



The New Newfangled Website

[Web Smart Newsletter](#) by Eric Holter, November 2006

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Back in June I mentioned that we had been hard at work on our new website. At that point the site had been in progress for almost seven months. It was supposed to go live in September. Alas, our clients kept us way too busy to finish. Finally, at long last, it's done; its live; its online.

This month's newsletter is a celebration of the finished product. In addition to some re-design we've added new content, updated five years of monthly newsletters, added an online version of our book, produced three videos, and implemented new search engine strategies and content management tools.

Come on--let's take a tour...

Well here it is--the new Newfangled website. Check out our new digs. As you can see we've upgraded the design. Hope you like it! You may notice that at the bottom of all these newsletter pages we've added commenting and blogging features. So feel free to leave us a note with your thoughts on the new design!

Agency Alliance Newsletter is Now Web Smart

We've renamed this newsletter from Agency Alliance Newsletter to Web Smart. It's always been our goal to help design and marketing folks stay up-to-date with the latest and greatest in the world of web development. We leave out the technical jargon and just give the essentials. We're trying to help you stay Web Smart.

Since you're here in the newsletter section, let me start by pointing out the changes we've made to the newsletters. First of all we went through all five years worth of monthly newsletters and undated the content. We pulled a few old ones that were no longer relevant, but the rest are now 2006 compatible.

I've already mentioned the new commenting feature, but we've also added digg and del.icio.us links. If your not sure what those are check out our previous newsletter [Wikis and Swiks and Blogs, Part 2](#). If you do know what these are, please do us the favor of digging our site and adding some del.icio.us links and tags.

We've also added trackback capability so bloggers can add links using the trackback URL (at the bottom of the right column) and our site will automatically create a link back to the blog. This is a mutually beneficial practice creating cross links and enabling readers to easily find related content. Oh, and speaking of blogs we added employee blogs to the site--they're linked off the People page.

Our rather lengthy newsletters have been broken into smaller chunks. This make our newsletters more digestible and helps with content optimization for search engines. All of our lengthy newsletters actually cover several sub-topics as we address each month's main subject. By breaking up the newsletters into smaller sections we create multiple pages, each of which is focused and optimized for search engines. An added benefit to this new structure is that specific sub-topics can be bookmarked or linked to directly, rather than linking to one long newsletter. To print a newsletter we dropped in a print icon in the blue bar for a printer friendly version of the full newsletter.

We've also upgraded the main Web Smart newsletter list page. We created a newsletter index which filters the list by topic. There is also a Web Smart search widget to search for content within the Web Smart newsletters.

One final thing on the newsletters--we replaced the old clunky sign-up form with a fancy sliding sign-up form. Go ahead and click on any of the Web Smart logo "sign up" buttons. See--pretty slick!

Home Page Changes

Home Page Changes

The site's navigation structure has been updated a bit, but the main thing to notice on the home page (as well as in the right column area of sub-pages) are the three videos we produced this past summer. There are three main points that differentiate Newfangled. The first is that we include (for free) an unlimited user license to the NewfangledCMS for every client. The Content Management Included video describes why we do this and the benefits we and our clients receive. The second video Avoid the Illusion of Communication describes how we stumbled upon our grayscreen prototyping process which radically transformed our experience as a web development company. It made our web projects productive, effective and enjoyable for both clients and developers. The third video The Simple Secret to Search was produced to answer one of the most frequently asked questions about web development and website marketing. In it we describe the basic premise behind successful organic search engine optimization.

By the way, existing Newfangled clients may notice we changed the name of our content management system to NewfangledCMS. It used to be called WebTop. We did this for two reasons. One, just about every professional web developer these days offers a content management solution of some kind (though not all of us include the solution free of charge). As a result it can be hard to tell if a web developer is offering their own system or one they've licensed from someone else. In our case we want potential clients to know the we built our own CMS. Secondly, we found ourselves faced with the dilemma that the term "WebTop" is becoming popular as a way of describing web applications that replace desktop applications. For example, I'm writing this newsletter in Google's word processing application (formerly known as Writely). Applications such as these are often referred to as "webtop" applications in contrast to "desktop" applications that are installed locally on a computer. So it goes.

Search Engine Improvements

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Speaking of search engines we made some significant upgrades to our CMS and our content in an effort to refine our search engine effectiveness. The main thing we did was enable a new CMS feature that allows each web page to have a "friendly file name" which produces a short and content rich URL (web page address). For example, a sample URL for a page in our old site used to look something like "www.newfangled.com/contentmgr/showdetails.php/id/10113." These were not a very informative or memorable URLs. Our new site allows each page to be given a friendly file name. So, for example, the URL of this page is www.newfangled.com/new_website. These friendly file names add relevant words to each page's URL improving their search engine relevance. Also, the fewer slashes in a URL, the more weight search engines give to a page when ranking results.

Unfortunately, as a result of renaming every single page with new, better URLs, we had a problem. What happens to all the links already in search engines and all the hard coded links across the internet to our old pages? When people click them they'll get "404 page not found" errors. Believe it or not this was a huge problem and not an easy one to solve. Every solution we came up with created other potential problems. In the end we created a special system that allows us to map old URLs to new ones. So, for example, if you were to find a link on the web somewhere that pointed to our old newsletter "[Words Make the Web Work](#)" (whose old URL was www.newfangled.com/contentmgr/showdetails.php/id/6594) our new site will recognize that old URL and produce a customized version of our search page that contains a link to the new page.

We could have just automatically redirected visitors to the new page, but that would potentially confuse search engines and possibly even look like spamming which could get us blacklisted. The way our approach works, the search engines gets a standard "404 page not found" error forcing it to re-index the site. Re-indexing can take some time (in our case about a week or so). But our mapping solution ensures visitors still get to the pages they're clicking to before and after the re-indexing takes place. It did take me a couple days to figure out exactly which old pages mapped to the new ones and to implement the URL map for each instance. But it is a clean solution for search engines and it keeps visitors on track toward their content. It also provides an ongoing mechanism for all the old hard coded links out there on the web.

Fancy Flash Gallery

Fancy Flash Stuff

Newfangled is not big on Flash as a website development environment. That's not to say we don't love Flash when it's used properly. Our new design gallery is built in Flash. The speed of the scrolling gallery can be controlled by mouse position or directly controlled with the slider bar. The images are still pulled from our content management system (making Flash work with a CMS is one of the standards we apply to proper use of Flash). The gallery can be filtered to show all projects, just Newfangled designed projects, or just projects designed by [agency partners](#). Oh, the video player for our three videos is also built in Flash.

Website Content Macros

Content Macros

One of the goals in redesigning the site was to improve the "stickiness" of our search engine traffic. Analyzing search engine traffic shows that, aside from when people are looking for us by name, most search traffic enters the site through sub-pages, not the home page. This makes sense since sub-pages usually have more detailed content on them than the home page. In these many cases the sub-page where they happen to land acts in a sense as a surrogate home page (for more on this dynamic see our newsletter Who's Your Homepage?) since it is the first page they hit. We wanted to take such instances and make sure that we capture the visitor's interest with our overall message, especially if they happen to be a potential client or agency partner. So we have added the right column on every page to encourage next steps in exploring the site. This section always contains the Web Smart newsletter widget because we like to keep in touch with site visitors by adding them to our email list. The right column also contains a couple other widgets, sometimes a link to one of our videos, or some other widget that speaks of our key messages.

Aside from Web Smart, the most frequently used widget is the Content Management Included video because it's so fundamental to what we do. There are hundreds of pages in the site with this widget on them. Imagine, however, if I wanted to change the content in that widget--site wide. No problem. With our new content macros I can create content like the CMS video widget and simply add a macro link to the side bar area on the pages where I want to include it. If I change the macro content, it changes across the whole site. We also implemented a system that searches all content areas, like this paragraph, for content macros. I can drop the macro in anywhere in the site and it will display properly.

Website Internal Link Management

Internal Link Macros

Another facet of our content macro is the new internal link macro system. Embedded links have always been a struggle when redesigning or maintaining a site. Any changes to a page's file name or URL and embedded links to that page will break. Think of all the times I've referred to other newsletters within the context of another page (I've done this three times already in this newsletter). In our case, because of the friendly file name URL system, every page on our site has a new URL. This also means that every link in the content throughout the site would break. And, in fact, I did have to go through every page and find every instance of internal links and fix them. But now that they're fixed, they're fixed for good! That's because rather than linking to the new URL directly, I used our new internal URL link macro system. With this system I can refer to any page by it's database record number rather than its file name (which can and often does change). The macro system finds and replaces these macros with proper URLs whenever I save my content. I can even change the friendly file name of a page and since I use the link macros throughout the site all internal links will always work. Nice!

On Being Done

It took a whole year. Hopefully, we won't need another redesign for a while, but at least I know that if we did upgrade again in a few years, the job will be much easier with content and link macros. Well, I hope you enjoy the new site and find the content helpful. Again, please let us know what you think by leaving a comment below.

Stay Web Smart.