CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

That's a FAQ

By Douglas E. Welch

People who are good at their high-tech career, like all of you, know that sooner or later your clients come to think of you as the source of all (or most) high-tech knowledge. They bring you their most intractable problems, and pepper you with countless questions.

Thankfully, you usually have the answers to their questions—or you know exactly where to look. In today's world, though, it is just as important that you share the information you have gathered *before* they ask for it.

Below are a few ways to "share the wealth," while helping both you and your clients.

FAQs

You have probably heard of the Internet files called "Frequently Asked Questions," or FAQs. These files were originally developed to reduce the amount of time spent answering beginner-level questions on Usenet newsgroups. While they don't answer all the questions, FAQ list can help people to help themselves instead of waiting for someone to respond to their questions. To help build your high-tech career, I would recommend that you develop your own FAQ files to begin sharing your wealth of information with your clients.

Developing your own FAQs can help you develop a better relationship with your clients and, if you put the information on the Internet, perhaps help you to develop new clients. FAQs work for you even when you are busy working on other projects. They can provide step-by-step instructions for certain procedures when your time is better spent solving the most difficult problems. Finally, if your FAQs answer a question for a stranger, you might just be able to turn him into a client.

FAQs become a collection point for all the good information you find on a daily basis. Most of this information never gets put to use because you don't have a place to share it. This might include interesting Web sites, manufacturers' tech notes about known bugs, interesting articles, or whatever else you think your clients might like to know.

Getting Started

Starting FAQ is as simple as opening up your word processor and beginning to type, but collecting the information is only one part of the equation. You also need to share the information in order for it to be useful. One of the simplest ways to share is to send the information as an e-mail to all your clients. This is similar to typing up a simple newsletter. While this will work, you will find that some clients don't like to receive such e-mails, and, once the information is sent, there is nowhere to store this information for future reference or Internet searching. To really get the most use of this information, I recommend a simple Web site.

Most of you already have some small piece of Web real estate available to you. This might be associated with your AOL or EarthLink account, or a free spot on Geocities. Wherever this space exists, you can take your simple file of information, turn it into an HTML file, and upload it. This will keep the information available until you decide to remove it, while also making it available for searching.

Advanced

If you want to develop a more full-featured spot for your FAQ, you can use Blogger.com (*www.blogger.com*) to develop your very own Web log (or "blog"). You can check out mine at *http://myword.blog.us* to see one example of how it might be used.

Blogger has a free service that makes it very easy to create and maintain a Web log, even if you are traveling around the country. Your blog can focus on whatever you wish. Mine encompasses many aspects of my life, including computers, activities in and around Los Angeles, and other information I find fun or useful. Your Web log will have its own character and theme.

On my Web log, I also use another free Web service that allows me to quickly and easily maintain a set of links without the tedious work of editing raw HTML files. Blogrolling.com (*http://blogrolling.com*) allows you to set one or more "lists" that contain links to other information. These lists can then be inserted automatically into any Web page you specify. This means that if you want to put your list of favorite links on several Web pages, you need to add the link only once, instead of on every Web page.

I use Blogrolling to maintain a list of recommended books on my blog, as well. This same list also appears in the Bookstore area of my Web site (*http://welchwrite.com/bookstore*). Now, when I want to recommend a new book, I need only add the title using Blogrolling.com, and it appears on both the blog and the bookstore pages.

You have an immense amount of specialized knowledge locked up inside your head. These computer tools can help you to make the most of it, help to make your clients happier, and thereby help expand your high-tech career. ❏