How to Build a Website in 4 Hours (without Elves)

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If it hasn't happened to you already it *will* happen eventually. Someday soon, someone is going to ask for your help building a web site *pro-bono*. Now, I think this is a very good idea. If you are a member of a Church, a Scout leader, a band booster or involved in any other worthwhile cause that's long on commitment and short on funds, you should dedicate a part of your skills to helping them leverage the web. The problem is usually time. If you are like me you may have trouble coming up with enough time to build a web site "for free" - at least not the 30 or 40 hours you feel such an effort deserves. Not to worry... I'm here to tell you that with a couple of simple choices you can build an excellent web site in around 4 hours. What?? You don't believe me?

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Step 1 - Skip the Design and Use a Jumpstart

My first piece of advice is to simply scrap the whole design process and use a *jumpstart* from **Community MX**. This site gets my vote for the most useful site on the web. In fact, to be in my will you have to promise to vote for it every year (and you have to be related to me - so don't ask). These little "jump starts" represent all the source material and documentation to skin an entire site. They come with PNG files, CSS files and a host of documentation from bone fide CSS gurus. They also come with *Dreamweaver extensions* allowing you to create a page based off of the template. Pick a jumpstart, drop in a few new images, change the text and Voila! - a very professional site design in about an hour.

Step 2 - Blogs as CMS

My second piece of advice is to install a blog. You can use **Ray's** BlogCFC if you like, but you should also consider **Blogfusion** by CF guru Jake from Countersink Design. If you are using it for non-commercial use, you can get a copy by simply sending him something from his Amazon wish-list. Why Blogfusion? Because it has a photo blog as well - so you get 2 features for the price of one.

If you are adept at installing CF applications, installing either of these blogs is no problem. Once they are installed you can re-skin them using your CSS template designs from step 1. You may not have thought of it, but a blog can also be a nice light-weight "content management system" (cms) for a small site. Create a container on the home page and add a query for the top entry for a particular category (say - "home page"). Whenever you want to alter the home page all you need to do is add a new entry to that category. You can even come up with a few categories, different pages etc. - whatever time allows.

Step 3 - Galleon Forums

This application is so easy to set up and skin, and it immediately adds an impressive feature to your site.

Step 4 - Calendar Application

There are a lot of these out there, but my favorite has to be **CF event calendar**. It

uses 2 tables, it's easy to skin and it has nice rollover features. Anyway, there are a number of event calendars out there that are free - or nearly free. Pick one and install it - then come up with a clever way to use the data. For example, display a list of "upcoming events" on the home page.

An Example

Here's **an example** (just registered - if it doesn't resolve try **this link** instead). I did this site for my church choir. The site is complete, but the principle stakeholders have yet to add "real" Content. Here are the steps I took:

- Using the "Machu-Pichu" jump start from community MX I created a sample home page.
- I used the PNG file that came with the jump start and gathered a few pictures of the choir and director. I made a new collage from the pics and replaced the "machu-pichu" masthead with the current masthead.
- I installed "blog fusion" in the /blog directory and re-skinned it.
- I installed Galleon Forums in the /forums directory and re-skinned it.
- I installed "event Calendar" in the /events directory and re-skinned it.
- I took out the bogus content from the home page and added a module that shows the latest post from the "announcement" category in the blog, and another module for the "director's message" category in the blog. Still another module displays "community news". By posting to the blog the site stays up to date.
- I added a "list" at the bottom that displays "prayer requests" from one of the forum items.
- I added link lists at the right for "rehearsals" and "performances" that pull events from the calendar application.

That's it. It was about 3 hours on the weekend and another hour today. It looks professional. It's not "flashy", but it has a wealth of functionality. It's a full fledged community site with lots of features, and all done while sitting in my sweats watching NFL playoffs and making bodily noises.

Summary

In short, it is possible to build a fully featured web site in a few hours *if you have the right skill set* (database, Coldfusion etc.) and if you use canned design and application.