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Building a free family history Web site

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With today's Internet tools, it is no longer necessary to work alone on your family tree. Joseph Irvine told a session at the BYU Conference on Computerized Family History and Genealogy about how [Google Groups](#) can help families collaborate on their research -- and it is free.

"Collaboration is the key in genealogy," Irvine said March 13. "There is no point in each of us being an island -- if we all do our own work ... and then the person next to us does the same family line and has to go do it all over again, that is a huge waste of time and resources."

Irvine, a major in management and information at Utah State University, said the free service is better in many ways than buying your own Web site to use for collaboration. If you buy your own site you will need to purchase software or write html code yourself. Google Groups has everything ready to go.

Once a Google Groups Web site is created, families can keep each other informed, ask questions and share information, files and photographs.

Google Groups walks people through a simple three-step process to make a group Web site: 1. create an account; 2. set up your group; 3. invite people to join your group.

Creating an account is easy and any e-mail address can be used. Irvine recommends using a "nickname" that makes sense for the type of group -- usually your real name.

To set up the group a name must also be chosen for the group. Again, Irvine said use a name that makes sense such as "IrvineGenealogy." Each group is given a specific e-mail address that is key to using the group.

Irvine recommends making the group private -- meaning that only invited members will be able to see it and participate.

"Public groups can sometimes get abused," Irvine said. "(People) may come and try to change your group and add things that are not the purpose of your group."

A private group is easier to control.

Once the group has been created, there is still one more step.

"Our group has now been created," Irvine said. "Fantastic! Except for one problem: we're the only member."

There are two ways to add people to your group once it is made. The easiest is to just type in the e-mails of people that you trust. The other is to type in e-mail addresses of people you want to invite. Those who are invited can respond if they are interested.

Once it is up and running, the Google Group becomes a way of communicating. Every time somebody e-mails the group e-mail, the rest of the group members are also automatically e-mailed the same information.

Every time somebody uploads a file -- such as a pdf file of a personal history of an ancestor -- every member of the group is notified that it has been added online.

People can also post information on the site as a page. Whenever this is done -- you guessed it -- every member of the group is notified.

"That is another one of the advantages of (Google Groups) is everybody in the group keeps aware of what is going on," Irvine said.

This ability to keep a whole group informed with one e-mail to the group was so useful that Irvine has created several groups. He even has one group he created to e-mail everybody in his family about family news and events.

Irvine said there are other sites that have similar functions, but Google Groups is his favorite for useful family history collaboration. [FaceBook](#) is one example of another popular site that could also be used, except it is not as private.

"Most people do not like to work through social networking sites (like [FaceBook](#)) because it is a little bit more open and has a little less privacy," Irvine said. "If you want to get your grandkids involved maybe you might want to consider creating a FaceBook page."

If you had information you wanted to get out to more people than your private group -- such as [a GEDCOM file](#) -- Irvine recommends posting it on [Rootsweb](#).

Irvine said a person could put information about the existence of their Google Groups Web site on [Ancestry.com](#) and other sites. To join the Google Groups site, people could request that they be added. It would be up to the creator whether or not to accept that person into their private group.

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