

LAUGHING BEAR NEWSLETTER 127

Wireless Web *(continued)*

version, then it looks for plug-ins, the little programs that let you listen to music and view videos and animation. It records this information in a little text file and places the "cookie" on your hard drive so it can avoid doing all that work again the next time you come.

Once it knows the configuration of your computer, it may ask you if you want to load a missing plug-in or upgrade your browser. Finally, it adjusts the web site to match your software so you see and hear it the way the webmaster intended.

That is a lot work to compensate for two companies who couldn't agree on a standard, but it's certainly not the first instance of that kind of behavior. In personal computers, we have Windows and Macintosh. In video recording, Betamax and VHS. In audio recording, cassette and 8-track. And everyone in the wireless industry is doing their best to assure this doesn't happen again. Unfortunately the way they are doing it is the same old way. The companies are all championing their own technology by making sure that theirs is the one used by the most people.

The most popular wireless web language is WML. This is the one used by the major cell phone companies and free web hosting sites I have found. It is based on XML, which will also be a major player in the future of wireless. XML is similar to HTML, so if you know HTML, you won't have too much trouble with WML. The code looks very similar, but the rules for using it are very strict.

The protocol for WML sites is WAP (Wireless Application Protocol). Your wireless web address is going to be similar to your world side web site, but the address (URL) will start with WAP instead of WWW.

You may have already received offers for free software to build your own wireless web site and free hosting for that site when you've built it. If not, go to <http://www.coffeeup.com/wireless> and you can get both. (As with HTML, you can also write WML code with any simple text editor, the editing software just makes coding easier and lets you preview your work.)

CoffeeCup Software is a little company in Corpus Christie, Texas. I have used several of their products to build and maintain web sites, including their HTML editor, and I highly recommend them. The software is inexpensive, or free in this case, and offers a lot of flexibility and creativity if you don't want to be stuck with the limitations of WYSIWYG applications like Microsoft Front Page.

All the big cell phone manufacturers (Nokia, Eriksson, and Motorola) offer free software to anyone developing wireless web sites. And a German site, <http://www.ccwap.com>, offers a wide range of free software including browsers that allow you to view wireless sites from your PC, a WML editor, a graphics program to convert existing images into the new .WBMP format, server software, and even a free shopping program so you can take orders online. The site also features tutorials and other information to help you build your site.

So why are they giving the wireless web away for free? There will always be extras you can pay for, as in the world wide web. But companies like CoffeeCup and ccWAP, the cell phones companies, and many others are also gambling on the wireless web. They have jumped on the bandwagon for the wireless technologies they hope will become dominant.

These companies cannot afford to wait until the wireless race is

decided before they can develop their products and neither can they afford to develop software for all the competing languages. So they are developing an entry-level product and offering it free to web developers to ensure as many web sites as possible are built in the language they are championing.

The wireless web as it is now, for cell phones and handheld devices, is a very small piece of the potential wireless pie. The standard established now will eventually be used for wireless networking, which is already becoming available as HomeRF. HomeRF lets you network computers, printers, scanners, and other devices in your home using radio waves. You can have computers in different rooms connected to a single printer without cables.

Wireless internet service, as opposed to phone modems, DSL and cable is already available in some areas. And soon you'll be able to connect your computer to your television, microwave, thermostat, sound system, nursery monitor, and electric barbecue. Your garage door opener will be able to turn on the lights, preheat the oven, turn on some music, and give you sports scores.

All that plus the advancements that will be developed for medicine, business, industry, entertainment, and communication make up the anticipated prize for the company that wins the wireless race. After all, for the wireless dream to work, all kinds of devices will need to be able to talk to each other in a common language. There are billions of dollars at stake for the company that develops and owns the rights to that technology.

Right now, the wireless web is where the world wide web was when we first started hearing about it. But unlike the web in 1995, the

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the ability to establish a presence in the wireless web is being offered to small businesses for free. Why not make the most of it?

Laughing Bear has a really primitive wireless web site at <http://wap.bluedomino.com/users/laughingbear>. I'm looking forward to doing more with it soon, but for now it will give you an idea of how a wireless site works.

You will need a browser (actually it's a viewer that works in conjunction with Netscape or Internet Explorer) to get to it if you don't have a wireless internet connection through your cell phone or other handheld device. You can download a free browser from <http://www.ccwap.com/download.htm>.

If you would like to try a wireless web site, this is a good time to do it. The technology is relatively simple now, so it will probably be much easier to learn at this point than a year or two from now. You'll be able to learn your skills in step with the technology. This is equivalent to building on the world wide web back when all you had to know was HTML.

For someone new trying to develop a world wide web site today, the technology can be overwhelming. There's HTML, DHTML, XHTML, XML, ASP, JSP, Flash, Cold Fusion, and on and on. You don't need all that, but just the volume of acronyms and expensive software is enough to intimidate many business owners into paying big bucks for a web site they could probably build better themselves.

The wireless web is in its infancy. Take a look at Yahoo's site (<http://wap.yahoo.com>), and you'll be amazed by how bad it looks and how little it does. But this is only the beginning, and this time you have a chance to get in on the ground floor - for free. ●

Writing Wireless

(continued)

book on a separate card so the person viewing it doesn't have to scroll endlessly.

Writing for the wireless web is different than a regular web site. On a full-sized web site you have unlimited space to go into detail about whatever your subject is. You can add photos, diagrams, and animation to enhance your presentation. That is why you will want to be sure to tell people who visit your wireless site where your regular site is and how to get there when they can get to a computer.

On the wireless site, you need to be succinct. Put out information of immediate interest. People will expect it to be updated often and that is what will keep them coming back. Keep your world wide web site updated and fresh too, but also use it for archives and background. The wireless web site is where people will check for what's new.

Remember, visitors to a wireless site will probably be checking it when they are away from home and most busy. That's why sites featuring news, stock quotes, and weather forecasts are particularly suited to the wireless web.

For a small publisher dealing with author tours, book fairs, and conferences, the wireless web could be particularly useful for keeping in touch with people attending those events. You could post schedules and changes in plans immediately. Since the wireless deck is a single file and you don't have to worry about photos, design elements, and graphics, changes can be made and uploaded quickly.

During a large book fair, for example, you could let people know which authors are available at your booth when they arrive. You could let them know results immediately when you hold a drawing and announce special offers. You'll have the flexibility

to draw more traffic to your booth when things slow down and you'll be able to back off publicity when you get swamped or want a break.

If you want to keep your site really up to date, recruit a volunteer with an internet connection to sit at your booth and update the site throughout the event.

Whatever you write and present, it won't make a difference unless people know about it. Unfortunately, the wireless web has not grown enough to support search engines (Yahoo's site doesn't even offer searches), so you need to promote your site with media releases, and mention it on all your publicity materials and on your world wide web site.

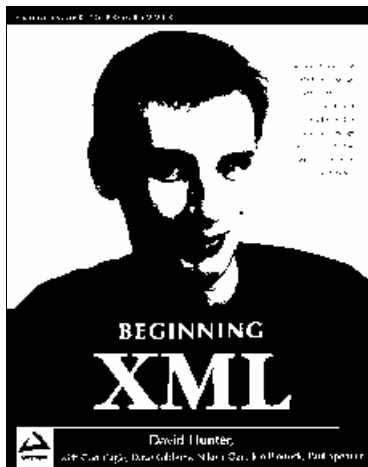
On the other hand, the wireless web is a new frontier and you should be able to get some good publicity for just having a site available. Send out press releases to announce it. You can also add a little wireless browser from ccWAP to your regular web page (for free), to let visitors see your wireless site.

There can be no doubt that as cell phones and other handheld devices become more affordable and more popular in the United States, the wireless web will begin to catch up with the world wide web in technologies. High resolution color screens cannot be far off, along with the ability to take orders online, live discussions, and all the other goodies that make the world wide web dynamic.

All kinds of innovations are already under development, like assigning web sites special phone numbers (like domain names) that will make it easier to access a WAP site from a cell phone and security over the air waves. The people who develop Palm Pilot type devices have already figured out how to put little web cams on their units.

So learn to write small for now. For better or worse, big things are coming in little packages. ●

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Beginning XML

by David Hunter, with Curt Cagle, Dave Gibbons, Nikola Ozu, Jon Pinnock, and Paul Spencer
Wrox Press Ltd., <http://www.wrox.com>, 823 pp, 7 1/4" x 9 1/4", perfect, \$39.99

XML (eXtensible Markup Language) is the hottest language on the web because it allows your web site to speak directly to databases, spreadsheets, and other data handling applications. It also allows businesses to exchange information directly over the internet.

XML is similar to HTML (they both are derived from SGML, a language developed in the 1980's before there was a world wide web). While HTML lets you format and display web pages, XML gives you the flexibility to organize data so it can be posted to and read from databases, etc.

Hunter introduces XML and style sheets, and shows how you can use to more efficiently present information about your books, take orders and collect information about your customers, and use XML to get the most out of your web site.

He shows how to use XML with plenty of practical examples and real life solutions. Like all the Wrox "Programmer to Programmer" series, the book is comprehensive, written in plain English, and very user friendly.

Announcements

- **Small Press Book Fair** (Karin Taylor; Small Press Center, 20 West 44th St., New York, NY 10036; 212-764-7021; <http://www.smallpress.org>) will take place March 24-25, 2001 at the Small Press Center. Space is still available. Admission to the fair is free. Each year they recognize a major figure in independent publishing with the Poor Richard's Award. This year's recipient is Bill Henderson of Pushcart Press, which produces *The Pushcart Prize*, an annual anthology of the best in small press.

- **Factsheet Five** (Dwayne-Michael Alborn, ed.; 32 Page St., Ste. 515A, Providence, RI 02903) is back with a new editor. *FF5* was a vital force behind the personal zine movement in the late 1980's, early 1990's. Each issue reviewed approximately 1,500 publications. It also reviewed books, comics, magazines, recordings, and anything else the editors received.

- **Flat Out Press** (Albert Drake, ed.; PO Box 66874, Portland, OR 97290-6874; <http://www.rdrop.com/~moss/flatout>) publishes books by Al about the hot rod era from the 1930's to the 1960's muscle cars. A lot of people on this newsletter's mailing list will remember Al's lit mag, *Happiness Holding Tank*, from the 1970's.

- **PreviewPort.com** (<http://www.previewport.com>) is a resource for the literary community that maintains a searchable index of authors. You can get listed in the index for free by clicking "International Author Index" and following the instructions to create your own listing, including a short biography, bibliography, and photo. They also work cooperatively with publishers to create web sites for their authors.

- **Comrades** (<http://www.comrade.org.uk>) is an exceptional online literary e-zine from England. Very well produced.

- **96 Inc.** (Vera Gold and Nancy Mehegan, co-directors; PO Box 15559, Boston, MA 02215) has published the 10th issue of its self-titled literary magazine. 96 Inc. is an artists' collaborative founded in 1992 for connecting and supporting new and established writers. Since 1995 they have also been the resident company at the Lansdowne Street Playhouse in Boston, where they present New Works on Tuesdays and afternoon workshops for high school students.

- **AllReaders.com** (<http://www.allreaders.com>) is an elaborate search engine for books and movies. It lets visitors search for book by plot, subplots, characters, genre, degree or type of action, theme, setting, and much more, and all can be cross-referenced. Readers can enter their own reviews.

- **Publishing & Marketing Your Book On a Shoe-String Budget** (Bobbie Christensen, American Self-Publishers Association, 800-929-7889) is a 4-hour seminar that will be given this Spring in Dallas, Austin, Houston, Atlanta, Washington DC, New York City, Chicago, Kansas City, Denver, Albuquerque, Seattle, and Phoenix. Call for dates and details.

Advertising: Insert ads, in the form of flyers to be inserted in newsletter mailings, are welcome. Send 200 copies of the ad with \$50, and the ad will be mailed with the next issue of the newsletter. Contest and other events or promotions that solicit money in the form of reading or other entry fees will not be accepted.

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