Keeping Your Website Up to Date

When something changes "at Internet speed", it's understood to be changing fast. A website that was cutting edge in 2005 now looks about as up to date as a 1987 Chrysler K car. In case you don't remember them, the K cars ("If you can find a better car, buy it!") are credited with saving Chrysler. Although they saved Chrysler, they were eventually discontinued as the world moved forward "at Detroit speed".

Your office probably isn't decorated in the same way it was in 1987. You're probably not wearing a 1987 suit to business meetings. You're probably not using a 1987 cell phone. Instead of a 1987 fax machine, you're probably using e-mail. Why?

In part, it's because new ways are better than old ways. They may be less expensive, faster, or provide enhanced capabilities. If you're not wearing 1987 clothes these days, it might be partly because of fashion. Most of us want to be perceived as being modern and up to date.

It's More Than Just Perception

Your website is your introduction to prospective clients. That's one of the reasons that I set aside some time every year to review the TechByter Worldwide website. It's not a redesign for the sake of redesign; sometimes the changes are major, but sometimes they're subtle. Each year, my goal is to find a way to make the site function better, to make the information on the site more accessible, and to keep it current with the various standards used by browsers.

I thought I'd share with you some of the changes I made this year and my reasons for making them. This year, the changes are mainly evolutionary.

Typefaces and Sizes

The default text continues to be sans serif because I am firmly convinced that it works better on screen than serif faces do. The reasons for this are mainly technical and concern screen resolution and the detrimental effect that these low-resolution devices have on typefaces with serifs.

But at a time when most text on websites seems to be getting smaller, I've chosen to use larger text. This is less important than it used to be because all current browsers allow users to change it. In most browsers, pressing Ctrl and the plus key makes everything larger, pressing Ctrl and the minus key makes everything smaller, and pressing Ctrl and the zero key restores everything to the default size.

Larger type is generally easier to read and, because there's no printing press, no paper, no ink, and no extra cost involved in making everything larger, this change seemed reasonable. I've also increased the line spacing just a bit and decreased the spacing between paragraphs.

I hope that visitors will find the site to be more readable and all of the people I asked to comment on the changes when I was working on the development thought that it worked.
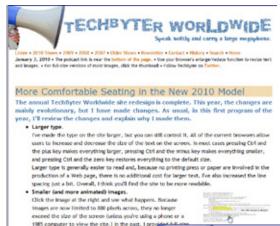
I've kept the width of the site the same as it was last year, 800 pixels. This is important because screen resolution has changed over the years. In the early days, it was important to make sure that the site could be viewed in a "VGA" monitor, 640 pixels wide by 480 tall. Today, few people have a screen that small and I've made several changes over the years. At 800 pixels, the site works acceptably on a Super VGA (800x600) or XGA (1024x768) screen. XGA is considered by many to be today's lowest-common-denominator size. Next year, I expect to increase TechByter Worldwide to 1000 pixels wide.

Simultaneously, it may be important to make sure that the site works reasonably well on handheld devices. For some companies, this is more important than for others. The *New York Times*, American Airlines, and Ameritrade probably pay a lot of attention to how their sites function on Blackberry devices, Iphones, and such. For most of us,

Law of Cat Toy Placement: Cats must knock their toys under the refrigerator.

this is not a mission-critical concern. But the good news is this: Most of the handheld devices do an excellent job of rendering websites even if they weren't designed with handheld devices in mind.

Making Images Accessible

Because I write about hardware and software, the TechByter Worldwide website needs a lot of images. In the past, I used images on the page that were 250 pixels wide. In most cases, these were too small to read, so a full-size image opened in a pop-up window when a visitor clicked the smaller image. Some visitors block pop-ups by default. Beyond that, the system I used didn't always work right with Microsoft's Internet Explorer.

When a visitor clicks the smaller image, it expands on the same screen to a larger version.

Now I limit the full-size images to 800 pixels across so that they no longer exceed the size of the website and the embedded smaller images are limited to just 200 pixels.

True full-size images provide better detail, particularly when the subject is digital photography, but those large images are hard to view and, even with a fast connection, they take a long time to download. Compromising on 800 pixels seemed reasonable.

I also eliminated the pop-up: Instead, the larger image expands to cover the page and, when clicked a second time, shrinks back to where it was. This is a result of using JQuery (I'll tell you about that in a moment) and the function should work the same on all current browsers, regardless of platform.

Adding JQuery

I've been looking at JQuery for the past couple of years and decided to implement it this year because it provides useful features that are compatible across all browsers. This technology is being used by some of the biggest players on the Internet, including such companies as Google and Amazon. JQuery is sufficiently mature and stable that it's a good addition to any site.

Do You Speak Russian?

This year I also added translations. This is something I didn't need to think about when Technology Corner was on WTVN radio. The station's signal blankets Ohio and covers parts of Indiana, Michigan, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Kentucky. Depending on the time of day, the station's signal can be heard in far northern Canada as well as in some of the Scandinavian countries.

As impressive as that is, the coverage pales when compared to the Internet. TechByter Worldwid readers and listeners are now spread across the globe, not only from

California to New York and North Dakota to Florida, but also from England to Belarus, from Norway to Australia, and from New Zealand to Japan. Because of this, it seemed reasonable to provide a translation service and I found one that's provided by Google. There's a translation option on every page in the site as of January 2010.

Call Me!

And I now encourage phone calls even though I don't have the time or the desire to take phone calls. Is there a dichotomy here? In a word, no.

Thanks to Google Voice, visitors can now click a link at the bottom of the page, fill in their contact information, and Google Voice will call me. It will then ring the visitor's phone so that the caller can ask a question or make a comment about the program.

All calls will be recorded by Google Voice.

Google Voice doesn't reveal the caller's telephone number to me or my phone number to the caller.

If you don't yet have a Google Voice account, let me know and I'll see if I can help you obtain one. ß

FTC Goes After Intel

The FTC says that chip maker Intel has engaged in anti-competitive practices. Intel, of course, disagrees. But computer makers say that Intel's "discount" structure is designed to punish those who buy too many CPUs from competitors such as Advanced Micro Devices (AMD).

Intel is the largest maker of CPUs in the world, but the FTC says it got that way illegally. The European Union has said similar things.

The agency accuses Intel of conducting a systematic campaign to block rivals from selling their microchips by cutting off access to the market. Intel says it was simply offering discounts to computer builders who bought a lot of product from Intel. The builders describe practices that forced them to withhold AMD-based systems.

The FTC has been investigating Intel for a year and the charges follow by days a settlement with AMD.

Intel's chief counsel predictably called the latest FTC action "misguided and unwarranted". This is an administrative action, so it will be heard by an administrative law judge within the FTC, but not until late in 2010. ß