

1998

Adventures in Librarianship: Conventional Wisdom

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Recommended Citation

Kraft, Ned (1998) "Adventures in Librarianship: Conventional Wisdom," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 10: Iss. 3, Article 43.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.2818>

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Web Hosting - Is it Really as Easy as \$14.95?

by **Ben Bauer** (Net Effect, Inc. <http://www.neinc.com>; Tel: 617-489-0656; Fax: 617-489-0763) <benbauer@neinc.com>. Copyright 1998 Net Effect, Inc.

When you're looking to avoid the demands of physically hosting your own Web site, outsourcing is an extremely efficient way to go. But, is outsourcing your Web site as easy as selecting the lowest price? Surely, that's what all the banner ads, unsolicited email, and good old fashioned junk mail would have you believe.

Is price the only determining characteristic? While it certainly appears to be easy enough to pick a hosting service based on price, you may end up dramatically short-changing yourself, your Web site, and your users. However, doing some up-front work may keep you from getting connected to a dubious firm and avoid going through the pain, expense, and delay of leaving that firm for a reliable partner.

A professional Web hosting firm can offer you many advantages, even over in-house resources. For one thing, these firms exist to serve you. Your in-house resources may have a long list of priorities and hosting your site might be low on that list. Letting someone else worry about the mechanical aspects of hosting allows you to concentrate on the primary element which makes your site attractive to users — Content. But how do you choose a hosting firm? After all, this is the Web—the options are endless! You don't have to go with the firm down the street.

Finding the right partner really starts with creating specifications in advance, then finding a service that matches your needs. I recommend to my clients the following five-point plan: • Purpose; • Competency; • Speed; • Support; • Features.

Purpose - This first item really has nothing to do with professional Web hosting firms. It's really all about you and your Web site. What's the purpose of your Web site? What do you want to accomplish with it? Write these points down. It sounds so elementary that most people jump right over this step. Taking some time at this point will help you answer questions about your targeted users and where they're located geographically. For instance, will your users be locally based or do you want to serve a national or global audience?

This will also help you think about other Internet services that you may want to include in your project such as listservs, public FTP, live chats, announcement mailing lists, etc. Who's going to provide these services? If you plan appropriately, it could be the same organization which is hosting your Web site and thus you'll only have to work with one provider.

Competency - Competency deals with all the issues around reliability. Users take for granted that the Web is there all the time. That's 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The Web isn't governed by the same norms which let businesses and retail establishments close at night. This is a totally new paradigm — a paradigm which is required to participate. Since your site is expected to be there every hour of the day, you should assess potential hosts

on parameters which are going to help you achieve this. The first such parameter is power loss protection. If the power fails due to storm or accident, are the lights at your site going to blink out? Or, does your provider have adequate power back-up to keep your site up and running while the rest of the neighborhood is dark?

Not that big an issue? Tell that to **Hiller Zobel**, the judge in the **Louise Woodward** trial, AKA the nanny trail. Last November, on the day that Judge Zobel was to announce his ruling, his provider was knocked off line. The culprit was a car accident which toppled the utility pole providing power to his Web hosting service. No back-up power protection — no ruling. Instead there was mass chaos back at the courthouse doing it the old-fashioned way with paper copies.

The next two inquiries which deal with competency are disaster recovery and protection from hackers. While it's unlikely that any host will tell you exactly how they protect their servers, they should be able to give you a general understanding. Even more telling is whether they've had any break-ins. If so, when? How quickly was the problem

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Adventures in Librarianship — Conventional Wisdom

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"So, are you a librarian?" The taxi driver eyed me through the rear-view, somehow dodging traffic at the same time. I might have wondered to myself, "do I look like a librarian? Is my 'I-heart-Dewey' tattoo showing?" But I've been to these conventions before and I know the routine. My driver has probably been shuttling librarians from the airport downtown all day long.

"Yep, that's me. Mr. Librarian."

After seven hours of travel that should have been four, after suffering the airborne big-bag-o-food for lunch, after ten false-starts through a metal detector betrayed (apparently) by a tiny scrap of foil candy wrap ... I was feeling a mite punchy.

"You here for the convention?" he asked, watching me again, instead of watching the white Toyota trying to push us into the guard rail.

"No. I'm... I'm here for the hot springs, the cure."

I saw him squint in the mirror, deciding not to talk to me anymore.

Just as well.

A convention is a bit like a gathering storm. The flights converge toward the chosen town. You start hearing tell-tale phrases, magic words, from nearby conversations: a whispered "Blackwell's" from the two men ahead of you at the ticket counter, a booming "taskforce" from a woman maybe three seats behind on the plane, an ominous "serials control" from who-knows-where.

And as those clouds converge you begin to assume that everyone around you is a librarian. There's one for sure! That one, too! The Faxon tote-bag is a dead give-away, along with an expression of guarded enthusiasm.

Then the rain starts in earnest. The town is wet with librarians and you wonder, for just a moment, why you've voluntarily joined this downpour.

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Acquiring Minds
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Distance education classes strain the concepts of fair use. Online courses demand online resources, and departments are struggling to provide resources, for example, images for art classes. It is more effective to digitize and provide online access to images; however, it is difficult to acquire rights to images or even to determine who has the rights. Retention and archiving must be dealt with. On the one hand, we need to be sure to archive the important works of the university. On the other hand, we don't want to retain something to which we have no rights.

The nature of these issues demonstrates how libraries and other campus units are grappling with different issues that now overlap. Managing information technology and intellectual property have become the responsibilities of almost every group on campus. Fortunately, librarians have expertise and an abiding interest in protecting rights, so they are ready to speak out and participate in policy development on campus. 🐾

Wandering the Web
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tures; register free.

Greenbook: <http://www.greenbook.org>. Information about market research companies from the NY American Marketing Assoc.

Chain Store Guide Information Services: <http://www.csgis.com> or www.d-net.com/csgis. Directories of retail establishments.

Trade shows: <http://www.industry.net/tools/tradeshows.htm>. Searchable database of 8,000 shows.

MediaFinder Trade Show Calendar: <http://www.mediafinder.com/trade.html>.

Trade Show Central: <http://www.tscentral.com/>.

EXPOguide: <http://www.expoguide.com/>.

Geocities: <http://www.geocities.com/WallStreet/6100>. For research. <http://www.geocities.com/WallStreet/6100/cs.htm>. For customer service ideas

Thomas Register of American Manufacturers: <http://www.thomasregister.com:8000/>.

Food Industry Register: <http://www.tfir.com>.

IANWeb Resources: <http://www.pitt.edu/~ian/resource/thinktk.htm>. Page for institutions think tanks, etc.

Working papers in Economics: <http://econwpa.vvustl.edu/wpawelcome.html>. Full text and abstracts from all over the world <http://www.hbs.edu/knowledge>. From Harvard Business School

Economist jokes: <http://www.eta.fi/>.

Business magazines:

Business Week Online: <http://businessweek.com/>. Archive of articles back to 1994. Abstracts free. Must pay for fulltext.

The Economist: <http://www.economist.com/>.
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Adventures in Librarianship
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Swarms of labeled folk crowd the sidewalks, food joints, tourist shops, and hotels, each taxonomically tagged for easy identification: *Referencium Publicanus Cincinatti*, or *Catalogo Academium Stanford*. Every genus and species is here.

In the convention center, rushing toward some diabolically hidden meeting room, you spot a face rushing the other way. Don't I know her from ... ? from ... ? but you don't have time to think. The exhibit hall, that specialized street fair, that open-air market for library trinkets and hushed deal-making, is even worse. Organized pandemonium. There's the faux-Elvis selling movable shelving. There are the spangled jugglers hawking a system still in development. There's the corridor of US jobbers, so closely packed you wonder if a fight might break out. You grab lunch sitting on carpeted steps leading to some mysterious upper level of the hall. Are the carpets always red, or is that a trick of my memory? Don't I know that guy from ... ? from ... ?

Your first meeting is far below your level. Oh, well. Your second meeting is far above. Darn! But the third ... Ah, the third is just right: a panel of librarians and vendors spilling their experience on just the project you are now designing. Eureka! Overheads and Power Point light shows flash their wisdom in colorful schema, larger than life. You are full of ideas. You are so inspired that later you jot notes all through your lonely dinner.

The next morning you rush to find

the Marriott, or some kindly native to point you in the right direction. Once there, you need "The Appaloosa Room," or is it "Pacific Crest", or "Brandywine." I'm convinced that checking the names of hotel meeting rooms in the OED would paint a spotty but heroic picture of US history — "The Franklin Room," "Ticonderoga," "Bunker Hill Suite."

The good meetings ... Ah, the good ones remind you why you came. They remind you of your very first time, when you were young and breathless, running to every meeting you could possibly make. One speaker looks at you and says, "that's a very good question," and you're on cloud nine for the rest of the day. At another you linger to discuss the issues with three librarians you just met from Seattle, Syracuse, and Sydney. At the end of the day, the moderator asks you to join him and two colleagues for dinner — you have arrived; you are exhausted; you are pleased to belong to a profession so complicated and connected.

As I checked out of my hotel, it began to, literally, rain. Shaking the drops from my hat, I glanced at the taxi driver. Hey, don't I know him from ... ? Could it be the same guy? I sank low in the seat, remembering my rudeness on the way into his fair city. He swerved between three potholes, banging my shoulder into the door. A just punishment.

"Were you in for the convention?" he asked.

I tried to disguise my voice, make it higher-pitched and squeaky. "Yes, sir. I had a great time. This is a wonderful place." 🐾

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