Building web pages for fun and profit … a prelude

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Rightyho! You have just loaded Microsoft Office 2001 and the ephemeral wizards and paper-clip office assistant announces that publishing html documents is simply a whizz. One mouse-click and you are off and running. Or so they say. But — alas — that's not how it is, or should be. A few hurdles will present themselves on the way to web-publishing nirvana, automated processes or not.

Consider, for a moment, the end user in relation to the content of your pages. Do the pages deliver the message you want to get across? Do the pages you build fit as part of a whole, or are they a collection of ideas in the making? One of the most obvious mistakes in webpage design (and website creation) is to attempt to translate a perfectly acceptable printed document that resides neatly in the environment of manila folders and filing cabinets into something that can take on a life of its own on the web. The two just do not mix.

Webpage content must attract an audience that wants to find information quickly and easily, and without fuss. Even a single printed A4-size page can be too much information for a single page on the web. And depending upon the type of message you are trying to convey, the content of a given webpage has to suit user expectations, or at the very least follow a number of conventions — if you want to get your message across quickly.

Over the coming months, within the pages of *inCite*, I will be highlighting the various stages in the planning and implementation of websites.

You may discover, as we did here at ALIAnet, that the best way to build a site that people will keep coming back to is to build pages that focus on the user — the person viewing the pages at the other end of the client-server food-chain. By throwing away the templates that invariably are packaged with html-building software (or by throwing away the software, too), and concentrating instead on the overall structure and content, good website design is a relatively simple task that demands relatively simple tools.

As with any building, the tools that you use can be important — but it is equally important to take a step back and work out what you are building first, long before loading those wizards and office assistants and getting Microsoft to do your bidding. Think beyond the 'where do you want to go today?' paradigm, and work out where you want your website visitors to be at the end of the day. Next month: how to plan your website. ∎

A party for Warren Horton

ALIA NSW Branch Council invites members and friends to celebrate Warren Horton's career, which began at the State Library of NSW, and to help launch him into retirement.

As everyone knows by now, July 1999 will see Warren's retirement from his post as director-general of the National Library of Australia — a position from which he has reigned as the 'high priest of information' for fourteen years.

New South Wales Branch Council will host a reception for Warren in the Mitchell Galleries at the State Library of NSW on Tuesday 20 July 1999, 6 for 6:30 pm.

RSVP and pre-payment for this event is essential (ALIA members – $25, Retired and life members – $20, Non-members – $30; Students – $20).

Cheques should be made payable to ALIA NSW Branch and sent to the local presence co-ordinator, PO Box 246, Artarmon NSW 2064. Further details can be obtained from Jo-anne Fuller or Heather Black, phone 02 9906 6000, fax 02 9906 5987, or jojo1@ozemail.com.au.