



## OUT & ABOUT

# Your '40 acres' on the Web, part three: Your own domain

Over the past two weeks, we've talked about different sorts of personal Web pages, and the inventive and myriad ways people use them as a way of explaining why you should want one of your own. While we've covered *blogs* (personal diaries online), *photo galleries* and *personal pages* of all sorts so far, we've saved one of the leading uses for "home pages" for last: business.

Many people have small home-based businesses or little commercial "hobbies" they'd like to turn into profitable enterprises, and the Web can definitely help you do that. In this column, we're going to cover the very basics of obtaining your own domain name, taking control of "serving" your Web pages to the Internet at large, and getting the word out about your pages.

You don't have to be engaged in any sort of business to do this – many technically-minded people set up their own "domains" for purely personal use – but it does take time and money (though not large sums of either if you do it right), so it makes the most sense for people who are thinking of offering some sort of product, service or advice/information over the Web.

### Master of Your Domain

The first step in carving out your own unique space on the Web is setting up your own domain, the common term for those "Web addresses" or URLs you see everywhere, like [www.somebodys-name.org](http://www.somebodys-name.org). Obtaining a domain name is easy: you visit a registrar site like [www.godaddy.com](http://www.godaddy.com) or [www.dotster.com](http://www.dotster.com) and pay them an annual fee for the rights (providing, of course, that someone else hasn't "claimed" that name already).

There are different types of domains for different purposes. Generally speaking, commercial enterprises should use the ".com" or ".biz" domain, charitable organizations should use the ".org" and Internet providers or maintainers should use the ".net" domain.

Often people will register one of the ones they technically shouldn't use because the popular ".com" version of the name they want is unavailable. In general, this is a bad idea: people tend to automatically use ".com" out of habit no matter what domain you actually have, so it's best to get a ".com" and just get creative with the naming if the original name you wanted is unavailable.

Let's say you wanted "www.widgets.com" but somebody already has that. You could much more easily get "www.orlandowidgets.com" or "www.orlando-widgets.com" or "www.widget-world.com" and so on.

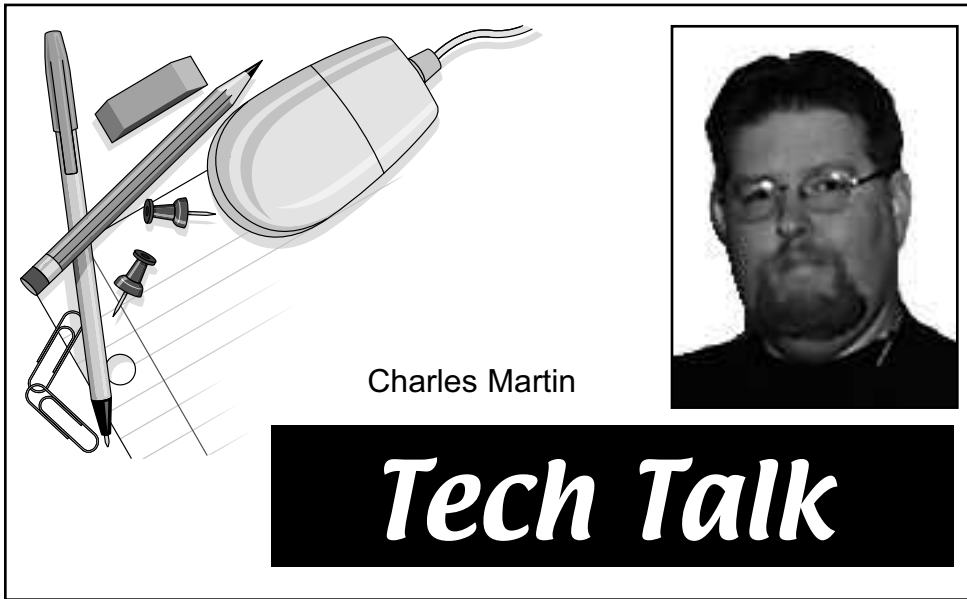
If you have a name you really like and it's totally unavailable as a .com or .net or .org, try one of the new "alternative" domains that recently opened up like .biz, .us or .info. The annual cost of these domain names varies greatly depending on the popularity of the domain (".com" is always going to be more expensive than ".info") and who you register with, but in general a .com domain name should run you about \$10-\$20 per year (less if you reserve the name for multiple years), while less-popular domains like .info can be downright cheap (I've seen them going for \$3-\$8 per year).

### Finding a Place to Park

The name is the really inexpensive part of staking a claim on the Web. The next step is finding a place to host the Web site you will eventually develop.

Most Web-name registrars will gladly "park" your domain on their servers for free or an extremely modest cost as long as you're not doing anything with it, but once you either create a site yourself or hire a designer or company to do this for you, you'll need to pay to "house" the site, and here's where some important pre-planning can save you big bucks.

Most hosting services base their fees for hosting your



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## Tech Talk

Web site on three important factors:

1. *How big and/or complicated is your site?* If you're setting up a full-blown company site with catalogs of products, credit card handling, or even just database-driven content, you'll need a hosting company that can accommodate things like (programming languages) PHP and Perl, Web services like secure commerce transactions and what are called "back-end" services like "shopping carts," SQL database connectivity and other programmable/customizable services.

On the other hand, if you're just setting up a basic domain to promote things like your small home business, the site may act more as a "calling card" imparting basic information and just acting as a front door to get people to contact you directly, which would be very inexpensive.

2. *How much traffic do you estimate you will get?* If you're plotting world domination through online marketing, expect to spend a lot of money doing so, both in setting up a world-class site and promoting it so the word gets out. If your goals are more modest, or the primary purpose of the site is to give friends and strangers an easy-to-remember spot to find you, basic hosting packages (that may even pay for themselves through ads on the site) should be more than enough.

Beware, however, any explosion of sudden popularity on your site: just like cell phone minutes, a sudden unexpected rise in visitors could cause "overuse" charges that can be excessive, or even result in the site being taken "offline" temporarily.

3. *Whose computer will the site digitally reside on?* For small or even medium sites, you may choose (if you have a broadband connection and your ISP allows it) to "host" the site on your own home computer (or preferably a spare computer sharing the same connection as your main computer). This requires geek skills, so judge for yourself whether this is an option for you. Beyond the most basic level of visitors, you'll more likely want to look at a modest "hosting plan" that runs from \$5-\$25 a month.

As your site grows, you might even need "dedicated" hosting (where an entire machine is devoted just to your site) that costs up to around \$100/month, and beyond that you might even want to look at "co-location" (where you provide the dedicated computer, and the hosting company just provides storage for it and lots of bandwidth at their location) which can run hundreds of dollars a month (but bear in mind – even this level of professional hosting still costs a lot less than even one large physical office).

### When the Going Gets Costly, the Cheap Get Clever

It's possible to combine several modest services in order to produce a slick-looking site that seems more expensive than it really is. Seeking out good-looking Web-site templates (warning: you really need to have a good sense of taste and design for this to work) or hiring talented designers to do the "groundwork" for your site (leaving you a way to easily update changing information without having to "redesign the wheel" each time), then locating it on an inexpensive server or your own home connection, is one way to "go cheap," at least at first. Godaddy.com and other registrar or hosting

companies offer an inexpensive service called "masking" that allows you to shield the actual Web address of your on-the-cheap site behind a professional-looking domain name – visitors never know that they're actually looking at your "free" AOL homepage space, and think they're visiting [www.big-business-enterprise.com](http://www.big-business-enterprise.com) or what have you.

One good reason to do this is to create a much easier-to-remember Web address. Friends, family and colleagues are much more likely to visit [www.bobs-family.org](http://www.bobs-family.org) or [www.thebobinsons.net](http://www.thebobinsons.net), than they are to remember something like [homepages.earthlink.net/~gsmith/personal/family.html](http://homepages.earthlink.net/~gsmith/personal/family.html).

Another great idea is to register a domain name like [www.smithfamilyreunion.us](http://www.smithfamilyreunion.us) or [www.my-favorite-cause.com](http://www.my-favorite-cause.com)

and "link" the name (via masking/forwarding) to a pre-set-up Web offering like a Cafe Press "Web store." Many clubs, groups and other organizations have done exactly this – Cafe Press sets up the Web site for you and offers merchandise like T-shirts, mugs and mousepads with your logos/designs on them for free (in exchange for a hefty cut of the sales of the items). All you do is come up with a catchy domain name, register it and point (mask/forward) the name to the pre-made Cafe Press site. There's no faster or simpler way to start a modest business.

For more details about how Cafe Press works, just visit [www.cafepress.com](http://www.cafepress.com), or visit the Florida Macintosh User Group's sample store: [www.cafepress.com/flmug](http://www.cafepress.com/flmug).

### Promotion, Promotion, Promotion

One of the biggest challenges to a Web site isn't the mechanics of putting a site together or finding a location for it: it's getting the word out. This can also be the most expensive part of a professional (or even amateur) Web site, but it doesn't have to be.

The main advice I'd offer in this area is to use the "Web-ranking" or "traffic-generating" options offered by your hosting company or registrar – beware the pop-up ads that promise to sail your site to the top of the Google listings; they are mostly scams.

Another cost-effective way to promote your site is to take out "banner ads" on Web sites that are very similar or take a similar attitude/worldview/philosophy to yours. Seek out sites that attract the same audience as you are but are better-established or more popular than yours (but not the huge corporate sites), and inquire about ad rates.

You'll often find that they are incredibly reasonable, particularly as compared to more "hit-and-miss" forms of advertising like TV commercials or mass-mailings.

In some cases (particularly where your site needs to attract more of a local audience), print or radio advertising can be very effective. Offer to be interviewed on your local station's "computer guru" show, sponsor a talk or NPR radio show that reaches the sort of people you're trying to reach, or selectively advertise in publications that regularly cover the subjects/items/area your site covers.

Obviously we're a little biased being a community newspaper, but properly targeted ads can be very effective in print – the trick is spending your ad dollars wisely on efforts that you know are being seen by the people you need to attract.

If you do some pre-planning that will narrow the focus of what you want to say, use professional methods to make sure your message is getting across, selectively advertise to targeted audiences in other media and offer visitors a compelling reason to return, your success as a Web site operator on either a professional or personal level is almost assured.

Whether you're interested in selling something or just attracting followers to your pet cause, a nicely-done, easy-to-remember Web site can more than pay for itself – it can open new vistas that expand the horizons of both your visitors and yourself.

## Big 'Mac' attack at UCF: Tiger arrives April 29, free demonstration and meeting follows on May 3

On April 29, Apple will unleash "Tiger," a.k.a. Mac OS X 10.4. The UCF Computer Store in the Student Union will have a special sale starting at 6 p.m., and invites anyone connected with the university or other large educational institutions to purchase their copy of Tiger or any of Apple's latest offerings, including the ultra-cool iPods or new Mac mini. The new UCF AppleCorps user group in conjunction with the Florida Macintosh User Group (FLMUG) will also present a demonstration of Tiger that should be of high interest to Mac owners, possible Mac "switchers" and PC enthusiasts (since many of the features of Tiger will be copied into Longhorn, due in late 2006) at a public meeting at 6:30 p.m. May 3 at the Communications Building, Room 101. John Allen (Apple Systems Engineer) will be the special guest, going over not just Tiger but also Apple's new video-editing suite of products. Both events are free and open to the public.