ElectricEdge
web solutions

The State of ElectricEdge web solutions

It is the end of the year and a good time to look at what has happened and is happening with ElectricEdge web solutions. ElectricEdge web solutions has been in official existence for almost a year now and has spawned TestingTesting and WhidbeyStore.com. ElectricEdge web solutions is a web design house, TestingTesting is an interactive music show on the web, and WhidbeyStore.com is an on-line store.

It is time to write down the answers to the following questions: What do these entities do and how do they relate to each other. where are they going? What have they accomplished and where are they going? What do they need to move forward?

This is the state of ElectricEdge web solutions.

What do these entities do and how do they relate to each other?

ElectricEdge web solutions' (http://www.electricedge.com core business is developing web sites. Customers for these web sites currently come from the south end of Whidbey Island. These customers are small businesses in retail, accommodations, services, and manufacturing.

Retail customers include Whidbey's Coffee Company, coffee and related merchandise, and Whidbey Trader, women's clothing. Accommodation customers include the Whidbey Inn in Langley and Sweetwater Cottage in Clinton. Service customers include Chuck Edwards, a CPA, and the Freeland Chamber of Commerce. Manufacturing takes on a broader meaning on the island. I define manufacturing to include those who make things. This includes commercial items such as a medical catheter manufactured and sold by ECM Corporation, and arts and crafts items such as wood carvings by Mike McVay and music CDs and tapes by musician Derek Parrott.

Because these are very small businesses, often one or two person operations, they often need assistance in computing and design activities related to their web site. I provide services such as helping choose a computer, installing the computer, setting up e-mail lists, designing logos, and photography.

Some jobs are somewhat peripheral to web site development but they are related such as the writing project I am working on for Marty Matthews. He is revising one of his books, FrontPage 98, which explains how to use a popular Microsoft web design tool. His new book will cover FrontPage 2000, the latest revision of

FrontPage, and I am writing three chapters, a chapter on web site design, a chapter on using RealAudio, and a chapter on electronic commerce.

The focus for ElectricEdge web solutions is web development. The term "web solutions" is used to recognize that the jobs often may include work that may not be directly web development but are done in support of a web development project. Even though there may be a larger market for this non-web work I don't want to move away from the core business of building web sites.

ElectricEdge web solutions is a licensed business with Gordon Coale as Sole-Proprietor.

WhidbeyStore.com (http://www.whidbeystore.com) is an on-line store selling Whidbey Island arts and crafts. It is focused on selling products produced by Whidbey Island artists. The idea for WhidbeyStore.com came from Mike McVay, a woodcarver, who wanted a web site to sell his carvings but did not want to handle the order processing and offered a percentage of sales if I did that. Mike is not unique. There are many carvers, musicians, painters, etc., that have product to sell but it is not worth the effort for them to set up to handle credit card transactions and process orders. Mike also suggested that I set up an on-line store for others like himself that didn't want to get involved with order processing.

This puts me in the business of running a retail on-line store. This is consistent with the goals of ElectricEdge web solutions since the only way the customers like Mike would find it worthwhile to have a web site made is if the order processing was done for them too.

In order for an artist to sell their products in WhidbeyStore.com on-line store they would have to have a web site and store page created by ElectricEdge web solutions. The informational web site for the artist would be separate from WhidbeyStore.com. It would have what information the artists want to include about themselves. There would be general information about their products and a link to the WhidbeyStore.com on-line store page, or pages, for detailed information and the ability to purchase the products.

The artist would promote their own site and products to bring new and old customers to their web site and from there to WhidbeyStore.com. For example, Mike McVay has a snail-mail list of about 500 names of customers that know he is having a web site done and want to see it when it is complete. When they come to his site he will offer them a small carving for their e-mail address and permission to send periodic announcements of new additions, specials, and information about his activities. When they come to Mike's site they will continue on to WhidbeyStore.com to view his products and will also see the other products of the other artists in WhidbeyStore.com. Artists will be encouraged to promote their own web site to bring traffic to their web site and WhidbeyStore.com.

When a customer purchases items from several artists it is processed as a single transaction. WhidbeyStore.com will take 15% of the sale, will split the orders up and pass them, and the money, on to the appropriate artist. The artist will ship the product and notify WhidbeyStore.com of the shipping.

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TestingTesting (http://www.electricedge.com/testingtesting) is a live weekly music show on the Internet. It started as an outgrowth to Derek Parrott's web site. Derek's site needed to have streaming RealAudio files of his music. In the discussions with WhidbeyNET on doing this they suggested we consider doing a live show on the Internet with the RealAudio technology. In March of 1997 ElectricEdge web solutions webcast LiveStock 1.0, a 90 minute live Internet variety show and, in November of 1997, ElectricEdge web solutions webcast a local talent show called Stars of 97.

There are many talented musicians on Whidbey Island and the intention was to provide a showcase for these musicians to promote the musicians and their products since many of the musicians had produced CDs, which has become easier to do, but the distribution of the CDs was still very difficult.

In order to provide a showcase TestingTesting was started, in August, 1998, by ElectricEdge web solutions, Derek Parrott, and Jim Freeman. It is a weekly 30-minute show featuring local, and sometimes visiting, musicians. It was done on a regular basis to get the experience needed in doing live broadcasts. It uses a guest book that invites comments from the Internet audience during the show that are read to the performers. The performers respond to these comments during the show.

The show gives the musicians an audience for their music and products. The show also introduces the musicians to ElectricEdge web solutions and the Internet.

The TestingTesting shows are copyrighted by ElectricEdge web solutions.

What have they accomplished and where are they going?

ElectricEdge web solutions

ElectricEdge web solutions' work has been in four areas:

- Informational web sites
- Electronic commerce, or e-commerce web sites
- Live web performances
- Writing

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Informational web sites have been the mainstay for ElectricEdge web solutions. Sites such as The Whidbey Inn (http://www.whidbeyinn.com), and the Freeland Chamber of Commerce (http://www.islandweb.org/freeland). The informational sites are usually a lower priced web site from $500 to $1000.

There is a potential for a large informational portal site for the businesses of Whidbey Island since the volunteer created Island Web, that WhidbeyNET has provided, has not met the needs of the Island businesses. There has been some interest shown among the different chambers to put together a consolidated effort to build such a site but that effort probably won't start happening for several more months. At that point ElectricEdge web solutions will be in a good position to bid for the job. If the chambers can't get together, a distinct possibility, I will be looking at other ways to make a Whidbey Island portal site happen.

The small informational type of site may still be the majority of web projects in the future but not the majority of income. I am looking to e-commerce sites for the majority of income for 1999.

E-commerce sites are a more desirable type of web site to build for ElectricEdge web solutions. They are more complex and bring in more money. They cost between $1000 to $3000 and up. They also do more for the customer. They provide information and sell product. There were two simple forms based e-commerce sites I did earlier this year. One for Island Arts (http:www.islandarts.com), selling beach glass encrusted glassware, and one for Stan Gabelein (http://www.stangabelein.com) a local artist.

Forms based e-commerce are limited by the number of items they can carry since all the items and the order form have to be on one page. A site that carries more than four or five items requires the use of shopping cart software. These sites use the shopping cart metaphor for selecting items. As you view the selection of items you can select an item, put in a quantity, add it to the "shopping cart" and continue on looking at other items and making other selections. When you are done you go to the "checkout stand" and complete the order. The Internet bookseller Amazon.com (http://www.amazon.com) uses this type of software.

Amazon.com uses custom developed software. There are a number of off-the-shelf software packages that do this but they are expensive and need to be set up by the Internet Service Provider. WhidbeyNET has been slow to support this. I had three projects that required this support and it wasn't until September that WhidbeyNET came up with a solution. While they were looking at different commercial options they suggested a free script that would do what I needed. The script requires editing the program but the free price makes it easier to build competitive e-commerce sites for small businesses. With this script I am moving ahead with three shopping cart sites.

The first shopping cart I started was for Whidbey Trader in Freeland. Whidbey Trader is a women's apparel store, This site has been a stop and go project. The owner has had numerous personal and business problems and the site is currently on hold. Her plan is to sell her physical store and concentrate on the web store. A lot of work has been done but, because of the delays, it will have probably have to be redone. I was paid for all work done. It may or may not be completed.

The second site is for Whidbey's Coffee Co. (http://www.whidbeycoffee.com). This site is partially completed waiting for information from a very busy owner. In addition to information about the company it will be selling 13 different blends of coffee as well as Whidbey's Coffee Co. shirts and coffee cups. It needs pricing and shipping information to complete the site. It should be completed after the holidays.

The third site is WhidbeyStore.com (http://www.whidbeystore.com) which will be covered below. It is in the final stages of completion.

I am the only web developer using shopping cart software on the Island at this point. Some others are starting to use simple forms based sites but some of those don't even use secure transactions. Once I have completed one of these shopping cart sites I will have a valuable marketing advantage. There are a number of local businesses that would benefit from an e-commerce site and I will be contacting them as soon as one of the e-commerce sites, either Whidbey's Coffee Co. or WhidbeyStore.com, is completed.

Live web performances have been done under the banner of TestingTesting. TestingTesting will be covered below but the experience gained doing the live web performances of TestingTesting is available for other projects.

Writing has become another revenue stream during the last quarter of 1998. As mentioned before, writing chapters for Marty Matthews' book "FrontPage 2000, is a side activity but it will be useful in promoting ElectricEdge web solutions' expertise in web development. The project will be completed in early 1999 and will be published in the Spring of 1999. There are no other plans for writing projects at this time but Marty would like to collaborate on other projects. I would only consider working on web related subjects.

ElectricEdge web solutions has been active in the Freeland Chamber of Commerce. Because of this, ElectricEdge web solutions teamed with another local web developer to do the Freeland Chamber of Commerce web site. This has also been a good place to network with other small businesses. I am also on the 1998 Board of Directors for the Freeland Chamber of Commerce as the Director of Publicity and Public Relations. This networking is starting to result in web sites for local Freeland businesses. These projects will start in January. Several others have expressed interest and I will be approaching them after the holidays.

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ElectricEdge web solutions will also be doing a community service project with the South Whidbey Historical Society. ElectricEdge web solutions will doing a web site for the Historical Society and working on a long term project to put the historical Society artifacts and documents on–line.

WhidbeyStore.com

WhidbeyStore.com became a licensed business at the end of October. It currently has Mike McVay's woodcarvings and Derek Parrot's recordings as items for sale. The site is almost complete. There are several others interested in selling through WhidbeyStore.com and when the site is complete I will be contacting them. I will also be marketing WhidbeyStore.com to all creators of arts and crafts on the Island.

It is the intent for WhidbeyStore.com be the web outlet for arts and crafts of Whidbey Island created by Islanders that do not want to be involved with the order processing and credit card transactions.

WhidbeyStore.com will be tied into TestingTesting. This will be particularly important for musicians who have CDs and tapes to sell. A TestingTesting listener can click over to WhidbeyStore.com to purchase music from someone they hear on the show.

TestingTesting

TestingTesting's first webcast was August 3, 1998, and we did 22 webcasts through the end of 1998. The show started out with regular performers Jim Freeman and Derek Parrott. The show offered a mix of music from Derek and the special guests and comedy from Jim Freeman. After eleven shows Jim left and Steve Showell became the other regular performer. The show shifted to featuring music. The music is very eclectic with the emphasis on the playing together between the special guest and the regulars. The basic format seems to work well.

The other thing TestingTesting does is invite audience participation though a guest book. This is an important aspect of the show and needs to be improved upon. The plan is to move to a chat room environment moderated by a TestingTesting member. This would make this aspect of the show more interesting for the audience.

The show is currently audio only. Zoe Gillman is looking at the possibilities of adding Video to the show. We want to add some visual component to the show and it probably will be done in stages as finances and technology allow.

What do they need to move forward?

The following are items that are slowing down these projects. Some of these are short-term problems while others are longer term. This section will be completed, with estimated dollar amounts, in the next week.

ElectricEdge web solutions

Extra telephone line(s)

New production computer

Development computer

Web server

WhidbeyStore.com

Digital Signature

Credit Card Merchant Account

TestingTesting

ISDN Internet connection

Advertising to support TestingTesting