

Build ^a Website for Free

Second Edition

Personal Site • Blogs • Wiki
Small Business Site
Multimedia Based Site



Build a **Website** for **Free** Second Edition

Mark Bell

que[®]

800 East 96th Street,
Indianapolis, Indiana 46240

Build a Website for Free

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Lora Baughey

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About the Author

Mark Bell is a Ph.D. student at Indiana University. He studies media and its effect on social relations. Before returning to school, Mark worked for 15 years in the software industry as a technical writer, trainer, and developer. He started his first web design company in 1993 and has been making pages and managing websites ever since. He is the father of Jackson, 8, and the husband of Sarah “Intellagirl” Robbins. Mark blogs at blog.markwbell.com. You can find him on Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

Dedication

To three people:

To Sarah, my wife, who because she believes in my strength and determination fuels those two things. She gives me energy, life, and love. I am damn lucky to have found her.

To my son Jackson, who is a constant source of joy and inspiration. He surprises me every day with his warmth and intelligence. Son, I give my best to you.

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Introduction

So you want to build a website for free?

If you are reading this book, you probably want to build a website (even though you might not know exactly what that is), and you want to do it for free. If you have no idea what a website really is and need some basic information, you'll learn this later in the Introduction. If you know what a website is, you probably are more interested in the "free" part. All the software and tools I discuss in this book are free of charge. If at all possible, I choose the best free alternative to commercial software.

In the past decade, the Internet, and in particular the World Wide Web, has grown considerably. There are now millions of websites on the Internet covering all sorts of subjects, from family and business to education and entertainment. Some websites have been long-lasting and useful (Yahoo.com and Google.com), and others disappear as quickly as they come. You might have plans to create a website that you hope millions of people will go to, or your site's purpose might be just to stay connected to your family members.

IN THIS INTRODUCTION

- Why This Book?
- For Free, Really?
- I Can't Really Do This... Can I?
- Note on Edition 2
- How to Use This Book
- Web 101
- What Is a Website?
- What Is a Web Browser?

Why This Book?

You probably picked up this book because you have an idea in your head—an idea you want to share on the World Wide Web in the form of a website. You might have a fully formed idea or just a kernel of that idea, but you have a starting point. Maybe you have been given the job of creating a website and have no idea where to start, or maybe you have a burning desire to connect with other people.

Regardless of your reason for creating a site, this book will help you understand the process of how those ideas become a website and then walk you through creating five different sites for specific purposes. These sites include a basic website, a blog, a content management system, a wiki, and a multimedia website. You might not know or care about all these, but this book will show you how to build them for free. This book covers how to plan, design, build, and maintain a website, and it does it using free tools. With simple step-by-step instructions, you will be up and running on the World Wide Web before you know it.

For Free, Really?

You're probably wondering how much this is going to cost. The book title says "free," but you have never believed anything was really free. This book is unique.

Different people and websites will promise you the lowest prices possible on website tools, hosting, and creation. Conventional wisdom says nothing is free. Generally, the more you invest in a project, the more options you have.

In the past five years, though, open-source and free software have been flooding the World Wide Web and allowing people to create fun, interesting, dynamic web pages for very little money. This book tries to use free software as much as possible. If people are giving away quality software, you should use it.

Open-Source Software

In the previous section, I threw out the term "open-source software," and you're probably wondering what the heck that is.

Most software, including your operating system, word processor, and web browser, is more than likely developed according to a traditional software model. Software is traditionally created by a bunch of guys who run a

software company, which runs on money. The people who run the company pay programmers to write and test software, and they employ marketing and salespeople to sell their products to you, the consumer. Most software has been developed this way since the mid-1980s.

The Internet is in a constant state of flux. Some people call this a revolution and others just a fad, but in reality, open source is here to stay. Open-source software is created by teams of people working for free, and it is given away to anyone for free. More than that, open-source projects also give away the parts that make up software, or “source code,” which a traditional company keeps secret. The theory behind all this is that the more people programming, editing, and using the open-source software, the better it becomes. Also, when the work is distributed among thousands of people, most of whom will never meet, the workload per person is drastically reduced. Don’t tell the traditional software industry, but their programmers are working for them and then going home at night and doing the same thing for free!

In this book, as much as possible, we will be using open-source software because it is usually free and, surprisingly, is some of the highest-quality stuff available. There are open-source operating systems, web browsers, graphics applications, and even website management tools. All these are covered in this book.

With each piece of software I recommend, I list where to find the latest version and what the major features are.

Is This Legal?

Your next question might be, “If I am getting this stuff for free, isn’t that stealing?” I am not advocating or recommending that anyone steal or pirate software. All the software I recommend is given away for free. The software industry is full of hard-working people who deserve to be paid for their work. If there is a price for software, I tell you about it. Where there is a cost, I provide a free alternative and let you know the differences.

I Can’t Really Do This... Can I?

In my years of teaching software in the corporate and academic world, I have heard people say they can’t do some computer task that they need or want to do because of this or that reason. Some people say they are afraid of computers or “just don’t get them,” some blame the hardware, and some just say they can’t understand these crazy things. This book is designed to get even the

most apprehensive would-be website developer, who has no special qualifications or knowledge, up and running in no time. I explain each task to you in easy-to-understand instructions.

Note on Edition 2

Any book about the web or the Internet in general is out of date as soon as it is finished. The World Wide Web continues to change at an accelerated rate. This book is no exception. For this reason, a new edition has been created to update the text. As part of my revisions, all the links have been checked and new ones added. Also, the mobile web has exploded in use and market share. The tablet market looks like a possible contender for the next big thing, so I have added sections on the iPad also.

How to Use This Book

Throughout this book, you will find special little notes to help you along the way.

Tips and Cautions

tip **Tips** contain little bits of information that will give you extra knowledge or save you time or money. They don't present mandatory information, but you should pay attention to them.

caution **Cautions**, on the other hand, are important to pay attention to. A Caution is must-read information that you need to know before proceeding with the task at hand. Please pay close attention to them.

Geek Speak

The world of computers and the culture that surrounds them are full of jargon. It is almost as though acronyms and arcane terms are the fuel that the software industry uses. When the terminology gets techy in the book, the Geek Speak sections decipher the lingo for you and use common, simple words to explain what is going on.



Whenever a line of code is too long to fit on one printed line, we've broken it and used a code-continuation arrow to indicate the continuation:

```
<param name="movie" value="http://www.youtube.com/v/  
-xL7YSsEy0s?fs=1&hl=en_US"></param>
```

Web 101

This book is trying to make it as simple and cheap as possible for you to create a website. To make sure this can happen, it's important to cover some basics, including how the Internet and web work. You may use the Internet every day but not know what it really is. For me, a basic understanding of the building blocks of the web helps me build better websites.

If you already know how the Internet works and what a web page and website are, skip ahead to Chapter 1, "The Order of Things." But if you want a quick refresher on some basic Internet facts, read over this section before moving on to the rest of the book.

What Is the Internet?

Can you even remember a time before the Internet existed? Depending on your age, the answer may vary, but how did we ever get along without it? Think about trying to find a new restaurant to go to before the Internet was around. You would have to look in the Restaurant section of the Yellow Pages, use a map to find the street where the restaurant was, and then devise your own directions to get there. With the Internet, you can not only do most of that with the click of a button, but you can read the menu, see pictures of the interior, and maybe even make reservations—all without leaving the house or picking up the phone. But what is this incredibly useful thing we call the Internet?

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