

Recent sites



Taupo for Tomorrow

Taupo for Tomorrow, is a web-based teaching resource in which pupils can complete practical exercises to learn about trout ecology, freshwater environments and fly-fishing. The site is administered by the Department of Conservation and includes content management, an image library, course scheduling and news publication.

www.taupofortomorrow.co.nz



Delta Cleaning Company Ltd.

Delta Cleaning Company's site is the ideal small business site: fast, concise and attractive. It delivers information about Delta Cleaning's services, its ISO 9001 quality endorsement and provides a form for potential and existing customers to contact the company. The site features original Netco street photographs taken amongst the sort of buildings that Delta services on behalf of some of the city's largest tenants.

www.deltacleaning.co.nz



The ALB Fan Club

For those who haven't met him yet, the ALB is the pseudonym of the Anti Litter Bug, a children's character from the Keep New Zealand Beautiful Society. The ALB has started a fan club to recruit youngsters to his cause of cleaning up New Zealand. The site includes a full membership management database that allows on-line sign-up and full administration for thousands of members.

www.albfanclub.co.nz



The Cranes Association of New Zealand (Inc.)

Take a name change, a new logo and banner, a redesigned newsletter and a rethink on how the country's crane owners and operators look after their industry and fit it all into a newly launched web site. That pretty much took care of available time at Netco for November. The site includes content management, news publishing and a complete, private site where members get the first drop on matters of importance to their industry.

www.cranes.org.nz

Feeling a little lost in the crowd? There are more than 100 million web sites according to an English company, Netcraft, that has been counting sites since 1995 (the year Netco was established).

In 1995, Netcraft counted 18 thousand sites world wide (there were around 1,400 in New Zealand). By 2004 they say there were 50 million and in the last 3 years, things took off to reach 100 million.

Use Google to find who links to your web site. Enter:

link:www.your-site-name.co.nz

into a Google search box and it will list every site that thinks yours is worth a link. (see also p.2 for an alternative in your site stats).

American web site, digg.org, which lists links to interesting stories on other web sites has been going for a couple of years, is owned by a couple of twenty-somethings and is so popular they were offered \$US100 million for it by none other than Rupert Murdoch. Of course they turned it down. They thought they were worth 50% more! Who said the dot dom bubble had burst?

Netco Update

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This issue

Protect your privacy with passwords

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Staying private

Protect yourself with simple password tricks

When I was a kid we left the house key under our back door mat. In 20 years of the practice, no one ever burgled the family home.

These days, the equivalent of a naive trust in a doormat to keep things secure has gone electronic. People will dead-bolt their doors but still leave passwords to their Internet activities flapping on the air-conditioning breeze on yellow post-it notes or they use their first name or (yes, this really happens), "password" as the entry to their on-line possessions.

Back in the eighties, when EFTPOS arrived, it's likely you had only one to remember and that was only 4 numbers. These days, many people have a dozen or more that matter and others that get used once and discarded.

It's not silly to protect your on-line life with passwords that defy a pattern. Your credit card information, personal information, bank accounts, Trade Me access and all manner of things you use every day are kept from being public items only by imaginative and unique passwords. Cunning people have written programmes that attempt (often successfully) in deducing passwords. If you share the same password across all your accounts, cracking one gets someone into your electronic life in the worst possible way.

It's difficult to remember many passwords but persevere, with characters other than a-to-z. Try mnemonics: my own cat's name is hob and he is black, would be "m0cniB&hib". It's not bad, but still just a-z. Confuse it more. Use an ampersand instead of 'and'. Capitalise the cat's name and substitute a zero for the letter o: m0cniB&hib. On-line password systems usually treat upper and lower case letters as distinct so even mixing cases is better than a plain word. 'Passw0rD' is inadequate but still better than 'password'. Toss in some numerals and shifted characters and you're starting to protect yourself better. Be cautious when you let Internet Explorer 'remember' your user name and password. Never, ever select that option when at a public Internet kiosk.

Password protection extends to more than banks and Web sites. Anyone using wireless access at home really should use protection or risk letting any passer-by with a wireless device into his or her network. If you carry a laptop or PDA consider what you'd lose if you lost it and it wasn't protected by a secure password. On a laptop, set a password in the bios which prevents the computer starting up at all without the correct password. Your laptop's manual tells you how.

People who run Web sites can often read your password in plain characters behind the scenes so, if you sign up to a new site, don't type in a password and user name that you use everywhere else. Your private electronic world would be opened to them if they were dishonest.

At a technology conference recently in the USA, a session entitled, "Privacy is dead", an expert asked the name and age of a conference participant and, before the session ended, he had the man's financial history, his relatives' names, his schooling record and his social security number. He was even able to tell the dumbfounded participant that someone else had been illegally using his social security number in another state for nearly twenty years!

Against an expert like that you may not have a chance to hide but secure passwords certainly give you a fighting edge against casual snoopers.Ω

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Stats and lies

How To make sense of your Web site's activity

Web Sites hosted through Netco all share a clever piece of software that ticks away in the background, recording all activity associated with the site.

The software is a Web site statistics package and in our case, it's AW Stats and its value lies in the figures it gathers, not in its prettiness, of which it has none. AW Stats runs constantly on the server on which your site is hosted and interprets all the records of visits that the server gathers. It records when the visitors arrive, which pages they looked at, how long they looked at them, what sort of operating system they were using, which browser they used and even where they were in your site when they clicked their way off to somewhere else.

Site statistics tell a tale about your site and you should be checking them frequently, seeing which combination of pages and links attracts most visitors, holds them for longest and results in sales or views. This is a complex discipline and here, we are describing just the bare bones.

Hits

Hits count the number of 'things' you send out to a visitor when he or she sees your web page. 'Things' include a count for each image and even the the page itself. In other words, if you have the page, five mug shots and your banner image, someone viewing your pages counts as 7 'hits'. Distrust any organisation that advertises fantastic numbers of 'hits' on its web site. It's an



interesting, if extremely inflated, figure of site popularity.

Page views

Page views record the complete pages viewed by your visitors. This is a good month-by-month figure to track to see whether interest in your site is waxing or waning. It's more accurate when viewed within your organisation and more honest, when publicised, than straight hits.

Bandwidth

Bandwidth measures the bits and bytes that flow from your web site to fill the screen of a visitor.

For you to see the videos on YouTube or the scenery on Google Earth, bits and bytes are sent to your computer down your Internet connection. The same happens when someone clicks to view your site except it's you sending out the bits and bytes. Your site host buys bandwidth and sells it on to you.

If your site publicises something amazing, expect more visitors and hence, that you'll expend more bandwidth.

It can be a Catch 22: you want to be popular but you don't want to be exposed to too much cost in bandwidth. Even without becoming popular, watch for increased bandwidth. Perhaps you are offering large PDF files for download (make sure they're text and not images of pages such as a modern photocopier produces).

Maybe you're putting images up on the site at 300 dots per inch (they should be at 72 dpi) or offering Word documents with images embedded in them for download (reduce the image resolution and put the document into a PDF). All these things (and many others) contribute to large bandwidth use because they occupy more bytes of disk space and consequently increase traffic when your web site serves them to visitors.


URLs

A URL is just the address of one of your pages. Monthly statistics include your most popular pages. If you're putting a lot of effort into one section of your site and find that almost no one visits it you might rethink your plans for your site and concentrate on more popular pages. The stats report offers the top ten pages and a link to a report on all pages in your site.

Connections

Look at the detail page on connections to see which sites link directly to yours. Search engines give more prominence to sites that have many links into them. This is also a handy tool to see what other sites are saying about you.

Searches

Search terms are what visitors were looking for when they were presented with your site by a search engine. Are you offering them the information? Is it relevant to your site? It's good intelligence on what visitors want. 

Make e-mail earn its keep

E-mail is probably the simplest and easiest way to stay in touch with people and its intelligent use is mostly common sense.


To set up e-mail for a small business you buy a domain: it's your personalised number plate on the Internet. Buy it from a domain name registrar such as OneSquared (www.onesquared.net) or by asking Netco to set it up for you.

The domain name is the bit between the '@' and the '.co.nz'. For around \$40 a year you can buy sole rights to use the name. Using the free one tossed in by your Internet provider or Yahoo won't wash. Give those accounts to your kids to play with. I've seen everything from boat makers to car yards trying to sell \$60,000 luxury goods and expecting people to take an Xtra or Yahoo e-mail seriously. Besides, why give Xtra a free advertisement every time you send an e-mail – if you're proud of it promote your own business instead.

When you set up e-mail accounts for staff, follow a standard pattern such as firstname.lastname@yourcompany.co.nz then no customer will ever have trouble deducing the e-mail address they need to a send message to you or your staff.

If all your sales enquiries go through one person, don't make his or her name the contact. Instead call it sales@ so, no matter who is on duty, the mail always gets through. Base important e-mail contacts on the position not the person so that when a staff members leaves, his or her successor takes over reception of the sales@ e-mail address without everyone having to learn a new address. Do this through a process called 'aliasing'. In this, all e-mail sent to sales@yourcompany.co.nz is automatically forwarded to whomever happens to be sales manager at the time. When that person leaves and is replaced by someone else, customers just keep sending enquiries to the same e-mail, except now it's forwarded to the new sales manager's mail account.

And while you're at it, you might make one account a catch-all: it receives anything not assigned to someone else. Without a catch-all, your enquirer has his or her e-mail rejected if they've misspelled the recipient's name and you may have lost a sale because of a spelling error. A second benefit of a catch-all e-mail account is that you can advertise addresses such as sales@, info@ and marketing@ and they all arrive safely in your catch-all mailbox, making it appear as though you have a work force of maybe a dozen people where, in reality, you work alone from your garage.

To become as big as Westpac on High Street you need to buy a lot of real estate. To mimic its size on-line, you can start with a simple e-mail account and appear as big as your imagination and ambition will let you. 

Internet Explorer 7 is released

Microsoft has finally released an upgrade to its Internet browser, Internet Explorer.

It's been available from Microsoft's web site as a download and it will also be included with Windows Vista, the new version of Windows due in shops early next year. The current version, 6, has been around for about five years, a long time, in a fast-changing industry and it was showing its age.

For site owners, the delayed, mass introduction of IE 7 (it won't take off until Windows Vista ships) is an opportunity to install IE 7 and run through their site to ensure that Microsoft has not written a browser that "breaks" it. Microsoft's existing browsers are the butt of much criticism for the haphazard way they display some code that otherwise adheres to Internet standards.

Newcomer browser, Firefox is much preferred

by developers because it behaves itself much better and so it's easier to write compliant code and know it should work. IE 7 is supposed to end a lot of that criticism. Firefox has also released a new version, 2.0, but no one is expecting it to alter the way it displays sites.

We can audit your site if you'd rather not roll your sleeves up and run a line by line check to see that IE 7 displays your site properly. Microsoft's momentum means IE 7 will rapidly become the browser of choice for most Internet users.

An average-sized site, about 50 web pages with a database should take around 2 hours to run through. We're happy to quote on larger sites. If we find the site needs updating we'd submit a fixed price quote for the work. 