

Publishing oral  
history on the  
world wide web

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This sheet will :

- Explain why you should consider publishing on the web.
  - Suggest a number of different file formats that you might want to use to publish your material.
  - Offer advice on what software to download and buy.
  - Show you where to get more help.
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# How can I put sound on the web?

Publishing books about oral history (see infosheet #10) can be very rewarding but transcriptions do not allow you to convey the full experience of listening to oral history recordings. Tape or CD compilations of oral history excerpts can offer listeners a valuable experience but often lack context and analysis. Luckily, the increasing availability of the world wide web can enable you to publish multi-media material combining text, pictures and sound files. Publishing material on the web is becoming easier all the time and has the advantage of being extremely cheap. However, if you have never tried it before you are likely to experience some frustrating trial and error as you put together your first website. Just remember that everyone had to start somewhere, and with a bit of perseverance you should be able to produce impressive results fairly quickly.

## Creating websites

This is not the place to try and explain how to set up a website from scratch. There are plenty of books that offer web design tips and explain how to use web authoring tools like *FrontPage* and *Dreamweaver*. You could, for example, check out *The Rough Guide to the Internet*, Jennifer Niederst's *Web Design in a Nutshell* or Beck, Maynard and Rodger, *A Student's Guide to FrontPage*. Alternatively check out Microsofts tips and hints for using *Frontpage* on-line at [www.microsoft.com/frontpage/using/](http://www.microsoft.com/frontpage/using/). It is even possible (if you are brave) to create websites without using any specialist software: Webmonkey's *How To Library* <http://hotwired.lycos.com/webmonkey/> is a good place to start if you are interested in

## Preparing sound for the internet

Infosheet #18 explains how to digitise sound, so this infosheet will assume that you have already got the sound into .wav file format.

Before you start, decide what you want to put on the internet. People are probably unlikely to listen to an entire interview on-line, so think about what excerpts capture the flavour of the interview best. Excerpts can be as short as 30 seconds but anything longer than 5 minutes probably will not be listened to in full.

Use a sound editing program to cut the excerpts out of the interview. There are a number of programs available for free such as *Audacity* (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>) and *WaveFlow* (<http://www.waveflow.com/>). The 'tucows' website lists other possibilities ([http://www.tucows.com/audio\\_recorders\\_default.html](http://www.tucows.com/audio_recorders_default.html)). Alternatively you might want to consider the more powerful *Sound Forge* (<http://mediasoftware.sonypictures.com/> - look under Products). Your local computer shop will probably have something similar to those mentioned above.

It is a good idea to do any editing of sound using .wav file format as it will maintain sound quality. Many sound editing programs allow you to boost the track's volume, fade in and out, join different excerpts together, and remove hiss and unwanted noise. Once you are happy with the excerpt, save it as a .wav file. This is the master copy of your sound file, but it would be too large to go on the web. Publishing sound on the web is always a compromise between quality and size or download time. The better quality the file, the longer it will take for users to download.

### Internet Good Practice

The internet is always changing so anything you decide to do needs to be reviewed periodically. However there are a few basic principles that you should remember.

**Compatibility.** Ensure that anything you put on the web can be accessed by people using different computers (will it work on both a Mac and a PC for example?), older and non-Microsoft browsers and different sizes of screens.

**Metadata:** Adding metadata to your sound files will improve your rating with search engines. Certain compatibility issues are also solved by using metadata. Users of Windows Media Files may wish to use Windows Media Metafiles. See <http://msdn.microsoft.com/library/default.asp?URL=/library/en-us/dnwmt/html/asx.asp> for more information.

**Alternatives.** Many people won't have soundcards or speakers. Will they still be able to use your site? Provide summaries or transcripts of any extracts. Providing alternatives is also important for users with hearing or reading difficulties.

**Fast downloads.** Fast download speed is central to the usability of websites. It is probably a safe bet to assume that a large section of your audience are using 56 KB modems. This means that a 1MB file will take around 3 to 4 minutes to download. **In this case, small is beautiful every time.**

## A Guide to Sound File Formats

Your sound editing program will probably allow you to save your excerpts in a variety of file formats. As sound is relatively new on the internet, there are still no absolute rules on what file formats to use. However your funding body may make some recommendations which you should be aware of e.g. the New Opportunities Fund recommendations <http://www.peoplesnetwork.gov.uk/nof/technicalstandards/technicalstandards.html>. However, think about what you are actually using the file for: High quality sound is likely to be important in the creation of a digital archive while speed and accessibility are king on the internet. The following list should give you some idea of the relative merits of different options:

File format	Strengths	Weaknesses
Windows Media Audio (.wma)	Easy to compress to very small sizes, easy to adapt to different file sizes/quality. Windows Media Player is widely distributed.	Need to download and learn how to use Windows Media Tools to create files, Mac users need to download Windows Media Player from <a href="http://www.microsoft.com/mac/products/mediaplayer/">http://www.microsoft.com/mac/products/mediaplayer/</a>
MP3	Fairly good compression, maintains high audio quality, MP3 players are widely distributed, works across PCs and Macs.	Files will not launch for many users on a single click and often have to be saved to the users file store before they can be played, MP3s also require extra software to fine tune the file size/quality of
RealOne also known as RealAudio (.rm)	The closest thing to a webwide standard audio format. Moderate compression, moderate quality. RealPlayer is widely	The compression is not good enough for longer clips. Requires you to buy software to edit size and quality of excerpts.
wav	High quality	File size too large.

On balance, the Windows Media Audio format is probably the best option for most web sites. You will need to download the *Windows Media 7 Resource Kit* from <http://www.microsoft.com/windows/windowsmedia/download/default.asp> to create Windows Media Audio files. This is currently free and gives you a tool kit for sound editing. Use the *Windows Media Multisource Encoder* to create .wma files. Notice that the **Profile** drop down menu offers a number of different options when creating your files which range from **Audio for low bit rate voice-oriented content** to **Audio for CD quality**. Obviously the higher the quality the slower the download time.

### Keeping your download time low

- Keep the files as short as possible. Make sure you've edited out any silence at the start or end of the excerpts.
- Cut the interviews into lots of smaller chunks rather than two or three long excerpts.
- Use the lowest quality and smallest file size for most excerpts. You will be generally dealing with speech rather than music and so will not lose as much by compressing the files.

### Getting people to use your excerpts

- Give a description of each clip so people know what they are downloading.
- Put the size and length of the clip next to each link so that people have an idea of how long they'll take to download before clicking.
- Don't expect the excerpts to speak entirely for themselves. Provide an introduction to them with some context and analysis. You can even add pictures to illustrate the excerpts.