

Websites, And Templates, And Tabs! OH, MY!

Piano Pedagogy In The Digital Age

Today, every successful business has a website that operates for informative as well as promotional purposes. Music teaching “businesses” should be no different. While the teacher is, appropriately, most focused on pedagogy and the students, he or she must not overlook the importance of the business side of what they do. Having a well-designed website may result in the prosperity and quality of a piano studio.

Unfortunately, most teachers lack the basic understanding of how a website is constructed. I find even my pedagogy

undergraduate students, who grew up with the Internet and are web savvy, have not given much thought to what makes an effective website.

There seem to be two main obstacles to creating your own website: technical concerns and what content to include. However, I have found if you break down these areas, the task is manageable by just about anyone. The following guidelines can walk you through the process and help you avoid some common mistakes.

Where To Start?

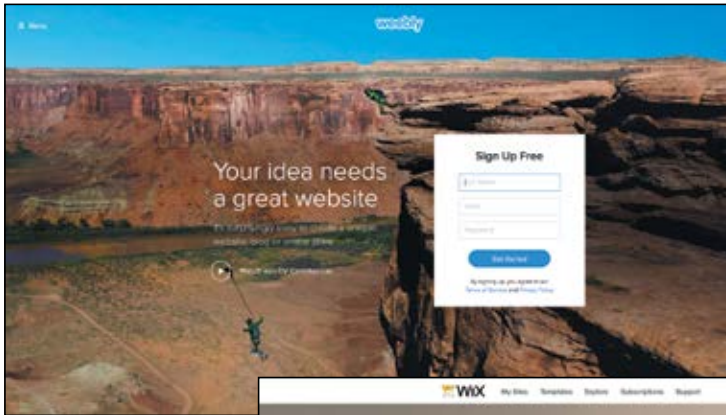
There are three elements a piano teacher will need to build a website: a domain name, hosting and a website builder:

- **Domain name** is the name of your website. This can be your studio’s name (www.CreatingMusicalGeniusesOneAtaTime.com) or your personal name (www.FredericFrancoisChopin.com).
- **Hosting** is where all of the information for your website will reside.

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Language And Format

I find the biggest mistake piano teachers make is not considering the different audiences that will use the website. Far too often the teacher writes what they want to say about themselves or their business *not* what eventual users need or want to read.

■ **Website builder** is a program that helps with the design and programming of your website. These programs can be found online or purchased. The domain name and hosting can be purchased through the website builder program; therefore, essentially all you will need is to choose a website builder.

Assuming you are not a professional web designer you will save yourself the painful learning curve of programming by using a website builder. Common website builders include: wix.com, godaddy.com, weebly.com and many others. Some website builders are free for a basic package. In my pedagogy class, for example, we used wix.com. It is completely free for the basic package and lets you explore and get acquainted with website building. Using the free version will have “wix” and other variants in the website’s address along with their advertisements on the pages. You will not have much say in your website’s name and the address might appear as: www.FredericFrancoisChopin303489.wix.com. Remembering a name like this is no simple task and eventually you might want to invest in having your own domain name such as www.Chopin.com. Still, the “free” version is extremely convenient both for teaching purposes as well as getting your feet wet with website design.

It is important to realize there are three unique audience members you have to consider: your current students, your future students and their parents. Choosing a “voice” and “personality” that can address all three of these audiences is the most crucial aspect when composing your website. Keep wording simple, concise and clear. Long elaborate paragraphs with fancy vocabulary might be appropriate in an academic environment, but definitely not appropriate on your website. Using short sentences and “simple” language is essential. Your website needs to be clear for people with different backgrounds (including those for whom English is not their first language).

The writing tone should be professional but friendly. Another mistake I see is the teacher who wants to show he is “demanding” and “serious,” yet on the website it comes across as hostile or mean. Conversely, exceedingly “nice” and “fun” lingo may be a turn-off for serious students. Your spelling and grammar have to be correct, as you are not only a piano teacher but also an educator.

Formatting your text is crucial and should be focused on getting your information across clearly. Writing in bullet points, for example, is easy to access and keeps your ideas organized. Make sure the font is easy to read; fancy

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font might look nice but could be unreadable. Design consistency will add professionalism to the website: use the same font for titles, body text, announcements and the like throughout the website. Font size should not be too small or too big; sticking to a 12–14 point font is the standard. The color of your font has to have enough contrast with the background. If your background is pink, the font should not be white. Keep in mind that some of your readers may be color blind.

The template and background color is the overall look of your website. Put the same attention into choosing them as if you were decorating your living room. The overall design has to look professional, attractive and tasteful. The website builder will have different templates to choose from. Once you chose your template you may change the background colors or leave it as is. In any case, try to steer away from bright colors, such as bright reds or yellows, because they can be difficult to read and hard on the eyes.

Photos and graphics are elements that add personality and bring your website to life. Include a friendly picture of yourself, preferably with a nice warm smile. Believe it or not, pictures can be the biggest factor in the overall feel of your website. Including a few photos of your students will enhance the look of your website and will show a successful and prospering piano studio. A written consent form signed by the student or guardian is required if a photograph is used.

While your website might look amazing on your computer or desktop it might look completely off on a mobile device. Therefore, it is important to check that the website also works on your phone. Some website builders have two designing options: “desktop editor” and “mobile editor,” editing your website in both modes will ensure your website looks good on both platforms.

Lastly, remember your website has to reflect your personality as a teacher. This might be a different personality than you as a performer, parent or friend. The best piano teacher websites are those that make you feel like you know the teacher.

Homepage, Webpages And Tabs

Every website starts with a homepage. This page should be attractive, concise, clean, inviting and not wordy. There should be lots of space and an enticing photograph that, in an instant, portrays what the site is about. If you have a YouTube channel, Facebook or any other social media you may include these icons on the bottom of your homepage. It should also make clear the navigation for the rest of the website through a select number of tabs which act as a table

of contents for the entire site. The homepage should reflect *your* piano studio and you!

After the homepage, there are endless possibilities when it comes to what you can include on your website. On one hand you may have a concise website with just “about,” “studio policies” and “contact information” tabs. On the other hand, you might take a more elaborate route and include many more webpages. In any case, do not get frustrated! Building a website takes time and does not happen all at once. Keep adding as the ideas come, but no matter how many pages you create, they should all be accessible from the tabs on top or on the side of your web pages. Having to go through studio policies to get to contact information will leave the prospective or current student frustrated.

Here are some other ideas of tabs for you to consider:

Schedule

Keeping students informed of your teaching schedule in advance will set clear attendance expectations and eliminate any ambiguities. Busy students and parents will definitely appreciate having a listed schedule available to them at all times. This will contribute to a more consistent attendance and fewer cancelations. Be specific about when you will be teaching and when the breaks will be. List the student recitals. Piano teachers compete with many after school activities.

Classes Offered

List the classes you are teaching; individual lessons, duets, theory group lessons and so on. Do not assume the students will know what classes you offer. Providing students with different options and additional classes is definitely an appealing bonus for parents.

Photo Gallery

Pictures can be excellent promotional devices. Seeing the success of your studio through these photos can sway a new student towards your studio.

Media

Video recordings are powerful tools that can be helpful to current and future students. Having a video recording of your student’s playing can be both educational and motivational. Watching these recordings together with the teacher can provide wonderful feedback and establish future goals. Clearly, not all recordings should be posted on the website. However, students might be encouraged to work harder to be featured on the website. In addition, posting musical exercises and teaching excerpts might be used as a way of review for your students.

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As for the prospective students, student performance clips, and short teaching excerpts will introduce your teaching style and show the results of studying piano in your studio. Again, a consent form would be required.

Studio Policies

The policy section is perhaps the most important aspect of your website. Having a written studio policy will avoid conflicts and helps teachers operate their businesses smoothly. Finding a good fit between teacher and student will begin on this page. The studio policies are personal and do vary widely from one teacher to the next. Some basic headers may include: description of your studio, parental involvement, required materials, lesson rates, payment methods, cancellation policy, practice requirement, your expectations and many more. This is the place where you can be selective and create rules and requirements for your studio.

Having a link with a downloadable PDF file of the studio policies on your website is strongly recommended. You might even want to consider having the student or guardian sign a printed copy.

Parents' Page

This page may include useful information for parents and thus encourage their involvement in their child's piano lessons. Practicing tips along with ways to motivate their child can help to nurture the necessary supportive system to the student. In addition, articles of interest, suggested local concerts and musical events, piano competitions and evaluation programs along with links of interest could all be included on this page. Fostering parental commitment to piano lessons results in a more motivated and hard working student. After all, we teachers know that behind every successful student there is a supportive parent.

Students' Page

Students respond with such enthusiasm to technology. Creating an interactive portal just for them may motivate and excite them. Some elements to include may be: interactive practice logs (where students write their progress), theory worksheets (note spellers, intervals, key signature and the like), and short music or video clips of classical performances.

Payment Methods

We have all been through difficult situations with lesson payments. The "I forgot the check" syndrome seems to infect many piano studios. Discussing money and late payments is an uncomfortable subject for many piano

Piano Lessons

✓ 1 Lesson \$60 USD
5 Lessons \$300 USD
10 Lessons \$600 USD



teachers, especially if your business is new. An online credit card payment option is an excellent solution to avoid these situations. You will need a business account with a payment processor such as PayPal or MTNA partner-company Elavon to connect to your website. These companies do a fantastic job of guiding you through the set-up process.

If you use PayPal, I would suggest two payment options "automatic billing" and "gift a lesson." The first option is obvious and will be applied toward all of your students. The second option is for friends and family members who want to give a gift of music.

The convenience of accepting credit cards, does not come free, but is well worth it. Processors typically charge 2–3 percent per transaction, which can be added to the piano lesson fee.

Maintaining Your Site

Continually updating your website and keeping it current is imperative for your studio. For one thing, it will keep people coming back! It is especially important if you post schedules and announcements. Having an out-of-date website is worse than having no website at all as it will appear that your studio is not active or no longer exists. If you have no updates to make, visit your website often. A frequent look at your website can only help improve it.

You Can Do It!

Having an active website is an essential part of a music piano studio in today's world. Learning website design is an important aspect of a college pedagogy class. Building a website is not a complicated task. It can be easily done and is accessible to individuals with the most basic computer knowledge. It is simple, quick and reasonably priced. It can range from a basic informative website to an elaborately designed one. It can have as little or as much information as you want. Your homepage and website is a reflection of you as a piano teacher, person and business, so get creative and make a great homepage, because after all there is no place like home!

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