

# The Best Thing I Ever Created: Jeremy Keith

BRIGHTON, UK: This is the latest in a [monthly series](#) in which industry leaders describe the projects and products that give them the most joy and pride. This month, web developer Jeremy Keith talks about recapturing his audience.



When I first started making websites in the late '90s, I knew that I wanted to make one dedicated to traditional Irish music. So I started doing that on a sub-domain of my own site, [adactio.com](#). I called it "The Session." Each week, I would post a new tune: a jig, a reel, or a hornpipe. I set up an email-notification list so that people could get an email whenever there was a new tune.

That all worked fine until I ran out of tunes. That's when I decided to really put some effort into the site and turn it into a more collaborative place, where people could sign up and post tunes themselves. I dove into learning PHP and MySQL, and in 2001, I launched [thesession.org](#). By this time, I had amassed quite a number of interested musicians through that email list. They started adding tunes, and the site took off. In just a few years, there were literally thousands of tunes on there.

## Very proud, but then...

I was very proud of The Session... at first. However, over time, it started to feel very long in the tooth. I added some new features, but I knew that the site could have been so much better. Eventually, any pride I once had in it was outweighed by a feeling of shame.

Ten years after launching the site, I knew that it needed a major overhaul. For two years running, my New Year's resolution was "Relaunch The Session." But the scale of the task overwhelmed me. I didn't know where to start. Changing the codebase, the design, and the underlying database structure of an active community site seemed like an impossible combination.

Eventually, I just started doing it brick by brick, spending every evening and weekend coding and designing. Sure enough, it was very challenging, but it was also really rewarding. I'd find myself getting lost in the code, not noticing the passage of time, and getting a real kick out of solving a tricky problem. I was actually enjoying it!

## **The www is made up of people... remember that**

The overhauled, redesigned site launched just under a year ago. I'm quite pleased with the result, although I don't plan to rest on my laurels - I'm going to keep iterating so that it doesn't stagnate again.

The funny thing is that I noticed the biggest improvement to the site didn't come from a nicer visual design or better functionality; no, it was the fact that I was being an active participant and moderator of the community again. It was a welcome reminder that the World Wide Web isn't made up of documents, apps, and formats: it's made of people.

*Jeremy Keith makes websites with design agency [Clearleft](#). You may know him from such books as [DOM Scripting](#), [JavaScript's New Hope](#), [Bulletproof Ajax: The Browser Strikes Back](#), and [HTML5 For Web Designers: Return of the Standards](#). He's the curator of the [dConstruct conference](#), as well as [Brighton SF](#), and he organised the world's first [Science Hack Day](#).*

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