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## DIY websites for newbies

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# DIY websites for newbies

## **Abstract**

I arrived at my current place of work in February 2010, a new graduate grateful for my first job in the profession, nervous about working full time after many years of part time work and with the brief of "get more students into the library" to guide me. And there was only me, this is a one person library. Defining 'library' to mean much more than just get the students in the door of the physical library, the first thing I decided to do was create a library website. This would enable me to connect with both students and our (largely sessional) teaching staff. Let me be up front here, I have no formal training or qualifications in IT, but armed with a keen personal interest, a reasonably tech-savvy background and a very limited budget that had to be kept solely for acquisitions. I was soon searching for inexpensive (read free) options.

## **Keywords**

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# DIY WEBSITES FOR NEWBIES

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Defining 'library' to mean much more than just get the students in the door of the physical library, the first thing I decided to do was create a library website. This would enable me to connect with both students and our (largely sessional) teaching staff. Let me be up front here, I have no formal training or qualifications in IT, but armed with a keen personal interest, a reasonably tech-savvy background and a very limited budget that had to be kept solely for acquisitions. I was soon searching for inexpensive (read free) options.

In the meantime, I set up the ubiquitous Facebook page and used that as an avenue for pushing information out to students about the library and its services. Though the take-up of the Facebook presence was limited, the point was to reach out and connect with users and provide them both with information they didn't know they needed and the basis of an information-seeking-toolkit.

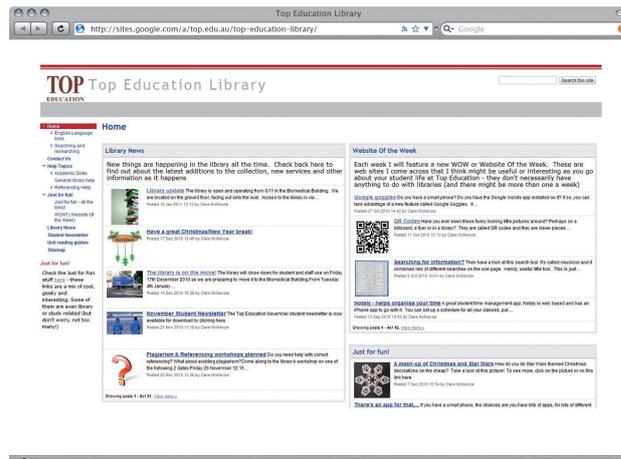
I discovered I could quickly and easily set up a free basic website using Google Sites. At the risk of sounding like a commercial for Google, I can't praise the Sites application enough for us non-IT people who need to get something up and running. It's an easy system of modules and pages that essentially bolts together to form a website with options for theme, style and fonts. You can use a template or start from the beginning yourself.

After a few aborted starts and failed attempts to understand how the templates had been constructed, I decided to build from scratch. In the end this was much easier as I could build in connections, links and functionality as I went, rather than trying to determine how it had been done in the template so that I could then either undo it or modify it for my own needs. Knowing much more about the way the application works now, I could more quickly adapt a template if I had to do it again, but I would recommend anyone dipping their toe in this as a newbie to start with a blank page.

Of course, good website design actually starts on paper, or at least my website design did. By the time I had finished mapping out my architecture the pages of mind maps I had created were starting to resemble a small book. The time spent on this planning stage was crucial to the quality of the end product and made the final creation phase much simpler and more straightforward. Needless to say, once I had the site up and running I still needed to make several tweaks to the architecture.

Maintaining the site is straightforward. I update a couple of blog-like pages on a regular basis (once a week or so). These pages post the five most recent comments to the home page of the website so the home page is dynamic. The new posts can be followed using RSS feeds – this is automatically built into this particular module and comments can be enabled or not. I upload relevant documentation such as unit reading lists or the student newsletter when they are published and add a link to the relevant page and it appears on the home page. All of this takes less than an hour a week.

So far, the only problems I have found with the Sites application are minor for my purposes. One is the lack of functionality for students and staff to connect with me. I have a contacts page with all relevant details but there is no option for direct feedback or communication via the site. The other issue is the URL for the site - it can be mapped to something else if you have a Google Apps account, but is



otherwise cumbersome: [sites.google.com/a/top.edu.au/top-education-library/](http://sites.google.com/a/top.edu.au/top-education-library/). I have largely worked around this second problem by having a link to the library site embedded into our organisation's main website so that students and staff can find it easily if they have not bookmarked it.

If you're in a one person library, or a small special or education library such as I am in, or just on a low budget and you need to connect with your audience, think about using Google Sites.

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