

“Tech Talk” TV Show

“Creating Web Pages” Episode

Tech Talk intro plays

Susan: Hello and welcome to Tech Talk from the University of Minnesota. I'm your host, Susan McKinnell. Tech Talk is your source of information on the technology that surrounds us every day and one of those technological marvels is the internet. You could spend hours browsing the web. Some of those websites; they're really neat! If you've ever thought to yourself, "I'd like to build my own website," this program is for you and it's really not as difficult as you might think. Some of the tech terms you'll hear today include: HTML, hyperlink, WYSIWIG, and FTP. To get us started on our website is Margaret Miller. Margaret is a Senior Information Technology professional in the University's Office of Information Technology. She specializes in teaching web development courses she designs websites, writes technical documentation and answers consumers' questions on the computer helpline. Thanks for being with us today, Margaret.

Margaret: Glad to be here, thank you.

Susan: What are some reasons why I might want to have a personal website?

Margaret: Well, various reasons, maybe if you have a home-based business or a hobby that you are interested in that you want to share with other people, or even just sharing family photos.

Susan: Great.

Margaret: That type of thing.

Susan: Great. We've got a couple websites, I think, of some personal websites, here. I think there are some pretty nifty looking ones. This one looks like it's from a wedding.

Margaret: Mm. Hmm. Yep. It's a very common thing to do.

Susan: Mm. Hmm. And then I think we do have a little business one here as well.

Margaret: Yep, very nice.

Susan: And so you can sell to the world from the internet.

Margaret: Yes.

Susan: And a home-based business, I believe that is., and then one with just some family pictures.

Margaret: Yes, family photos; a very nice thing to do.

Susan: Where is the first place I want to start to get a personal web page up there?

Margaret: Well, a lot of people have web space available to them they may not be aware of.

Susan: Mm. Hmm.

Margaret: And their internet service provider would make that available to them. So, you could check there to see if they have that and they may have some tools and other things that you could use to create a website.

Susan: So, with your internet service provider (ISP) a lot of people have something like AOL, is a common one, but lots of other ones as well.

Margaret: Correct.

Susan: Mm. Hmm. So, check to see if you've got a web space. What if you don't have one with your ISP?

Margaret: Well, there are lots of place you can get free web space. A lot of times if you have free web space they might have advertisements that are associated with that.

Susan: Okay.

Margaret: So for sharing family photos that's not a big deal or you could purchase web space as well.

Susan: I think I've seen a lot of sights that have like a banner across the top. It's a personal site you can tell because it has their pictures or whatever but it's got some sort of ad right across the top as well.

Margaret: Probably a free service that they are using.

Susan: That's the first step that you've got to have that space in order to put your site up.

Margaret: Yeah, yeah. Make it available to the rest of the world.

Susan: Okay. What about creating the site itself?

Margaret: You can use a free tool like Mozilla which is a browser that is free on the internet and they have what's called a web editor that you could use to create your website. It's very much like working with a word processor.

Susan: Should we take a look at that and see how it works here?

Margaret: Sure. Sure. I think we have composer up here and it looks very much like a word processor. And I can just type some text in.

Susan: Mm. Hmm.

Margaret: Say, "The Miller" oops.

Susan: Is there a spell check on this?

Margaret: Well you know some of them probably do. I am having a hard time.

Susan: There we go!

Margaret: The Miller Family and so I've got some text up there and I could, oops! I could insert an image very quickly. Just click on the image...

Susan: There is an image button right there.

Margaret: And I've got the image on my hard drive so we'll just go there and I can select the image that I wanted.

Susan: And this is a picture that you might have gotten out of, say, a digital camera, or maybe scanned into your computer.

Margaret: Correct. Mm. Hmm. Oh. It wants me to insert some alternative text.

Susan: And that's what sometimes shows up on... Well, what is the alternative text?

Margaret: Alternative text has to do with making the image, if the image is not available for whatever reason, somebody else could still see the text and know why that image is there.

Susan: I notice sometimes on my home computer when there is a slow modem connection, sometimes the picture takes a while to load and in the mean time there may be some words there. Is that the...?

Margaret: Yeah. That would be the alternative text that you're seeing.

Susan: Mm. Hmm.

Margaret: So there's the image. This is probably a bit larger than maybe what you'd want to do.

Susan: And I noticed that this was a .jpg image.

Margaret: Yes.

Susan: And when you've got the digital camera, the scanner that's something that you might want to consider; saving as a .jpg so that you can use it on the web?

Margaret: Yes. Mm. Hmm. Yep.

Susan: Okay. So you've just got some text in here, that was just as easy as typing it, and it was just clicking on a button, it looks like a pretty simple thing to do.

Margaret: Yes. It is very simple. Now, web editor, behind the scenes, is actually creating some HTML code for you. HTML is the language that a web page is written in.

Susan: Okay.

Margaret: And we could look at that real quickly if you wanted to see what it looks like.

Susan: That would be great; a computer language.

Margaret: We don't have to know HTML to do this. The web editor is doing that for us.

Susan: Okay. There is a lot of stuff in here!

Margaret: It's primarily just text-based and it's primarily just some tags that are telling the browser how this page is going to be formatted.

Susan: So this is how my computer, if we were to take a look at this web page, how my computer would know how to put it together and show it to me.

Margaret: Correct.

Susan: Okay, now I am recognizing a little bit here. I can see "The Miller Family" right up here.

Margaret: Yep. There is the text that I typed in. and here is my image, right here.

Susan: Mm. Hmm. Oh it says ".img" for image.

Margaret: Mm. Hmm.

Susan: There is even the name of the image; gooseberry.

Margaret: Mm. Hmm.

Susan: Great. What is this "body, body?"

Margaret: Oh! This tag, the body tag really is the content that you actually see visibly on the page is contained within the body.

Susan: Okay.

Margaret: So the opening and there is the closing body tag down at the bottom.

Susan: So we really don't need to know a thing about HTML. If I really want to get a little more complex with stuff, is it a good idea to know some of it?

Margaret: It is very helpful to know the HTML because then you can do some troubleshooting on your own. You could write the HTML by hand if you wanted to, but just being aware of some of the restrictions of HTML is good.

Susan: Are there resources for learning about it?

Margaret: Oh sure. There are tons of things on the web. You could just do a search for HTML tutorial and there are many free resources out on the web that you could, you know, use.

Susan: In my experience what has been frustrating about creating web pages is sometimes I make it and it looks the one way on my computer but then it looks completely different when it gets up on the web.

Margaret: Yes. That's very true. Different browsers display HTML differently. A professional designer would check that out in advance and try to minimize those differences between the browsers, but yeah, it can look very differently on different browsers and computers and different...

Susan: And just to clarify when we're talking about browsers we're talking about Internet Explorer, that's a biggie out there but there are lots of others.

Margaret: Mozilla, Netscape...

Susan: Mm. Hmm. Common ones. Great! Now, what if we want...well one of the main things that's missing on this page is a link, if we want to link to a different page.

Margaret: Yes, oh yes. Now let's say that we want to link out to favorite search engine called Google. We can just type in some text that we want somebody to click on. I'm going to just highlight this text and then up here in my tool bar, you can see that I have a link button here.

Susan: Great.

Margaret: And I just click on that and I'm going to type in the address for where I want to go.

<http://www.google.com>

Susan: And I notice that you're typing the whole thing in there. A lot of times when we are working with our browser we use the shorthand.

Margaret: We have to put in the whole address and then we'll say okay and then that becomes a link. We could actually try this out if we wanted to. Oh! Wait a minute. It requires that I save.

Susan: Always have to save your file.

Margaret: So I'm going to give this file a name, index.html.

Susan: Mm. Hmm. And so this is a file just like any other file on my computer.

Margaret: Yep. My composer is actually set to actually add the extension for me. Now there I am.

Now, we are previewing this. This is not actually live on the web.

Susan: Okay.

Margaret: But we are previewing it.

Susan: So we can see what it would look like on the browser. And it takes you straight to Google. The link actually worked. That's great. Just to clarify, or just a little bit of terminology the Composer editor is a WYSIWYG editor, right?

Margaret: Yep. What You See is What You Get.

Susan: So, ideally what the idea is, what you're putting in Composer is exactly what you're going to see on the web.

Margaret: Right.

Susan: As opposed to doing the HTML straight. Great. I've seen some stuff like in my Word or PowerPoint programs, I can go up to my file menu and it will say, "save as a web page." Can I create my web page in there?

Margaret: You can. Actually you can do it very easily. If you have a document, say you have recipe that you want to put on your website. If you already have it in word you could just go to the file menu and just put Save as a Web Page, yeah, Save as a Web Page

and that will create some standard HTML for you. For simple things like that it will just go up on the web very easily for you. You wouldn't even have to adjust the settings.

Susan: Mm. Hmm. If I wanted to...you say for a recipe or simple things like that...if I wanted to get more complex, should I stick with word or should I go on to...

Margaret: Well, Word is not probably the editor of choice for most people, simply because it adds in a lot of extra code that you don't really need on a web page and sometimes it can be frustrating; it doesn't display properly in all browsers and those kind of things.

Susan: Okay. At what point to I kind of want to move on from the free options like Mozilla or what might come with my ISP?

Margaret: Well, if you want to do more production work, if you're creating a larger site and you want to...there are web editors that you can pay, you know, buy that have a lot of tools that you can use to manage your website.

Susan: But it's a good idea to just start with this stuff--the free stuff--and see how it works.

Margaret: Oh, definitely, yeah.

Susan: Great. Great. Now as we said, this is just on this computer. If we want to get it onto our website, we've got to do something else.

Margaret: Yes, the most common way to put a website up on the...make it available to everybody is to use FTP, which is the File Transfer Protocol. That allows you to transfer files over the web.

Susan: FTP, sounds good. And I think we're going to have a little more detail on that in just a second. Thank you so much for being here with us today.

Margaret: Well, thank you. I was glad to be here.

Susan: We've designed our first page but how do we get our information up to the server? Let's watch.

Male voice: To get a web page onto the internet, most people use something called FTP, that stands for File Transfer Protocol. When FTPing you're actually transferring your files from your computer to a server, a server is a computer that servers web pages. So, people wanting to connect to your web site will actually connect to that computer to view the site. Often an FTP program is provided by your ISP, your Internet Service Provider, or your web hosting company. And there is usually FTP capability built into website design programs as well. All FTP programs need certain information from you. They need your user name, your password and the address of the computer that you're connecting to; this

may be referred to as the host, or the server. You can get this information from your ISP or your web hosting company. Once you have it all typed in, just hit the connect button. There are often a lot of files here already. Usually there is a folder designed for putting your web page in. Ours is called web-docs. Your folder may have a similar name or something slightly different. Make sure you get all the files, images and everything and make sure that they're in the same file structure. If you have some files inside a folder, transfer the whole folder. Transferring the files may take some time but after the transfer process is complete, go in your web browser, type in the address of your site and there it is. When you need to update your webpage, just make the changes on your computer and use FTP to transfer those new files to your web server.

Susan: Okay. We know how to get our pages up and out to the world, but now think about this: are you sure your website sends the appropriate message? Do people enjoy looking at it? Can they get around? And just because you can do something spectacular, should you? Scott Wilson-Barnard is the man who knows all about that, he is a special projects coordinator here at the University, not only does he help instructors here at the University effectively use technology when they teach, he also teaches short classes on web design and consults one-on-one with faculty. Moreover, Scott has been a fine artist for several years. Scott, it's nice to have you with us.

Scott: It's nice to be here, Susan.

Susan: Scott, what is good design?

Scott: Well, a lot of people think that a good design would be a page that's really artistic or maybe really creative, but I have a, maybe a duller definition. A well-designed website clearly communicates your content; it says the things that you want to say.

Susan: Okay.

Scott: And if you made website that communicates your content, it's well designed.

Susan: Doesn't matter if it's got all the pretty pictures or the flashing lights or whatever, as long as you can communicate.

Scott: You know, many times all the bells and whistles and also the pretty stuff on a site maybe distracts from your message. And so sometimes you may want to pull back from some of that stuff.

Susan: Okay. So what are the sort of things that we want to think when we start think about our web design, where do start at; the basics?

Scott: One place you start, you don't initially start at the page itself. What you think about is the structure of the site. And the structure of your site is really important. I think that all of us have been lost on websites at one time or another and if you structure your site carefully, it reduces the chance that your users will get lost.

Susan: Great. Now you've got some charts here that show us some of the basics of site structure.

Scott: Yeah, I can show you. Now here, we have a site structure for a real simple page and you can see at the top up here, we have the home page. And the home page is kind of like a menu. It's almost like a table of contents for a website.

Susan: That's usually the first page you see when you go to a website.

Scott: That's right; it's the first page you see and a lot of time on homepages you'll have hyperlinks and hyperlinks will go to the other pages on your website.

Susan: Okay.

Scott: And on this page, it's a very simple site and you can see at the bottom that there are links to all of the content pages on this site.

Susan: And so the home page would have, say, four separate links is what we see on this chart.

Scott: That's right. Now, a lot of times though, your site it going to be a lot more complex than this. Now if that's the case you have to have a structure that's a little more complex as well.

Susan: Okay.

Scott: And I have another little diagram for you, here. You can see that this website has a lot more content pages and what we've done is created sub-menus and each of the sub-menus will go down to the content.

Susan: Okay.

Scott: If you create a site that is well structured like this, it's called a hierarchical structure.

Susan: Mm. Hmm.

Scott: If you create a site like this it's going to be harder for your users to get lost.

Susan: Yeah, I have been on site where you go following these links and all of a sudden, you don't know where you are, you can't get back to the main page, you can't find what you're looking for, but with this sort of structure, that's not going to happen to you.

Scott: It's a little bit harder for people to get lost on your website, that's right.

Susan: Great. Great. So that's the first thing you want to think about, is the structure, before you even start to think about which pictures and so forth.

Scott: Yeah. And after you think of structure, then of course, you have to think about, "What are the pages going to look like?" And I have some examples here for you. Example of sites that are maybe not that well designed.

Susan: Okay.

Scott: And sort of thinking about taking you through a page that doesn't look so good to a page that maybe looks a little bit better.

Susan: I think we've all seen those pages, you know, you got to some user's websites and it's really hard to read or it's just kind of hard to look at.

Scott: Well, I've made up an example that maybe is a little bit over the top but we're going to take a look at that and just see.

Susan: Sounds good.

Scott: Here's a page and the site would be about cows. This is a cow website.

Susan: This is definitely about cows.

Scott: Now this site you see, we have sort of like moving graphics and we have some flashing words and the background is really loud, really noisy. Even as a scroll down there are some words there.

Susan: It's really hard to read the text on top of it.

Scott: Yeah and some hyperlinks in here... some more of these graphics.

Susan: It's awful hard to pick out the links in the midst of everything else.

Scott: It is. And you know when you are a beginning web designer sometimes you tend to get carried away with graphics and things that move, things that are animated.

Susan: Or you can use all the colors...yeah.

Scott: What I suggest to your viewers is that they pull back a little bit from this.

Susan: Mm. Hmm.

Scott: And so I have a second page here that's a little bit better. It's still not necessarily well designed but it's a little bit better than that. Do you want to take a look at that?

Susan: Absolutely.

Scott: Let's look at that second page. Now here is the second page and the first thing you see is nothing moving on it anyway.

Susan: It's nice. It's a little simpler.

Scott: Now something that is not good here still is it's kind of hard to read that title, it sort of blends into the background.

Susan: Absolutely.

Scott: Also there's a picture here but it's huge. It's taking up almost all the screen and you just don't want to use images that are great-big right here at the beginning of your home page.

Susan: You have to scroll down before you can get to anything.

Scott: Now here's our text but, you know, it's tough to read that text.

Susan: Mm. Hmm.

Scott: I'm getting a little bit older, wear glasses and I would have a real hard time reading this text.

Susan: And that's really something to keep in mind, particularly for people designing...you need to not only design for your own abilities but perhaps for other people's abilities as well.

Scott: Oh sure. You want to be able to reach all of your audience.

Susan: Yep. Absolutely.

Scott: Now, I have a third example for you that still is not perfect, but it's a little bit better.

Susan: Okay.

Scott: Let's take a look at that. We've solved a couple of the problems in this next example.

Susan: Oh, the picture is a lot smaller.

Scott: First of all, the picture is a little bit smaller and you can finally read that title, "Crazy about cows."

Susan: It's nice and dark on the light background.

Scott: And you know if you look at the text, you can read that text still but when you get to this part of the site, this page is kind of full of text. There is a lot of verbiage, lot of words and these hyperlinks makes it kind of hard to read those sentences at all.

Susan: And also I can't glance at it and know what these links are about.

Scott: That's kind of tough. You would have to read almost all of the text, the entire thing just to find out what's going on.

Susan: I know a lot of people on the web like to move things fairly quickly.

Scott: Fairly fast, they want to be able to scan stuff quickly, that's right.

Susan: They want to find what they are looking for quickly.

Scott: That's right, that's right. Now, what I've done, I've come up with a page that is maybe it is, maybe it's a well-designed page, I don't know.

Susan: (Laughs)

Scott: It's a page, though, that anyway is a lot easier to read, it has a nice white background; made a nice little header, up here.

Susan: And a nice cow on the left. That's a lovely picture.

Scott: So you still know that it's about cows, but here there is less text, you can pick out those hyperlinks fairly easily.

Susan: And tell exactly where they're going.

Scott: And what I've finally done here, we haven't lost our cow picture but we get to the bottom and it's a nice appropriate size.

Susan: It balances that one up top real nice.

Scott: Yeah.

Susan: I noticed on this page you've got...it's a little complex in the actual, the layout because you've got this kind of side bar effect going on.

Scott: Now, that's true. This is a little more complex as far as HTML goes, but still even a beginner using HTML could be able to lay out a page like this.

Susan: Is it something you'd be able to lay out with one of those free programs that we showed... looked at with Margaret.

Scott: Sure. You bet. A Mozilla Composer could easily create a page like this without any trouble at all.

Susan: Great. Some of that stuff we had...all of that animated stuff, all those pictures...I know that one of the things that's going on with web pages is there is a lot of free stuff out there and so that is one of the things that people do is they look for all this free animated clip art or just regular clip art, is it okay to use some of that?

Scott: You know, it's okay to use some, the point would be the more clip art that you use, especially if you get it from different places, the pictures may not go well together. What you really want to think about is making a harmonious whole.

Susan: Okay.

Scott: You want to make the whole thing look nice and clean. I would say, if you're going to make a mistake one way or another, make your site a little bit simpler as opposed to making it a little more complex. I think that you will be glad that you do.

Susan: Okay, sounds great. We mentioned just a little bit with Margaret that there are different browsers out there and you want to have your site look...or at least readable on different browsers, how can you take care of that as a designer?

Scott: Well, one thing that you should do when you design your web page, you should find someone that has a different type of computer than you have and uses a different browser than you use and take a look at your web page. See how it looks. See if your words are sort of in the same place, see if the colors look the same. Basically web browsers look generally the same, but there are slight differences between browsers between Macs and PCs.

Susan: So that is something that you want to build into the whole design phase, is making sure you have time to...

Scott: Yeah. Just check it out on some different machines.

Susan: Alright, sounds good. You have a lovely tool that I want to take a look at.

Scott: Yeah. You know, let's say that you don't know HTML but you want to sort of practice doing a little page lay out. I've made a little Flash program and Flash is an animation program and this is a program where I have some buttons over here on the right hand side and what you can do is simply click on a button and an element for a web page shows up on the screen.

Susan: And you just clicked and moved that around.

Scott: And you just kind of click and drag it; it's real simple and what you can do is just sort of make a pretend web page.

Susan: Uh-huh.

Scott: And here we have a little side panel there and we can throw in a little bit of text and all of the little elements that are involved in creating a web page are available to you on this tool. Here, we'll put a little...

Susan: This is a heck of a lot of fun.

Scott: Yeah. It's kind of fun. We'll put a little picture up there too.

Susan: What's going on here? I see something that says 560 pixels wide why would that be marked off for us?

Scott: It's marked off for us because you can see things on a screen above the scroll line and then when people scroll, some of the material is going to be below the scroll line.

Susan: Okay.

Scott: And as a designer you want to be aware of what shows up on your screen that's up above the scroll line and the things that are...end up below the scroll line.

Susan: Okay. It's a very important thing to know what people are going to see when they first get to the page as opposed to having them move around.

Scott: That's right, when they first see your page.

Susan: Okay, now is this available to our users?

Scott: This is available to our users. I think that you're going to put a link on the Tech Talk site and users can play with this from their own computers.

Susan: Sounds good. I can see that the web address is a little complex so we'll just put the link up there to make it easier for them to get to.

Scott: That's great. That sounds wonderful.

Susan: One more thing, a little bit, the scroll line, I want to mention a little bit about screen resolution. Is that another issue that people want to consider?

Scott: Screen resolution is...basically it means some people see less of the screen than other people depending on how they've set their screen resolution. What you probably want to do when you create your site is set it for a screen resolution of 800 pixels by 600 pixels. And a pixel is sort of the little teeny unit of measure for a computer screen.

Susan: Yep.

Scott: If you set your browser at 800x600 pixels, that resolution; everyone should be able to see your web site if you set it at that resolution.

Susan: Sounds good. Thank you so much, Scott. You've given us lots of wonderful information today.

Scott: It's been fun to be here, Susan. Thank you.

Susan: Well, that's our program on web pages. We presented a lot of information, some of it we've pulled out For Your Files.

Margaret Miller, a U of M web design instructor said check with your internet service provider to see if you have web space.

Margaret: a lot of people have web space available to them they may not be aware of. So you could check there to see if they have that and they may have some tools and other things that you could use to create a website.

Margaret also said web development tools are available on the internet. For example...

Margaret: Mozilla which is a browser that is free on the internet and they have what's called a web editor that you could use to create your website. It's very much like working with a word processor.

Scott Wilson-Barnard, a U of M Design instructor says that a well-designed website communicates content, but beware of clip art.

Scott: the more clip art that you use, especially if you get it from different places, the pictures may not go well together. What you really want to think about is making a harmonious whole.

Susan: Okay.

Scott: You want to make the whole thing look nice and clean. I would say, if you're going to make a mistake one way or another, make your site a little bit simpler as opposed to making it a little more complex.

Susan: Once your web page is done Scott suggests...

Scott: the more clip art that you use, especially if you get it from different places, the pictures may not go well together. What you really want to think about is making a harmonious whole.

Susan: Okay.

Scott: You want to make the whole thing look nice and clean. I would say if you're going to make a mistake one way or another, make your site a little bit simpler as opposed to making it a little more complex.

And finally, Scott says, remember...

Scott: some people see less of the screen than other people depending on how they've set their screen resolution. What you probably want to do when you create your site is set it for a screen resolution of 800 pixels by 600 pixels. Everyone should be able to see your website if you set it at that resolution.

Susan: If you missed any portion of this program or want to see it all again stop by our website. All of the programs we've done so far including this one are right there for your viewing. Our address is techtalk.umn.edu. And if you have a question about website design, just post it on our website and we'll have one of our specialists answer it. Next week, you know, now that you have your website you might want to think about using not only to say who you are but to sell what you no longer need. Now your friends and family can find you and so can potential buyers. But wait! Is selling stuff on the web safe? Who buys? What are the good and bad points? We'll tell you all next time, when Tech Talk buys into e-commerce. Until then, thanks for watching. I'm Susan McKinnell.

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