

The Tropical Fish Hobbyist and the Internet... Destined for Success!

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Not too long ago anyone who wanted to keep and raise tropical fish and plants had to rely solely on either reading a magazine or library book when it came time to do research. Some were fortunate to have a close friend involved in the hobby or even better, they may have been a member of a local enthusiasts club such as KWAS. So what did this mean? Well, either you waited patiently to see what the next month's magazine published or you called upon your friends in the club for suggestions and guidance.

The real problems facing those individuals was time and of course the extremely limited resources available. Please do not get me wrong, there will always be a place for the local library, the monthly magazine publications and your friends in the hobby. What if you could have instant access to literally thousands of articles and an online community of hundreds of thousands of people all with very similar interests to you! Yes, you read correctly. Today the internet touches virtually every single corner of our world.

As a youngster, I can recall wandering the Pet sections at the local department stores, visiting the K-W bookstore and our own public library looking for that special fish, plant or book and wanting to know more about it. There is no doubt in my mind that those days were challenging to say the least. Often if the weather did not cooperate, you simply did not get out. I was one of the lucky ones back then as there was a local gem of a Tropical

Fish store very nearby where we lived. **Bridgeport Aquarium** owned and operated by our own late **Jim** and **Dorothy Daniells**. I often found myself leaving my bicycle in their driveway then opening their side door and going down to see what new fish or plants they had for sale. Little did I know that 30 years later I would be a part of KWAS who has many members that recall these two special people and their very special store.

Finding stores like this today is becoming increasingly difficult. Fortunately, in our area we still have some retailers who will take the time to talk to their customers and along the way pass along their help and knowledge to fledgling hobbyists. The advent of the online communities all over the globe like our very own Forum have made it possible for us to gather invaluable knowledge in the blink of an eye. Popular search engines such as Google allow us to simply type in key words and have hundreds if not thousands of results appear instantly right there in front of us on our monitors.

How did I find out about KWAS? A quick search on Google using the keywords Tropical Fish and Kitchener returned the link that drew yours truly to come out with my family to a monthly meeting. If you have been to a meeting lately, increasingly the same is true for a majority of our guests.

What does a person do if it is early Sunday morning and you wake up to find your prized fish acting odd or showing the signs of sickness? Well we could wait until the LFS (short for Local Fish Store) opens or perhaps hope a hobbyist friend is awake and had breakfast. A much easier and often better choice is to turn on your computer and do your own quick research.

There will no doubt be someone, somewhere who is or has already gone through the exact same trouble you are currently experiencing. I myself have found the internet to be an invaluable tool to have at my disposal 24 hrs a day, 365 days a year. Do I want to know what others find helpful? On the other hand, do I want to read another hobbyists review of a product? Absolutely I do. I have even become a member on so-called speciality hobbyist websites devoted entirely to a single species. Yes, the soul focus of these websites and their communities is on a single species of fish or plants. Talk about a custom tailored experience!

As you peruse the myriad of websites and online forums you will no doubt at one time or another be presented with conflicting information. This is no different from having a chat at a local coffee shop with your friends. We do not all think alike, we all have our own opinions and that is a good thing. This is what keeps our hobby so interesting.

What worked for one person may not necessarily work for you. The important thing to remember is that these experiences are what worked for those individuals. He or she is simply sharing what worked or did not work for them. It is a safe bet that if you pick up any publication from your local library and you finish reading it, and then go on the internet you will likely find someone who has tried something that completely contradicts what you just read. What I am saying is that we have so many options available to us. If one recommended solution does not work, we continue our search or join a forum and ask for suggestions. Help is usually not far away.

When I first joined our club, I found a devoted group of individuals whom collectively had so much to offer their fellow hobbyists. There were people

who specialized in aquatic plants and others who focussed entirely on a particular species of fish. Getting to know people in the club and listening carefully to what they had to say was and still is a wonderful thing to do. I decided it was time to put my ideas and thoughts to use and thus I found myself offering to help develop the KWAS website to help better promote our hobby. Doing so has been one of the most rewarding things I could do to help our club and the hobby in general. My desire to share the wealth of knowledge that I learned existed within the club did not stop there. A few years ago at one of our business meetings, I tabled an idea that KWAS should take things to the next level and have our very own online community forum.

My suggestion was answered by a resounding yes vote and today you see the fruits of that collective desire flourishing on our KWAS Community forums. Today our own forum has well over 600 members from not only Ontario but also from the United States and even overseas. Together our very own online community has over 30,000 posts spread across the various specialized sections, which range from South American Cichlids to Aquarium Photography. Each individual area of our forum has its very own moderators who are experienced in that particular category.

Our forum members like those found on many other forums are always eager to help and offer their own experiences to those seeking that information. One unique aspect about our KWAS forum is that at a fundamental level we are about our club and the hobby. We encourage the younger members to post and they do. Our rules are very simple and clear and this has helped KWAS avoid some of the not so desirable comments posted on other public forums. So is the marriage of the Tropical Fish

Hobbyist and the Internet destined for success? In my mind there is no doubt it already is a success. Where do we go from here? The sky is the limit as literally hundreds of thousands of hobbyists like you and I continue to use the internet to better not only our own knowledge of the hobby but others as well. If you have not joined our forum, I encourage you to look and see for yourself just how successful our hobby and the internet really are. You can find us here www.kwas.ca/forum I look forward to reading your first post!