pickup where you were, in effect collaborating with yourself. All you have to do is peruse the structure of the website and begin working on one of the empty or partially filled buckets sitting there waiting to be filled.

Synthesis

Synthesis means bringing together facts into a coherent whole. Genealogy research produces a huge number of facts, generally unrelated at first. A consumer of information needs more than facts to understand a topic. What's required for understanding is synthesis – the integration, generalizing, combining, consolidating or abstracting of facts to form meaning. This is the basic work of the genealogist – synthesis is how the genealogist adds value to the genealogy product. A genealogy website helps the genealogist to synthesize - to bring together disparate information into one whole. Subtle relationships can be presented more easily because a website can communicate information in a highly purposeful and structured presentation. In effect, conclusions are possible that weren't seen before. This process of synthesis is possible because the underlying facts are organized and orderly on the genealogy website.

And let's not forget the communication factor of a genealogy website - more eyes are looking so more synthesis occurs as the genealogy information bounces around in the public domain. Visitors to your genealogy website will participate in the synthesis process when they combine your synthesis with their own information.

Collection

A genealogy website puts real muscle in the actual collection of genealogy information. With a genealogy website, genealogists have many powerful computer tools to enhance their effectiveness in the field such as when at libraries, research centers, relatives' houses, etc. not to mention at home to collect genealogy information.

For example, a genealogy website can contain the genealogy information that is in play in the current genealogy research and is readily available for quick reference. This is because the genealogy website evolves in sync with the genealogy research. In effect, the genealogy website is a searchable "database" of the current information. With a genealogy website, you can quickly lookup those little facts that you would normally have to haul out the files to check. This is an incredible time-saver.

Of course, the genealogists must adapt a disciplined approach to continually updating his or her genealogy website. But it's worth it! Once the underlying documents are scanned and stored in the various "buckets" (described above) of the website, then the genealogist can instantly and effortlessly draw on them to synthesize the information (described above). Also notice that once the documents are scanned and stored on the genealogy website, they are then available to everyone in the world!

In fact, a genealogy website uncouples the process of collecting information from the process of synthesizing information. The genealogist doesn't have to decide how a piece of information "fits in" at the point in time the genealogist collects the information. With a genealogy website, information can be collected, scanned and filed in the various "buckets". The author can quickly define new "buckets" and continuously integrate them into the structure of the website. Later, the genealogist can figure out what the information means and build hyperlinks to it at various places in the web pages of the genealogy website.

Also, a genealogy website can be used to upload material collected on a genealogy trip such as scans, photos from digital cameras, or unique files available only at that library. In this case, the genealogy website is used to store files temporarily which can be

retrieved later when you get home. These stored files are not intended to be viewed by the public (yet).

Control

A genealogy website puts you in control of your public genealogy information. You get to be the arbiter of your information. You get to decide what information is made available on your website. Books sit on the shelf but web pages are changeable. You get to change it when you want. You can make sure your information is accurate and you are not dependent on others for updating your information.

Currency

A genealogy website, unlike a genealogy book, presents your latest genealogy information. You can easily and quickly correct or remove bad information on your genealogy website. You can easily and quickly update the website with new information or insights when they are discovered.

Presentation

A great byproduct of having information on a computer is that it can be presented in a very appealing format and printed from that website as good-looking output. An important aspect of presentation of genealogy information is "The Book" – the publication of the author's genealogy information in a beautiful book. This is the goal of many genealogists. The tools we propose you use (discussed later) will allow you to reformat and print your genealogy website as a genealogy book. In other words, if you want, you can always print that book you've promised your grandchildren in addition to having a very useful research tool. While the production of "The Book" from the website is definitely a time-consuming project, it is very straight forward and doable since the hard part of collecting and synthesizing the genealogy information has already been completed.

Also, the consumption of genealogy information is greatly enhanced by the ability to perform computer searches as well as having the genealogy information organized and interconnected by hyperlinks on a website. On a well-organized genealogy website, little time has to be wasted looking for scraps of information that the genealogist, especially the author, knows are there somewhere. The trouble with these distractions is that the genealogist loses that keen state of mind of the current hunch and must often go through a lengthy process of reestablishing the mental framework of the hunch once that scrap of paper is found. However, with a well-organized genealogy website, those scraps of information are often instantly available either by hyperlink or computer search thus avoiding the distraction.

Storage

A common problem facing every genealogist is the sheer number of pieces of paper that must be stored. The problem is made worse because documents must often be reproduced so that two (or more) copies can be filed in two or more separate file folders.

For example, the genealogist finds a great listing of people buried in a cemetery showing several of the genealogist's ancestors from several of the genealogist's families with really important information such as dates and family structures. Or the genealogist

discovers a will showing several of the genealogist's ancestors with really important information such as where they are living at the time or the daughters' married names.

Without a genealogy website, the genealogist has a problem of loosing the connection between the ancestor and the document. Often the genealogist will xerox separate hard copies of the document to be filed in the file folder of each of the ancestors mentioned in the document. With a genealogy website, the document is scanned and published once to the genealogy website. Then the document can be referenced from the current and future web pages of the various ancestors via hyperlinks.

Protection

The genealogist puts the heart of his or her genealogy research on the website. It is the most scrubbed, synthesized, and perfected of the genealogist's information. In effect the information on a genealogy website is a very valuable asset that must be treated like any asset – protected, preserved, guarded. and defended.

A genealogy website gives the genealogist their own personal "Iron Mountain." The concept of "Iron Mountain" is well known in this modern era and is a colloquialism that represents the absolute protection of information. During the cold war, the idea got started that government and corporate records must be stored somewhere for absolute protection just in case of the "Big One." Now the computer industry uses the term to represent absolute protection of computer files. The idea is that computer files must be sent off-site to an "Iron Mountain" to be protected absolutely from fires, earth quakes, hurricanes, and other disasters. No matter what happens, the computer files must be intact after any disaster.

A very powerful characteristic of a website is its natural ability to protect information. This is because the information of a website is contained in computer files which are stored offsite on a web server. The web server is in a highly-secured environment with daily backup of all files on the web server. The web server is completely safe and cannot be corrupted. The web server is like an "Iron Mountain" to the genealogist where his or her genealogy information is placed for ultimate backup.

Recognition

A genealogy website brings well-deserved recognition to the author. The author has spent years conducting research and has gone to the trouble (and expense) of creating a website to share his or her genealogy information with the world.

However, notice that with recognition comes responsibility. When you have a genealogy website, you automatically become an authority on the topics of the website in the eyes of the world. For example, if you have a surname website, you become a recognized authority on that family surname automatically. If you have a genealogy website you owe it to the genealogy world to only have the highest quality genealogy information on your website.

Sharing

This is the big one. A genealogy website allows the genealogist to "cast the net wide," inviting the world to share its knowledge of the topics of the website. The sharing capability of a genealogy website is particularly powerful for locating cousins or distant

relations. These are the people who will know the most about a common ancestor such as your mutual great-great-grandmother. These distant cousins may have important facts and interesting stories that have been passed down on their side of the family.

The old method (prior to genealogy websites) of contacting distant cousins was to trace collateral lines down modern times to locate contemporary people that could then be contacted. Once you found a possible cousin, you would write or call them – make a “cold call” on them. This method is very slow because the person may not actually be your cousin or if so may not be interested in genealogy or more likely may not have any new information about your common ancestors.

By contrast, a genealogy website in effect says “Hello Cuz...are you out there?” A genealogy website invites them to come to you! Any cousin who is interested in genealogy will eventually find your website as they do their own research on the internet for the common ancestors they share with you. This will be especially true if you get your genealogy website listed in the search engines described in “Get Listed in the Search Engines,” page 123.

Also, a genealogy website drastically improves the logistics of sharing information. Instead of sending a pile of papers to your contacts, you send them the URL of your genealogy website. And notice, in this way, they will always have your latest information. In fact, by creating a genealogy website, you are in effect contributing directly to the global genealogy information network (Figure 10) made up of millions of websites interlinked in a vast sea of genealogy information!

You’ve Convinced Me! What Do I Need to Have a Genealogy Website?

First, congratulations on your decision– you won’t regret it! Now, let’s get down to business. In order to have your own genealogy website you will need to purchase some services from a web hosting company – what we call “website plumbing” in this guide. Also, you will need a website authoring application. Let’s start with the plumbing. You have to purchase two important website plumbing services: a domain name and a hosting plan. Both of these are purchased from a web hosting company, such as www.genealogyhosting.com. There is a detailed explanation of these website plumbing services in “Appendix G: What Hosting Services are Required?” beginning on page 295. For now, here is a summary:

Domain Name

All great things about a genealogy website start with the domain name! The domain name is the moniker that your website will be known as. For example, Margaret Schmidt’s website is www.schmidt14.org. The domain name is technically the last two nodes of the website name i.e., “*schmidt14.org*.”

Purpose of Domain Names

Domain names were invented to make it easier for humans to access internet services such as websites. Underneath the covers, the internet uses a comprehensive numeric addressing scheme to route network traffic (e.g., messages sent from one computer to another). Domain names are used to form the human address of a computer on the internet which is translated into the actual numeric network address. The network addressing scheme is comprehensive because it applies world wide. It's easier for us humans to remember that the Schmidt surname website is *www.schmidt14.org* rather than its actual network address of 64.202.189.182.

Registering a Domain Name

The technical term for ownership of a domain name is to "register" it. You obtain a domain name by registering it at a web hosting company such as *www.genealogyhosting.com* and paying a small yearly fee. Once you register your domain name, you will own it and can continue to own it for the rest of your life, passing it down to your children and grandchildren just like any other asset. As long as you continue to renew it by paying the small yearly fee, it's yours. The yearly fee is a pittance compared to the value you receive from your domain name. Also, at *www.genealogyhosting.com* you can register a domain name for up to 10 years so you won't be bothered with the yearly renewal.

Domain Name as Marketing Collateral

But a domain name is much more than a way to humanize a complex network address. A domain name is what business consultants call "marketing collateral." A domain name is equivalent to a brand name in the world of marketing. It is the moniker for a product. A brand name is very valuable because in the eyes of the public, it is the product. When the public thinks of the brand name they think of the product and go buy the product and when they think of the product they think of the brand name and go buy the product.

In the same way as a commercial product, the domain name of a genealogy website is the moniker for the genealogy product contained in the website. When fellow genealogists see the domain name they know what's in it, both by the suggestive power of the name as well as being reminded of a previous visit to the website. And the reverse is true: when a genealogist wants to find out more about a genealogy topic, they will look for a suggestive domain name that looks like what they are after.

For this reason, genealogists have a responsibility when they register genealogy domain names. In registering a domain name, the genealogist is monopolizing in a sense that genealogy topic. This means the genealogist has a new responsibility to shepherd that topic properly in the genealogy world. Shepherding means managing, looking out for, being the expert on, providing quality, and sharing the information of the topic. Also, notice that by registering a genealogy domain name, the genealogist is preventing other, perhaps more committed genealogists, from being the shepherd of that genealogy topic.

Compared to a Free Website

Thousands of genealogists have taken advantage of the free websites offered by Rootsweb.com and other hosting companies. These are great services which allow the genealogist to have a free genealogy website. It's a great way to get started! The problem with these free services is that the website URL is complex. The importance of having your own domain name is that visitors can get to your website easily (which is the whole point of domain names). With a free service such as Rootsweb.com, the URL of your website is of the form "*http://freepages.family.rootsweb.com/~familyname*" (i.e., difficult to remember) With your own domain name and website, your URL would be of the form "*http://www.familyname.org*" (i.e., easy to remember!)

With your own domain name, you can still use your old free website service (although there would be no reason to since you will receive a free website from *www.genealogyhosting.com* when you register a domain name as we will explain in a moment). To continue to use the old free website you've already set up, you can use the technical capability of domain names called "domain forwarding." We have presented a detailed explanation of domain forwarding in "Using Your Domain Name for your Free Rootsweb Website" page 331. With domain forwarding, any messages sent to your new domain name URL will then be forwarded automatically to your old free website URL. In effect, your domain name is the public moniker of your free website.

For example, once domain forwarding is setup (Figure 11), when a visitor enters "*http://www.familyname.org*" then they will be forwarded to "*http://freepages.family.rootsweb.com/~familyname*" in this example. In this way, your website will be known by the much better and easier to remember URL of *http://www.familyname.org*.

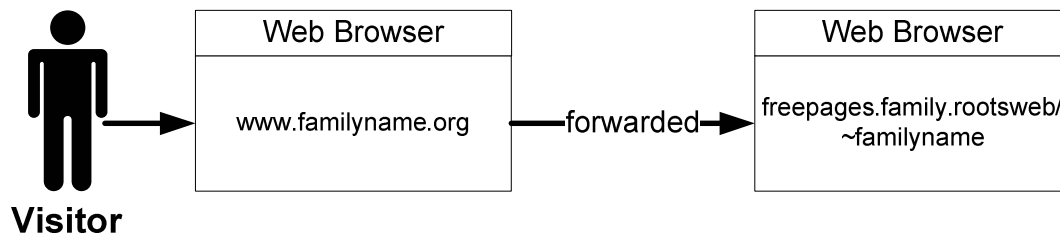


Figure 11 - Domain Forwarding

Warning - Notice in the above examples that "*familyname*" is the same in both cases of the free website and the domain name. However, this would seldom be possible unless the "*familyname*" is very unique or rare. In any huge, world-wide registry such as either the registry for free genealogy websites or the registry for domain names, the particular family name may already be taken by someone else. In this case, your free website name at rootsweb's FreePages service will have to be an obscure identifier that only you know. This same type of problem could also occur with your domain name. The domain name of your surname (e.g., *familyname.org* in the examples above) may already be taken. We have presented many techniques for effective alternative domain names in "What if My Domain Name is not Available?" on page 297. However, no matter what, you can always append a serial number to the base name. In this way, a unique domain name can always be registered that still has the suggestive power of the base. This is the strategy, Margaret Schmidt used with her *schmidt14.org* domain name.

Your E-Mail Address as Your Domain Name

A really cool feature of your domain name that you obtain from www.genealogyhosting.com is that it can serve as your genealogy e-mail address. In fact, your domain name can be your permanent e-mail address that you use for all your e-mail! No more e-mail chaos when you change ISPs (Internet service providers). If you did nothing else, this would make having your own domain name well worth it!

Here's how it works: When you register a domain name at www.genealogyhosting.com, you get a fully functioning e-mail account with it. For example, when Margaret Schmidt registers the domain name "schmidt14.org" for her Schmidt surname website, she can then set up an e-mail account using this domain name as her e-mail address, for example margaret@schmidt14.org.

The e-mail account can be configured to either forward to an existing e-mail account or be used as a full e-mail account. Forwarding is a technique to continue using your old e-mail address while you convert to your new e-mail address over a period of time. For example, Margaret's current e-mail address is margaret871@comcast.net. She wants to continue using this e-mail address for a while because she doesn't have time right now to convert to her new e-mail address associated with her domain name of Margaret@schmidt14.org. She can accomplish this easily with e-mail forwarding (Figure 12). In this way, any email messages sent to Margaret@schmidt14.org (figure top) will be forwarded to margaret871@comcast.net. Also, any email messages sent to margaret871@comcast.net (figure bottom) will not be effected and will be routed as usual. In this way, Margaret would then continue processing her e-mail from her margaret871@comcast.net e-mail account.

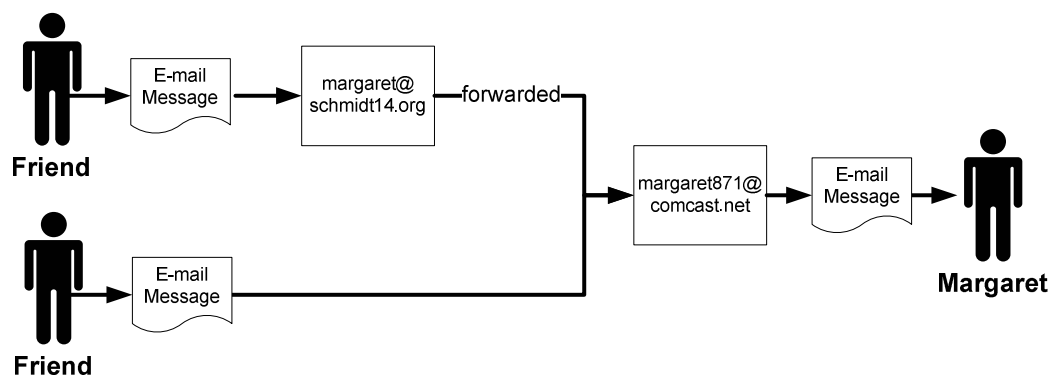


Figure 12 - E-Mail Forwarding

The alternative to forwarding is to convert immediately to the new e-mail account. Even though it's harder, this is the recommended way. Margaret would tell all her friends her new e-mail address of Margaret@schmidt14.org as well as update any genealogy forums and message boards that have her old e-mail address. Then she would process all her e-mail from her new account. She would probably keep her old margaret871@comcast.net e-mail account for a while but she would delete this account after a few weeks.

The important point is that either way (i.e., forwarding or full account), Margaret will have just the one public e-mail address of margaret@schmidt14.org. In this way, when

she gives others her e-mail address or she leaves it on genealogy forums, it will always be correct.

If Margaret chooses to use her full e-mail account (i.e., rather than the forwarding option) then she can access her full account at www.genealogyhosting.com via web-based e-mail or via an e-mail application such as Outlook Express (Figure 13). Web-based e-mail is familiar to anyone who has a hotmail.com e-mail account. You start a web browser such as Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator, log on to your e-mail account, and process your e-mail. This option is very handy on a trip since you can process your e-mail from any public computer, such as in a library.

The alternative to web-based e-mail is to make use of an e-mail application such as Outlook Express. Either of these access options (web-based or e-mail application) can co-exist. Thus, if you use a local e-mail application, you can still access your e-mail account at www.genealogyhosting.com via the web such as when on a genealogy trip.

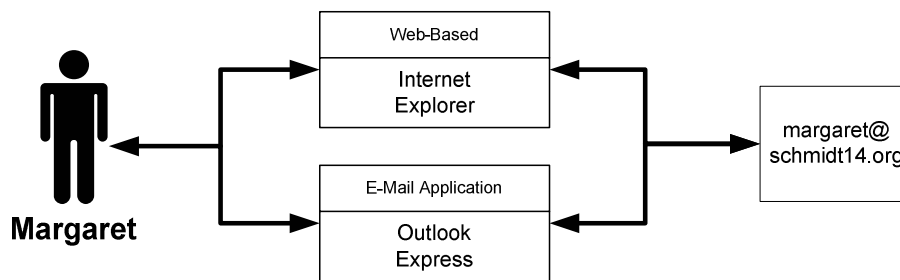


Figure 13 - Two Ways to Access E-Mail: Web-Based or E-Mail Application

Should Margaret want to move her domain name from www.genealogyhosting.com to another web hosting company, it's very easy for her to change her e-mail setup. She would just use the above techniques of forwarding or full account to establish her desired e-mail configuration at the new service and she would still have her e-mail address of margaret@schmidt14.org. So in summary, no matter what happens, your e-mail address is and will be permanent when you have your own domain name!

Hosting Plan

The other website plumbing service you'll need for your genealogy website is a hosting plan. Hosting means housing the confederation of files that makeup your website on a special computer called a web server. The web server provides network access to the website. A hosting plan is selected based on a number of factors: server disk space, number of e-mail accounts, and network bandwidth (the amount of network traffic expected). www.genealogyhosting.com offers two categories of paid hosting plans each with several options as well as free ad-supported hosting plans discussed in a moment.

Standard Hosting Plans

The first category is our standard web hosting plans. These plans are typical of most websites on the internet. This type of web hosting plan is under the total control of the webmaster who makes all technical decisions and performs all changes or updates to the website. Our "Economy" hosting plan would be perfect for most genealogy websites with gigabytes of disk space and hundreds of e-mail accounts (refer to the www.genealogyhosting.com website for the exact specifications.)

“Website Tonight” Hosting Plans

The second category of our hosting plans is our “Website Tonight” plans. These hosting plans provide the ability to have a professional looking website with minimum technical knowledge compared to the standard hosting plans. Our “Website Tonight” plans provide numerous starter templates, point-and-click prompts, and behind-the-scene handling of most technical chores. With a “Website Tonight” hosting plan, the author can focus on the content of the website rather than technical issues.

While a “Website Tonight” website is not intended as a full-blown genealogy website as described in this guide, the big advantage of a “Website Tonight” website is that you can get started very quickly. In a few hours, the average genealogist could have a decent prototype genealogy website up and running. “Website Tonight” allows the author to install many sophisticated communication features using simple wizards (such as a guestbook, a full-blown internet forum, or a contact page). In this way, the author could start communicating instantly with fellow genealogists on the topics of the website. Later, as the author becomes more knowledgeable on website technology, he or she can always switch to one of the standard hosting plans. This conversion can be done seamlessly without disruption to the public access to the website.

We have included some detailed instructions on how to use “Website Tonight” in “Getting the Most from “Website Tonight”,” page 320.

Free Stuff

When you register your domain name at www.genealogyhosting.com, you get two very useful free hosting services. These free hosting services included in the small yearly fee of your domain name can get you started immediately on your genealogy website.

Free Website

First, when you register a domain name at www.genealogyhosting.com, you get a free, ad-supported five-page “Website Tonight” website or a free ad-supported “Economy” hosting plan website. (i.e., you choose one or the other. Also, refer to the www.genealogyhosting.com website for exact details). This means you can quickly get started on a first-effort of your genealogy website for just the small yearly fee of registering your genealogy domain name! For example, you could use your free “Website Tonight” website to sponsor an online forum (a community discussion) of your genealogy topics as a way to instantly get online. Later, you could methodically define the requirements, design and build your permanent genealogy website using a standard hosting plan such as the “Economy” hosting plan. The same domain name could be used throughout.

Okay, okay there’s a catch to the free websites offered by www.genealogyhosting.com – they are supported by advertising. A banner is placed at the top of the web pages of a free website with clickable ads to vendor websites. Our banner advertising is not particularly offensive but it does disturb the image of serious genealogy. A free genealogy website, whether obtained from www.genealogyhosting.com or elsewhere such as rootsweb.com, does not present the public image you want to foster. Genealogy is a serious, scholarly avocation which is incompatible with the image that a free website implies. We strongly recommend that you purchase your own hosting plan such as either a five-page “Website Tonight” plan or a standard “Economy” hosting plan once

you've gotten your feet wet with the free website. A genealogy website is not very expensive anyway and your visitors won't have to contend with ads (which are present on this and virtually any other free website service from any other vendor).

Free Blog Website

Another free service you get when you register your domain name at www.genealogyhosting.com is a blog website, also ad-supported (as most free blog sites are). Blogging is the newest of the social networking applications. A blog website is the equivalent of a virtual round-table discussion conducted online but the author of the blog website controls the discussion. The author creates and writes about new topics and invites the public to make comments on these topics. A blog website is very easy to set up at www.genealogyhosting.com with customizable templates. The issue mentioned above of advertising to support the free genealogy blog website is not really the same issue since most blog websites are this way anyway (i.e., ad-supported). Everyone expects it.

Like the free "Website Tonight" website mentioned above in which the author has installed an online forum, the free blog website is perfect for genealogists to get started quickly on their web presence. A blog website allows the genealogist to quickly get started communicating with fellow genealogists which is a major purpose of a genealogy website in the first place! Images and photos can be uploaded to the blog website and visitors can be notified via e-mail of new articles of interest to them that are posted on the blog website.

Blogs vs. Forums

Notice that you can instantly setup a genealogy community discussion website with both the free blog website and the free "Website Tonight" website mentioned previously. That is, with a free "Website Tonight" website, you can setup an online forum by just completing some simple wizards which like the blog website allows a community of people to participate in discussions.

So, what's the difference between a blog and a forum? We have included a discussion and comparison of these two in "Collaborating with your Visitors: Blogs and Forums," page 327. In summary, an online forum is a community of members who conduct online discussions of topics of mutual interest. On the other hand, a blog website is controlled by the author who makes statements then invites visitors to make comments. While the online forum was originally a vehicle for community discussion and a blog was originally a vehicle for personal expression, the underlying web application in each case is nearly identical in function. Both are organized by topic, both permit the posting of comments, both encourage the development of discussions, both have e-mail notifications and both are sponsored and controlled by an administrator who has absolute authority. Thus, either an online forum via a free "Website Tonight" website or a free blog website are perfect ways to get started on the initial incarnation of a genealogy website to foster community discussions on your genealogy topics during the startup period.

The Website Authoring Application

In order to have a website you have to somehow create the HTML files of the website. Recall that HTML is the special coding language used on web pages to achieve the

screen presentation and hyperlinking of the website (as well as several other important functions we will discuss later in this guide). If you select one of our "Website Tonight" plans then this requirement is taken care of automatically. However, if you choose one of our standard websites (e.g., the "Economy" hosting plan), then you will be responsible for creating the HTML files of the website. You normally do not work directly in HTML but rather use a website authoring application. These applications allow the author to create the web page content as it should look in the web browser, but underneath the covers, generate the corresponding HTML code for the website content so the author doesn't have to. The author could select one of the major website authoring applications such as Macromedia Dreamweaver or Microsoft Expression Web (which has recently replaced the still popular Microsoft FrontPage).

However, *www.genealogyhosting.com* recommends you take a different approach on the selection of the website authoring application. Remember as we mentioned above ("So What Exactly is a Genealogy Website?," page 4) a genealogy website is a non-fiction literary work, and its medium of creativity is words (i.e., most of the content on a genealogy web page is text based) as well as images of historical documents or photos.

For these reasons, we recommend that either Microsoft Word or Microsoft Publisher be used. Both of these applications produce the necessary HTML files as well as provide the various functions that a genealogy website will require all-be-it without bells and whistles. That is, both are "sufficient" as website authoring applications. But the important point is that both are designed for the written word with extensive capabilities to create complex documents. Also, the author will most likely already own and know how to use one or both of these applications already especially Microsoft Word. In other words, the author can just "write" rather than having to learn a new application which has its own peculiar features, jargon, and procedures.

And the really neat part is that websites created under either Microsoft Word or Microsoft Publisher can be reformatted into "The Book." A genealogy book is the dream of many genealogists. A genealogy book can be produced from the genealogy website using either Microsoft Word or Microsoft Publisher in a straight forward project! The conversion to a book is definitely time-consuming involving much reformatting and tweaking, but nevertheless, the book conversion project is straight forward.

Also, the process of converting a genealogy website to a genealogy book is greatly improved by structuring the information of the website using the multilayered structure discussed throughout this guide. That is, if one observes some design principles, the two projects (website vs. book) can be made to be compatible from an information structure standpoint. There is a detailed explanation of using Microsoft Word and Microsoft Publisher as a website authoring application in "Appendix F: Website Authoring Applications" beginning on page 241.

Also, keep in mind that a website produced by "Website Tonight" is a very attractive option especially for getting started on web technology. However, "Website Tonight" does have certain limitations that the dedicated genealogist turned website author will eventually encounter. For example, a website created with "Website Tonight" cannot be converted easily to the genealogy book. Also, "Website Tonight" imposes restrictions on the actual design of the website. That is, you can only implement the web functions, features and content that "Website Tonight" supports. For these reasons, "Website Tonight" should be used to get started with a genealogy website with an eye on eventually creating a website based on a standard hosting plan.

The Genealogy Website Project: You'll Need a Method to Your Madness

Most modern products are created by engineers using a development methodology. A development methodology is used to develop everything from airplanes, to cars, to consumer products. A development methodology is a written procedure used by engineers to control the steps to create a product. One of the main purposes of a development methodology is to formalize the communication between numerous engineers involved in the project. While the various engineering disciplines have different names for their development methodologies, they all resemble each other at the broad level. Most development methodologies have three mainline phases: requirements, design, and build. A development methodology defines the disciplined activities conducted in each of these three phases of development.

Building a genealogy website is no different from any other engineering project. The genealogy website must be created in a disciplined, three-phased project: First, you have to define your requirements, second you have to design it, and third you have to build it. All this will take many weeks to accomplish (but, remember that if you were to do a traditional book it would take a lot longer!)

Here's an important point: You are essentially building a computer system when you build a genealogy website. Software engineers, like any engineering discipline, have their own development methodology for developing computer systems. Therefore, you can take advantage of the development methodologies used by software engineers to develop your genealogy website. In effect, you can take advantage of the knowledge and wisdom of how computer systems are built to build your genealogy website.

At www.genealogyhosting.com we have developed a comprehensive website development methodology which we use in our own personal genealogy websites. Our website development methodology is based on the systems development methodologies used by computer engineers. Our website development methodology uses the three phases of development (requirements, design, and build), but makes them specialized to the needs of a genealogy website.

Example of a Development Methodology: Building Your Dream House

To understand how a development methodology is used, let's take a more concrete example: Building your dream house. We'll go through the three phases of building a dream house (i.e., requirements, design, and build). Let's say you and your spouse have a dream of the perfect house that you will someday build. When you first start out creating your genealogy website you should think of your role as similar to this – a person with a dream. Let's outline the three phases of “developing” a dream house. Then we can use this example to understand how a website is developed using our three-phased website development methodology.

After many years of dreaming, you're finally ready to make the leap – to actually proceed with your dream house. You and your spouse will be the primary players during the first phase of the project in which you define the requirements of your dream

house. Then you will bring in an architect in phase two of the project who will design the house based on your requirements. Then in the third phase, you will hire a contractor who will build the house based on the architect's design.

The Vision of a Dream House:

The requirements phase starts out by articulating your vision of the dream house. You and your spouse have talked about your dream house many times. The two of you imagine living in the new house. You can easily state your vision which might be something like this:

"Our dream is to have a beautiful new home in the country where our children can grow up and the family can be happy."

Define the Requirements of the Dream House:

Before you hire the professionals, the architect, the contractor, you, your spouse and your family will define in some detail your actual wants and needs for the new house. You might do this in a series of family meetings where you make a list of your family's wants and needs. You are defining the requirements of the dream house.

You are in effect defining what you want your dream house to be like –what it will be like to live in it. In short you are defining "the what" as opposed to "the how" of your dream house. That is, at this point you are not defining "how" the requirements will be satisfied. "The how" is the work of the architect in the design phase. You will make a list of your wants and needs to turn over to the architect who will in turn take your list and design your dream house. For example, your list of wants and needs for your dream house might include such items as:

- There must be a bedroom for each member of the family.
- There must be at least three bathrooms: one for the parents, one for the kids, and one for guests.
- It must have a great kitchen which will be the center of family life.
- There must be plenty of space for us to do our hobbies (i.e., genealogy, carpentry).
- There must be a backyard so the kids can play and the dogs can run around.
- It must have great schools at all levels (primary, middle school, high school).
- It must have some acreage out in the country.
- It must be within 30 minutes from work for both parents.

Not to belabor the point, but let's say it once more: It is very important to notice that at this point you are not defining "the how" – that is, how each want or need of the above list will be achieved in the new house. "The how" is the work of the next phase of the methodology, the design phase. For example, you won't worry at this point about the

house's floor plan. All you are worried about now is "the what." In this case, instead of a floor plan, all you would worry about is the various activities and functions that the family will want or need to do in the new house.

Also, notice that there is a fine line between "the what" and "the how." This can be seen in the list above in which a few of the items could be construed as "hows." For example, the first item "There must be a bedroom for each member of the family" is really a statement of how something will be achieved – in effect its design. To be technically correct the statement should actually be replaced with two more basic "what" statements of wants and needs: "There must be the capability for each member of the family to sleep in the house." Also, "There must be places in the house for each family member to have privacy." However, you know that you will have bedrooms in the house since all modern houses have them so why not just jump to that level right off for this item?

This is an example of a recurring dilemma in defining requirements – determining the level of abstraction. That is, requirements are satisfied by design in which the design is a much higher abstraction compared to the detailed requirements it satisfies. So always use the highest level of abstraction possible in stating requirements which means using a component's obvious design as its requirement(s). In other words, it's not necessary to follow a formal development methodology blindly – when you just know how something will be achieved and there are no other reasonable alternatives for it, then make that the requirement. This will save you a lot of time later avoiding unnecessary effort that is largely redundant.

Designing the Dream House

Once you have a pretty good list of your wants and needs for your dream house, you can bring in the architect. You and your spouse will have a meeting with the architect and use your list of wants and needs to explain to the architect what you are after. The architect will take notes and a copy of your list then go off to design the house.

The product of any design phase of any engineering development methodology will be a detailed specification of "how" the requirements will be realized. Most formal development methodologies will produce a set of design documents for this purpose. For example, for a house, the design documents will specify how the house will be built – every detail of its construction. These design documents will be in sufficient detail so a contractor (the next phase) can build the house. You and your spouse can compare the design document you get back from the architect with your list of requirements for your dream house to see how each of your requirements is satisfied before you authorize the next phase.

For a house, this level of detail is necessary but for a genealogy website, there is not a need for a formal design document like this. The reason why is that the purpose of the design document is to communicate between three parties: the owner, the designer and the builder (i.e., for the dream house, you, the architect and the contractor). However, a genealogy website is usually built by only one person so communication is unnecessary. However, it is still very important to distinguish between the two phases, the requirements ("the what") phase and the design ("the how") phase and to avoid the temptation of mixing the two.

Build the Dream House

The contractor will then take the design documents provided by the architect and build the house. Every engineering profession from airplanes to small appliances will have its own development methodology but all will have a strong discipline that requires that the design document be followed to the letter – in other words, not to deviate from the specifications. This is actually one place the development of computer systems such as genealogy websites will differ from the other engineering disciplines. A website is best developed using iterations – repeated cycles of designing and building with nothing set in concrete. We will return to this point in the design chapter (“The How: Designing the Genealogy Website,” page 53).

Summary of the Completion of the Dream House

In the description above, we have summarized the completion of a dream house. You can use this example as a handy reference to how a genealogy website is created using our website development methodology. We will summarize our methodology in a moment (as well as present it in detail in the following chapters). But here is a quick list of the correlation between the dream house example and our website development methodology:

- Requirements (results of the family meeting) – the subject of phase 1 of the project and described in detail in the chapter “The What: Defining the Requirements” on page 41.
- Design (done by the architect) - the subject of phase 2 of the project and described in detail in the chapter “The How: Design” beginning on page 53.
- Build (done by the contractor) – the subject of phase 3 of the project and described in detail in the chapter “Building the Genealogy Website” beginning on page 89.

Overview of the www.genealogyhosting.com Website Development Methodology

Here then is a summary of our website development methodology. Like the dream house example, our methodology is divided into three phases. These three phases are covered in detail each in their own chapter in this guide but for now here is a summary.

The What: Define the Requirements (see “The What: Defining the Requirements of the Genealogy Website,” page 41)

Our methodology for building a genealogy website, like all engineering methodologies, distinguishes between “The What” and “The How.” In the first phase you focus on “The What” question. During this phase, you are defining the requirements for your genealogy website.

- Articulate Your Vision
You start the requirements phase by articulating your vision. This is the same point that the couple was in when they were dreaming of their dream house. This is an important first step because it gives you the momentum to complete your difficult project. A vision is at its core very succinct. For example, “Someday I will locate all

people who descend from my great-great-grandfather. Therefore, I will build this website to hold all of the information on all of the lines descending from him.”

- Focus on Your Visitors and Define Their Wants and Needs
You determine the requirements of your genealogy website by focusing on the visitors to it (and don't forget – you will be the principal visitor). This was done by the couple building their dream house when they sat down with the family for a series of family meetings to define their wants and needs. It is the use of the website that justifies its existence and determines its contents and functionality. You will classify your visitors into types then make a detailed list of the wants and needs of each visitor type of your website thinking of the visitors as in a dialog with your website.
- Define the Features You Will Implement
Once you know the wants and needs of your visitors, you can make a list of specific features your website will have. These will be website implementations of the wants and needs of your visitors.
- Identify Your Success Factors
Since now that you have a handle on the features you will implement, then you have a detailed understanding of what your website will provide. At this point, you can then list what you would consider to be a successful website – what would be required for you to have that warm, fuzzy feeling of success.
- Ask the Question: Is This Really Possible?
You round out the requirements phase by asking this basic question recognizing the large commitment that you must make. Time is by far the largest commitment but there are expenses and there is the need for specialized expertise.

The How: Design it (“The How: Designing the Genealogy Website,” page 53)

Once you have determined the requirements of your genealogy website, that is “The What,” you can continue with “The How,” that is, you will design it. In the dream house example, this was the work performed by the architect.

- Structure the Information Contents
You start the design phase by making a precise list of the information elements of the website. Examples of information elements of a genealogy website are the family group sheet, the genealogy of an individual, a description of a locality, a map of a locality – any self contained quantity of information which can be treated as a whole. The information elements are implied by the features you will implement determined in the previous requirements phase. That is, you take each feature in turn and decompose it into its information elements. Then you reduce the combined list to a set of unique information elements.
- The Multilayered Structure
Your genealogy website will use a multilayered structure. A multilayered structure recognizes the natural levels that exists in a set of information elements. A multilayered structure is created by taking each information element and classifying it into a handful of categories (e.g., three to five). Once classified, each category of information elements can be arranged in a set of layers corresponding to the relations between the information elements on different layers. The layers can be

arranged on paper much like stacked bricks and represent the way most genealogists would understand the structure of the information and thus be able to navigate it. Once you have your layers, you can define the individual web pages for a given layer.

- The Three-Layered Structure
The author of a genealogy website can make use of a three-layered structure. The three-layered structure is a special case of the multilayered structure and has 1) a general layer, 2) a synthesis layer, and 3) a facts layer. A three-layered structure can be used to organize any non-fiction literary work which presents complex information such as a genealogy website.
- Organizational Metaphors
You can take advantage of organizational metaphors to organize the web pages of your genealogy website. An organizational metaphor is an information structure well-known to the general public which you can borrow to give the public an instant understanding of the organization of your website. For example, the states project of the US Genweb site (www.usgenweb.org/states/index.shtml) is organized around the metaphor of a map of the United States. One clicks on a state on the map to navigate to the web page of the state in question. Organizational metaphors work very well with the idea of a multilayered structure mentioned above.
- The Generic Genealogy Website
Your genealogy website can borrow from the structure of the generic genealogy website we have defined. Our generic genealogy website is a universal genealogy website that most genealogy websites would resemble as a subset. Our generic genealogy website is based on the GENTECH Genealogical Data Model and demonstrates how genealogy information is naturally organized into a layered structure that any genealogist would feel comfortable understanding and navigating. The budding website author can use the generic genealogy website as a starting template to build their own genealogy website.
- Hyperlink Model
The information content of a genealogy website is made available to the visitor through what we call the hyperlink model. The hyperlink model abstracts the information of the website hiding its physical location giving a structure to the information of the website. The hyperlink model is implemented by hyperlinks which are placed strategically in the content of the website as well as in menu bars to form the overall information structure presented to the visitor. In this way, visitors will quickly grasp the “model” of information in their minds and can navigate the website easily and efficiently even on the first visit.
- Different Types of Web Pages
The actual web pages of a genealogy website will fall into one of a handful of different types. That is, each web page of a specific type will have a specific purpose and a corresponding specific contents. The budding website author can plug-in these predefined types of web pages to get started quickly on his or her own website.

Building the Genealogy Website (“Building the Genealogy Website,” page 89)

Once your genealogy website is designed, you can start building it in the third phase of our website development methodology. In the dream house example, this was done by

the contractor. This will be an ongoing phase because a genealogy website is never actually complete and is continually perfected. In other words, the requirements - design - build cycle will be continually repeated as the website evolves through time.

- What Do I Need?
To build a genealogy website, certain “plumbing” is required including a domain name and a hosting plan. The first task in the building phase of our methodology is to purchase these.
- Tools to Construct a Genealogy Website
The HTML files of a genealogy website are built using a website authoring application. We recommend using Microsoft Word or Microsoft Publisher to build your first genealogy website. Most likely you already own one or both of these applications (especially Microsoft Word). In this way, you can get started without additional costs. Not only can these applications create the HTML files of the website, but they can also publish the website as a book after some straight forward reformatting activity.
- Constructing the Genealogy Website
Our strategy of actually constructing a genealogy website is that you will first build the structure then fill it in as you progress. This is the realization of the idea of “filling in the buckets” mentioned previously. You start by building the complete folder structure of your genealogy website then build the entire complement of web pages using “stubs” (blank pages). In this way the website is always structurally complete and you always have a vision of the overall organization which is very helpful as the website evolves. This strategy allows you to always stay organized as you build the website in short spurts even setting it aside for periods of time as the demands of your schedule dictate.
- Life Cycle of a Genealogy Website
The work flow in building a genealogy website is to make numerous small changes testing each change on your local web browser. Then the website can be published to the web server (the process of copying the confederation of files to the web server) thus making the website available to the public using disciplined change control procedures so as to minimize the impact on your current visitors.

Getting Visitors to Your Website

Once you publish your genealogy website, you will want to attract visitors to it. You can use a variety of techniques to let the world know about your new website:

- The Family
Start by notifying members of the family such as cousins (even very distant ones). These will be your most important visitors and will help you perfect the information of your website).
- Genealogy Bulletins
Contact the editors of various genealogy bulletins of genealogy societies (especially in the locales mentioned in your website) whose members may be interested in the topics of your genealogy website.
- Rootsweb Website Registry
Rootsweb maintains a massive genealogy website registry and they will register

genealogy websites for free. Once registered, your website will be listed in searches on Rootsweb.

- Rootsweb Mailing Lists
Rootsweb mailing lists are the perfect place to announce your new genealogy website. You would enter messages in various mailing lists related to your website such as surname mailing lists or locality mailing lists.
- Get Listed on the Search Engines
You can register your website in all of the major search engines and they will list your website in their search results. Also the primary search engine, Google, which accounts for nearly half of internet searching has a handy web page at <http://www.google.com/webmaster>. This web page shows you how to make your website more "Google friendly."

Your strategy will be to get your website listed in search engines for specific search keywords and phrases that fellow genealogists would use to find the type of information that your genealogy website contains. This process is known as "website optimization." In this way, many of the visitors to your website will encounter it through specific searches in which your website is pertinent to them. Thus, you must plan and execute a campaign to optimize your website and get it listed in the various search engines for your keywords and phrases.

- Pay Per Click Advertising
Google is the major search engine to target. You should definitely use the techniques above to register your website with Google and optimize it for searching. However, there is also an alternative Google strategy: pay for it. Google as well as the other major search engines including Yahoo! and Windows Live Search have pay per click advertising services. For example Google has a service called Google Adwords which allows people to advertise their websites and to be billed on a pay-per-click basis. At around 5 cents per click for the non-commercial keywords of genealogy, it is not very expensive to use these advertising services and it really works. You specify the keywords you want people to use in their searches that will cause your genealogy website to be listed on the sponsored pages portion of the respective search results (e.g., Google, Yahoo! or Windows Live Search). It would cost no more than \$10 - \$15 for several hundred clicks – in effect several hundred people specifically interested in the subject matter of your genealogy website!

What's Next

In the following three chapters, we will present the three phases (requirements, design, and build) *www.genealogyhosting.com's* website development methodology in sufficient detail so that genealogists can create their own genealogy websites. As various topics are presented, we will make frequent references to the appendices where detailed explanations of underlying technical topics can be found.

Throughout this guide, we will trace the progress of the fictitious genealogist Margaret Schmidt as she goes through the three phases to create her Schmidt surname website *www.schmidt14.org*.

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