

DATABASES FREE vs. FEE-BASED

Web art collections

By Péter Jacsó

Web art (sometimes spelled as Webart) is the collective name for the gizmos used to spruce up Web pages: navigational buttons, arrows, dividers, separators, frames, and background images.

If you ever created a Web page, you know how important they are. If you have not created one yet, you will learn that you cannot live without these Web gizmos even if you are a puritan.

Web art is like clip art and the two often overlap except for one important difference: Web art is always in GIF or JPG format as these are the two graphic formats understood by every browser.

While it is true that the much more space-consuming, bit-map formats (like BMP or TIF) can be converted to GIF or JPG, they may lose some of their fizz in the process. Files in vector graphic formats are popular in clip art but never in Web art because they need special helper applications or plug-ins that users may be reluctant to download just to see a home page.

You may already have a large collection of Web art without knowing it. Most of the presentation programs and all of the Web editing programs come with a large collection of gizmos. The brand new Harvard Publisher package is itself an excellent deal for the software. It is more than icing on the cake that it comes with half a dozen CD-ROMs of graphics for less than \$50 (including the mail-in rebate).

Many of the graphics are explicitly designed for Web pages where size is very critical. The smaller the file size (not the image size) the better, as visitors of your Web site would balk if loading your page is like watching paint dry because of the large sizes of Web gizmos on your pages.

Free collections on the Web

It is just natural that the Web is host to a large number of free Web art collections. There are thousand of sites featuring tasteful and tasteless collections of Web gizmos. You may easily find them at http://dir.yahoo.com/Arts/Design_Arts/Graphic_Design/Web_Page_Design_and_Layout/Graphics/—mind the underscore characters.

I can't give in this space even a one-liner summary of all the sites listed, but it is worth it to scan through all of them to get a feel about the variety and style—and the overlap among sites. A few of the sites are tutorials that help you with using these Web gizmos effectively. The sites really cover a very broad spectrum.

The A+ Art site has a large variety of gizmos under three major categories (icons, buttons, and animated GIFs) and dozens of minor categories. The A+B+C Graphics Web site claims to have the largest number of backgrounds, and it seems to be right. It also has all kinds of other Web gizmos, including nifty 3-D bullets and balls, as well as fonts. So does Cool Archive that also offers software tools like logo maker and button maker.

Although you would only find square buttons at The Button Hole Web site, these are exquisite with covers of very nice textures and photos. It is another question that text on many of the buttons may be difficult to read.

Three sites are not listed in this Yahoo! classified list although they are among the best for Web art: Icon Bazaar at [http://](http://www.iconbazaar.com)

www.barrysclipart.com, Barry's clipart collection at <http://www.barrysclipart.com>, and Andy Art at <http://www.andyart.com>, which is also available on CD-ROM.

Yahoo! has relevant Web art sites in its other subdirectories, so follow the links listed under related categories on the very top of this subdirectory, such as Animated GIFs, Backgrounds, and Icons. The site at <http://www.clipart.com> is also a superb directory in a very tight format.

Subscription-based Web site

Art Today is THE best representative of this category. Many of the other Web sites of graphic art collections include a hot link to <http://www.arttoday.com> that is not only by

far the largest site of any graphics collection but also is the best organized and most searchable. There were more than 750,000 images in its database at the end of January, and the collection keeps growing. The yearly subscription price of \$29.95 for such quantity, quality, and accessibility of clip art (including a special subset of just Web art) is so reasonable that no one spotted the error when *PC World* incorrectly pegged the subscription price at \$29.95 per month (<http://www.pcworld.com/cgi-bin/pcwtoday?ID=9307>). Even for heavy users such a monthly rate would be reasonable. The relative size of the Web art subset may

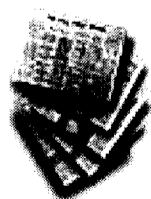
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THE TOP 100 U.S. NEWSPAPERS (BY CIRCULATION)

The Wall Street Journal*	Denver Post	San Antonio Express-News	Syracuse Post-Standard/Herald-Journal
USA Today	St. Petersburg Times	Hartford Courant	Nashville Tennessean
The New York Times	St. Louis Post-Dispatch	Richmond Times-Dispatch	Record
Los Angeles Times	Baltimore Sun	Oklahoma City Oklahoman	Toledo Blade
The Washington Post	Denver Rocky Mountain News	Los Angeles Daily News	Akron Beacon Journal
New York Daily News	San Jose Mercury News	St. Paul Pioneer Press	Grand Rapids Press
Chicago Tribune	Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel	Seattle Post-Intelligencer	Chicago Daily Herald (Arlington Heights)
Newsday	Sacramento Bee	Cincinnati Enquirer	Salt Lake City Tribune
Houston Chronicle	Boston Herald	Austin-American Statesman	Allentown Morning Call
Chicago Sun-Times	Kansas City Star	Rochester Democrat & Chronicle, Times-Union	Wilmington News Journal (coming soon)
San Francisco Chronicle	Buffalo News	Philadelphia Daily News	Tacoma News Tribune
Dallas Morning News	New Orleans Times-Picayune	Memphis Commercial Appeal	Columbia State
Boston Globe	Orlando Sentinel	Florida Times-Union	San Francisco Examiner
Arizona Republic/Phoenix Gazette	Detroit News	Arkansas Democrat-Gazette	Spokane Spokesman-Review
New York Post	Columbus Dispatch	Providence Journal-Bulletin	Knoxville News-Sentinel
Philadelphia Inquirer	Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Sun-Telegraph	Des Moines Register	Albuquerque Journal
Newark Star-Ledger	Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel	Riverside Press-Enterprise	Lexington Herald-Leader
Atlanta Journal & Constitution	Charlotte Observer	Tulsa World	Worcester Telegram & Gazette
Minneapolis-St. Paul Star Tribune	Investor's Business Daily	Palm Beach Post (coming soon)	Charleston Post & Courier (coming soon)
Detroit Free Press	Fort Worth Star Telegram	Dayton Daily News	Madison State Journal, Capital Times
Cleveland Plain-Dealer	Louisville Courier-Journal	Las Vegas Review-Journal	Jackson Clarion-Ledger
San Diego Union-Tribune	Tampa Tribune	Asbury Park Press	Long Beach Press-Telegram
Orange County Register	Seattle Times	Raleigh News & Observer	Honolulu Advertiser (coming soon)
Miami Herald	Omaha World-Herald	Fresno Bee	Roanoke Times & World News
Portland Oregonian	Indianapolis Star	Birmingham News	Washington Times

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- 92% of the Fortune 1000's hometown newspapers
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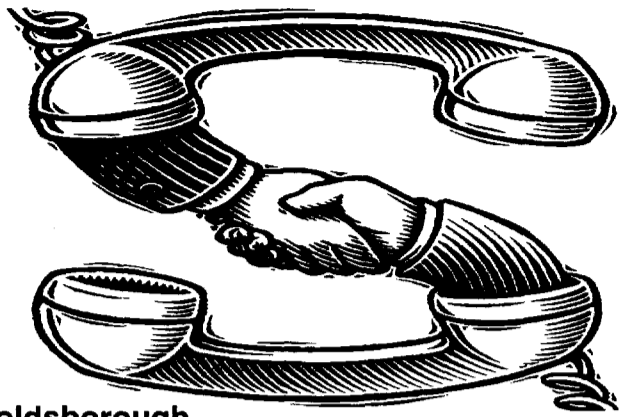


Dow Jones Interactivesm

<http://djinteractive.com>

Making Telecommuting Work

You might want to give it a try



By Reid Goldsborough

Imagine the perfect job. You rise in the morning not when the alarm sounds but when your body tells you it's time to get up. You set your own schedule and work at your own pace, seamlessly managing childcare and other home duties. You take responsibility for your output, with nobody staring over your shoulder.

This is the ideal for telecommuters, employees who work at home, freed by advances in telecommunications and computer technology from the tyranny of traffic and the pettiness of office politics.

With unemployment low and good employees harder than ever to hold onto, it's not surprising that telecommuting, also called teleworking, is growing in popularity. A recent survey by the William Olsten Center for Workforce Strategies found that 51 percent of North American companies permit some form of telecommuting, an increase of nearly 10 percent from a year ago.

Employers can benefit from telecommuting as well as employees through a reduction in office space requirements and expenses. And everybody profits from decreased traffic, noise, and air pollution.

Telecommuting isn't right for everyone, however, and even when it's right for you or an employee you supervise, it's not necessarily a panacea. There are precautions you should keep in mind before setting up an office away from the office.

"Telecommuting works best with employees who are already high performers," says Ann Tiefertaler, a customer service manager for Morristown, New Jersey-based AlliedSignal. The company, active in the aerospace, automotive, and chemical industries, has a history of allowing employees to telecommute, and Tiefertaler recently set up a telecommuting program for one of the 18 employees she supervises who had a new baby.

Everything is more challenging in a home environment, says Tiefertaler. Employees have to be able to work independently, since it's more difficult to ask questions and get support, despite advances in technology.

The most important step a supervisor can take to promote the success of a telecommuting program, she says, is to thoroughly discuss and agree on goals and expectations for the employee beforehand. AlliedSignal uses a series of questionnaires that both employees and supervisors fill out. The questionnaires detail such things as the hours that will be worked, the specific work activities, the childcare situation at home, the equipment and other support services the company

will provide, the expenses that will be reimbursed, and how the employee's performance will be measured.

A common concern among managers is that employees will slack off at home. Interestingly, most studies indicate that employee productivity increases when they telecommute compared with working on company premises. A U.S. Agriculture Department study showed that the quantity and quality of the work of department employees who telecommuted at least several days each week were higher on average than employees who worked entirely in the office. A study of California state employees revealed that two-thirds of managers felt their telecommuting employees were more effective than those who didn't telecommute.

Distractions at home don't bother Lynne Lieberman, a computer programmer who telecommutes for Reed Technology and Information Services of Horsham, Pennsylvania. "I like what I do. I'm never tempted to, say, clean the bathroom instead of working."

Some telecommuters have reported that they miss the in-the-flesh camaraderie and the water cooler chitchat they enjoyed when working in the office. Some also have complained that the distinction between work time and personal time becomes blurred at home, causing them to work more hours than if they had stayed in the office.

Lieberman has avoided these problems by telecommuting three days a week and physically commuting to the office the other two days and by keeping to a regular work schedule. When working at home, she starts the day at 7 a.m. sharp and most days finishes by 3:30 or 4:00 p.m.

To keep the lines of communication open with others in her workgroup, though, she's made it clear that it's OK for them to phone or e-mail her after her normal work hours.

Lieberman says her supervisor was supportive when she asked to telecommute after she and her husband bought a new house an hour and 15 minutes from her office. "He's interested in using the latest management techniques," she says. Other supervisors may require some persuading. Tricks here include describing how companies similar to yours are benefiting from telecommuting and suggesting a 1-month pilot program to start.

You can find related tips, along with a wealth of other information about telecommuting, at the Web sites of the International Telemarketing Association and Council, at <http://www.telecommute.org>, and the American Telecommuting Association, at <http://www.knowledgetree.com/ata.html>. ♦

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be small, but it is over 40,000 elements. In addition, many of the 2,150 fonts and 720,000 clip art images and photos can also be relevant in a Web project.

Earlier, Art Today was available free of charge for browsing the collection, but it must have been so popular and crowded that now you must have a subscription to browse, search, and download the files. Art Today had been an independent site owned by Zedcor until late last year when it was acquired by IMSI, Inc., which has the largest clip art and Web art collection on CD-ROM, and found Art Today to be a perfect complement.

CD-ROM databases

Beyond making the smart decision to buy Art Today, IMSI has been very active in pursuing other products related to image management. It also acquired the Barry Clip Art collection, the Clipart.com directory site, and earlier bought the venerable HiJaak program, and the powerful presentation design software of Corel (originally called Click & Create, now renamed Multimedia Fusion) to enhance its own MasterClips arsenal set, a large collection of multimedia files.

The collection comes on five CD-ROMs and includes Web art, fine art, photos, animated GIFs, and sound files. The first CD-ROM is dedicated to Web art, tens of thousands of them. Just of sidebars, I counted 220 sporting different colors, sizes and patterns. I stopped counting the e-mail icons after 500.

The impressive MasterClips Web Art collection needs a better software and

classification scheme to make the selection process easier. Browsing the redundantly and inefficiently laid out category/subcategory structures makes it longer to find the most appropriate icon or divider line than necessary.

Even with this deficiency the price (\$50) is right for this immense collection. As a bonus, you also get a 2-month free subscription to the Art Today site.

A collection of 100,000 images may not impress you these days since in CompUSA shops there are boxes of clipart collections screaming their numbers in big bold print, such as Broderbund's Clipart 200,000 or Macmillan Digital Publishing's 250,000 Graphics. But all these are dwarfed by the latest version of the Corel Gallery 1,000,000. That's right, it features 1 million files for a mere \$129, and is selling in better shops for below \$100.

Actually, this collection has been licensed by Corel from DeMorgan. The DeMorgan original collection under the WebSpice label offers useful subsets such as WebSpice 1,000,000 Page Design Edition, WebSpice Animations each for \$99 street price or for \$149 as a bundle; WebSpice Themes and WebSpice Objects are at \$99 street price each, or as a super bundle WebSpice Deluxe for the 4 individual packages at \$250 street price.

At first it may seem difficult to justify the use of any of the fee-based products. But if you are a frequent user of Web art, the free Web sites may not offer enough variety and/or fast enough access, and your time will justify the subscription fee to Art Today or the purchase price of the CD-ROM Web art collections.. ♦

eReps support your business

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believe that PeopleSupport.com will lead the way in solving this problem with its easy, user-friendly customer support interface."

A recent study by Jupiter Communications showed that 42 percent of the top Web sites failed to provide acceptable customer service on the Web. These sites either never responded to their customers' needs, took more than 5 days to respond, or did not offer e-mail options to their customers.

According to Northwestern University's Mohan Sawhney, a marketing professor who specializes in Internet-related issues, "One of the biggest challenges facing e-commerce sites is that the look-to-buy ratio is between 1 to 3 percent currently. There are many more lookers than buyers. Support is an important reason why people leave without buying."

e-Reps

PeopleSupport.com believes that in order to replicate a retail environment, live help is essential, and that its eReps are key to the success of this strategy.

Customers are able to interact with eReps via chat simply by clicking PeopleSupport's Live Help button, which is installed on the client's Web site.

PeopleSupport e-Reps are expertly trained in the client's products and services and are accessed from the client site via a customized interface that faithfully reflects the "look and

feel" of their Web site. In addition to chatting with customers, the e-Reps harness the full multimedia capabilities of the Internet by instantly sending Web pages or files directly into the customer's browser.

Said David Nash, CEO of the LA-based company, "PeopleSupport.com will enable our clients to add an additional sales force or customer service department without hiring a single person."

Customer benefits include the following:

- ◆ real-time knowledgeable 24-hour live assistance without leaving the Web
- ◆ personalization of the online selling environment
- ◆ decreased frustration at the buying moment
- ◆ e-mail transcript offered of the entire live help session, including a list of URLs

E-commerce company benefits include the following:

- ◆ increased online shopping cart value
- ◆ improved customer acquisition and retention
- ◆ increased customer satisfaction
- ◆ cost savings over traditional call center

PeopleSupport.com is an Internet-based company (www.peoplesupport.com) that provides online outsourced customer service and sales support, as well as a range of e-commerce solutions, to substantial businesses with a presence on the Web.

For more info, visit the Web site or call (310) 914-5999. ♦