



The Early Bird Catches ...

I saw a most interesting statistic in my newspaper this morning, in a story about the early days of the world wide web. It mentioned that the number of websites in existence has grown from a total of around a million in mid-1997, to more than a hundred million now.

This was particularly interesting to me, because mid-1997 is exactly the time that I created my own website. So this means that my site is among the earliest 1% of the entire world wide web! And as time goes by, and more and more websites are created, that 1% statistic will continue shrinking. For example, once there are two hundred million sites on the web, mine will then be among the earliest 0.5%.

I'm quite proud of my 'pioneer' status! It seems a bit strange that somebody who works in such an old-fashioned area, as I do with my woodblock printmaking, should have been so 'cutting edge' in this new field. But I realized early on, that anybody on this planet who is doing something 'interesting', simply has to use the internet to let other people know about it. For an extremely minimal investment, information on my activities is now available to anybody anywhere who cares to look at it.

In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that the internet, and my website there, is making it possible for me to make a living with woodblock printmaking. Some years ago, when I was making prints of the *Hyakunin Is-shu* poets, my work sold quite well in Japan, due to the popularity of that theme. After that series was finished however, and I moved on to other print projects, it was a different story. But because my 'market' is now global, and no longer limited only to people who can attend my exhibitions in Tokyo, I am still managing to make a living at this job.

Another advantage to having a website is the fan mail that comes in. Because my site has been on the web for such a long time, it has been very well indexed by Google and other search engines, so whenever anybody is looking for something related to woodblock printmaking, they soon end up browsing my pages. Many of these visitors send me email letting me know that they have enjoyed my materials - the print images and related stories. It's fun to get email like this: *"I have been mesmerized reading the stories of the craftsmen ... I don't know how long I have been staring at the computer screen, but now my neck is killing me!"* ... or, *"Your web site is ... dangerously distracting!"*

The downside to all this though, is that I have to spend a lot of time updating the website. A website is never 'finished', and every hour I spend typing is an hour I don't spend carving or printing. Some days I end up spending more time in front of the computer screen than I do in front of my printing bench. Overall though, I think I'm perhaps finding a good balance; at least the pile of finished prints is still growing steadily!

Because of global time differences, most of the email that I get from North America comes in during the night, so it is my habit to read and answer most of the mail first thing in the morning. I do this while I eat my breakfast. That would not be so polite if there were anybody else here, but I live alone, and find this an excellent way to force myself to eat slowly. It makes a very nice start to each day ... a bowl of granola, with a dollop of jam ... and a dollop of fan mail! *"Thank you so much, David, for your devotion to your art, your craftsmanship, and your gracious spirit in so generously sharing what you have learned!"*

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