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## The tree hugger's web

### Green Collar Technologies

By Keana Okuda

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What is sustainable web design? Never had I heard the term until I met Brent Norris. Full of energy and enthusiasm (you'd never guess his age), Norris is best described as 'perma-stoked' about his new web based company. Green Collar Technologies is his way of combining two passions -- a love of web and multimedia design and his relatively new found respect for sustainability.

As someone who is herself passionate about all things green, my ears perked up at the mention of sustainable web design. After listening to Norris talk about the concept for a few minutes, I realized he was referring to his customer's ability to sustain a website on their own.

Norris designs super user friendly platforms and then offers complimentary classes for his clients to learn to use them. They learn to upload new pictures and change text, all so that the site doesn't die when its owner gets tired of the way it looks. Rather, the website owners of Green Collar Tech sites become empowered and take on the tasks of designing and maintenance themselves.

My next thought is, 'Okay, no big deal. This guy is just using buzz words to attract business during a time of heightened public environmental awareness.'

When Norris goes on to talk about how creating websites using CSS (Cascading Style Sheets) serves the environment because it uses less energy and requires less storage, I'm back in the fold. When he starts going on about switching all of his hosting to a solar powered server over at NELHA (Natural Energy Laboratory of Hawaii Authority) in Kona, I'm hooked. There I am, already thinking of ways I can get this guy to build a website for me.

A website for what, you ask? I don't know yet. That's not the important detail right now, I just want a sustainable website to call my own.

Here's what Norris calls the five main factors that web design sustainable:

"The hardware including the computer, its power supply (no carbon offsets), backup system and connection to the Internet all affect the design.

"The software and the environment the site is hosted in should be spam and virus free. The code that everything runs on needs to be fast, easily and freely upgradeable and open sourced. This keeps the total cost of ownership down



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and reduces the power required to serve the pages.

"Ease of use. Websites fail when they aren't properly adopted. Meaning, if they aren't dead-simple to administer, maintain and edit, humans don't take care of them. The design and features are critical to longevity. Sites that have to be rebuilt when they get old aren't sustainable. A complete separation between content, style and features is required.

"Standards and best practices must be adhered to so that website run equally well on all kinds of machines and phones. Websites that expect to be used by tourists here should work in cars, cell phones and any internet kiosk on a ship or a cafe.

"Training. The ability of a human to care for their site is ultimately what creates long term online sustainability. Sites need to be as easy to update as sending an email. Website owners and webmasters need to know how to attract visitors and build online community. Sites that are not user and community focused are perceived as such. We hold monthly classes for our Sustainable Web Community to teach Hawai'i Island business and residents how to promote and care for their sites."

While the NELHA deal is still in the works, Norris is offering web sites that are "100 percent powered by the sun in New Mexico. "

He explains that "getting our web servers off the grid and at NELHA is still a priority. We have a plan to bring the green web server environment to Hawaii and we fully expect that to happen by the end of the year."

In the meantime he has outsourced a totally off the grid data center in New Mexico. "All of their systems are 100 percent off-the-grid and self-sufficient. The uptime is the same as anywhere else that's connected to the grid," he explains. "In fact, we believe that eventually all data centers will be on lesser-connected grids. Being connected to older electrical systems might not be that great considering the transformer blowout recently at our data center in Texas which then caught on fire. Luckily, our clients had no disruption of service.

Norris is proud to be offering truly green web serving on sustainable web platforms now. His site provide an online form for easy sign-up.

Norris loves surfing -- whether it be ocean waves or the seas of information available online. His business card even includes mention of the talent: "Videos, podcasts, RSS feeds, web design, consulting and surfing." Born and raised in Florida, Norris attended design school but didn't last long; he was anxious to get to work and left for a job in Massachusetts.

Currently living on a 20-acre parcel in Kopua Farm Lots, near Fern Acres on the eastside of Hawai'i Island, Norris is focusing on building an off-grid tree house and taking his own lifestyle down a sustainable path. This undertaking has led to some interesting building choices, such as incorporating used, hollow doors for siding inside his home.

During our interview, Norris talked about the amount of research he has put into this experiment of building with the environment in mind. It's an effort that runs the gamut from the perfectly normal -- he's read about 30 books on the subject -- to the downright absurd -- sometimes he just sets things outside in his yard to see what Nature does to them.

All along that spectrum, Norris is fired up about the possibilities. These days, most of his work is done from his tree house, 15 minutes from any major road. He said living and working out there by himself has got him "talking to trees, and the whole nine yards." Could this be the secret to his success with tree huggers? I'll let you guess. Whatever the reason, Green Collar Technologies is a success, with many local small business owners lined up to take advantage of Norris's services.



Since the interview, I have had a chance to sample that work. Though headed by a rather eccentric man, Green Collar Technologies puts out a clean and professional product. Make no mistake, this off-grid surfer dude knows his stuff. If you are interested in having Green Collar Technologies build a sustainable website for you or if you're just interested in learning more about their sustainable web community and other resources, log on to <http://www.GreenCollarTech.com>.

In addition to these services, Norris produces a Sustainable Living Educational Series Thursday night in July at 6 p.m. at the Hawaii Innovation Center. Registration for this can also happen online.

But wait there's more! Norris conducts monthly Sustainable Web Community classes every third Tuesday after the Adobe User Group meetings at 6 p.m. at Hawai'i Community College.



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