

CGI and Forms in your Marketing Website

By Stuart Reid

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Are you making the most of interactive features for your web site? Almost all browsers now support various scripts and data entry methods. They are not hard to use, and can spur a browser to do *something*. JavaScript and Java plugins can work in any web page. CGI tools will usually require access to your `cgi-bin` and an ability to set permissions, unless the tool is remotely hosted.

Note: If you are reading this online and the "pre" tags show up ignore them. They are to stop the examples executing.

Forms

If you include a form on your website you can use e-mail from the server to do lots of useful things. You can include a feedback form, which will send you a note to your personal e-mail address. You can use a sign-up form that does the same thing but sends the details to your autoresponder or newsletter tool. You can even use a refer-a-friend script that will send your link to inputted e-mail addresses.

All these help to promote your site and give something back to the user. An empty input box or a flashing cursor is screaming to be used! It is much more efficient than a `mailto:` link.

Forms are simple to implement. You need to place some HTML in your page and you need to use a script on your site. Most hosting packages come with an e-mail form script, if not use one the links at the end of this article. As you can see from the example below, which goes in the body of your page somewhere, it's just a list of inputs for name and e-mail, plus a submit and a clear button. The rest is just standard HTML codes.

```
FORM ACTION="scriptname.cgi" METHOD="post"
INPUT TYPE="hidden" NAME="recipient"
VALUE="your.email@whatever.com"
Name: INPUT TYPE="text" NAME="name" SIZE=10 MAXLENGTH=20 br
E-Mail: INPUT TYPE="text" NAME="email" SIZE=10 MAXLENGTH=30
br
INPUT TYPE="submit" VALUE="Send!" br
INPUT TYPE="reset" VALUE="Clear"
/FORM
```

Obviously change scriptname.cgi to your script, and recipient to your e-mail address. Script names are usually something like /cgi-bin/fmail.cgi or /cgi-bin/formmail.cgi

Pop-Ups

Pop-Ups are a simple line of JavaScript that will open another browser window. They can be misused, so keep it to one per site. Pop-Unders are similar but they are loaded behind the main window and are not seen until that main window is closed. Exit Pop-Ups will only appear when the main window is closed. They are all great advertising tools. Use them along with the next suggestion!

This next part is placed in the HEAD section of your HTML page. Where it says htmlfile insert the name of the page you want popped-up. Where it says myWin that's the window title. Hopefully the rest is self explanatory.

```
script language="JavaScript"
!--hide
function OpenPopup()
{
window.open("htmlfile", "myWin", "status=no,scrollbars=yes,width=
400,height=300");
window.event.cancelBubble = true;
window.event.returnValue = false;
}
//stop hiding--
/script
```

Then change your BODY tag BODY onLoad="OpenPopup()"

Page Rotators

These are used a lot for those running start-page exchanges, to maximise hits from various programs. You can also use them (and more effectively) with a Pop-Up to show different ads for each window that appears. They are also useful as a home page to show random ads, banners, etc on the site.

Here is a good page-rotator script. It's too long to put here. Find it at <http://www.netpreneurnow.com/articles/rotate.txt>

Forums

There are a few good forum systems available for free. These are a well developed messageboard for your website and can help to create a community. In practice it can take a while to set up but if you are reasonably competent on your PC it shouldn't be no problem. You can get forums remotely hosted so you only need to provide a link from your site, but this is probably a last resort as reliability can't be assured and the external site will take people away from your own pages.

A good forum system is from Discus. Get it at

<http://www.discusware.com/>

There's an example running at:

<http://www.netpreneurnow.com/forum/>

FFAs, Classifieds, etc

Worth hosting on your site, but probably not worth using yourself. All they are good for is harvesting e-mails and these are usually fake, junk, or autoresponders anyway. If you moderate your links page well and only allow posting from the page itself it can be useful to your visitors.

FFA from <http://www.submitad.com/>

Classifieds from <http://www.becanada.com/>

Ad Trackers

Not really part of your site but useful for your own ads. A lot of things you *pay* for can be had for free with a little know-how or perseverance. Why use ROI Bot or similar if you can have it tracked from your own URL? eg: "http://mysite.com/track.cgi?link1"

Look for all kinds of scripts from:

<http://www.bignosebird.com/>

<http://www.scriptarchive.com/>

<http://www.free-scripts.net/>

<http://javascript.internet.com/>

<http://freecode.com/>

There are scripts for everything out there. If you have the ability to use them then do! You can even get complete referral scripts, affiliate program scripts, shopping basket applications, remote-management scripts and more. Not all are free, but compared to the cost of a subscription service well worth considering.

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