◆ **Get Started**   Monica Shaw

6 essentials of a professional Web site

One of the best ways to market yourself as a writer is to create a professional Web site. Think of it as an online portfolio that shows people what you can do. Like a portfolio, your Web site helps you promote your work, particularly when sending queries to editors and agents. For example, if an editor wants to see a writing sample, you can e-mail her a link to the sample on your Web site. This avoids e-mail attachments, which some editors dislike due to virus risks and spam filters.

You can gain further exposure by including a link to your Web site on your business card, in your e-mail signature, and on social-media sites such as LinkedIn and Twitter. But before you get busy promoting your site, make sure that it accurately represents you as a professional. Here are a few basic elements that every professional writer's Web site should have:

Clean design and easy navigation. First impressions count, so it's important that your Web site is clean and well organized. Make sure the home page briefly describes your work and contains an obvious menu with links to your writing samples, resumé and contact details. This menu should be present throughout your site so that visitors can easily navigate from page to page. Choose your font and background colors so that the text is easy to read and does not strain the eyes. Also, your site should be free of ads, animated graphics, sound, and anything else that distracts from the written content.

Samples of your best writing. After navigation, writing samples are the most important part of your professional Web site. To get people to view them, your samples must be easy to find and read.

Create a page on your site that lists the titles of your samples in reverse chronological order, including the name and date of publication. Each line item should link to a page containing the individual sample. Avoid Word files, PDF documents or any other format that requires visitors to download anything. Instead, display your sample in plain text or as an image of the clipping at a reasonable size.

Your writing resumé. What portfolio is complete without a resumé? This is where visitors can view a complete list of your writing credits and work history. As with writing samples, your resumé should be easily accessible, so create a page that displays your resumé on-screen. You can still link to a Word version of your resumé that visitors can download if they choose. Just remember, you want to minimize the number of mouse clicks it takes for users to get to the information they want to find. If you don't have a resumé, this is the perfect excuse to create one. If you've had jobs that are only tangentially related to writing, consider using a skills-based resumé that focuses on your writing skills rather than your work history.

Who you are and what your writing is all about. Most professional Web sites contain an "About" page that describes the service. Your Web site should be no different. In your case, your service is writing, but what led you to writing in the first place? Use an "About me" or "Biography" page to tell your story.

Contact information. The whole point is to get published, so include, at the minimum, an e-mail address so editors can get in touch with you. If you feel comfortable listing your phone number and/or address, include this as well. The most important thing is that you make this information easy to find.

A sensible domain name. A domain name (e.g., www.monicashaw.com) is the address people will use to connect to your Web site. Invest in a domain name that describes you and your profession. Stick with ".com" and ".net" suffixes. Avoid generic domains that include "geocities.com" or "blogger.com," or domains with a less common suffix such as ".info" or ".biz."

Remember, your Web site can be an asset or a liability depending on how you present yourself. But if you make sure your Web site has all of the elements I've described, it will become an indispensable marketing tool that you can use to promote your writing.

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Monica Shaw is an internationally published freelance writer who has been building Web sites since the early days of the Web. She co-founded www.writersresidence.com to help writers create their own online portfolios. Web: monicashaw.com.

RESOURCES

- **Sitelutions** (www.sitelutions.com) Domain registration and Web hosting at reasonable prices. Plus, 10 percent of profits go to charity.
- **WordPress** (http://wordpress.com) Create a free "wordpress.com" Web site and blog, or get domain registration and customizable templates with its paid service.
- **Writer's Residence** (www.writers residence.com) Specifically for writers. The monthly fee includes customizable templates, tools for writing samples, and support for your own domain.
- **Writing for the Web** (www.useit.com/papers/webwriting) Jakob Nielsen's tips for writing Web pages.