Web Site Designer ◄

BRIEFLY: The zillions of Web sites on the Internet compete for visits from Internet surfers. So the technically challenged who want Web sites hire the technically able to produce a site that will capture hits. When they hire Tony Alunni, they get more— an artist whose skills with line and color invite visitors to "come on in and stay awhile."

Tony Creates Virtual Collages on Multimegabyte Canvas

Bright Colors, Nifty Graphics Invite Surfing

"First impressions are everything on the Net," Tony Alunni says. "If people don't like the way your site looks, they aren't going to want to surf it. That's why I try to make the pages I design visually pleasing, easy to navigate, and, most importantly, unique."

Tony (29), as owner of A.P.A. Designs, which he operates out of his home in North Hollywood, Calif., creates Web sites for clients across the country. Combining an artist's eye with strong technical skills, he electronically pastes together graphics, photos, and text onto a computer screen to build collages of information. To make the pages viewable on the World Wide Web, he translates the layout into *HTML*, the programming language that browsers like Netscape Navigator and Microsoft's Internet Explorer utilize.

"Clients often want me to create something out of nothing," he says. "But I like to produce pages that will give surfers a feel for the company before they even begin reading the content. For that, I need a company's logo, mission statement, goals, and signature pictures or images. I want to give sites I create more of an artistic touch than a technical touch."

Much like the Web, Tony's career path is one punctuated by links rather than linear progression. At Lake Zurich (Ill.) High School, he excelled in art and played drums for The Limbocats, a band he and his friends had formed. Summers he worked for his father installing carpet. "I learned the value of working hard to make

pet. "I learned the value of working hard to make the customer happy," he recalls.

After graduation in 1987, Tony took a semester's break from school before enrolling at a nearby community college. "I took a lot of art classes there, like life drawing, design, pottery, regular drawing, visual communications, and art history." Once he had received an associate's degree, he transferred to Northern Illinois University to continue his art education.

► *Tony (right) confers with clients at the outset to find out what they want their Web sites to be.*

"I decided to take a more abstract direction there," he says. He steered clear of visual communications classes in which computers were increasingly important. His inspiration came from within. "I used watercolors, charcoal, and colored pencils. I would go to classes in the morning; paint and draw the rest of the day and eat a

Anthony Paul Alunni
Owner
A.P.A. Designs
North Hollywood, Calif.

EDUCATION

▶ Lake Zurich High School, Lake Zurich, Ill. Graduated 1987. Favorite subjects—English, art, science, and math. *"These were intuitive courses for me."* Played basketball. Ran track. Played in a rock 'n' roll band.

▶ William Rainey Harper Community College, Palatine, Ill. Associate's degree in art 1990.

▶ Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Ill. Bachelor's degree in art 1992.

▶ Learned TV production and editing skills at TCI cable producers workshops 1994-1995.

▶ *"My artistic background allows me to be more creative than just a technical person who knows only how to use a computer."*

▶ *"Some people take classes to learn computer programs and others learn on their own. I'm self-taught."*

WORK HISTORY

▶ Carpet installer during summers in high school. Worked for his father.

▶ Shoe salesperson and record store clerk during first two summers of college.

▶ Picture framer, Fast Frame, Arlington Heights and Lake Zurich, Ill., 1990-1996. Designed custom frames. Cut matting and glass. Assembled frames. Also handled some sales.

▶ Office manager, Women in Film/Chicago, Chicago, Ill., 1996. Managed operations of Chicago-area office of national not-for-profit organization.

▶ Graphic designer/production assistant, *Insider Magazine*, Skokie, Ill., 1996-1997. Designed layout for magazine pages and ads. Designed posters, CD covers, invitations, business cards, documents, coupons, and fliers. Also did some typesetting. Laid off when the magazine went through a financial squeeze.

▶ Graphic artist, Swibco, Inc., Lisle, Ill., 1997-1998. Designed novelty products, like key rings, magnets, brass items, pens, lighters, and plush toys.

JOB BENEFITS

▶ None. Self-employed. *"I have control over my work schedule, which allows me to seek projects during regular business hours and work evenings when I choose to."*

Pizza Pocket at night and watch 'Late Night with David Letterman.' Then I'd start all over again the next day."

In 1990, while he was still in college, Tony began working at a framing store. Customers brought in posters, artwork, or other items. He would frame them, choosing the best colors, layout, and design to suit each piece. After graduation, he began looking for another position.

Loads Up on Software

"I wasn't sure how my experience as an artist was going to translate into something else," he recalls. "I thought I might find a visual communications job in advertising or whatever, even with my art degree. But everyone asked if I knew the Macintosh or if I knew how to use programs like QuarkXPress, Illustrator, or Photoshop. I realized that I needed to buy a computer."

Tony spent evenings and weekends teaching himself to use the Macintosh computer and the software programs necessary to do professional graphic design. "Right away, it just felt right, as if I had worked on it all of my life," he says. He continued to work at Fast Frame but also began to free-lance on the side, designing fliers and brochures and producing designs on T-shirts, which he sold on consignment in Chicago-area stores.

Because he stood eight hours a day at Fast Frame, a back injury from a previous auto accident continued to flare up. Finally, he quit to start an intensive back-treatment program. To earn income, he free-lanced as a videographer, working for the American Red Cross and several cable television programs. He also designed brochures for Women in Film/Chicago, part of a national not-for-profit organization. After he completed medical treatment, he accepted a job as the organization's office manager.

"I wasn't doing what I love to do," he notes, "and I wasn't using my computer skills at all." He was, however, making contacts, many of whom were interested in his ideas about Web sites. "I say Web sites need an artist versus a technician. All Web sites look the same, and I think they should be a little more unique."

One of his contacts connected Tony to a job more suited to his interests: free-lance production artist for *Insider Magazine*. Here, while de-

signing and laying out magazine pages, building ads, and designing posters, he also investigated the construction of the company's Web site.

Laid off a few months later, he went back to working from his home but soon obtained another job creating designs for novelty products, like key rings and refrigerator magnets, for Swibco. He now had a steady income with enough time to design Web sites and do other free-lance projects for clients.

In March 1998, Tony tired of cold weather and moved to North Hollywood, Calif. "I decided to work for myself from my home instead of being on-site contract labor in the client's office," he says. "Independence lends itself to more creativity." Through networking and word-of-mouth references, he quickly began attracting clients who wanted Web sites.

Tony's tools are a Macintosh computer and software, including Illustrator, FreeHand, Photoshop, and Simple Text. "Using a Mac rather than a PC is simply my preference," he notes. "It's equivalent to a painter choosing a brand of paint."

Space Dictates

The first step in designing a Web site is to determine how much space the client's Internet service provider (ISP) allows. "Most ISPs throw in some space for you to build your own Web site as part of their regular fee," he explains. "That space can be as low as 2 MBs [megabytes] to as much as 10. Of course, you can always purchase more at an additional fee. Trying, however, to explain to a client not versed in technology what can and cannot be used within the allotted space can be frustrating. Image files in particular take up a lot of space. Everything works off how much they are willing to spend. Only then can I present them with ideas for a possible page layout."

Yesterday, Tony began his workday at 10 a.m. after exercising, eating breakfast, and feeding his four cats. Turning on his computer, he typed text into Microsoft Word for a Web site he was designing for a tango dance instruction company. He then scanned into the computer several photographs of couples in different dance poses. Next, he copied the text from the Word file into Simple Text so he could begin programming in HTML, the universal programming language for the World Wide Web. Among other procedures, he tagged every word that he wanted to appear in

he tagged every word that he wanted to appear in boldface or italic type.

Returning to the photos, he retouched them in Photoshop, smoothing out blemishes and erasing scratches and dust marks. He lightened several and altered their orientation and size. "I retouch photos with tools the software offers," he explains. "There is even a paintbrush icon that lets you go in and choose or smudge a color and apply it to the electronic image on the screen."

▶ *Tony studies photos to select ones to scan into the computer for a client's Web site.*

Tony cropped three of the dancing photos to identical sizes, altered each one's brightness and contrast until all three matched; then transferred the images to a *gif*-building program. Here, he set up each image within its own frame, saving them as one image and setting the interframe delay at 1/50th of a second. When viewed in a Web browser, the three images will appear one at a time but dissolve into each other. The resulting image makes it appear the couple is actually dancing on the screen.

At 12:30, he ate a turkey sandwich and yogurt in his kitchen; then began adding various images to a basic Web page template. He spent the next three hours playing around with placement of the images and the text, breaking at 4 to rest his eyes and arm. When he returned to work, he built icons in FreeHand. Following his supper, he added these icons to the template and adjusted their colors. Next, he did HTML programming, took a break at 10, and added background to the HTML programming.

After midnight, he stopped to eat a bowl of cereal; then spent 90 minutes putting final touches on the pages he had started. "I finished two of what will eventually be eight pages," he says.

Single, Tony enjoys his flexible schedule. One week he may put in long hours devoted entirely to his work. The next week he may take off to travel or work less hours and spend more time on music. He still plays drums in a band, which performs occasionally at area nightclubs. Last year, he also established his own online magazine called *Musicrom.com*. The site offers CD reviews, interviews with musicians, and concert reviews monthly.

"Many new Web applications for designing, uploading, and programming are always coming out to make everything simpler, easier, and faster," Tony points out. Because of this, he believes everyone will be able to build their own Web sites. "This will undoubtedly take away work from people like me," he acknowledges. On the other hand, he has advantage over newcomers to Web design: experience and an understanding of how rapidly the Internet and computer technology changes. "Staying on top of technology is as important and time-consuming as doing it," he notes, "but I will do it so I'm always one step ahead of the game."

DATA FILE   Web Site Designer

D.O.T.:141.061-018   CF S.O.C.:3252   HC:AES

WORK DESCRIPTION

Builds Web sites for clients—meets with client to discuss needs and amount of space available for Web site; obtains logos, mission statement, goals, pictures and images, product descriptions, legal wording, and contact information from client; enters text into word processing program; scans photos and graphics into computer, touching up and resizing them as needed; lays out pages on computer screen; translates files into HTML code so page will be viewable on Web browsers; makes changes at client's request. May maintain sites, adding timely material periodically. May advertise services and make sales calls. May do record keeping and billing.

WORKING CONDITIONS

In office. Sedentary work. Risk of eyestrain and carpal tunnel syndrome from spending long hours looking at a computer screen while using a mouse and keyboard.

PLACES OF EMPLOYMENT

Self-employment; computer sales and services companies; online service providers; software companies. Many companies employ their own Webmasters.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Interest in computers; artistic aptitude; good color sense; creativity; originality; organization; hand/eye coordination; dedication; independence; open-mindedness; concentration; patience; helpfulness; tolerance for sedentary work.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Extensive experience in design and HTML programming minimum. Bachelor's degree in computer science or related field helpful.

JOB OUTLOOK

Growing, although as more sophisticated yet easy-to-use software programs become available, more people with less technical training will be able to design their own Web sites.

SALARY RANGE

$30,000 to $70,000 per year, depending on experience, reputation, employer, and location.

RELATED OCCUPATIONS

Computer Game Designer
Desktop Publisher
Internet Consultant

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The subject of this biography is not available to answer personal inquiries. For more information, please write to the following organizations or go to their Web site. Addresses are current as of publication date.

Ask a guidance/career counselor about computer-related training programs at postsecondary schools.

National Association of Schools of Art and Design Web Site: http://www.arts-acredit.org

To find information about similar careers, see separate Vocational Biographies booklet index and cluster listing, an encyclopedia, or books on careers found in your library, career center, or counseling or placement office. Check the vertical file, card catalog, microfiche, or computer listing. Look up the following words:

Computer, Designer, Graphic Artist, Internet, Programmer, World Wide Web. Also see the Business and Office, Communications and Media, and Fine Arts and Humanities Careers clusters in the Vocational Biographies Career Library Index.

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

Search the Internet for innovative Web sites and contact the designers and Webmasters credited for the pages. Talk to them about what they do. Learn various Web-application programs and develop your own Web site or one for your family. Help design Web pages for school or community organizations. Get a part-time job in an electronics store or computer services shop. Take courses in computers, algebra, trigonometry, calculus, art, drafting, English, and composition.

LIFESTYLE IMPLICATIONS

Free-lance Web site designers often work long hours, including evenings and weekends, to meet deadlines, yet enjoy some flexibility in their schedules. Those employed by large companies typically maintain regular business hours.