

Starting a Scouting Website

From Scoutmasters to Webmasters

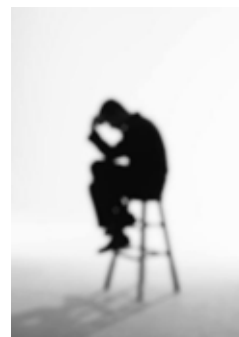
The information superhighway opens its doors to us at an even faster rate with the spread of broadband Internet like cable and digital subscriber lines (DSL). The Internet can be a very useful tool to quickly disseminate information and provide a bragging arena for our achievements. Currently there are but a handful of Scout groups from the Philippines found online, and for good reasons I hope.

This document will cover very basic information about getting you started with a website and probably answer some questions you really ought to ask yourself.

Is a Website Necessary?

It all depends on your audience. For the National and Local Councils, I would say that it is necessary to get information out there faster and provide a portal for your local units. For a unit (a troop/outfit) it might be too much and may not be necessary.

The first thing you really want to ask yourself is: who your target audience will be? Are they the unit leaders from your district, the parents of your Scouts, the parents of prospective Scouts, or combination of these? By answering this question, you have already provided a direction on how the content of your website will be.



Next thing you want to ask yourself is what purpose a website will serve for your target audience. If your intention was to simply display the Scout Oath and Law, display the names of officers, and post a few pictures here and there, then probably buying a small cork board from the local National Bookstore will serve that purpose very nicely. If that was your answer, I'd say drop it and focus your energies on something else. But if your intention is to provide a venue for frequent announcement and guidance for upcoming activities and meetings, and provide a place to have online forms and applications to be downloaded, then maybe that will be better.

Lastly, you want to determine if it will be useable. How many of your target audience will have access to your website? If only 5 out of the 100 units within the district have access to the Internet, then probably disseminating information over the Internet is not a good idea. Also, how will prospective members know about the website? Are you doing a recruiting campaign annually that provides them with this website address?

So personally I cannot tell you whether having a website is truly necessary for your purpose. But by asking yourself these three questions, you should be able to come up with something on your own.

If you believe that a website will truly benefit you and your group, continue on to the next page.

Searching for a Web Host

To pay or not to pay, that is the question. For a unit website, paying for web hosting might be too much. Stick with places like Tripod (tripod.lycos.com), Angelfire (angelfire.lycos.com), Bravenet (bravenet.com), Geocities (geocities.yahoo.com), or other free web hosting providers out there. The only catch with these providers is that you must ride on their domain as a sub-domain and display their banner ads.

Selecting a Free Web Hosting

Feature	Tripod	Angelfire	Bravenet	Geocities
Disk Space	20 MB	20MB	50MB	15MB
Monthly Bandwidth	1 GB	1 GB	1.5GB	3GB
Page View Reports	Yes	Yes	No	No
Remote Imaging Loading	No	No	No	No
Blog Builder Tool	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Photo Album Tool	Yes	Yes	No	No
Site Building Tool	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
FTP Support	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
CGI Support	Yes	No	No	No
Perl Support	Yes	No	No	No
JavaScript	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Customizable Error Pages	No	No	No	No
Front Page Extensions	Yes	Yes	No	No
Ad Free	No	No	No	No

Two major items you want to consider when selecting a free web host. FTP upload access and the availability of site building tools. You may actually disregard the rest for now. FTP allows you to move all the web files from your local computer to the web server of your web host. The site building tool allows you to click and drag your pages without the need to know a single bit of HTML (the language of web pages). I would suspect that if you are going towards a free web host then purchasing Dreamweaver or FrontPage might be too much for you at this time.

Since these web hosts are free, I also encourage you to try each and everyone of these web hosting services and make a decision for yourself.

Paying for Web Hosting

Is it worth paying for web hosting? There are numerous advantages with paid web hosting like no unwanted Ads, increased control over the space with no limits on file types, and option to select your domain name that people can easily remember.

But with these advantages comes at a price. This is the reason why I do not readily recommend going "paid" for Scout units since I don't think it is a wise investment of your unit's funds. Take for example the annual cost required to maintain a dot PH domain with basic web hosting package.

	Annual Cost in US Dollar (\$)
Domain name (1 Year)	\$ 35.00
Starter Web Hosting Plan	\$ 72.00
Mail Forwarding	\$ 20.00
Total Annual Cost	\$ 127.00
Converted to Philippine Peso (\$1=PHP50)	<u>PHP 6,350.00</u>

*Note: prices are annualized based on www.Domains.ph pricing on November 13, 2006. Domain name and mail forwarding requires minimum two year registration with the entire two-year payment due upon ordering the service. Starter web hosting plan is \$6 monthly.

With this kind of price tag, we could have sent at least 6 boy scouts to a great summer camp or buy new uniforms for everyone in the troop. So unless your troop has a very good reason how you can justify such an expense, you may want to stick with free web hosting for now.

So to answer our own question: is it worth it? It all depends on your troop and how you can justify such an expense to benefit your troop. No one else can answer that question for you.

Searching for a Web Development Tool

When I first began creating the Merit Badge Center I did not have the money to buy professional web development tools like Microsoft Front Page or Macromedia Dreamweaver. Free development tools like Yahoo! Site Builder, weren't available at the time as well. Microsoft Notepad was the closest thing to a web development tool to me.

HTML looks something like this:

```
<html>
<head><title>My First Web Page</title></head>
<body>
  This is my first web page.
</body>
</html>
```

You don't really need to learn HTML to start a web page. You can easily use free web development tools available with your free web hosting with Yahoo! Geocities or Tripod. As I mentioned before, if you're looking into free web hosting, then Microsoft FrontPage and Macromedia Dreamweaver will be way too much. If you have Microsoft Word, you can use Word for your layout and save the document as an HTML file instead of the regular DOC file.

But if you are really interested in doing hardcore HTML, my personal recommendation is to get the "HTML Visual Quick Start Guide" by Elizabeth Castro published by the Peachpit Press with ISBN 0-201-35492-4. Each HTML tag (keywords enclosed within angled brackets "<" and ">") is discussed individually starting with the most basic. It is great for beginners and a good reference for the most advance developers.

For the serious people who want to make a career out of web development, I always recommend learning HTML, but always stay open to the opportunity of learning the various development tools available out there. A development tool allows you to get the work done faster, and knowing how to do hardcore HTML allows you to customize the encoding and compensate for the development tools shortcomings.

Sample Websites

Below are some sample works done on Microsoft Notepad and other web development tool.

UnOfficial BSP Website
Macromedia Dreamweaver

Food Handlers of California
Yahoo! SiteBuilder

Grace Christian High School
Microsoft Notepad

Mattel Federal Credit Union
Macromedia Dreamweaver



The Philippine Scouting Movement
Microsoft Notepad
Migrated to Macromedia Dreamweaver



Ohana Hawaii BBQ
Yahoo! SiteBuilder
Migrated to Macromedia Dreamweaver



Crescent Bay District, WLACC, BSA
Microsoft Notepad



Montgomery Communications
Microsoft Notepad



Merit Badge Center
Microsoft Notepad



Kanpai Sushi Restaurant
Macromedia Dreamweaver



Grace Christian Service Scouts
Macromedia Dreamweaver



Gary Wang & Associates, Inc.
Microsoft Notepad

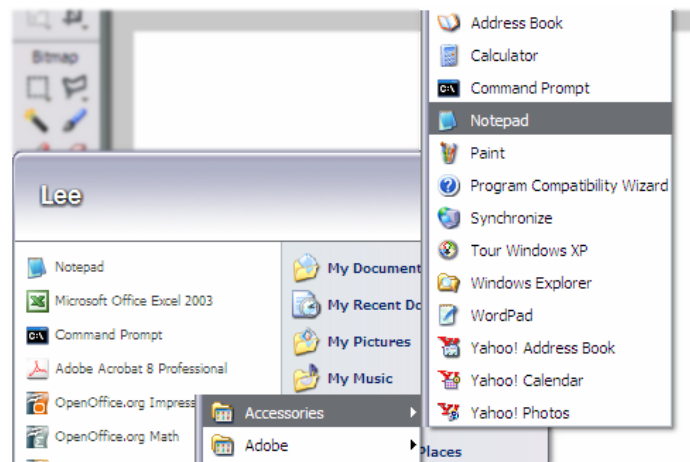
You will notice that you can achieve the same level of design of Macromedia Dreamweaver using only Microsoft Notepad. The design possibility is wherever your take your development direction. The important thing to remember is the efficiency and cost factors when using web development tools as oppose to Microsoft Notepad. Obviously it takes longer to produce on Microsoft Notepad, but it is cheaper.

Starting Your First Page

Since there is a plethora of choices on web hosting, development tools, and other factors affecting your development process, it will be quite difficult to create a “one-size fits all” instruction on how you come about with your first web page. Also, I won't be going into extreme details about HTML, it is all up to you to pick up a book from the bookstore or the library and do your own studying. HTML stands for HyperText Markup Language.

An HTML file is basically a text file. You may have seen files with the TXT extension. You simply rename the file to have an HTML extension and BAM! You have your HTML file. The first page of your web site or your home page is often named as INDEX.HTML or DEFAULT.HTML, it will all depend on your web hosting. Sometimes the HTML extension is cut to simply HTM.

To start your first HTML document, go ahead and start Microsoft Notepad or your favorite text editor. Microsoft Notepad should normally be under START> PROGRAM> ACCESSORIES.



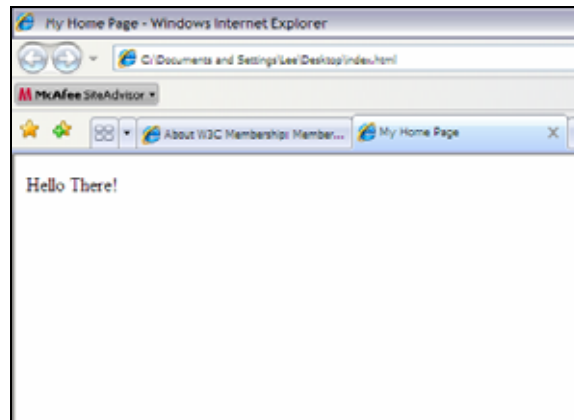
Type the following into your text editor.

```
<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD HTML 4.0 Transitional//EN">
<html>
<head><title>My Home Page</title></head>
<body>
    Hello There!
</body>
</html>
```

Save your text file to your desktop and name it as INDEX.HTML.

We begin the document with our Document Type Definition (DTD) as recommended by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). Simply copy this line as necessary. Other than the DTD your HTML file will contain numerous tags, tags are the items enclosed in the angled brackets. There are opening and closing tags, closing tags can be identified by the forward slash “/”. For each tag you open there will almost always be a corresponding closing tag (there are some exceptions though). Everything you want sent as an output to a web browser or the actual web

page that people see are enclosed within the <body> tag. Once you go to your desktop and open the INDEX.HTML file, your web browser will display the content.



Notice that the name of your page is "My Home Page" as indicated by you in between the <title> tags.

Adding an Image

Now on my desktop I have the TOBS medal in JPEG format. Currently web browsers support the display of JPEG, GIF, and PNG image files. JPEG and GIF are the most widely used because of the file size.



I can simply add the image into my page by making this change:

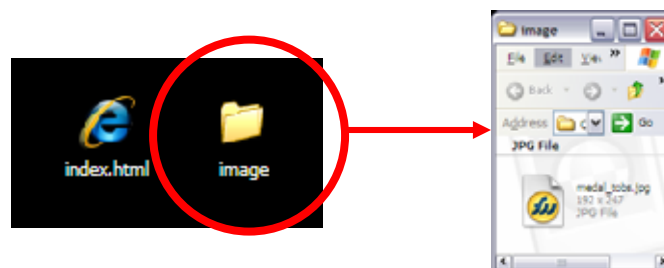
```

<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD HTML 4.0 Transitional//EN">
<html>
<head><title>My Home Page</title></head>
<body>
Hello There!

</body>
</html>

```

Note that the tag did not come with its own closing tag it closes itself by having the forward slash "/" in the end. The tag will look different if the image file is located inside a folder; say for example within a folder on the desktop called "image".



The file should look something like this if the image were located inside a folder.

```

<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD HTML 4.0 Transitional//EN">
<html>
<head><title>My Home Page</title></head>
<body>
  Hello There!
  
</body>
</html>

```

Regardless of where the actual image file is located, the ending web page will look like this on your web browser. Save your HTML document and refresh your web browser.



White Spaces

Web browsers ignore the extra white spaces on your HTML document. Consider the example above; the medal image is on the same line as the "Hello There!" To force text or images to the next line you can use the `
` to have a line break or enclose the text within the `<p>` and `</p>` or the paragraph tags. The `
` tag does not have a closing tag counterpart.

```

<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD HTML 4.0 Transitional//EN">
<html>
<head><title>My Home Page</title></head>
<body>
  Hello There!<br />
  
</body>
</html>

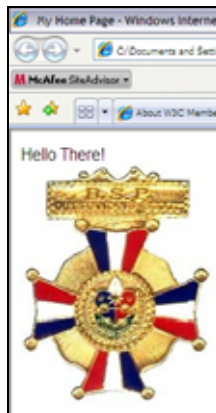
```



Changing the Font Attributes

You can change the font on your page by using the `` tag. Although the W3C now recommends using Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) to modify font styles, CSS is a little on the intermediate side rather than a beginner side as I see it.

```
<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD HTML 4.0 Transitional//EN">
<html>
<head><title>My Home Page</title></head>
<body>
  <font face="arial" size="3">Hello There!</font><br />
  
</body>
</html>
```

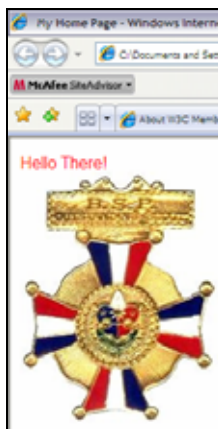


You can also change it into bold face `...`, italicize `<i>...</i>`, or underscore `<u>...</u>`.

In addition, you can also change the text color by adding the `color` attribute into the `` tag. Tags can have numerous pre-defined attributes that can be change. Leaving out an attribute simply means the tag will take on its default value. Simply change the tag to read:

```
<font face="arial" size="3" color="#FF0000">
```

You will end up with this page output.



The `color` attribute accepts as value `#rrggbb`, where RR is red, GG is green, and BB is blue. Each component goes from the hexadecimal number 00 to FF. To count in hexadecimal you count like regular from 0 to 9, but instead of 10, you count A next, then B, C, D, E, F, then 10 all the way to FF. #000000 is equivalent to black, while #ffffff is equivalent to white. It is up to you how much of each color component you want to add.

Headers

Headers are use to provide some kind of title on your web page. It comes in the form of `<h n >` where n can be a number from 1 to 6. You might only need up to header 2.

```

<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD HTML 4.0 Transitional//EN">
<html>
<head><title>My Home Page</title></head>
<body>
  <font face="arial" size="3">Hello There!</font><br />
  
  <h1>Header 1</h1>
  <h2>Header 2</h2>
  <h3>Header 3</h3>
  <h4>Header 4</h4>
</body>
</html>

```



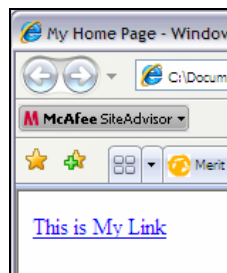
A Hyperlink

The most important part of an HTML document is the hyperlink that allows you to click on a text and it brings you to a whole new page. This can be achieved using the `<a>` tag. Say you have another HTML document on your desktop named ABOUT.HTML. To link to this from your INDEX.HTML simply do this.

```

<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD HTML 4.0 Transitional//EN">
<html>
<head><title>My Home Page</title></head>
<body>
  <a href="about.html">This is My Link</a>
</body>
</html>

```



You can also link to other website like the official BSP website by writing this instead.

```
<a href="http://www.phiscout.org">Official BSP Website</a>
```

A Final Product

Here is a sample page that with a short introduction on the Ten Outstanding Boy Scout. I've highlighted yellow some items that were not previously discussed: like aligning the image to the right of the document, adding a special character "ñ" using ñ and adding a horizontal line using the <hr> tag.

```
<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD HTML 4.0 Transitional//EN">
<html>
<head><title>Ten Outstanding Boy Scouts</title></head>
<body>
  
  <h1>Ten Outstanding Boy Scouts</h1>
  <font face="arial" size="2" color="#888888">
  <p>
    The search for the
    <a href="http://www.geocities.com/tobspa_Scout">Ten Outstanding
    Boy Scouts (TOBS)</a> was conceived in 1989 by the late
    Education Secretary and BSP National President Isidro D.
    Carillo as one of the avenues to propagate his values
    education program.
  </p>
  <p>
    The search aims to give due recognition to the most
    outstanding Scouts who epitomize sterling qualities of school
    and community leadership, academic excellence, and good moral
    conduct, thereby serving as role models to the youth.
  </p>
  <p>
    The quest starts at the council level where Scouts contend
    to participate in the regional eliminations and to eventually
    represent his region in the national finals in Manila. After
    a thorough scrutiny of the candidates' credentials, they
    undergo rigid interview with a distinguished panel of judges.
    Criteria for judging include leadership potential, non-academic
    awards and recognition, academic proficiency, personality, and
    verbal communication.
  </p>
  </font>
  <hr size="1" />
  <font face="arial" size="1" color="black">
  Sample Web Page by Merit Badge Center
  </font>
</body>
</html>
```



Using Framesets

Frame set allows you to cut up your web browser to display different web document that you'd work on to integrate to look like one. Consider the following basic frameset document.

```

1: <!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD HTML 4.0 Frameset//EN">
2: <html>
3: <head><title>Ten Outstanding Boy Scouts</title></head>
4:   <frameset rows="70,*" border="1" frameborder="1" framespacing="0">
5:     <frame name="top" src="top.html" scrolling="no" noresize>
6:     <frame name="bottom" src="bottom.html" scrolling="yes" noresize>
7:   </frameset>
8: </html>

```

I placed this encoding into our INDEX.HTML file and saved it. I also created two other HTML documents: TOP.HTML and BOTTOM.HTML. Your naming convention can be different. Let us break this down.

1. Is your Document Type Definition (DTD), notice that we used Frameset.
2. <html> tag.
3. Our header.
4. This tells the web browser that we're about to split the browser screen into two separate frames row-wise. Our first row is 70 pixels in height and our second row will get whatever is left so we used an "*".
5. This defines the first frame row. We named this frame "top" and it references by default to an external HTML file named as TOP.HTML.
6. This defines the second frame row. We named this frame "bottom" and it references by default to an external HTML file named as BOTTOM.HTML.
7. We close our frameset definition.
8. We close our HTML document.

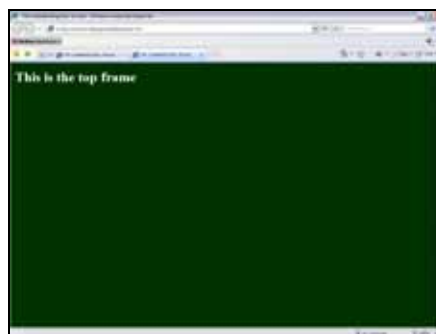
My TOP.HTML file contains this:

```

<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD HTML 4.0 Transitional//EN">
<html>
<head><title>Ten Outstanding Boy Scouts</title></head>
<body bgcolor="#003300">
  <font color="white"><h1>This is the top frame</h1></font>
</body>
</html>

```

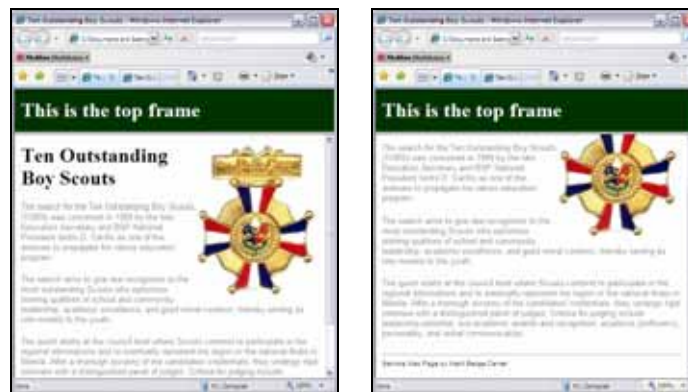
On its own the TOP.HTML is rendered on the browser like this:



My BOTTOM.HTML file is our original TOBS finish product on page 12. On its own it looks like this:



Using the frameset codes, the resulting page will look like this. Notice how you can scroll the bottom portion of the frame without affecting the top portion.



You can also cut it in column-wise by changing rows to cols.

```
<frameset cols="70,*" border="1" frameborder="1" framespacing="0">
```

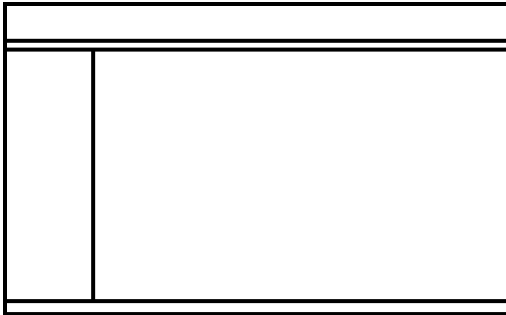
You can also cut the window further in any combination of rows and columns to fit your needs.

```

<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD HTML 4.0 Frameset//EN">
<html><head><title>Crescent Bay District - WLACC</title></head>
<frameset rows="70,20,*" border="0" frameborder="0" framespacing="0">
  <frame name="topframe" src="topper.html" scrolling="no" noresize>
  <frame name="tbframe" src="toolbar.html" scrolling="no" noresize>
  <frameset cols="170,*" border="0" frameborder="0" framespacing="0">
    <frame name="linksframe" src="mlinks.html" scrolling="no" noresize>
    <frame name="mainframe" src="mmain.html">
  </frameset>
  <frame name="botframe" src="footer.html" scrolling="no" noresize>
</frameset>
</html>

```

In the example, I cut it into 4 row frames and the further cut the 3rd frame row into two column frame. The resulting cut is like so:



Learning More HTML

Pick up a book from the library or from the bookstore and start learning. Again I recommend HTML for the World Wide Web by Elizabeth Castro published by the Peachpit Press ISBN 0-201-35492-4. Better yet, you can also search online for web-based tutorials.

Here are some websites that you may want to check out:

- <http://www.w3.org/MarkUp/Guide/>
- <http://www.case.edu/help/introHTML/toc.html>

In addition to HTML, you may also want to learn Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) to have better control over your element formatting.

Page Design

When you first design your page, you want to have some kind of uniform look and feel throughout your web site.



It will be easy to maintain uniform look and feel throughout five or six pages using any development tool. But once you reach hundreds of pages to maintain, Microsoft Notepad might

not work as well once you want to change a phone number or address on the uniform part of your website. Consider the time it will take to modify a shared design and whether the time spent is an acceptable amount of time.

If you're using Microsoft Notepad and have several dozen of pages in mind, consider using frame set instead of the regular transitional type pages.

Free Code

One of the challenges I had to face while maintaining the Merit Badge Center on free web hosting is the fact that I cannot pass information to the next web page. My issue was, I do not want one page per merit badge requirement. I wanted a single page that will have the ability to change its content based on information passed-on to it by a previous page.

www.mbccenter.org/htm/meritbadges.php?mb=filipinoheritage

On the example above, I use a document named meritbadge.php and passes on the information that the merit badge I want is the Filipino Heritage Merit Badge. This works great with PHP, but JavaScript, which is the only scripting language normally available on free web hosting (other than VBScript) does not have pre-built functions to retrieve the information (so I think). So I made up my own function. By calling the function `getvalue('mb')`; the function returns the value `filipinoheritage` and this tells the page to display only Filipino Heritage.

```
function getvalue (from){
  var CurrentLocation = new String (window.location)
  var DataTemp = CurrentLocation.slice (CurrentLocation.indexOf("?")+1);
  var Data = " "
  while ((Data == " ") && (Data != "-9999")) {
    if ((DataTemp.slice(0,DataTemp.indexOf("="))) == from){
      Data = DataTemp.slice (DataTemp.indexOf(from)+(from.length+1));
      if (Data.indexOf("&") != -1){
        Data = Data.slice (0,Data.indexOf("&"));
      }
    }
    else {
      if ((DataTemp.indexOf("&") != -1)){
        DataTemp = DataTemp.slice (DataTemp.indexOf("&")+1);
      }
      else {
        Data = "-9999"
      }
    }
  }
  if (Data != "-9999") {
    DataTemp = Data
    Data = " "
    while (DataTemp.indexOf("+") != -1) {
      Data = Data + DataTemp.slice (0,DataTemp.indexOf("+")) + " ";
      DataTemp = DataTemp.slice (DataTemp.indexOf("+")+1);
    }
    Data = Data + DataTemp
  }
  return Data;
}
```