



TCG

THEATRE COMMUNICATIONS GROUP, INC.

CENTERPIECE

FOCUS ON: TCG'S WEB SITE

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CAUGHT IN THE NET

BY JENNIFER SOKOLOV

I spend a good portion of my professional life online either working directly on the TCG Web site or doing research to develop new content and am one of the biggest advocates for theatres to accelerate their participation in the technology curve. But unlike many in my line of work, I revert to a near Victorian level of existence at home, no television, no microwave, no beeper. This is not to say that I don't use the internet in my off-hours. I do. I read *The New York Times*, buy books and hiking-gear, check the weather, and engage in a wide variety of research for my creative writing. But, truth be told, I'd rather be at the theatre or hunkering down with a cup of tea and a good book.

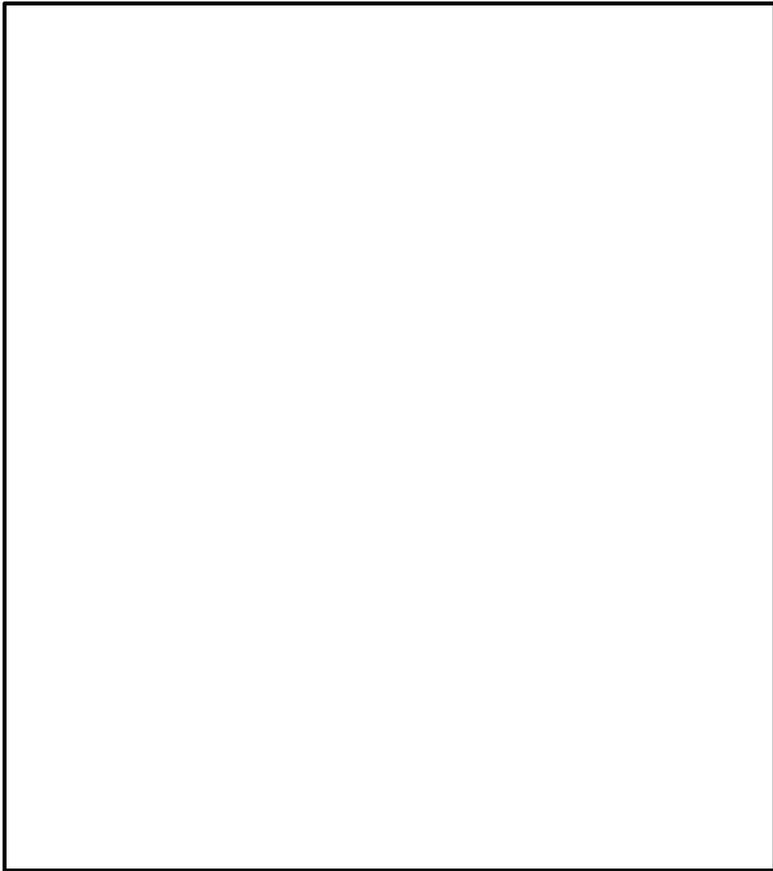
I recognize that I have an unusual set of proclivities. I've shared them with you because there is an underlying assumption behind my online activities that seems to apply to all users: "Does this Web site have **use and benefit** now and in the future?" The reason I'm excited by the internet, Web site development, and specifically the kind of contribution TCG's Web site can make to the theatre community is that our proximity to our membership gives us the unique capacity to stay at the forefront of what is useful and beneficial to you.

This affects the development of TCG's Web site in two ways:

- We are using the Web site to communicate about our programs and services so that you can quickly access what is useful and beneficial to your theatre, when you need it, where you need it.
- We are fashioning it into one of our programs and services to provide content that could not appear in any other form.

On the following pages, I hope to introduce you to all of the present and upcoming features of the TCG Web site. I encourage you to take this document, log on to the Web site and visit any pages with which you're not already familiar. I also urge you to share it with your colleagues. Different departments have different needs and they might find that some bit of information they use (like this *Centerpiece* series) already exists on the site. In addition, if there is anything else you feel we've missed, questions you have or ideas you want to run by us, please feel free to contact me at jsokolov@tcg.org or (212) 697-5230 ext. 229.

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LET'S START AT HOME.

So here we are—www.tcg.org—the home page. The key features are the mission statement, the What's New section, and main navigation buttons (image at left). What's New should be a helpful shortcut to new and upcoming activities, publications, and site updates. Click on the link at the bottom of the What's New text to get additional information when available.

**Many thanks to those of you who have submitted images for the home page. We're looking forward to featuring more art from member theatres throughout the site.

A QUICK NOTE ABOUT NAVIGATION.

When you leave the home page (above), those same buttons appear on the bottom frame (below) of every page so



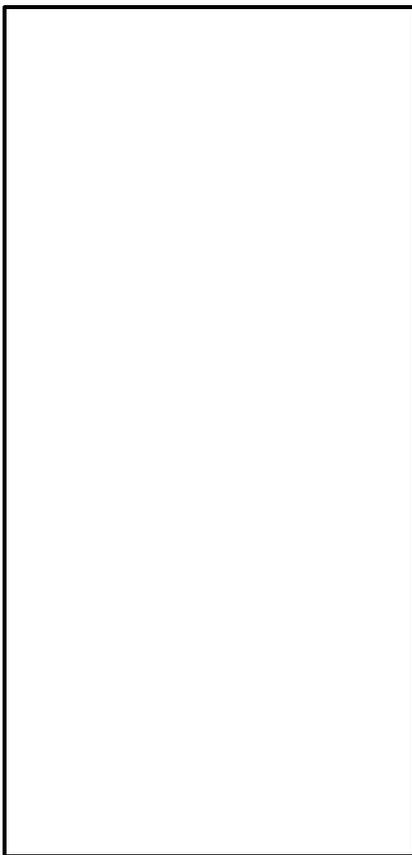
that
you're
always
within

reach of the main navigation.

The leftmost frame highlights the main section in larger type and lists the second layer of links to pages beneath it. (See About Us on the next page.) In a few instances, like Management Programs, we required a third layer of navigation, which appears below the header at the top of the page. (below)



ABOUT US



About Us tells you everything you need to know about TCG. Contact us through our hot-linked emails, read bios of our board of directors and national council members, comb through our archive of press releases, rent the audition room, learn how to donate to TCG, and search for TCG jobs (for national employment see *ArtSEARCH* on page 4). An important feature that exists here and in Membership is our "Search Member Theatres" database. Any user can search for current information about our members including hotlinks to your Web site (if you have one) by company name, city and state. If you're on line right now, check your listing and let me know if everything is current.



MEMBERSHIP

Membership offers a comprehensive look at the various types of memberships we offer theatres and individuals. You can purchase individual membership here, which includes a subscription to *American Theatre*. Theatres interested in joining TCG can learn about benefits and eligibility requirements and download membership application forms in pdf format.

With our new membership category, Trustee Leadership Network, and our new affiliate category, University Affiliates, we will be altering the Membership section of the site to accommodate these changes. The main page of Membership will have capsule summaries of the benefits with complete information a click away. As I mentioned in About Us, users can also perform a member theatre search here to find out more about you.

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

If you're attending a conference, applying for a grant, or kicking back to read the latest *TCG Bulletin*, you've come to the right place.

Conferences, Forums and Meetings



Conferences, Forums and Meetings has up-to-date information and downloadable registration materials for current TCG events. Online registration is an obvious next step for us, and we plan to deliver it for the 2001 National Conference in Philadelphia.

Artistic Programs

Grant applications and guidelines in downloadable pdf files live in Artistic Programs. A warning: guidelines and applications change every year. We have made the most recent versions of them available to you as REFERENCE materials. As new guidelines are available for each grant program, they will be posted on the Web site and labeled ACTIVE. You'll need to print out and complete the ACTIVE version for the application form when you apply to any grant program. Also available in artistic programs is a five-year list of former grant recipients.



Management Programs

Immediate access to the monthly *TCG Bulletin*, *Centerpiece* series and Ben Cameron's Field Letter is now available in Management Programs. Because use of these publication is restricted to our theatre membership, you will need to type in your theatre's ID number to be able to download the pdf versions of these publications. "What ID number?" you ask. Your member ID number is a nine-digit number (I still refer to my TCG rolodex card even though I type it everyday) that appears on the label above all of the TCG publications your theatre receives. If you can't find a copy of the *Bulletin* to get your number, the artistic or managing director should call customer service at 212.697.5230 to ask for the code. You will never have to wait for these publications to be routed to you ever again.

More good news: There are five back issues of the *TCG Bulletin*, and the complete set of *Centerpieces* and Field Letters archived for your reference.

In the future, we plan to offer an online version of the annual fiscal survey, available only to theatres that participate in the survey, which will hopefully inspire even more of you to complete it and send it in.

Government Programs

Stay abreast of advocacy issues by reading Action Alerts online. We have current and archived action alerts hotlinked for ready reference. If you need to know your Representative in Congress, we've linked to the Association of Performing Arts Presenters Web site, which helps you identify your representative and tracks how he or she voted on NEA appropriations. We've also included a link to our Grassroots Kit "Political Advocacy for Your Theatre," and to the American Arts Alliance's grassroots kit on their Web site which details House and Senate voting records, lists committees and staff responsible for arts issues, and includes a statement of support for the NEA.



TCG BOOKSTORE

Search by Publisher:	<input type="text" value="TCG"/>	<input type="button" value="GO!"/>
Search by Title:	<input type="text"/>	<input type="button" value="GO!"/>
Search by Author:	<input type="text"/>	<input type="button" value="GO!"/>
Search by Subject (Genre):	<input type="text" value="Acting"/>	<input type="button" value="GO!"/>
Search by Keyword(s):	<input type="text" value="-- Enter keyword(s) here --"/>	<input type="button" value="GO!"/>

You can purchase all titles that appear in the TCG catalog and order *ArtSEARCH* and *American Theatre* subscriptions on our Web site. Books are searchable by publisher, title, author, subject, and keywords. *American Theatre* back issues are searchable by month, year, and keyword.

To receive your member discount, log in using your member ID number and the Bookstore automatically displays your title at the discounted price. Additional ordering (bulk orders, shipping and handling, etc.) and customer service information have dedicated pages on this section of the site.

Coming soon: The bookstore will receive a cosmetic overhaul to allow us to incorporate more images, more information about new titles, and streaming media options on the site.

ARTSEARCH

The answer: Fall

The question: When is *ArtSEARCH* going to go online already?

Yes, it's finally going to happen. The *ArtSEARCH* section of the site which now contains advertising information and leads you to the subscription section of the bookstore

will be a fully functional online publication. When you purchase a subscription, you will be able to choose a username and password, which you will use to log in to *ArtSEARCH* as long as your subscription is active. You can then conduct job searches by category and location, or you may view all current ads in one continuous, scrolling list.

Advertisers will be able to send your ad copy directly through the internet to the *ArtSEARCH* staff, who will review and post the ads within 72 hours. The entire process of finding jobs and employees will move so much faster once *ArtSEARCH* goes online.



AMERICAN THEATRE MAGAZINE

Each issue of *American Theatre* appears in its online version at the time the magazine hits the stands. Typically there are two free articles that appear in full, accompanied by Ben Cameron's editorial and a list of the magazine's content. At the bottom of the page, *American Theatre* article archives are hotlinked and contain a year's worth of articles previously published online.



Also on the site:

This Month Onstage improves upon the print version by allowing users to search for our members' productions by theatre, production title, city, state, or date. Users receive contact information so that they can quickly turn their queries into tickets.

1. In addition to the Back Issues Index, Search AT Articles allows you to search for articles by department, author, article title, play title, artist last name, theatre, category/subject, or key word. Okay...the system is a little clunky. You have to find the article you want in Search AT Articles. Then you have to check and see if that back issue is available in the Back Issues Index to place your order. Fortunately, combining these two databases is part of the next round of Web site developments.
2. Submission information, the magazine's staff list, and advertising information also reside here.

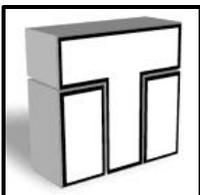
BULLETIN BOARDS

In terms of functionality, our Bulletin Boards can't be beat. We created discipline-specific members-only Bulletin Boards for all theatre and individual TCG members and a Public Forum for anyone who travels to the site. By and large, however, the Bulletin Boards are lying fallow. I have two theories about this. The first is that rather than disciplines, perhaps it would be better to let discussion cluster around specific topics. That way, if you are a Development Director looking for information about ticketing you don't have to decide whether to post your message with the Marketing Directors or the Development Directors or both. The second is that the field hasn't perceived the Bulletin Boards to be useful yet. Bulletin Boards work on the same principle as fax machines. If one person has a fax machine it does no one any good, but if two people own fax machines the impact is actually greater than $1 + 1 = 2$. Suddenly, there is an exponential increase in demand because the perception of its usefulness spreads to all those in contact with our two fax machine owners.

Applying this principle to TCG member theatres, how do we get everyone to buy proverbial fax machines? What do you or don't you find useful about Bulletin Boards and what might entice you to try them? Could the Bulletin Boards provide some relief from the geographic isolation between theatre professionals? Would seeding discussions help to get things started? Ideas are welcome.

TCG LIVE

We're having custom event software designed to host TCG Live events online. We will be able to convene large and small forums to discuss artistic and management issues. We will also have the capacity to edit, post and archive transcripts. This is a significant undertaking adding two events a month to the TCG calendar. We're going to be looking to you to help generate topics for new programming and to serve as panelists and participants.



INTERNATIONAL THEATRE INSTITUTE

Get a capsule summary of ITI's activities with the ITI Newsletter and links to the ITI Centers in 90 other countries. Our future plans for ITI include links to the top ten periodicals in the ITI Library, a Q&A section for researchers and an extensive international theatre related links section.

RELATED LINKS

The related links section of the site is close to its debut. We will have a list of over 130 key Web sites listed both alphabetically and by the following categories: arts and education, publications, media, fundraising/foundations, government, festivals, listings, cultural policy, theatre organizations, arts organizations, international sites, nonprofit resources, unions/guilds, performance rights, portals, regional sites, technical sites, and libraries. Quality has been the main criterion for inclusion on the site. I personally visited each one of them to evaluate their professionalism and relevance. Compiling and vetting the sites has been a monumental task, but I suspect maintaining and updating them will be an even greater one. Please don't be shy about notifying me about dead links, and feel free to propose new sites for consideration.

Eventually, we would like the related links to be available in a searchable database to keep users from being overwhelmed by long lists of URLs. I can't yet predict when this will happen. What I can say is that your usage patterns will be a guiding force in what resources will be allocated to this section of the site.

CONCLUSIONS

It is my great hope that after you've read all this information, you have become aware of at least one feature of TCG's Web site that you didn't know about before, and that that feature has particular usefulness and benefit to you. We receive a detailed report of how you are using the Web site that will allow me to track the effect of this *Centerpiece* by measuring the number of downloads of our various publications and guidelines, and the number of visits to particular sections of the site. I look forward to a boost in the numbers of you who are taking advantage of the resources we are already able to provide.

As I suggested in the introduction, I am a real person who speaks real English. I will not bombard you with geek-speak if you call or email me. I recognize that everyone has different levels of experience with the internet. For beginners: I'd rather you call me and learn how to download free Adobe software to view the *TCG Bulletin* than turn away from the site in frustration. For the rest of you: let me know what you have found useful and what you haven't so that we can continue to increase the value of our Web site.