



Your Web Coach, Christine Chubenko:

Before You Start – Know the Basics

by Christine Chubenko | for Oakland Business Review
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As a website coach, my widest audience is the small business owner. As a small business owner myself, I know very well that we wear many hats - some rather ill-fitting! One hat many are forced to wear is "website developer" because they don't have the funds to have it done professionally. This is exactly why programs like Microsoft Expression Web and Sharepoint Designer and template systems like Website Tonight and Sitebuilder were created. They're meant to allow the non-programmer the ability to build their own web presence and I'm all for empowering the business owner so he doesn't have to go without.

Where I see these programs fall short is in the delivering of basic knowledge to the business owner (user). To compound the problem, is the unwillingness of the user to learn the framework of the components of a website BEFORE trying to build one for himself. For example, not long ago I had a gentleman come by the office for training in Dreamweaver (this is a professional package). He tried to use a template-based system to build his site and was not happy with the results. There were two basic reasons for his dissatisfaction: 1) the template-based system was too restrictive and 2) he didn't really know how to use the package. He then paid a web developer to build his site and he was quite happy with the results. He knew he needed to keep his content fresh so he decided to purchase Dreamweaver and learn how to update certain parts of the site. In theory this is not a bad decision and in the long run, it would be more cost-effective. In practice though, that is another story. When Ryan (not his real name) came to me, he knew what he wanted to update on his site and he wanted me to show him how to do that. I quickly found out that he didn't know that a "table" is a basic construct in HTML and when I tried to explain to him the concept of tables and how they are used in web, he kept saying "I don't want to know that, I just want to know how to do this thing." Clearly, that is exactly what I was trying to explain to him; he needs to understand how tables work and how his developer used them in order to do any modifications. I was able to make my points but I wonder how much he was able to retain because I'm sure he thought it'd be "easier".

If you plan to build your own site, my words of wisdom to you are: **Learn the basic concepts** of building a page and **understand the tools** you are using. It does not matter what you do for a living (brain surgeon, rocket scientist) or how wildly brilliant you are - you can't work like a webbie if you can't talk like a webbie. I'm not suggesting you dive into a nice, thick book of ASP.NET laced with AJAX and a side of Silverlight. No, I'm recommending that you understand the building blocks of a simple website so you can understand what your

tools will allow you to do. Believe me, that is half the battle. I'm quite fond of the "Dummies" books because they get down to the nitty-gritty rather quickly. They're meant for busy people who need info quickly and they add humor along the way. In my opinion, even if you find the Dummies books to be outdated, the concepts and constructs they are teaching are still alive and well. Good luck!

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