


[www.STARPOLISH.com](http://www.STARPOLISH.com)

## Music And The Internet: Creating Your Official Site

Sara Gibson

### THE NAME GAME:

#### Artist Name Vs. Site Name

Figuring out your name is hard enough, without having to consider how it's going to serve you on the Internet. Yet that's precisely what I suggest you should do. When first considering a band name, start by reviewing the StarPolish section on [Names](#), and then sit down at the computer and crosscheck every potential name you come up with at a domain name registry service site. A new site that gets the StarPolish stamp is [Cheap Domain Registration](#) (.com) - they offer some of the most competitive prices on the 'net. [Register.com](#) and [Network Solutions](#) are also both good sites that can tell you in an instant if a domain name is free or taken.

Some terms: a domain name is your site's name on the Internet (e.g. yourband.com). A URL is that name's full Internet address (e.g. http://www.yourband.com). It is important to cross-reference all of your potential domain names with a registry site instead of just typing the URL into a browser. By typing the URL into a browser you may get an "address not found" notice and it will seem as though the domain name is available -- but someone may have actually bought and registered it and has simply not yet used it. Don't set yourself up for a nasty surprise at the last minute.

As an example, let's say your band is considering calling itself "Sacred Cow." You run a check at Network Solutions on sacredcow.com and you discover that that domain is reserved by a soon-to-be Hindi web portal. But then you think of the name "Sacred Baboon." You enter that name in and see that it's free. Great! Put Sacred Baboon on your list of possibilities, and shelve Sacred Cow. The same goes for registering a solo artist name. If your name is Jennifer Lynn Smith and jennifersmith.com is already registered, you may want to consider performing under a different name-- like Jennifer Lynn or Lynn Smith (or even Zenobia Frost, what the hell)-- if those alterations are available for registration. (Of course, on top of all this, keep in mind the considerations listed in the [Names](#) section of StarPolish.)

This may all sound rather extreme and perhaps counter intuitive to the creative naming process, but the Internet is truly one of the most profound promotional tools available to you. It's worth the effort.



A final point you may want to consider is how your name will literally *look* on the Internet. For example, there's currently a band called "...And You Will Know Us By The Trail Of Dead." An interesting name for a band in and of itself, perhaps good for it's curiosity value-- but what a crappy domain name that would make. Not to mention what a pain it would be to spell: andyouwillknowusbythetrailofdead.com. On a web page or listed in a directory, It's just too long. (Turns out their official site is [www.trailofdead.com](http://www.trailofdead.com)).

Of course, you may already have a name that you've been performing under, and it doesn't make sense to change it at this point. Or, you may simply be in love with a name and you feel that you *really, really, really* must use it, Hindi web portals be damned. OK. You may be creating a more difficult situation for yourself Internet-wise, but the right name is most likely worth it. So what do you do? What I do *not* recommend is settling for second best-- in other words, registering the domain sacredcow.net instead. Not only would this inevitably lead to confusion, it's also just so obvious that you couldn't get the .com so you went for the .net. It's not terribly creative. What you want to do is come up with something that your fans (both kinetic and potential) will remember and "get." Keep in mind that you can register more than one name and have all names point to the same IP address. An IP, or Internet Protocol address is the true, numerical address of a site. Domain names were created so that we don't have to go around memorizing long numbers like 456.65.158.973, a typical IP address.

So let's say that you discover that holymoo.com is available, as well as sacredcowmusic.com and sacredcowband.com. Snap 'em all up. You can direct all those names to the same place. Maybe you'll decide to

market holymoo.com, but if one glorious day a NYC label mogul or some kid from Iowa decides to try and look up your site because they downloaded a song of yours off Napster and liked it, they may hit upon it through sacredcowband.com. The basic theory here is: The more doors you leave open, the more people will find a way in.

### Registering Your Site

To continue with our example, let's say you decide to go with the band name Sacred Baboon. The minute you decide that's the one-- register it. Register it as a .com, .net and, if your budget allows, as a .org. You should also consider registering as many alternatives as you can-- sacredbaboonband.com, sacredbaboonmusic.com, etc. It sounds silly, but wouldn't it piss you off if, after five years of relentless work under the name Sacred Baboon, some half-assed illegal MP3 site decided to launch under the auspices of SacredBaboonMusic.com? Of course it would. www.RageAgainstTheMachine.com will take you to a local Las Vegas Music Scene Site, and I'm sure the band isn't happy about that (their official site is www.RATM.com). And although a lawsuit would be one potential recourse, it would be much easier for you if you were able to prohibit such an occurrence by already owning the domain.

But buying up bunches of alternative domains can become prohibitively expensive, so be sure to prioritize which names you would like to register and then figure out how many you can truly afford. Register.com charges \$35 per domain name per year-- a fairly low fee, and it comes with a plethora of useful tools and services to assist you in getting your site off the ground. Once you register your main domain name (sacredbaboon.com), a good web hosting service should allow you to sign up for low-cost "domain aliasing." [Concentric](#), which is register.com's preferred hosting service, allows you to re-direct an unlimited number of alternative domain names (sacredbaboon.net, sacredbaboonmusic.com) to your main-domain-name for just \$5 per domain name per month when you sign up for their basic hosting plan. This means that if someone typed [www.sacredbaboon.net](http://www.sacredbaboon.net) into their browser, they would automatically be re-directed to [www.sacredbaboon.com](http://www.sacredbaboon.com).

Finally, I suggest only registering your name for a one year period. There is no chance of losing your domain-- once it's yours, you have the opportunity to re-register it first-- no one else can take it unless you allow your registration to lapse. There is talk that registry rates will drop significantly in the next few years -- so why pay for ten years at a rate of \$35 per year, when there's a chance that in 2002 registry rates will decrease to \$10 per year?

### The Value Of Registering Your Own Domain

Maybe you're thinking, "Why the hell would I pay to register my domain name, and then on top of that pay someone to host my site on their server, when I can create my own, *free* website with AOL, Angelfire or MP3.com? It just seems so much easier."

First and foremost, do you want your website to be [www.sacredbaboon.com](http://www.sacredbaboon.com), or do you want it to be <http://hometown.aol.com/yourusername/myhomepage/sacredbaboon.html>?

I hope you're thinking that you want the former. The reasons are obvious -- it all boils down to the fact that you want your fans to actually be able to find you. One band I know manufactured a rubber stamp with their logo and web address (you can make these at any Kinko's or Office Depot), and asks the bouncers at their club shows to stamp everyone's hands as they come into the club. That way, they literally force everyone to notice their web address. Great idea-- but one that will only work with a succinct, memorable URL.

Additionally, you don't want to be beholden to a service provider and its whims. AOL has a strict service contract that every user must agree to. They themselves state that, "Unlike the rest of the World Wide Web, AOL reserves the right to monitor home pages created by our members in our Web community." This means that if you fail to abide by the terms of their service contract (e.g. if your site were to contain "offensive content" or "obscene language"), AOL technically has the right to remove your homepage and terminate your account. It may not happen, but don't take the chance. And although working with the simple publishing templates on AOL may initially seem easier, eventually you will run into some major expansion issues. "Free Homepage" services like Angelfire will embed irritating pop-up ads on every page of your site. And although MP3.com offers a good service-- you get a free band page on its site, with space for MP3 files, a bio, pictures

and more-- it is still too limited to serve as your-one-and-only site.

To be blunt, do you want to be a squatter beholden to a landlord, or do you want to own your own home? Trust me-- the initial climb may be tougher, but you'll end up in a much better place if you start out with your own, 100% yours domain. Keep in mind that there are many ways to garner promotion on AOL, MP3.com and the like, and still have your own homeland.

Finally, Internet directories and search engines (like Yahoo! and Lycos) are far less likely to include a "Free Homepage" site in their listings. Even if they do list you, the search and inclusion rules for most directories and engines are such that a Free Homepage site is going to be a low rung on the ladder-- meaning that, if a user were to search for "Sacred Baboon," he might come up with 10 Encyclopedia Britannica listings for *Papio hamadryas* before he got to the link for your site. Directories and engines don't like pointing to Free Homepage sites because the content is often paltry, limited to one to three pages, and they are often updated infrequently or left-for-dead. A licensed domain, such as [www.sacredbaboon.com](http://www.sacredbaboon.com), is considered to be a much more serious and appreciable venture. Most directories have real live people picking sites for inclusion, not just a random generator, as one might think. It truly helps to live up to their standards in order to garner a descent ranking, let alone be listed at all.

### **BUILDING YOUR SITE: Master Of Your Domain?**

As I mentioned in the introduction, if you have no idea how to design a site, don't despair. With some inclination you can learn how to build your very own quality site in about four months. Either take a class at your local college, or if you are really in the DIY spirit, buy yourself a good HTML program. ([Homesite](#) is great for PC users and costs approximately \$100. [BBEdit](#) is a good one for Mac and costs about \$119. You can download trial versions of both of these programs at their respective sites.) These programs, and most like it, feature tutorials and help sections that can walk you through the site creation process, from HTML basics to web page maintenance. I also recommend a few books: *Creating Cool HTML 4 Web Pages* by Dave Taylor is a great beginner's book, and all of the titles in the *Visual Quickstart Guide Series* are wonderful primers. Start with *HTML 4 for the World Wide Web*, and then move on to the Photoshop, Illustrator and/or Javascript guides. All are available at Amazon.com. You'll also see that most of the registration sites, like [register.com](#) and [Network Solutions](#), offer some great help in the area of site maintenance, from managing your domain to web hosting solutions.

Being your own Webmaster is a great thing-- you'll be in total control of your site, able to make updates quickly, and ensure that the overall look and feel of the site is exactly what you want. You'll also find that you're able to connect with your fans and contacts better than ever before. On the other hand, you may feel that you simply do not have the time, ability or inclination to build and manage your own site, in which case you need to find the right person for the job. A web-savvy friend, fan or family member is often a good bet, but don't let your personal relationship interfere with the fact that you are entering into a *business relationship* with this person. You need someone who truly has the know-how to build and maintain a site that's right for you. Check out previous work he/she has done, or have him/her create a mock-up of your site before you agree to anything. You want to make sure that you having matching visions. Perhaps most importantly, you need someone who will be able to upkeep and troubleshoot the site on a regular basis, which means a once-per-week time commitment *at the very least*. You need someone who's going to stick around and keep the site running for the long haul, and if and when the time comes for that person to move on, he/she will be responsible enough to train and assist the next Webmaster until everything's running smoothly again. A friend of mine in a fairly popular local band used to have a fabulous website-- their "number one fan" had offered to build and maintain it for free, and of course they accepted. But when the band and the fan had a falling out, the guy just left them high and dry. The band had no way to access the site-- they didn't even own the domain, they had let the fan do all of the work! The guy ended up turning it into a site dedicated to humiliating the band, and there wasn't a damn thing they could do about it. The moral here is: Stay in the loop. Do at least some of the work yourself and remain conscientiously involved in your site. Your website is a hugely important undertaking that requires a lot of skill and effort-- treat it as such.



## Cool Lookin' Vs. Ease Of Function

An amazing, spinning, flashing logo or image may seem like a good idea-- but it will actually make your page slow to load (in the case of Java applets) and potentially unusable for many end-users. Recent statistics suggest that 15% of Internet users do not have Flash, a leading animation application. Check out the front pages of Yahoo, Lycos, and Excite-- three of the largest directory sites on the web, according to Media Metrix (a company that keeps tabs on these sorts of statistics). You will notice that they are very simple, and that they load very quickly. That's because they contain simple graphics and basic text all within a compact page. "Flashy" may work for a print magazine, but it's not necessarily better in the Internet world. The more "flashy" you are in cyberspace, the more bogged down, slow and irritating your site can be. Which is not to say that you can't have funky images. You just need to be very aware of file size, load time and which applications you use to create your graphics-- especially if you use animations. In other words, if you're envisioning this really cool Flash Pro animated dancing baboon morphing into your band logo on your site, you *might* want to reconsider.



A slow-page load time can drive users away and cause directories to turn you away. Many directories heed the "eight-second rule," an industry standard that states that if your page takes longer than eight seconds to load, most users get annoyed and go elsewhere. If your site takes longer than eight seconds to load, you run the risk of directories rejecting your site for inclusion. You also run the very real risk of losing potential visitors. Keep in mind that "eight seconds" not only goes for the woman in her office with a T-1 connection, but also for the kid in his garage using a 28.8K dial-up. Go with the lowest common denominator to ensure that *everybody* can get on your site relatively easily. Do checks on each page of your site, using, at *best*, a 56K modem. If any page takes longer than eight seconds to load up, scale it down.

If you are intent on using Java applets, Flash, or other intense graphics and animation applications, consider giving your users the option to access a low-bandwidth version of your page before it fully loads, as well as the option to download whatever applications you are using.

## The Importance Of Ease Of Navigation

A website is a great thing-- you can let your creativity run wild since you're not as constricted as you are in most traditional content mediums. You can have pages upon pages linking anywhere and everywhere, combined with a plethora of images, colors, audio, video, etc. It is *true interactivity*. Interactivity combined with creativity can result in endless, mind-expanding possibilities. It can also result in a muddled mess of a website that comes across as perfectly unintelligible to all who access it. The best way to make your site muddle-free is to spend time thinking about and perfecting your site navigation. You want your site to *flow* from one area to another, to have synergy while at the same time maintaining clear-cut content areas. It's a somewhat abstract concept, but follow the nine tips outlined below, and you'll be on your way to a clear, accessible site.

**1. Don't fall into the "free pages/free hosting" trap.** These services are offering you a limited number of space, usually only one to three pages. You probably cannot fit all of your content into three web pages without each page becoming endlessly long. Free sites from hosts are just as bad as free sites from service providers-- the only comparable advantage with a free host site is that you get to use whatever URL you previously registered. Still, they are probably going to throw an ad banner on your page, you may be limited in file size and design, and there is rarely room for growth. A good hosting service is going to cost you money, but it's well worth it. You'll have all the space you need. [Concentric.com's](http://Concentric.com) basic Web hosting plan is just \$24.95 a month, and it comes with e-mail boxes, 100 MB of disk space, tech support and more. They also provide upgrade plans, which allow your site room to grow.

**2. Follow the "minimal scroll" rule.** Internet users don't like scrolling down pages -- research shows that on a long, scroll-down page, most users read only the upper-most part of the page. So create content blocks that more or less fill the page, but require little or no scroll down. Instead of putting everything on one long page, break up your content into linked, separate pages. Check out the band site for [Roger Clyne & The Peacemakers](http://Roger Clyne & The Peacemakers). These guys have managed to get all of their pertinent info into separate areas with not too much scroll on any given page, with the possible exception of their news page. Not only is it a damn fine site, it



exemplifies the “minimal scroll” rule perfectly.

**3. Balance the design elements of your site-- images, text and background scheme.** There’s no real set standard for an images-to-text ratio, but no more than 75% text is good practice, and go heavy on the images on your main page. You don’t want your site to read like an essay, and you don’t want to turn it into a pictorial. Don’t use more than two or three different fonts, and don’t vary image sizes and patterns too widely. Balance your color scheme. Please, no pink text on a fuchsia background, and no heavily patterned backgrounds. Stick to two or three main colors, and use them throughout the site. See [The Loud Family](#) artist site as a great example of balance. Nice image to text ratio, not too many fonts and colors. Everything is easy on the eye, which makes one more inclined to actually spend time browsing through the site.

**4. Balance your hyperlinks.** Links should not appear at every other word-- only use them when and where necessary. Do not link entire sentences, and stay away from including the words “click here” in your text. If it’s a hyperlink people will understand that they can click there. For example, in a bio, don’t use: “Gary Bills was born in 1973. For more info on Gary, click here.” Instead, simply use: “Gary Bills was born in 1973.”

**5. Avoid “jump links” that throw the user down the page when they click on them.** Use another page if you can, or at least make sure that there’s a very clear break in content. Users can become disoriented by a link that simply moves them down a page, and if they don’t use the links, they can become bored with such a lengthy page. If you must use jump links, just be sure that the breaks in content are clear and discernable. ([The Loud Family](#) uses jump links in their FAQ section. The clear breaks in content make it successful.)

**6. Do not use a webcounter.** There are other ways to track how many folks have visited your site-- you don’t need your users to see how many people have (or have not) been there before them. Webcounters are passé, and they can be rather embarrassing. Do you want a booking agent to see that only 11 people have visited your site? Instead, rely on back-end information. Your website host should give you reports that detail your traffic.

**7. Employ a navigation (nav) bar.** A proper nav bar has prominent placement on each page of your site, usually within a fixed header (see the artist [Cut Up](#)) or along the left- hand side of the page (see the artist [Outside Toy](#)), and contains links to every main area of your site: home, bio, audio, pictures, links, news, etc. A nav bar is truly the single most important piece of navigation you can utilize on your site. And the more prominent, the better. You want to make everything on your site clear and easy to find. If a fan comes to your site and just wants to buy your CD, will he/she be able to find it easily? Will it be “one click away,” or will he/she have to scrounge for it? In order to grant easy access to every nook and cranny of your site, use a good nav bar-- it’s like giving your users a map of your site. A nav bar can be global, which means it remains fixed as you move throughout the site (again, see [Cut Up](#)). Or it can be local, meaning the nav options change depending on what page of the site you are on (see [The Loud Family](#).) A global nav is always a safe bet-- it is easier to create and your users will know exactly what to expect at all times.

**8. Feel free to break the rules if you’ve got a superb idea and an amazing implementation plan.** For example, check out the [Radiohead Official Site](#). They don’t follow all the rules, but the site is still great, because it has a really funky concept combined with intriguing design. It’s a fascinating site-- it makes you want to stay and browse through it all. An idea like this can overwrite all of the rules and get away with it successfully, because the level of creativity and design goes above and beyond. But note that part of why it works is that they’re Radiohead, and there are 100 fan sites out there dedicated to them, and those fan sites have all the basics. But you too can allow creativity to supercede the rules, just proceed with caution.



**9. Finally, keep in mind that different computer set-ups yield different results, so your site is not going to look the same on every computer.** Perform checks on different monitors, browsers and Operating Systems to ensure that your content is more or less displayed as you envisioned it. I can’t stress the importance of this enough. You want your site to be accessible to everyone, whether they are using a Mac or PC, Windows 95 or Windows NT, or Netscape or Internet Explorer. It may be that the only way to get your site working properly for everyone is to “dumb it down”-- simplify your design and minimize your content. Of course, that may not be something you’re inclined to do. At the very least, consider how your site is going to come across to each and every visitor.

## SITE CONTENT

A well-named, well-designed site is key, but you've got to have compelling content to back it up. Users will be visiting your site for a multitude of reasons. Some will be fans that want to hear the latest band news and find out when the next gig is. Another may be a record executive who just wants to hear a few songs and see what you look like. Whoever comes to visit your site, you want to make sure that you've got something for 'em. The following pieces of content are the basic building blocks of an artist site. They make for a thorough, provocative website that hooks new visitors and gets repeat traffic. Not every section is crucial, but if you have the product, the time and the know-how, get it up there! Think of your site as your "wired" press kit-- it contains much of the same information as your offline [kit](#), but your website has the power to be even *more* extensive, even *more* creative. Just remember to keep everything easily navigable, make it all visually appealing, and include the sections outlined below on your main site nav bar.

## Bio

You could just copy and paste your hardcopy bio here, but why don't you play around with it a bit? Try breaking your bio up into linked sections. Maybe your main site bio page is just a version of your hardcopy bio. But when you mention each band-member's name, you can link to an individual bio page dedicated to that band-member, with photos, quotes, and individual statistics. (The [Red Delicious](#) artist site provides a fine example of this style.)

Additionally, you should link out to any venues, cities, schools, coffee houses, etc. that are mentioned in your bio, provided that they have an online presence. You'll be surprised by how many people, places and things have their own websites! For example, if you write about having your first gig at [Mulligan's Irish Pub](#), provide a link. If you first began performing while attending [Lincoln High School](#) in [Stockton, California](#), provide links to both the school and the city. Not only will linking out earn you points in the reciprocity department (Mulligan's will be pleased to see not only a mention but a link to their site, and maybe they will link to your site in return), it will no doubt entertain some of your users-- especially fans and friends.

You also want to "link in" as much as you "link out." That means linking to other areas of your site when appropriate. If you mention a particular song in your bio, include an audio link. If you mention upcoming gigs, include a link to your tourdates section. (See the [Mad Machinery](#) bio as a good example of outlinking and inlinking.) You're not limited to one sheet of paper here, so get creative.



Think about including "extras" like a bullet-point band history or artist timeline, or even a historical pictorial in which each image represents a period of the band's history. How about a fact sheet-- a short list of pertinent facts and dates that sums up your history and current projects? It's like "band at a glance." Another option is a FAQ (frequently asked questions) page, in which the band answers any questions that may be burning in fans' minds. ([The Loud Family](#) has a great FAQ page).

But remember that creativity does not mean that you sacrifice clarity. With so much information, you still want to keep your bio area clear and concise. I suggest that you do retain some version of your hardcopy bio on your site, if only because many music directories, sonicnet.com included, will cut and paste your bio from your website. Make it easy for music sites to include you among their artists.

## Photos

Photos and images should be littered throughout your site. We live in a visual society that, for better or worse, makes a lot of judgments based on image, so be sure to project an image that's right for you, a *personality*. It's going to come across in your photos more than anywhere else. If you have professional/publicity shots, use those in the main site areas. Remember to credit the photographer when appropriate. If the photo is live, or anything other than an obvious artist promotional still, provide a description: "Joanna playing a drum solo at the Mercury Lounge in 1999." This provides a background for the image and allows your users to follow along with you. It lets them into your world. FYI: "rollovers" (that's when your mouse rests on an image and a little sentence pops up) are great for photo descriptions and credits.

Besides the photos and images placed throughout your site, you should include a



photo gallery. Have fun with it! Remember, it's not all about shooting you in your best pose, it's about capturing your artist personality. So include live shots, pictures you've taken on the road, pictures of fans and venues (be sure to get permission first)... anything that you think conveys a sense of you, your band, your *vibe*. [Red Delicious](#) has a quality image gallery, although descriptions of the photos would be nice. With that said, from the technological standpoint, be sure to keep your photo gallery area manageable. Create gallery pages using "thumbnails" – smaller versions of your images, which a user may then click on to see an enlarged version. Keeping in mind file size and the time it takes a page to load, place only 10 to 15 thumbnails each per gallery page. (Remember the eight-second rule!) Finally, instead of a massive mélange of photos, try to group them together by chronology, band-member, tour, etc. [Spinning Images](#) has a great photo gallery, divided up into pictures of each band-member, the band as a whole, and the crowd.

## Mailing List

If a user is visiting your website, he/she probably wouldn't mind being signed up to receive a regular e-newsletter from you, or mailings about upcoming gigs. Give folks the clear opportunity to sign up, and let them know exactly what you're going to be sending them and how often. Most importantly, let them know what you plan to do with their information. Most users want to know that you're going to keep their information *private*. You may want to give users the option of signing up for an e-mail mailing list, and/or a snail mail mailing list. Tell your users straight up: "Please sign up for our mailing list, so that we can send you information about upcoming gigs, contests, band news and more. We will keep your information in the strictest confidence, and if you ever want off of our mailing list simply e-mail us at [band@sacredbaboon.com](mailto:band@sacredbaboon.com)." Don't ask for too much information. Ask for a name, an e-mail address and, optionally, a street address. You want to be up front about your mailing list-- don't ask users to sign a "guest book" and then use their info to send them stuff. A lot of people don't take kindly to unsolicited mail, so just be honest and forthcoming. You can provide an e-mail for them to submit this information, but the most effective tactic is to use text boxes so that the user can just enter his/her info, press submit and voila-- the info is off to you. See [Urban Rhythm's](#) "join our mailing list" section for a good example of what an effective text-box submission form looks like.

There are more details on putting together and using an online [mailing list](#) in my section on CyberMarketing.



## News And Current Events

This section is important because it keeps your site fresh and new, encouraging return visits. Many artist sites keep news on their main page, which is a good idea – it means that each time someone comes to the site they are bound to see something new right away. Keep in mind that "news" doesn't just have to be the latest information about you and your band. It can be industry happenings, social or political concerns, or anything that you care about and that you think would be interesting to your fans. Have an intelligent opinion! Post your views and encourage discussion on your Bulletin Board, or ask fans to write to you and tell you what they think. Publish their letters as editorial pieces (with their consent, of course). All of this will make for an appealing and intelligent section. Of course, this means that you'll need to know what's going on out there. Sign up to receive free weekly online e-newsletters from the likes of [sonicnet.com](#), [Rolling Stone](#), [Vibe](#), [Launch](#) and [Webnoize](#).

Also register for [The Velvet Rope](#), an online Bulletin Board with reserved posting for people working in the music industry.

Take into account the fact that a news page, when updated frequently, has a tendency to get pretty long. I suggest that you archive older news, but if that's too much trouble, just be sure to remove outdated stories before the page becomes unwieldy. Make sure that your most recent news is at the top of the page, and older stuff is at the bottom or archived. The [Roger Clyne & The Peacemakers](#) band site has a great news section, as does [Red Delicious](#). You'll notice that [Red Delicious](#) uses MP3.com's "Daily Top 10" list as news content. Syndicating daily content

from other sites is a great idea-- it ensures that you have new content every day, and it can result in favored partnership status with whichever site you decide to sync up with. Just be sure that the syndicated content



doesn't overshadow your own great content, and that you get permission to use it.

### Press And Media

Include a section on press if you've received some good reviews and write-ups. Include *everything*, from a column in an Arkansas free weekly to a one sentence mention in the [Village Voice](#) to a glowing review on MP3.com. Many of your reviewers will undoubtedly appreciate having their blurb featured on your site, and all will be able to see the good stuff the world has written about you. Be sure to link everything back to the source if an online reference is available. Put the best, most recent write-ups at the top of the page, and put smaller sources and past dates lower down on the page. Also feel free to quote from fans or any other "expert" on your music – just make sure that you quote something that exemplifies who you are as a band. [The Rosenbergs](#) have a nice press and media section. They've included small but telling paragraphs from each write-up, along with proper quotation style, credit, and links back when applicable.

### Discography

Only incorporate a discography section if you've got three or more recordings. Definitely incorporate a discography if you've got a bunch of odds and ends-- demos, 7"s, LPs, EPs, singles, etc. A discography section will help your fans keep track of everything that you have available. A good discography section also gives the impression that you've been around the block and that you know what you're doing. The structure of the section is pretty simple-- it's basically just a listing of each recording in chronological order. But make it informative. Include the cover art for each piece, as well as a short description, the year it was released, applicable labels/producers/studios, and a track listing. The bells and whistles you can throw in here are links to lyrics for each track, links to audio files for each track, and most importantly, a link to buy that particular release. You can allow your discography section to stand on its own and simply link to your other pages for this information, or you can integrate your discography into your other sections, such as lyrics, audio, and/or product. [Weak Lazy Liar](#) has a nice, well laid out discography section, although sadly, they have not included links to buy albums.



### Lyrics

Both [Weak Lazy Liar](#) and [Red Delicious](#) have nice lyrics areas on their sites. Lyrics can be incorporated into other sections, such as discography or audio clips, or they can stand alone. Either way, it's a simple way to give your fans what they want. Do try to toss in some creativity-- use a funky layout or some odd images that you find to be representative of the song.

### Audio

Since you are a musician, displaying your music will obviously be a critical part of your site content. However, audio can also be one of the most difficult sections to develop. Ideally, you want to provide the user with as many ways to listen to your music as possible, without overloading your allotted disc space. Your basic file choices are: WAV, AIFF, AU, QuickTime, RealAudio, Windows Media, MP3 and Liquid Audio. For a full discussion on the pros, cons and technical statistics of each type of audio file, along with instructions on how to convert your music into digital audio files please see my dedicated [Digital Audio Workshop](#) section.



### Tourdates

A tourdates and gigs section is key, for obvious reasons-- you want people to know where you're going to play, and the Internet is used as an informational source. Be super-informative in this section. Include the date, the venue that you're going to play (linked), address, directions, phone number, cover charge if any, age restrictions, and any other bands on the bill that same night (linked). If the venue doesn't have its own website, consider linking to venue information from a tourdate site such as [Music Today](#) or [Gigmania](#). At the very least, it's a good way to curry favor with the venues. Let them know that you are linking to them from your site. Also include info on past gigs: A list of linked venues and cities played allows your experience to show, and it also serves as a compliment to places you've played. [The Peacemakers](#) have a pretty good tourdate area on their site, minus a "past gigs" section.

Be sure to update your tourdates area constantly, and once a tourdate has passed move it immediately into the "gigs played" area. An outdated performance schedule looks unprofessional – whereas an always up-to-date schedule keeps 'em coming back for more.

Another idea is to keep a tour diary, and post it or link to it from this section. This serves a couple of different functions: (1) It gives users insight into your personality and your thoughts. That's a cool thing for a fan. (2) It functions as a "thank you" to great venues and cities that you've played, which can earn you brownie points when you return. It can alternately function as a "fuck you," but I don't suggest burning your bridges. (3) It serves as bait-- if you keep it entertaining and frequently updated, it gives the user a reason to return to the site. (4) It keeps you clear on your gig experiences, what worked, what didn't. Not only is it good for the fans, it's good for you. See the section called "Gerlinda's Big Mouth" on the [Weak Lazy Liar](#) artist site for an example of a tour diary done well.

## Community

Your community area includes things that allow your users to interact with you and with each other. The easiest and most effective community pieces to build into your site are chat rooms and bulletin board systems (BBS). [Red Delicious](#) has a great "interact" section with chat room and BBS. [Roger Clyne & The Peacemakers](#) also have both of these components. If you have the skills to build out these areas, do it! A chat room can be ineffectual if it's simply left to the users to take the prerogative. But if you use your news section to promote a scheduled chat, once a week or once a month, you just might stir up interest. The band can go online and talk to users about what's new and what's happening. At the very least, it'll give the impression that you are appreciative of your fans. Whether or not you decide to incorporate a chat room, do try to include a BBS. They are fairly easy to script into your site, and then they basically manage themselves. You can build your own [from scratch](#) or with [BBS software](#), or you can [subscribe to a BBS host service](#). A BBS will allow your users to ask questions and get to know each other. And they'll get to know you when you get in there yourself and respond! The more of a close-knit community you build, the closer your users will feel to you, and the more likely they will become dedicated fans.

## Contests and Giveaways

Contests are a great way to get your fans involved. They don't have to be big and intricate-- [Mike Errico](#) routinely gives away a pair of tickets to each of his shows via promotions through his site and his e-newsletter. Try to do giveaways that get your users to come visit your site. For example, "Come talk to Sacred Baboon live in our chat room on Thursday at 7p.m.– the first five people in the room will win a T-shirt!" People love free stuff. Contests get you connected to your fans, and they're yet another great way to increase repeat traffic to your site. Also think about conducting some larger-scale contests, such as, "submit your original artwork to Sacred Baboon-- our favorite piece of art will become our new CD cover!" Just remember, no matter how big the contest, you need to promote it in order for people to know about it!



## Links

A links page allows you to point your users to other bands, newsgroups, organizations and sites that you like. ([Baby Snufkin](#) has a great links page – they separate their links into different categories and provide succinct descriptions.) A links page is a method of further expressing your personality, but it can also become a great business tool. Many sites, like MP3.com and UBL.com offer affiliate programs, in which they actually pay you to link back to their sites through a button or banner, as well as provide some of their content on your site. Be sure to read the affiliate agreements closely, and if you're into it then go for it. These are good opportunities, but button and banner links (which are basically ads) placed on your front page or thereabouts, can make you look like a sellout. By placing such things on a links page, you look much less cheesy, and to most users it won't come across as such a sell.

Finally, consider using frames to keep users at least partially within your site layout when they link out. Frames allow you to divide the browser display area into multiple sections. Each section is a frame. If a user links out, the page is coded so that they remain within your frameset, meaning that the user gets the content from the outlinked page, but they still have at least one of your frames displayed (usually your nav bar). Frames ensure that the user will not forget where they came from!

## Video

Videos and cybercasts are by no means necessary to the success of your site, and video, like audio, can be a difficult section to develop. Video also takes up a lot of disc space, so if you want to include video on your site, proceed with caution. Still, done correctly, video can be an awesome addition to your site. There are two ways to go about this: Host your own video on your own site, or have someone else shoot the video segment, host it on their site, and then you can point to it.



Clearly, hosting your own video on your own site is the more time-consuming of the two options, but it also gives you the most control. If you want to post something that exists only in VHS format, you're going to have to encode and digitize it for the Web. If you're an audio/video engineer, you'll know all about this. If you're not, then it's probably not worth the effort. Instead, tape your desired footage with a digital video camera. That way the content is already digitized-- you only have to encode it. Many digital cameras now come with software that shows you how to encode using either RealPlayer and/or Windows Media Player. The second option is to have your video hosted by a cybercasting network, such as [Digital Club Network](#) or [Online TV](#). If you book a show at a venue that is in partnership with one of these networks, they'll theoretically cybercast your show for free and place it on their network, leaving you free to point to it. The reason I say "theoretically" is that the way it works with these networks is constantly evolving, so for the most up-to-date info, check out the network sites. Also note that in both cases the content will not live on your site-- you will only be able to point to it.

The [Spinning Images](#) have a great video section with various clips from live shows, all in RealPlayer format. Also note that they provide information and a link for users to download the necessary player. If you're going to include video, this is the way to do it.

## Contact Info

Contact info should stand alone in its own area, although you may want to make various methods of contact available throughout the site (consider having your e-mail address on every page of your site, perhaps embedded into a footer). It can be a very simple area with a listing of various e-mail contacts (like [Urban Rhythm's](#) contact section), or you can incorporate text boxes (as [Red Delicious](#) has done). The only addition I would make to both of these sites is to include a contact mailing address.