New developments in The Family History Guide website, demonstrating an innovative utilization of educational technology by means of an online resource for genealogists

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Introduction

The Family History Guide website (thefhguide.com), a free, best in class learning environment, is now six years into its development and has experienced rapid and extraordinary growth. The Family History Guide is presently being supported by donation made to a non-profit 501 (c) 3 corporation; The Family History Guide Association (https://thefhguide.com/association.html)

In previous years' presentations at the Brigham Young University Family History Technology Workshop, we introduced the concept of a structured, sequenced learning platform for genealogy. The current state of the website confirms our initial expectations of wide acceptance for the project.

This paper outlines the continued development and technological advances of the website. Including the innovative use of Show Me Videos, Quiklinks, a comprehensive tracking system, and family history centered activities to enhance the website's users' learning experience at all users' experience levels. The website contains detailed instructions for using the FamilySearch partner websites Ancestry, MyHeritage, and Findmypast.

The Family History Guide is approved as the official FamilySearch training partner and is widely used to train staff and patrons at FamilySearch Libraries and Centers around the world to train both staff and patrons. The website is independent from FamilySearch and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, although both have approved the content of the site.

Our Mission: To greatly increase the number of people actively involved in family history worldwide, and to make everyone's family history journey **easier, more efficient, and more enjoyable**.

Background of The Family History Guide website

The Family History Guide is a just-in-time leaning system that has layered and sequenced instructions and an exhaustive tracking system for formal or informal instruction. The system is based on a hierarchy of **Projects, Goals, Choices, Steps (instructions), and Linked Resources** that are audio and video based as well as written.

Although the basic structure of the website is linear, the information is arranged in a web-based environment where jumping

from topic to topic is always available through a menu driven environment. All of the linked resources are chosen to avoid pay-walls. Some of the resources, however, such as the major online genealogical database and family tree programs are subscription-based. But in each case, there is a free version of the linked websites and other resources.

Innovative changes to the basic structure of the website are based on captured web statistics of click-thru and time-on-page as well as review by experienced designers with years of experience in website design.

Presently, all of the participants are volunteers and provide support in all aspects of administration and operation of the supporting non-profit corporation. Despite the limited budget for promotion and advertising, the website has achieved year after year growth and market recognition.

The main objective of the website is to get people involved in genealogy/family history and keep them involved with content that is both easily accessible and challenging. As such, the website addresses the major objections to involvement in family history; difficulty, time commitment, and an incomplete understanding of the scope of the work (i.e. my family history is all done).

One major goal of The Family History Guide is achieved by providing a success-oriented environment where learning is broken down into easily followed and easily comprehended sequenced steps. The supplemental, linked resources allow the users to explore almost every topic in depth and at their own speed. Although, to avoid overwhelming the users, all of the supplemental resources are limited to no more than two links. The additional material that is not used in the main body of the website is archived in an area on the website named the "**Vault**" thereby allowing the users access to more information if they would like to expand their understanding of any particular section.

Current Development

During the past year, there have been some major upgrades to the website. These include the following innovative features.

1. Recent additions to the website include **Show Me videos** with step-by-step instructions that follow the text accompanied by computer-generated audio narration (TTS or Text To Speech). These videos are designed in short discrete segments (like building blocks) so that any updates or changes to the website can be rapidly and inexpensively implemented in the appropriate video instructions and that any elements that are the same in different segments can be easily duplicated and inserted as the videos are produced.

Surprisingly, there is almost no resistance on the part of the users to the computer-generated TTS voice used in the Show Me videos. The use of a TTS voice eliminates the need to rerecord out of date segments of the videos and provides a path to rapid updates of the videos.

The videos are all archived on The Family History Guide YouTube Channel which allows all of the videos to be independently accessed outside of the website itself.

2. The Country pages have been enhanced with additional links and **QuikLinks** to specific online resources. There are currently links to 69 countries. All of the links are audited to maintain currency and to add additional links as new genealogical records become available.

Additional enhancements of the country by country resources are currently being added to the website. Including, additional historical and cultural links.

The Country pages of the website act as an ongoing source for more advanced research into the genealogical records available on the internet. Each country in this section of The Family History Guide has links to the available major record sets in an organized fashion enabling the researcher to quickly find and understand the content of the available records.

The QuikLinks link directly to specifically applicable records in online database programs. Some of these links are on the big online genealogy websites and do require a subscription to the website listed.

3. The Family History Guide incorporates a sophisticated tracking system that allows both individuals and those teaching classes to record their progress in working through all of the instructional material on the website. The results of the tracking can be kept online or on paper depending on the desires of the student or instructor.

Each user of the program can create an online account to track his or her learning progress. Every goal and choice on the website is listed in the tracker and there is way to record the completion status of each

step in the instructional process and mark the level and date of completion.

To enable the Tracker to be used in a group or classroom setting, the program allows the instructor to create groups of students whose progress can then be monitored. The performance indicators also facilitate determining a grade if appropriate. The teacher or instructor can also run reports showing the progress of the students.

The reports that can be generated show the following:

- All Choices—This displays three bars for Choices: Started, Good and Proficient.
- Learning Paths—This displays totals for each Learning Path: FamilySearch, Ancestry, MyHeritage, and Findmypast.
- Projects—This displays totals for each Project. If many Projects are included in the report, you can scroll the chart horizontally to view them.
- Projects—Goals in a Project (Select a Project): This displays totals for one selected Project. Click "Select a Project" and then from the list, click the title of the Project you want to include. "Select a Project" is then replaced by the title of the Project you selected.

4. The website provides an evolving section of fun and educational, family history centered, activities for families, single adults, youth, and children. This section can help increase the level of involvement of almost anyone.

Conclusion

The learning system provided by The Family History Guide provides a unique environment for just-in-time learning from layered information. Because of the thousands of resources linked from the website, the entire website can be a