

Build Your Own Cool Web Site

You can do it with
a little help from some
cutting-edge software

BY JOE DYSART

Designing a stellar golf course Web site once involved tedious coding and a nerd-like understanding of the 'Net. The good news is that a slew of new software has emerged to help automate the process. This means that heart-stopping golf course photography, audio/video streaming, 3-D imaging and other Web special effects are now within the grasp of any design-hungry personal computer user.

Indeed, given that superintendents are continually seeking ways to better communicate who they are — and what they do for the courses they represent — such cool tools can't come a nanosecond too soon. Superintendents can now use these nifty software programs to catapult their golf course Web sites beyond the ordinary.

Not surprisingly, you'll find most golf course Web sites use at least some of these tools. But there are a few sites

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that have leveraged a range of these tools to create truly distinctive Web presences. In either case, the best of the sites enable a superintendent to reach the community, as well as enable the community to use the Web site as an alternative communications interface to the actual golf course. Golfers can learn more about the design of the course, course conditions, weather and relevant news to make their course visits more enjoyable.

Here are the tools that make this kind of community outreach possible:

General construction

If you're serious about building a Web site, Dreamweaver 3.0, (\$299) by San Francisco-based Macromedia, is the industrial-strength package you'll want to learn. It's designed to let you build Web pages using images, rather than HTML text, and integrates well with related tools such as Adobe PhotoShop.

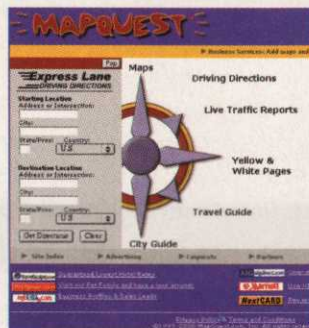
DreamWeaver also enables you to ensure that your site can be downloaded by 'Net cruisers using older browsers, can be optimized to ensure it does not "overwrite" pages you've created with other programs, and enables you to select and resize images directly on the Web page your creating. It's a powerful, pro-level tool that is also accessible to the motivated beginner. (Check out www.macromedia.com for more information.)

Sunol Valley (www.sunolvalley.com) in Sunol, Calif., provides a solid industry example of what is achievable with a program like Dreamweaver. Sporting a well-designed and easily navigable interface, its home page offers quick jumps to all the site's major interest areas. The design is eye-catching, yet the images are kept small so that the site can quickly download over the 'Net.

Interactivity

Generally available as a programming option in any good Web design package, interactivity enables visitors to begin using your Web site.

For some courses, such as the Agate Beach Course (www.orgolf.org/agate-beach.html) in Newport, Ore., interactivity comes with something as simple as a link to Mapquest (www.mapquest.com), a free service providing door-to-door driving directions between any two points in the United States.



Meanwhile, Boundary Oak GC (www.boundaryoak.com) in Walnut Creek, Calif., has a function that allows visitors to sign up for an e-mail-delivered newsletter, which includes news of course improvements, progress on its new irrigation system and other related capital improvements that often fall under a superintendent's responsibility.

Crucial elements

You're blessed if you're already sharp enough to create your own custom Web-site banners, backgrounds, buttons, bullets and the like from scratch.

For the rest of us, there's NetStudio 2000 (\$89) by Berkeley, Calif.-based NetStudio. This is an easy-to-use program that enables a superintendent to upgrade a Web site from dreary to dramatic. It's easy to grasp and it features learn-by-doing tutorials. (Check out www.netstudio.com for more information.)

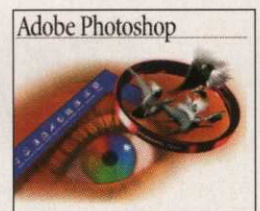
Creation and management

Superintendents with only peripheral graphic needs can probably get away with a less expensive program. But for serious graphics aficionados who are looking for industrial-strength performance, nothing but Photoshop 5.5 by San Jose, Calif.-based Adobe (\$544) will do.

Virtually everything you wished you could do with an image — combine, paint, modify, go crazy with filtering effects — can be done with Photoshop.

New features include multiple levels of undo, text that is customizable, and a magnetic pen and magnetic lasso. (Check out www.adobe.com for more information.)

Courses like the Iron Horse (www.golf.sw.com/tx/ihorse) in North Richland Hills, Texas, have leveraged dramatic photography to offer an aerial photo of each hole. The Richmond CC (www.richmondcc.com), in Richmond, Calif., also boasts pictures of the grounds crew's labors with gorgeous photos of every hole.



Animated images

Too often, animation software seems designed by those determined to make you pay your dues before you can use it effectively. Thankfully, this isn't the case with WebSpice Animations (\$149) by Morgan Hill, Calif.-based DeMorgan Industries.

Simply pop in the CD-ROM, point and click four or five times and presto — you've lifted the animation you want from this program right to your golf course Web page. Choose from 3-D animated objects, letters, words, buttons and arrows and leave people wondering how you became so gifted in Web animation. (Check out www.webspice.com for more information.)

Virtual reality tour

While considered fairly sophisticated, panoramic virtual reality is nevertheless being used by some Web sites to create 360-degree "tours" of products, company headquarters and the like. The technology is perfect for a superintendent looking to give visitors an up-close view of course conditions.

Currently, the standard bearer of panoramic VR software is QuickTime VR (\$399) by Cupertino, Calif.-based Apple. Essentially, users create panoramic VR experiences by photographing a number of angles of a scene or product, and then "stitching" those scenes together with the software to create a 360-degree, navigable experience. (Check out www.apple.com for more information.)



Easy to download

Let your competitors create golf course sites with bloated, slow-loading graphics that no one has the patience to download. But you can take the fast-load, smooth-as-ice-cream approach with your approach by using WebRazor Pro

(\$129) by Los Angeles-based Ulead. This software virtually guarantees downloading fastness and smoothness with tools that squeeze all the fat from images, animation and 3-D design. (Check out www.ulead.com or more information.)

Audio/video streaming

Audio/video streaming can really give the site a professional look. Seattle-based Real Networks is a pioneer of streaming. With its RealAudio and RealVideo Pro Bundle (\$399), you'll be able to reach 115 million RealPlayer users.

Its video scaling feature allows you to import video at any size and scale it down for use on the Web. An optimal bandwidth programming feature enables the presentation to adapt to the specific bandwidth of the user.

In short, users will enjoy the experience whether they're using a paltry 28.8 modem or a Ferrari-speed T-3 Internet connection. (Check out www.realnetworks.com or more information.) ■

Joe Dysart is an Internet business consultant and free-lance writer based in Thousand Oaks, Calif. He can be reached at joedysart@aol.com

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