

# Driving Force

## Six reasons to develop a lab website

August 30, 2012 | Author: Summer Allen, Graduate and Postdoc, Brown University



When doing research for my last [post](#) about teaching genetics, I visited the Redfield lab [website](#) and was really impressed by its content. This got me thinking about how a well-designed lab website can be incredibly useful for a number of reasons. Here are six:

- 1) Sharing protocols:** Many labs publish detailed protocols of new techniques on their lab pages. These protocols often contain more information than the methods sections of papers and can be a useful resource both for the lab itself and for other labs trying to replicate the technique. And there's an added bonus: it may save a PI/lab manager from a barrage of method-related e-mails.
- 2) Creating a portal for lab resources:** Along similar lines, a lab website can be a place to post tools that are useful for other labs, such as vector sequences or software. For example, Jonathan Eisen's lab [site](#) has links to software developed by the lab in their studies of microbial phylogenetics. Resources like these, along with a blog (see no. 4), can help develop collaborations with other labs.
- 3) Recruiting new lab members:** A website can be a powerful tool for recruiting new students and postdocs. Not only is it an opportunity to explain ongoing projects and list lab publications, it can also include information about the people in the lab and what alums from the lab are currently up to. Prospective students and postdocs also look at websites to get an overall feel for the personality of a lab (a picture is worth a thousand words).
- 4) Communicating findings to the public (and the media):** Some labs use their websites to engage with the public—especially through blogs. A lab blog can cover recent conference experiences, discussions of published papers, or general commentary on science issues (see the [Su](#) and [Redfield](#) lab blogs for examples). Effective outreach can be especially important for biomedical labs working on experimental treatments because of patient interest in the research from these labs. For example, the Knoepfler lab's site includes a [guide](#) to stem cell treatments for patients. A good website also makes it easier for reporters and bloggers to do background research and figure out how to get in touch with questions about lab findings.
- 5) Securing funding:** Grant agencies, like the NSF, are interested in the broader impacts of research dollars—a website is a way to highlight these. A website can also be used to secure funding through crowdsourcing. An amazing example of this comes from the [Rare Genomics Institute](#), which uses public donations to sequence the genomes of patients with [rare diseases](#).

**6) Publishing data:** A lab webpage can be the perfect place to deposit large datasets that can't possibly fit in a paper. It can also serve as a general repository for lab data, preventing the "where is that data?" confusion that can occur between lab generations. Some labs protect their data by limiting access to parts of the website to lab members only. Others, like the Lang lab, practice [Open Notebook Science](#) and make everything available to the public. This type of openness can lead to serendipity (perhaps a 15-year-old will discover your data and come up with a new [test](#) for cancer).

And getting meta: The [Perlstein lab](#) has a website that includes analysis of how people are using the website. This page has all sorts of goodies—data from the lab, discussion of new papers, tweets, and even information about how the lab spends its money—very impressive. In fact, all of the example sites I've mentioned are great, but you might have noticed that they are all from biology labs.

I'd love to hear about more examples of lab websites from other fields. Please send me an [e-mail](#) if you know of a good one or add it below in our comments section.