

Why Your Website Matters and What to Do about It

What is the first instinct of students who want to find out about a new gene or process? They probably Google it. And if they are lucky, they find a well-designed lab website of one of the experts in the field. The site offers an introduction, some references, a few useful diagrams, and enough pictures and lab information to pique a student's interest in a potential postdoc position.

Shouldn't that expert be you?

An effective Internet presence will not only help you attract students and postdocs, it gives you a public profile in your field. We live in an online world, and a well-managed profile can be a significant asset to your career.

We've come a long way since the first Mosaic browser, through Netscape to Chrome. It used to be enough to have a simple text page. Now, visitors to your website expect to see something visually appealing and to have easy access to the information they want. There are several ways to provide that information, but they all share one overarching, essential requirement: It must be up-to-date.

The Golden Rule: Keep the Information Current

How much confidence do you have in an investigator whose webpage lists no publications since 2001? Unfortunately, too many labs give the task of creating the website to a student or postdoc without appropriate planning. The person assigned may make a nice-looking page, but when he or she moves on, no one remembers how to update it. Within a few years it falls out of date, an Internet remnant. Regardless of how you build a website, you must have a clear strategy to maintain and update the information. At a minimum, you should review it once a year to make sure that the science is still fresh, the papers are up-to-date, the links work, and your title and contact information are correct.

The Minimalist Approach

Most universities or departments offer some sort of Web presence to their faculty. In many cases, they will provide space for a research

summary, maybe a diagram, and a list of recent publications. If the sites are managed efficiently, they may even automatically update the publications from PubMed. But don't forget to review the information there regularly.

If your university offers nothing more

on the Web than directory information, you really do need to arrange for something more substantial. But look around—Google yourself. You may not even realize that you have pages on the university site, your department site, and on that multi-department graduate program site. You may even find there is a webpage from your previous job! Make sure that the information is coordinated as

much as possible by contacting the webmasters of the different sites.

If You Want Something More Extensive...

Maybe you've outgrown your university webpage, or you want to provide more information online. It's actually much easier than it used to be to set up a website, and even an old professor can do it!

The first thing to do is decide what you want on the website, lay it out on paper, and write the text. A designer cannot write the content for you. Most lab websites feature three basic components: a research section, a list of publications, and a section listing the people in the lab. Make sure to identify colorful pictures or diagrams that provide visual interest.

The research section is where you can describe your work and convey your excitement about it. This should have enough background for someone new to your field but still have enough current information for your colleagues. It's not a dissertation. Most people will not scroll past the first screen of text, and certainly not past a second. If you really have more to say, use separate "interior" pages with clear links to the top level.

The list of publications should include all recent work. Ideally, there will be links to the abstracts on PubMed.



Susan L. Forsburg



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The section on people is your recruiting tool. Students and postdocs considering your lab will want to know who is there already, and where your alumni have gone. Smiling faces denote a happy lab!

These basics can be expanded as needed to include additional information on your research system and your university, useful links, protocols, and so on. Just make sure it's easy to navigate between the sections—one or two clicks at most—and to get back to the home page.

Work with a Designer—or Do It Yourself!

After you know what you want to say, you can think about how you want it to look. If you are working with a designer, you will meet with him or her at this point. You may choose to work with a student or staff member. Some universities have an internal contract service that does webpages. Or you can use an outside designer. But—I reiterate—regardless of who is going to do the design, you must have a clear strategy to update the content.

Don't be afraid to do it yourself—designing a website is no longer as complex as it was in 1995, when I wrote my first site's HTML code by hand. These days there are a number of useful programs, ranging from free HTML editors like PageBreeze to professional-quality programs like Dreamweaver. I use one called Rapidweaver. These programs can make it easy to add pictures, navigation menus, and other bling. Make sure

you choose a uniform look in fonts and colors for your pages, and keep them simple and easy to read. Preview your webpages on different browsers and different platforms to be sure that all viewers will see the site as intended.

The final step is to upload the new site to a server. Your university has a server for faculty websites; the IT department will tell you how to gain access. Then make sure the link to your website is put on your faculty directory page and any other sites for your field or your organism. And don't forget to review it and update it regularly.

It is important to remember that this is your professional site. Keep it focused on science-related issues, and resist the temptation to include personal information. If you want an individual website or a blog for your nonscience life, keep them separate. More suggestions about managing your online identity can be found in my previous column, "The Internet Never Forgets."¹ ■

Happy surfing!

— Susan L. Forsburg, for the Women in Cell Biology Committee

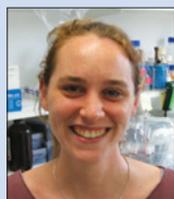
Note

Susan L. Forsburg recently redesigned her lab website, PombeNet (www.pombe.net).

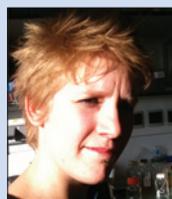
Reference

¹Forsburg SL. (2009). The Internet never forgets. *ASCB Newsletter* 32(4), 14–15. www.ascb.org/files/0904wibc.pdf.

Dambournet, Vernay Honored as Young French Cell Biologists



Daphné
Dambournet



Aurélia Vernay

The French Society for Cell Biology recently chose two young scientists to receive student travel awards. Daphné Dambournet and Aurélia Vernay will receive expense-paid trips (compliments of the French Society for Cell Biology) and meeting registration (compliments of ASCB) to attend the 2011 ASCB Annual Meeting in Denver, CO. They both will present their posters and will report on their meeting experiences for the *ASCB Newsletter*.

Dambournet is a PhD student in the Membrane Traffic and Cell Division Lab at Institut Pasteur, Paris, France. Her abstract title is "Spatial and Temporal Control of Lipids and F-actin in Cytokinesis Completion." Vernay is a PhD student at the Institute of Developmental Biology and Cancer, Nice University, Nice, France. Her abstract title is "An Actin-Dependent Phosphoinositide-bis-phosphate Gradient Is Critical for Fungal Filamentous Growth." ■

—Thea Clarke