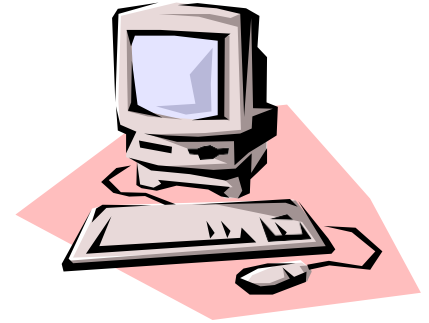


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Creating your Own Genealogy Website

by Michael Wilson



If you've ever thought about having your own website for your genealogical information, this article is for you! I have had one since 2006 and can definitely recommend it. I had two motivations for wanting to start a website. The first was simply that I wanted to share the information I had accumulated. Over the years, I had found a lot of very helpful information on the internet and wanted to pay it forward, so to speak. (There's a lot of bad information out there, too, and sometimes I put warnings about that on my site.) Secondly, putting my information out there was a way to come into contact with distant relatives and others researching the same family lines as me. My website has succeeded very well on both counts. Most of the people who view my web pages never contact me, but occasionally someone will email. I have had a number of effusive thank-yous from people who learned things about their ancestors, and I have heard from many distant relatives, including some who were able to fill in important gaps for me.

There is a wide range of possibilities for a genealogy website, from ones that are easy to get started (including blogs and family trees on places like Ancestry, MyHeritage, or WorldConnect) to ones that require quite a bit of knowledge and effort. This article is about stand-alone websites for your genealogical information. For these, there are three main issues: (1) how to generate the website page or pages, (2) where to put the website, and (3) how to get the page files to the website.

The simplest option for generating pages for a website is the genealogy program on your computer. I use RootsMagic and it has, under the



“Internet” tab, an option to “Generate files for a website...”. I know I have also seen websites generated by Family Tree Maker, and chances are other programs have such an option as well. So, if you're interested, take a look within your genealogy program to see if it can generate a website for you, and then experiment with the options it allows. I personally was not satisfied with the choices available from RootsMagic, but maybe they will appeal to you.

An option I liked better was to generate a website using a program called GedPage (www.gedpage.com). This is a program that you can download and try for free, but it costs \$10 if you want to continue using it. It takes as input a Gedcom file that you export from your genealogy program, and it generates a family group sheet for each family, with hyperlinks connecting them all. Important to me is that it has an option to include pages with the notes for each person, and it can also include photograph pages. There is also an option to include on each page a link to a home page, which you have to generate yourself somehow. One possibility

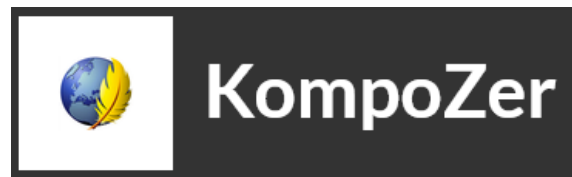
would be to use something like a blog page as the home page. If you want a customized home page, you will have to learn how to make one. More about that in a minute, but first let me note that there are other systems out there for generating websites from a Gedcom file (GED2HTML is another one I have come across), but I have no direct experience with them. If you don't like the options mentioned so far, look around and maybe you can find something you like better. I eventually ended up writing my own computer program to read a Gedcom file and generate web pages from it in order to make them more like I wanted. Doing this isn't really that hard, but it's obviously not for most people.



An important issue these days is privacy. You should not post information about living people on the internet. The best way to ensure that is to exclude such information from the Gedcom file when you export it from your genealogy program. RootsMagic has options to “Privatize living people”: you can choose not to export facts about living people, and you can choose not to even include their names. Look for similar options in your genealogy program. If you want to have a website to share full information with selected people, you should choose a method that has the option of access restrictions. Access restrictions on a website is an advanced topic beyond the scope of this article. If you do such a thing, you might want to sequester only certain pages of your website and let the public see the rest.

How you make a personalized home page could depend on where you are going to post your website, so let's look at that next. There are a lot of companies that offer web hosting, and for an additional fee you can usually even choose the name of your domain (of course, you have to find one that isn't already taken). Shop around, as there's a range of prices and services. Generally, the cost per month will be lower if you commit to a longer period of time. As part of the package, most of these companies offer software tools such as WordPress for building a website. This is probably the easiest way to make a personalized home page for your site. The approach would be to build the home page, and possibly a few other pages, and then upload the genealogical web pages that you generated as discussed earlier. At its simplest, you just need a home page with some sort of introduction and links into the genealogy pages. For example, there is probably a name index that you can link to, and maybe you want to link to a root person or a pedigree chart or ancestor list, or something like that. Beyond that, you can add photographs or other material as you like.

If you are more adventurous and want to make your own personalized web pages, you can do it directly in HTML (hypertext markup language—the basic language of web pages) or with an HTML editor. If you just want a simple page or pages, it's not hard to learn how to do it, though the trend over time is toward more and more complexity in web pages. There are very sophisticated web-development programs like Dreamweaver, but they are expensive. If you have, or even want, a program like that, chances are you already know a lot about creating web pages. There are some free HTML editors, but I don't know of one that is entirely satisfactory. I used to like one called KompoZer, but they stopped updating it several years ago. It still works fine for simple web pages, but it does not



handle newer constructs well. It can still be downloaded at <https://sourceforge.net/projects/kompozer/>.

Another editor I have used is called BlueGriffon (<http://bluegriffon.org/>). It can be downloaded and used for free, but some capabilities require a license that costs €75. If you want to learn to build or modify web pages by hand, a good resource is <https://www.w3schools.com/>.



The last issue is, how do you upload the web pages from your computer to your site in the internet? If you're using one of the commercial web-hosting services, they probably have an option for uploads through their interface. The program that generates web pages for you might also be able to interface directly with your website. RootsMagic has an option to "Publish online", but I haven't tried it so I don't know how it works. Many HTML editors, including KompoZer, have FTP (file transfer protocol) capability built in (I think the licensed version of BlueGriffon does too, but I only have the free version). If none of those works for you, there are stand-alone FTP programs, which can be used to upload and download files to and from the internet. A good free option is FileZilla (<https://filezilla-project.org/>).



In closing, the AGS website (abqgen.org) has a page where members' websites are listed. If you have one, let us know and we'll list yours, too. Or, just take a look if you're interested in seeing some of your fellow members' research.