TECHNOLOGY

by Jeffrey C. Dircken

Even good websites need regular updating

The previous catersource.com website had served the world in happy fashion for two years, but evolution is ultimately the fuel that drives the Web.

Let's take a quick tour of the new catersource.com and get an inside look at what we did—and why we did it.

Visitor feedback and the need to keep a website fresh, informative and user-friendly will always be key concerns for those of us who wish to maintain a successful online presence. When we were asked to improve the *catersource* website, we put this credo to work.

• Reapportioned real estate: By today's standards, the old website may have appeared a bit dark and graphically heavy. The new site breathes more freely with a cleaner, crisper edge. The former website layout devoured approximately 30 percent of available on-screen real estate with its heavy sidebar panel. The revised design compresses common shell elements so that the overall presentation (although still quite powerful) is warmer and less intrusive for the viewer.

• Unified navigational theory: The underlying structure of the original template provided some interesting logistical problems when new features were required for the site. The

revision allows visitors to easily log into secured sections of the site without shuttling back and forth between the Home page simply to log in. Gone are the scattered navigational elements that sometimes masked key features beneath unassuming image panels. Even for visitors familiar with the sight, some key features may seem brand new simply because they've been hidden from view in the old website. The new site also employs a sexier and more intuitive drop menu system that lends itself well to pinpoint navigation and faster page-loading times.
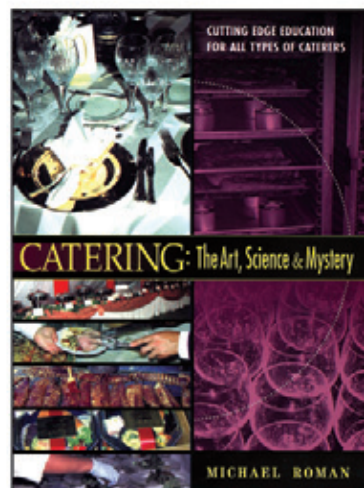
• Better, faster and more scalable: For database-intensive sites, pulling information from the server and quickly rendering it in a web browser is an ongoing battle of resources. The new site now makes solid, practical use of HTML framesets, in which commonly repeated elements (including the login area, sidebar logo and main drop-menu system) are nested comfortably into external areas of the design that don't require

reloading every time a visitor navigates between pages. Updating content becomes a quicker and far less finicky process for both the site administrator and end user (such as visitors to the highly rated Forum) since pages are now relieved of surplus scripting that would otherwise be necessary to accommodate recycled elements.

One additional benefit from a site administrator's perspective is that this new system allows features to be incorporated much more fluidly (and without encroaching into real estate otherwise apportioned to existing services), which will ultimately facilitate exciting growth opportunities at catersource.com for years to come. CS

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