

Sunday, March 18, 2007

## Building a blog and website II

Our website launched in 1999, and our blog in 2006. Following up on this previous blog entry, here are some more thoughts for bloggers, webmasters, and e-mailers:

- Alexa is an imperfect but useful site for comparing one website's traffic and visibility to another's. Alexa arrives at its traffic rankings through people's use of the Alexa toolbar. Because not everyone uses the Alexa toolbar (I do not, in part because it is one more of the myriad intrusions into online privacy, which is an oxymoron to begin with), the usefulness of Alexa's traffic rankings and statistics is limited accordingly.
- Links to other websites can go dead at any time. Therefore, I use my judgment about which links are more likely to stay or fade (e.g. Cornell's posting of the Bill of Rights is likely to stay, but many new websites fade when it comes time to renew their domain name registration, or to pay a new sitehosting bill). Similarly, if you change the URL/web address of one of your webpages, you may wish to keep a duplicate of the page at the old URL address to accommodate websites that link to that address. We have hundreds of links by now, which are too many to be checking all the time for accuracy. Therefore, on our links page, we say: "IN CASE OF A DEAD LINK: Try finding an archived version of the site with the wayback.com site."
- Sitehosts for websites (companies that provide space to upload and park webpages, and that often provide e-mail service) can change in quality and even existence from one month to the next. Factors to consider in selecting and changing sitehosts include: the sitehost's ability to accommodate your web publishing software and its extensions; whether the sitehost runs redundant servers to minimize having your site and e-mail (if you use the sitehost for e-mail) unavailable when the main server goes down (and Internet servers will go down from time to time, no matter how excellent the sitehost); the availability of sitehost technical support to recognize and fix website downtime twenty-four hours daily; whether the sitehost censors (for me, it is more a matter of principle than practical need); and the overall quality of customer service and fair and accurate billing. Make sure regularly to backup every page of your website and blog, in case the sitehost's backup technology fails or if the sitehost goes out of business. We are on our fourth sitehost -- Daytona Networks -- in seven years, after the previous three started off strong but petered out within as short as a few months or as long as two years. I welcome all recommendations for sitehosts to have in my back pocket.
- Whether or not you have a website, with the Internet, your words can come back to haunt you now more than ever before. Before clicking the send key to deliver an angry message to a website's comments section or to an e-mail listserv that you mistakenly thought was confidential (none are), and before uploading any webpage or blog entry, consider not only that you will never be able to retrieve those words from the recipients, but that the message may become permanently findable on google.com and the other search engines. On the flip side, this phenomenon also gives you a chance to render widespread praise where praise is due, including my praise of Sun Ra's railings against nuclear madness (and the accurate, more blunt, lyrics are here).
- If you refer to a website in a court filing or other important writing, it is a good idea to save the webpage being cited, in case it changes or gets deleted. Thus far, I have found but one scholarly writing that refers to our website, which is a 2003 research dissertation by a Cape Town, South Africa, law school student, entitled "Unsolicited Commercial Email - Overview on possible approaches towards the problem of spamming from an American and European legal perspective." (I would have shortened the title to: "Spammers are Hemorrhoids who Deserve Free Expression Protection Nonetheless"). Page 27 of that dissertation twice footnotes my 2003 article for the Libel Defense Resource Center's newsletter about an ironic libel lawsuit by spammers against anti-spammers. Spammers (as well as everyone else) should not file libel suits, because such suits weaken the very First Amendment that is often the only thing that prevents lawmakers and prosecutors from running roughshod even more over the First Amendment against spammers. Jon Katz ADDENDUM: Here are thoughts on why I blog: By doing this blog, I'm keeping a valuable diary that helps keep my pen sharpened, my self-awareness deepened, and my bully pulpit strong. Also, it can be more important to touch one person in the audience in a valuable way than for thousands to receive the message in a much less profound way.

Posted by Jon Katz in Jon's news &amp; views at 01:40