

# Birth of a website: THE DICTION DOMAIN™ and educational website development

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*[The following is a text adaptation of "Birth of a Website," a web-based multimedia presentation about educational websites and their development.]*

Education is changing as the means to present information expand. The Internet and web-based technologies now allow educators to deliver information in an engaging, interactive format suitable for both the local and the global classroom. As music educators, the two of us have spent the past two years learning to create webpages and adapt teaching materials to this new medium, culminating in the creation of The Diction Domain™, located on the Internet at <http://www.diction.vocalist.org>. In this discussion we will introduce The Diction Domain as a specific example of an educational website, then share some ideas about developing web-projects. Throughout, our emphasis will be on practical applications of existing technology.

## The DICTION DOMAIN™

The Diction Domain is an educational website devoted to voice diction-related resources. Its references include books, articles, websites, language fonts, software and teaching tools, announcements of events and projects, and an open invitation to contribute to the website's contents. The site is free and available to anyone who has a computer with an Internet connection. Webspace for The Diction Domain has been provided by The University of New Mexico, and the site has received over 6000 visitors from around the world since its public opening in January 1998.

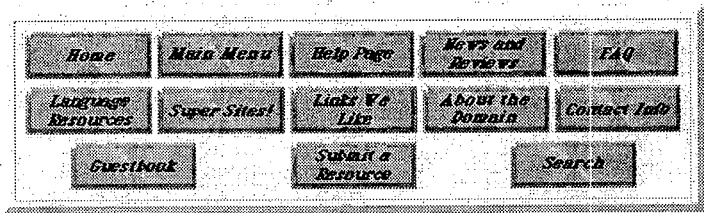
The primary goals of The Diction Domain are: 1) To archive and disseminate knowledge and resources pertaining to the field of voice diction, 2) to especially feature diction shareware and freeware materials available on the Internet, and 3) to encourage global collaboration and participation in the continuing development of the website.

## Features of The DICTION DOMAIN™

Typing "<http://www.diction.vocalist.org>" into a web-browser takes you directly to The Diction Domain's Home Page (Ex. 1). This is the official "front door" to the website; it displays the logo and mission statement, offers a choice of frame or frameless viewing, and counts the number of visitors to the site.

The homepage links to a welcome message, basic instructions, and a Navigation

Bar (Ex. 2) that allows visitors to go anywhere within the Domain. This ability to hyperlink to information and sections is one of the key advantages to web-based education: each person is allowed to choose his or her preferred pathways through the information offered.



Ex. 2. Frameless Version of the Navigation Bar

At the heart of the Domain is its archive of Language Resource links. The Table of Resources (Ex. 3) features a wide variety of language groups to choose from, as well as a collection of resources devoted to the International Phonetic Alphabet. Each topic in the table has its own page of links to diction-related websites, books, recordings, and other resources. We regularly search libraries and Internet holdings for works relevant to the teaching and study of voice diction. Any reference is welcome if it can be used to improve singing language skills, whether or not the resource was originally created specifically for singers.

|   |                   |                 |                         |          |
|---|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|----------|
| R | [Multi-Language]  | [Asian]         | [English]               | [French] |
| e |                   |                 |                         |          |
| s | [Germanic]        | [Hebrew]        | [Italian]               | [Latin]  |
| O |                   |                 |                         |          |
| u | [Russian/Slavic]  | [Scandinavian]  | [Spanish]               | [Celtic] |
| r |                   |                 |                         |          |
| c |                   |                 |                         |          |
| e | [Other Languages] | [IPA Resources] | The Diction Domain 1991 |          |
| s |                   |                 |                         |          |

Ex. 3. The Table of Language Resources

We also offer a list of Super Sites, diction-relevant websites we have reviewed and deemed to be particularly outstanding, and a page of Links We Like, sites of more general interest to singers and voice teachers. The News and Reviews page includes site updates and announcements of diction-related projects and events.

Not all of the resource links at The Diction Domain take visitors outside of the website. Original content within the site includes a tutorial on ASCII Equivalents for International Phonetic Alphabet symbols (Ex. 4) and a list of Frequently-Asked Questions about studying voice diction. Plans are currently underway to create an online

Introduction to the Phonetic Alphabet, as used by singers, and introductory tutorials for the most commonly-sung languages.

| Singers' IPA symbols and their ASCII Equivalents: |                  |                                    |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------------|
| IPA Symbol                                        | ASCII Equivalent | Example Word                       |
| [ɑ]                                               | /A/              | father                             |
| [a]                                               | /a/              | ball (East Coast American, German) |
| [ã]                                               | /A~/             | enfant (French)                    |
| [æ]                                               | /&/              | cat                                |
| [au]                                              | /AU/             | house                              |
| [b]                                               | /b/              | bet                                |
| [ç]                                               | /C/              | human                              |

Ex. 4. IPA Equivalents Tutorial

The online environment allows us to include electronic forms for resource submissions and comments, and a search engine for the site's language resources. We regularly receive email from teachers, students, and others interested in language and diction, and utilize suggestions and feedback when updating and changing the website.

### Developing educational websites

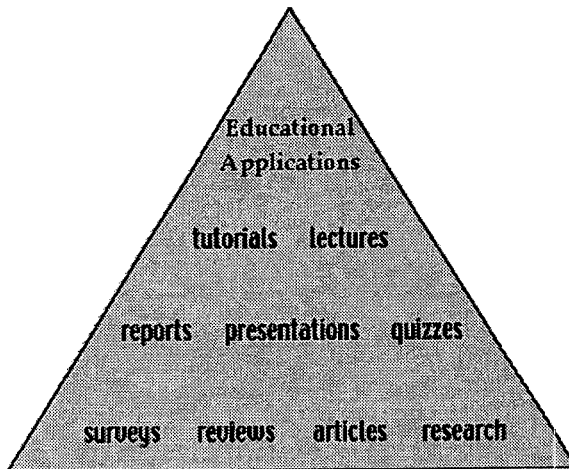
The Internet has become more than just a popular forum; it is now a legitimate research tool, an alternative method of education, and a means of supporting differing learning styles. Having outlined our project, we'd like to share some ideas and thoughts about bringing web-pages to life.

Why develop webpages for the World Wide Web? It's a chance to reach a world-wide audience. You will stay current with the times, using the tools your students are now growing up with. You can use interactive multimedia to engage the interest of people with a variety of learning styles, and encourage your students to develop skills ranging from music-technology and computer-proficiency to critical thinking.

## Effects and applications

What can you put on the web? For a start, try text and hyperlinks...graphics ranging from photos to cartoons...electronic forms...tables of information...sounds in a variety of formats...lists and outlines...video clips...animated graphics...and special effects like Java, Javascript, Shockwave and Flash. The Internet is not the perfect environment for all your educational materials and projects, but the current technology is impressive and it continues to improve.

The educational applications (Ex.5) for webpages are numerous. You can create text-only or multimedia-enhanced tutorials and lectures, reports and presentations, interactive online quizzes, opinion or information surveys, unit reviews, or publish your articles and research with examples on the Internet. The possibilities end only with your imagination.



Ex. 5. Ideas for Web-based Projects

## Getting started

There is a learning curve involved in web-development, especially for more complex projects, but getting started is easy. If you've "surfed the Net," can word-process, email, and upload or download files, then you can learn to create web-pages. You will need a computer with a modem and Internet connection, a web-browser and some webspace. You'll want an HTML (HyperText Markup Language) editing program to help you create your pages, and some readable references about web-design and development. Add a scanner and graphic/sound editing software to your materials list if you want to create

original multimedia, but many graphic and sound resources are available freely on the Internet.

## Keys to success

Good design, logical organization and interesting information are keys to a successful web-project. To begin, first define your audience, and your project's goals. Outline and organize your project thoroughly before adapting it for the web. Create a clear plan for navigation throughout the site. Provide alternatives (especially names and descriptions for graphics) for people with visual impairment or less-sophisticated computer equipment. Allow for future expandability in both content and structure. Encourage feedback at the site, and respond promptly to comments and inquiries. Your primary concern is to make it easy for visitors to find what they are looking for.

## What we started with — What we learned

The Diction Domain began with a series of emails between the two of us, in which we discussed creating a website focusing on Voice Diction Resources. We spent several months planning the website, and searching for materials before creating a test version of the website. Following evaluation and suggestions from a group of colleagues, the Domain held its official Grand Opening in January 1998 and has been rapidly expanding in holdings, features, and contributors ever since. The project began as an experiment, but we felt strongly that since we both were interested in voice diction, other people would also be interested.

In the process of building, restructuring and updating the site, we have learned about the principles of web-design and development, located many unusual and impressive diction resources, and come into contact with people who share our passion for language and diction. The project has demanded time and dedication, but we consider the results to be well worth our efforts.

## Conclusions

By learning to develop for the web, you can create flexible, interactive products, generate immediate and widespread feedback, develop professional contacts, and provide useful tools for the professional and global community. Like any other creative endeavor, a combination of dedication, experience, imagination and experimentation is required to create successful web-projects, but the effort is repaid in the flexibility of the form and the breadth of its audience. For those with a taste for adventure, developing educational websites is an exciting new frontier, a frontier we welcome you to explore for yourself.

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