

Seven Free Tools for Your Website

By Dianne Reuby

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Free Site Builder <http://www.freesitebuilder.co.uk>

A search utility makes your site look more professional, as well as providing a useful service that will make your visitors return. I've been using FreeFind, <http://www.freefind.com/>, which will spider your site on request or by schedule, and sends an e-mail report of search terms that your visitors have used. You can also have a "What's New" link and page, with an icon if you want. You can set member-only pages not to be spidered.

Visitor feedback is also a good idea - though some of the responses I've had have been confusing to say the least! If you don't want to create your own form, a ready-made feedback form provider is FreedBack - <http://www.freedback.com/> Once you have chosen your options, the form is generated on-line. You then copy-and-paste the code into your web page.

Adding these two options to your site also provides an excellent (and unique!) article for your ezine - I describe how in my free article "Use your Feedback". Get a copy by e-mail from <mailto:fsb-uf@getresponse.com>

One of the greatest source of free webmaster tools is Bravenet - <http://www.bravenet.com/> Guest books, forums, polls, feedback forms, site counters, and more. Call in and sign up for as many free tools as you need, all fully explained to help you install and customise them to match your site.

A site counter is a must - or how will you know if anyone is visiting? I've used SiteMeter <http://www.sitemeter.com/> for my sites. They e-mail weekly stats, and by logging on to the site you can find out who, when, where, what with, how long, and of course predictions for the future! The help is set off as a default - to get explanations of the diagrams scroll down and click on "Help" to turn it on.

If you are offering freebies such as e-books or demo programs, it's handy to know how many times they are downloaded. I check my e-books this way to see which are popular, and which I should remove from the library. LinkCounter <http://www.linkcounter.com/> is very easy to use. Sign up, and enter the URL of your download file. Then copy the generated link code, and paste it into your web page to replace your direct link. Choose to receive reports daily, weekly or not at all. Use it to check affiliate or reciprocal links too.

Starting an ezine or newsletter? I use Topica, <http://www.topica.com/> for my mailing list. Type up your ezine in a text processor, copy it, and paste it into the "Post message" box. They supply the sign-up code for your web page, although you can adapt this, or use your own, if you prefer. They will provide on-line archives, but these can only be read by Topica members, so I keep mine on my web site as well. eGroups is a similar service - they are now part of Yahoo! - <http://groups.yahoo.com/>

Auto-responders can be used to send out information to anyone who requests it. I use OttoResponder from the Newbie Club, <http://newbieclub.com/responder/?pramclub> and GetResponse from <http://www.getresponse.com> for my articles, "lessons by e-mail", and sample ezine. For example, if you send a blank e-mail to <mailto:fsb-lessons@getresponse.com>, you will get a list of my free e-mail lessons. You can send out a series of e-mails, or just one. You choose an account name, and post your e-mail message(s) to that account. Every time a blank e-mail is sent to that e-mail address, your auto-responder sends out the information you've stored.

Some of my favourite freeware sites:
<http://www.completelyfreesoftware.com/>
<http://www.webattack.com/>
<http://www.jumbo.com/>
<http://www.moochers.com/>

Dianne Reuby is co-author of the e-book "First Website Builder", <http://newbieclub.com/builder/?pramclub>
Dianne created and runs the Free Site Builder web site and ezine, dedicated to helping newbies create web sites with free tools, services and resources.
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