



# On The Frontier

## Views From The Leading Edge

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Welcome To The New Frontier ©

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When I started "On The Frontier" many years ago, it was just a series of basic web pages occasionally updated with a few articles written from time to time.

I had an idea of where I wanted to go with the publication but I was also facing some pretty major personal changes in the middle of what was then the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression.

Upgrading the work would involve changes in the website design, ongoing domain name issues and hosting matters, not to mention a complete redesign of the blog itself.

Moreover, I have always been involved in personal technical projects, which limited my available time and that, combined with the daily pressures of work and life events, made it all but impossible to take on the task of keeping up a regular publication.

Time has a way of getting by one and years have passed since I considered a more formal blog. Good and bad times have come and gone while the ticking of the clock became ever louder with each passing day.

I still pursued my writing interests but those had to be balanced against all the other issues of life. So the best I could do was to write sporadic articles as the spirit moved me and archive them while I waited for the day I could make the information they contained available to others.

Yet in the back of my mind I still held on to the idea of someday creating a more formal publication that would allow me to publicly present my writing.

That day finally arrived when I happened across an ad from a cloud firm that offered a super deal on a one-time paid 2-terabyte "lifetime" cloud account which could be used to host a static website as well as other data.

This piqued my interest, as it would eliminate constant ongoing web page maintenance, hosting issues and costs typical of most websites.

I was familiar with Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML) coding and had used a number website design applications that made it unnecessary to do all the HTML coding manually. But constant “upgrading” of HTML itself and incessant changes in website applications and browser software made ongoing website design and maintenance a real pain in the behind.

Having built and maintained websites previously, I knew well what a time-waster HTML websites were. Worse, as HTML and browsers evolved, users were forced into constant upgrading and maintenance tweaks or else had to accept the fact that in due course their existing work would become inaccessible as browsers no longer worked well with older HTML coding and formats - in spite of contrary claims by the industry.

Unfortunately, in my time, the IT industry is itself characterized by galloping obsolescence and none of the players in the field seem to appreciate that constant change across the board can be destructive and even self-defeating.

At some point it just becomes too cost and time intensive to keep “upgrading”. What I needed was some format or platform that would continue to work without constant maintenance for long periods of time across the changing IT landscape.

HTML itself was developed in the late 1980s or early 1990s (depending on whose history you accept) when microcomputers, as they were called at the time, were just beginning to emerge as mass marketed products. This was critical to the development of the Internet during that same time period since computers and data connections of the day were barely adequate and extremely slow.

Portable Document Format (PDF) came a little later and was developed in the late 1990s. It first emerged as a proprietary platform to allow document sharing across wildly incompatible computer hardware and software prevalent “back in the day”. PDF did what it was designed to do very well and was hugely successful. In 2008 it finally became an open source standard and PDF readers are now nearly universal.

Early on I had tried using widely available blogging tools and services with spectacularly dismal results. These failures also factored into my deliberations.

Popular blog software and blogging services are typically designed to be all things to all people. As a result, they end up being overly complicated, difficult to use and force the publisher to accept pretty severe restrictions on publication.

A lot of blog software (like server-based versions of Wordpress) is heavily tied to host resources. Anyone who has ever experienced a server glitch or moved to a new hosting service can tell you what a disaster server-side resources can be.

Online blogging services are more portable but most are pretty severely limited as well. They also have tricky rules, often governed by arbitrary and capricious corporate decisions and policies.

I once tried an online commercial publishing service where I expressed some controversial opinions and found myself excommunicated from the service with no appeal possible.

I've thus learned valuable lessons over the years about what happens to bloggers using these services when they don't tow the corporate party line while publishing. There are numerous examples like mine where bloggers got kicked off the online services for exercising their free speech rights under the U.S. Constitution.

Anybody who speaks the truth will gore somebody's sacred cow sooner or later and many corporate interests have very little regard for either the truth or free speech.

I also wanted to explore all the related aspects of the ideas behind my website and blog, including special projects and commercial products. Such elements usually mean lots of limitations due to software or service restrictions. The last thing I wanted was that kind of frustration.

After mulling the problem over for awhile, I began to wonder if it might be possible to use PDF to construct a basic static website suitable for publishing my work.

HTML had by this time evolved into a coding nightmare, incorporating Javascript (JAVA), cascading style sheet (CSS) formats and even more weird stuff as changes prompted by online video, augmented reality, virtual reality and other new developments took hold.

Moreover there always seemed to be one problem or another with HTML rendering that led to strange page layouts in different browsers, page size problems and a host of other frustrating issues.

Since PDF was simple to work with, stable and was specifically developed for use across different computer systems and incompatible application software, it seemed like a good alternative to the tangled mess that HTML had become.

So I engaged in some PDF web page experimentation, tried out various PDF applications and some of the more modern word processors capable of exporting documents to the PDF format. PDF allowed for easy page construction, stable formatting, hyperlinks and export of new documents directly into PDF format.

As a result of these experiments, I concluded that PDF had matured enough to be used as a website platform that removed the drudgery and frustration of HTML web page design.

While PDF is nowhere near as flexible as HTML and is also slower to load, it has the clear advantage of making web page design simple again. Because of my specific application and the fact that PDF readers, along with high-speed Internet connections, are nearly universal in most developed places at this point, it seemed that a static PDF-based website could be built and successfully deployed.

The key to developing such a website is to keep the pages as light as possible. Since I wanted a professional appeal to the site, which included images, that meant I had to design simple but good-looking single web pages with links to switch between them.

There is also another lesser-known problem with some images - personal pictures. I wanted an image of myself in the header but experience has taught me that online images are misused in a variety of ways - some criminal or even dangerous.

So large, clear personal pictures were out. I decided to use a thumbnail image made some time ago and reduced the resolution almost to the point of pixelation. Although not as satisfying as a large, clear and recent picture, this sort of image helps to ensure that it will be nearly useless to those who might be tempted to misapply it.

That solved most of the technical problems and all that remained was to convert my previous work to PDF formats. That has proved to be by far the most difficult task, however.

Times change and what was once unknown becomes known. Old ways of thinking become new ways of thinking and what was once important and obscure becomes mundane and obvious. And people evolve as well. As is so often the case, one's thinking changes in light of new understanding.

Yet an article or other publication is essentially a snapshot and does not evolve as does its author or with the passage of time. In reading many of my old documents, I found myself cringing at the occasional simplistic reasoning and naiveté.

But these shortcomings can also be overshadowed by a certain prescience reflected in these older writings, validating the vision that drove me to draft them in the first place.

In the end, aside from the mechanics of adding headers along with correcting text and formatting errors, I decided to present them mostly as they were written - some without any changes at all. The most important change, however, is the blog's new look. It is sleeker than the old version and, of course, has a new format.

So I decided to avail myself of the "lifetime" cloud account offer in order to publish my work for some very practical reasons, not the least of which was universality, cost and longevity. A good question is if "lifetime" refers to the lifetime of the subscriber or the lifetime of the offering company, however. Probably whichever comes first.

I've always liked Google's home page for its simplicity, lack of clutter and scarcity of screaming visuals, although I can't abide the company's onerous corporate philosophy. Their appropriation and sharing of personal and private data is truly abhorrent. That aside, they offer a pretty clean home page.

Sure they advertise - and make a ton of money doing it. But it's not an "in-your-face" experience. I wanted something like that but yet different - not a Google clone. And for practical reasons I needed to be able to manage my blog with very little effort - one of the main underlying reasons for considering the PDF format in the first place.

All these considerations don't sound particularly challenging in themselves but are actually a real showstopper. Earlier disastrous experiences with custom blog applications built for me by freelance coders, commercial and open-source blogging software and online blog services, convinced me that I had to take a new direction.

I needed publishing control, easy web page drafting, freedom from server resources, longevity of the work and immunity from infringements of my First Amendment rights at the whim of some nameless corporate bureaucrat.

Many times during my search I was told that such a combination was simply not available and it was a fool's errand even to contemplate such things.

Ultimately I turned to conventional word processors and PDF formatting, which are more compatible with the way I like to do things.

This method offers stable web pages, is free from the interminable "versionitus" of HTML and well-known commercial applications (where the object seems to be to extract as much money as possible from the customer base), or, in the case of online media services, freedom from corporate control of authors and readers.

This publication is now about as simple, straightforward, consistent, self-contained and independent as I can make it and has a unique look and feel as well. It will also be a gateway to many new projects and products.

I will no doubt continue to evolve over the long haul, as will the publication itself. After all, the essence of life is change.

**So...welcome to the new frontier.**