

Nathan Thoughts Personal Websites

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Why Would Someone Want Their Own Website Anyway?

(<http://www.nathan.com/thoughts/personalsites/2.html>)

There aren't a lot of related statistics, but according to a poll by NFO Interactive published in **WIRED** <http://www.wired.com/> magazine in October 1997,

62% of those with personal sites simply want to provide information about themselves and their families, presumably to friends and other family members.

48% are using their personal sites to find others on the Internet (in other words, in the world) with similar interests.

28% just want to be "cool" (well, at least they're honest)

28% want to conduct personal business

28% want to share their ideas, philosophies, and beliefs

6% want to show their childrens' accomplishments

and, lastly, 4% want to search for a new relationship (thankfully, this is a low number).

While commenting on these figures, in an uncharacteristically non-supportive but characteristically snotty view of technology, **WIRED** wrote: **"Sadly, most pages are simply self-aggrandizing autobiographies or digital photo albums."** But just what is it that **WIRED** *expected* personal websites to be? Even if this were true, what's so wrong with it? Why is it "sad?" Why the need for the high-brow sarcasm? **WIRED**'s own digital offerings are hardly faring much better than the best of the personal websites -- if at all. I suspect that this is a reaction to a perceived **threat**, and **perhaps WIRED and the rest of the publishing world does, indeed, have something to worry about.**

As is usual with new media and technology, we tend to wrongly view the new as different than what has come before merely because it is unusual. However, personal websites are close cousins to journals, photo albums, diaries, and holiday letters. In all the important ways, they are not new at all, but merely the latest evolution of personal expression. Would **WIRED** have said the same about family reunions? Would their expectations for a family's personal history retold be of selfless devotion to issues other than their families, or to journalism's myth of objectivity? What's wrong with people describing themselves and telling their own stories -- especially in a medium that requires the audience to consciously

come to it (after all, personal websites don't just pop-up intrusively like television ads or the dreaded interstitial?)

I suspect that the entire publishing industry -- especially [The New York Times](#) and even [WIRED](#) -- is threatened by the thought that people might be happy to communicate with each other, to share their own ideas, stories, and beliefs. For every eyeball and minute spent interacting with the work of another person, it is one less spent with more sanctioned, *published* opinions. It is as if the publishing industry, or [WIRED](#) at least, believes that their voices -- their perspectives and relevance -- will be diminished when everyone has the opportunity to have their own voice. Of course, the media have nothing to worry about, in some senses. People will *always* look to reasoned, interesting, insightful opinions and analysis, but what traditional publishers *do* need to worry about is that when everyone has a voice, they will feel incredible pressure (and competition) that will require them to become more insightful, more relevant, and more valuable. They will no longer have a monopoly on publishing and personal websites will force them to finally offer quality reporting and information instead of merely showing up with gossip in a timely fashion.

There are already many kinds of personal websites and the lines are hazily drawn between what could be called a "professional" website and a "personal" one. These days, it has gotten increasingly **difficult to separate the personal and the professional in our lives**, and our websites are no different. In fact, they make a good bellwether of what we consider personal and not. This division will either get more distinct in the near future, or become irrelevant altogether.

The Future of Personality

<http://www.nathan.com/thoughts/personalsites/14.html>

Perhaps someday almost everyone will have a personal website the same way that most everyone (at least in the developed world) has a phone number. These sites are already a new way to express ourselves but may evolve to be as much a part of us as our clothing instead of merely a new form of resume or portfolio. **Andy Warhol** once said, now infamously, that in the future, everyone will be famous for 15 minutes. Had he lived to see the Internet, perhaps he would have seen the very medium that could actually make this true. However, time is not an issue on the Internet. A better expectation might be that everyone in the future will be famous for 15 pages, but to make those pages count, they must reflect who we are personally and how much we're willing to share with each other.

Another interesting figure from the same study I cited in the beginning is that while 20% of those already online already have personal websites (that's a *lot* of sites) and 14% are planning a personal site, but that still leaves about 66%. The truly interesting story here is what *their* thoughts are for this medium and their involvement, why they don't want a site. Is it that they have nothing to say to the rest of us? Are they too shy? Do they not think they have something to share or maybe they don't know *how* to make a personal site? Perhaps they just have better things to do with their time.

My guess is that, in time, they will discover their voices, throw-off their fears and self-doubts, and join the rest of us with their own sites, messages, stories, and experiences. I'd like to end with a quote from **Eduardo Galeano** from his *Book of the Embraces* that captures the power and importance of this genre:

"When it is genuine, when it is born of the need to speak, no one can stop the human voice. When denied a mouth, it speaks with the hands or the eyes, or the pores, or anything at all. Because every single one of us has something to say to the others, something that deserves to be celebrated or forgiven by others."