

# Making the most of your chunk of the Web

By Russell A. Graves

I've learned a lot about Web sites in the past year. I am not new to the Web, but it's just been in the past several months that I've started to put a lot more thought into my site. Since I put up my first site in 1998, visitors to [www.russellgraves.com](http://www.russellgraves.com) remained fairly stagnant and never showed any appreciable bumps in visitation.

About a year ago, a veiled tip from a friend in a casual conversation revealed my problem. "I like going to your site," he said. "But when are you going to put on something new?"

Although he's no Web expert, he nailed the problem.

Since last summer, I've made it a point to keep fresh content on my Web site, and the result is that visitation has jumped some 3,000 percent. The time people spend on the site has grown equally. Most importantly, Web-based sales have followed the trend.

## Web presence?

Should a writer or photographer have a Web presence? I think it's important but not critical. However, if you do have a site, you should have a plan for what you'll do with it. How do you plan on marketing the site? What kind of content will you have? How often will the content be updated? These are fundamental questions that you'll need to answer before you even build your site.

## Your site's function

A fundamental question that every creative content provider needs to answer is, "What is the function of my Web site?"

Will your site serve strictly as an online portfolio, meant only for industry people to see, or would you like it to be a place where both the general public and industry professionals can view your skills? By determining exactly what your site's purpose will be, you can better plan the site's content and how often you'll update it. I want my site to be a place that industry pros and the general public find useful, so I update my site at least once a month.

## Your design

What do Wal-Mart, General Motors, Ford Motor Company and any other Fortune 500 Web site

have in common? They all contain lots of content, are simple to navigate and sport basic yet functional design schemes.

Borrowing lessons from companies who spend millions for a Web presence, I set out to design my own site. What I discovered from looking at big corporate Web sites is that these sites lack background music or sounds, are fairly neutral in their color schemes and don't sport cluttered background images or artwork. Instead, they use what works best: a clean background that makes text easy to read.

Corporate America's design schemes might seem basic in a high-tech world where you can put music, swirling graphics and complicated backgrounds on a site. The absence of fancy Web elements on corporate sites ought to speak volumes to the wannabe Web designer: You don't need complicated elements to have an effective site.

On the World Wide Web, simple designs, uncomplicated backgrounds and neutral colors never go out of style.

## To watermark or not

This is a tricky question for photographers and one I'm asked about continually: Should photographers watermark their Web images? If you want to that's fine, but I don't think it's absolutely necessary. Here's why: Some 10 years or more after the proliferation of the Internet, virtually all industry people know that lifting images off Web sites is a no-no and comes with hefty penalties. I am not too worried about unauthorized use of my images by people in the outdoors industry. Moreover, the images on my site are low-resolution, so their use for commercial purposes is limited.

Therefore, it's the home user or school kid who might take images off my site without permission. If a dad wants to use one of my deer pictures as a background for his home computer, I don't have a problem with that. If a college student needs a prairie dog image to help with a PowerPoint presentation, I don't mind that, either. Who knows? That college student may be a photo buyer in a couple of years. ■

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## Briefly

### Dues Deadline Approaches

The October *OU* included your 2006 dues notice. Please complete the form on the back cover of the October issue, consider a donation to your favorite OWAA fund, include your check or credit card information and mail or fax to OWAA headquarters. Questions? Call OWAA headquarters at 800-692-2477 or e-mail [assist@montana.com](mailto:assist@montana.com). Dues also may be paid with a credit card by calling headquarters. Thanks in advance for considering renewing your membership in this manner. Your membership is important to us!

### Minnesota Deer & Turkey Expo

The new Minnesota Deer & Turkey Expo will be March 10-12, 2006, in Owatonna, Minn. The expo offers a range of activities and events for hunters and their families, including seminars, hunting and shooting equipment exhibits and a display of Minnesotan trophy game. "Owatonna is in the midst of a lot of Upper Midwest deer hunters, Minnesotans and beyond," said Glenn Helgeland, president of Target Communications and producer of the new expo. "Everyone who hunts or fishes knows how to find Owatonna, and it's an easy drive from just about everywhere. We expect to draw hunters from at least 15 states," he said. For event details, contact Target Communications at 800-324-3337 or [www.deerinfo.com](http://www.deerinfo.com).