

# The *OurPlace* Website: a Tool for Creating Homepages for Places

## 1. PROBLEM SCENARIO

The recent years have seen tremendous activity and excitement over community based Web sites, where users contribute content for other uses. “Web 2.0” is a term used to describe a recent generation of Web sites where the users are the contributors, participation of users creates the content and a sense of community, and content sharing and self-publishing are encouraged. Wikipedia, MySpace, Blogger, Youtube, MSN Groups, Yahoo! Groups, MSN Spaces, Flickr are key examples of Web 2.0 sites providing a platform, in short, for end-user participation. In fact, discussion groups, mailing lists, online virtual communities and online noticeboards are older examples of such user-driven Websites. Notable is also Facebook ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)), which in recent years, has grown to more than a billion users world-wide, certainly a phenomenal growth, making the creator effectively a billionaire. Many people and organizations also have Facebook and Twitter homepages.

Many of the above community-driven Websites transcend geographical boundaries and are world-wide in scope. Almost the opposite is Websites driven by and for the community of people local to a place. Physical communities pervade life, originating from villages to cities. With any physical location where people live, a community can arise. Melbourne itself is divided into areas such as Darebin (<http://www.darebin.vic.gov.au/>), Whittlesea (<http://www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au/>), etc. Some suburbs themselves tend to have their own Websites (e.g., Point Cook town centre on the western side of Melbourne has the Website <http://www.pointcook.com.au>). La Trobe University itself has a community of its staff and students, with an associated Website. Physical communities of people at places, at different levels of population and granularity, including universities, cities, municipalities, suburbs, airports, shopping centers,<sup>1</sup> etc, tend to have their own Websites. One could think of these Websites as being virtual (or cyberspace) counterparts of physical places, enhancing the community life at those places – it is helping to build a virtual community for people at a place (hence, the term *place-based virtual communities*). Imagine a version of Facebook but with faces localized to a place (e.g., Bundoora). Such a *place-based virtual community Website* is like the “homepage” for a place (or the people living there).

The primary function of the *OurPlace Website* is a tool to make it easy to set up a Website that is a counterpart to a physical place, i.e. to support interactions between people within a particular physical place. For example, for the suburb of Bundoora, I would like to set up a Website similar to the one for Point Cook mentioned above, in order to enhance interactions among people living in the suburb and to highlight events and concerns for that suburb (Incidentally, there does not seem to be such a Website for Bundoora, i.e. <http://www.bundoora.org.au/> does not exist, and there also none for a suburb like Reservoir, i.e. <http://www.reservoir.org.au/> does not exist, and neither does

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<sup>1</sup> The Chadstone shopping center on the southeast part of Melbourne has its own Website (<http://www.chadstoneshopping.com.au/>). However, the Website is more a place for the management of Chadstone to offer information to the public, than for businesses at Chadstone or people visiting Chadstone to interact with each other. But the Website does report on events, etc at Chadstone to generate a loose sense of place and community.

<http://www.preston.org.au/>, etc). Another category of places whose community life can be enhanced with a Website is shopping centers. For example, one can generate a homepage for the Northland shopping center say.

The *OurPlace* Website/tool allows one to quickly create a Website that is a counterpart to a physical community at a place. Consider an analogy with Myspace.com: roughly speaking, *OurPlace* is to a place what MySpace is to an individual; MySpace.com enables any individual to generate and host a homepage (or profile page) for the individual, and also to meet other friends. *OurPlace* enables any physical community of a place (or its representative) to generate and host a “homepage” for the place (which, for simplicity, we will term as “**place homepage**”), to help enhance the community life of people living at that place.

## 2. AIM OF THIS TOOL

Say, I want to generate a “homepage” for the suburb of Preston, I will use *OurPlace* to do so, rather than starting from scratch. I will first register as a user/customer/client with *OurPlace* and then fill in a HTML form available from the *OurPlace* Web site to provide information on the place whose homepage I want to create. Thereafter, on submitting the information, *OurPlace* will generate the homepage for me (with a default layout or slightly configurable layouts). Anyone can then visit *OurPlace* and browse to the homepage for Preston I just created.

Therefore, the main aim of this tool is to ***help one to create a homepage for places easily, and to provide a host for such homepages***. The *OurPlace* Web site (or tool) is being created for a company called *OurPlace Pty Ltd*. *OurPlace Pty Ltd* reserves the right to add advertisements to homepages (on a portion of the homepages only), and receives revenue for allowing companies to add advertisements to homepages. When designing such an *OurPlace* Website or tool, the designer has to see the problems mainly from a customer’s (or homepage creator’s) point of view.

## 3. REQUIRED FUNCTIONALITY

The Web based tool is envisioned to be used by customers/clients and the *OurPlace Pty Ltd*’s administrator. The tasks these two categories of users need to perform are given below.

Customers will need to be able to perform the following five tasks through the Web site:

- (CT1) register as a client of *OurPlace* (before one can create any homepage, and a registered client can create more than one place homepages),
- (CT2) fill in a form to create a homepage for a place: e.g., the form should ask *at least* for the name of the place, the location of the place, a description of the place, a catch-phrase for the place’s homepage (these are required fields on the form) – the form can allow the user to supply more information than this; using such required information, the system will generate a homepage for the place with such information being inserted into the place, using a default template, i.e. the default homepage that is generated should contain *at least* the name of the place, the location of the place, a description of the place, the catch-phrase for the place, a

space on the page for latest news and important news (related to the place), a space on the page for information about events at the place, a space on the page for advertisements that *OurPlace Pty Ltd* might want to insert into the homepage, a space on the page for links to further information about the place (e.g., links to roads/infrastructure, community news information, emergency warnings, media releases about the place, contacts for local councils, links to contacts for the needy in the community, etc – for more information about what could go on a place homepage, see the following place homepages: <http://www.darebin.vic.gov.au/> (homepage for the municipality of Darebin), <http://www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au/> (homepage for the municipality of Whittlesea), <http://www.thatsmelbourne.com.au/> (homepage for the city of Melbourne), <http://www.nyc.gov/> (homepage for New York City), <http://www.ny.gov> (homepage for New York State) [you can Google for other examples of place homepages, including shopping centres and schools]; note that homepages for a shopping center, a suburb, a municipality, a city, or a state, could share some things in common, but also tend to have major differences, i.e. different types of places tend to have different types of information [your *OurPlace* tool should support at least **three** different types of places, with a default template corresponding to each type of place; default templates can contain standardized layouts for place homepages];

for each place homepage that is generated by the system, ensure that there is a logo (of your own design) of *OurPlace Pty Ltd* (with a link to the homepage of *OurPlace*), and a footer containing “About Us”, “Contact Us”, and other links (of your own discretion) that relates to the hosting company *OurPlace Pty Ltd*,

the form you design should also allow the client to select optional features (of your own innovation – have at least three options) to be available on the homepage,

- (CT3) use a community blog facility (which serves as a forum for the locals) to the homepage where registered users of the community can create new topics or discuss topics they choose,
- (CT4) log in and then update a created homepage except for the name of the place which should not be changeable, and
- (CT5) report problems to *OurPlace Pty Ltd*.

The *OurPlace Pty Ltd* company’s Administrator will need to perform the following two tasks through the Web site:

- (AT1) select one or more place homepages (that exists so far) and add/remove advertisements to/from these place homepages; different advertisements can be added to different place homepages; each advertisement containing some text and (optionally) graphics, and
- (AT2) delete created place homepages.

A third category of users is the general public. As mentioned in section 2, “Anyone can then visit *OurPlace* and browse to the homepage for Preston I just created.” The general public should be able to visit the *OurPlace* Website, and find (via some sort of navigation facility of your design – e.g., links, drop-down menus, etc) the homepage of a place and visit that place homepage.

**A Final Note (bonus marks – up to [10 marks, to get up to 110marks]):**

The system can be extended in two ways:

- i). [3 marks] enable advertisements on a place homepage to automatically update periodically (e.g., every 3 minutes, show a different ad, etc).
- ii). [7 marks] create a mobile version of the website taking into account mobile web site design guidelines, and have users automatically redirect to the mobile version if they are accessing the Website from a mobile device. Provide a detailed two page documentation on your design rationale.

## 5. YOUR TASKS AND MARKING SCHEME

**TASK 1 [10 marks]:** Design the static (perceptual) aspects of the Web user interface for the *OurPlace* Website. For each of the tasks above, you need to submit some *sample* screen shots of your design. Along with the sample screen shots, provide some explanations that justify your choice of design layout, forms, colour combination, headings, etc. Do follow the design guidelines in the lecture notes as much as possible.

**TASK 2 [5 marks]:** Design the dynamic (logical) aspects of the tool using SNN (Site Navigation Net) diagram. Note that you are not required to draw iFIN diagrams, only SNN is requested. This SNN diagram should reflect the navigation and the integration of the different screens in Task 1.

**TASK 3 [75 marks]:** Implementation of the tool (note where sensible, use JavaScript for form validation):

1. CT1 [10 marks]
2. CT2 [20 marks]
3. CT3 [10 marks]
4. CT4 [10 marks]
5. CT5 [5 marks]
5. AT1 [10 marks]
6. AT2 [10 marks]

**Note:** you must complete the implementation of all the modes above. Note that the main emphasis of this subject is the client side usability, consistency and standard of the layout and data presentation. The connectivity with the database through PHP is performed mainly to demonstrate the flow of interactions. However, it is expected that all the modes above will have a real connection to a database. Do focus on the client-side functionality first, and then the server-side end.

**TASK 4 [10 marks]:** Heuristic-Based Usability Testing of the whole implementation  
In this final task, you are required to perform a heuristic based usability testing. Note that this heuristic analysis / testing is to be performed by your own team members. You are NOT permitted to ask other people outside the members of your own team to perform the testing. You are required to develop a comprehensive set of heuristic guidelines based on the design guidelines and examples given at lectures, and use that to evaluate your system, and justify how your design and implementation fulfil the criteria in the guidelines. Provide examples, sample screens, etc. to validate your claims.

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