

WYSIWYG HTML EDITOR

Roundtrip HTML technology and Dynamic HTML

Macromedia Dreamweaver

BY PETER DUDAR

MACROMEDIA HAS POSITIONED *DREAMWEAVER* as a strictly professional web authoring tool, and appropriately so.

Macromedia intends to lure web designers who have rejected the current generation of visual HTML editors in favour of handcoding. They com-

you work with a visual Document window and text-based HTML editor open simultaneously. *Dreamweaver's* DHTML features, like animated layers, behaviors, and style sheets can be implemented expeditiously, without writing code (the catch is, DHTML works only with version 4 browsers). Also, the application is extensible: you can add functionality just by dropping a text file into the appropriate *Dreamweaver* directory.

Dreamweaver's sleek interface excels on both operative and aesthetic levels. Macromedia describes it as *FreeHand* or *Photoshop*-like. *Dreamweaver's* narrowly proportioned and



Dreamweaver's Document window and HTML inspector, plus the Object palette (left) and Launcher (bottom).

plain that visual editors create dense, almost uneditable code, and make significant changes to imported code. *Dreamweaver* will also appeal to graphic designers who have migrated from print to DTP-style applications like NetObjects *Fusion* and GoLive *CyberStudio*.

HTML IMPORTING MADE EASY

Dreamweaver's touted features are its unique Roundtrip HTML technology and its deployment of Dynamic HTML.

Roundtrip HTML technology enables you to import HTML documents with no code reformatting. And it lets

subdued toolbars (Launcher, Object palette, Property inspector) remind me of *QuarkXPress*.

You use the Launcher to open and close palettes, windows, and inspectors. You create objects such as images, tables

and layers with the Object palette. And you edit the attributes of your current selection in the Property inspector. A single click opens *Dreamweaver's* Help Pages (in your default browser), and takes you to the sub-category for the selected element. The interface also provides customizable grids and rulers.

The Document window displays the current page approximately as it appears in a web browser. Element insertion (with the exception of layers) is cursor-based, as in *Microsoft FrontPage* or *Adobe PageMill* (*Fusion* and *CyberStudio* users, who can move elements effortlessly within their pages, may find this appallingly regressive; these two applications generate table-based layouts automatically).

DRAG 'N DROP TABLES

Creating pixel-precise tables in *Dreamweaver* is easy enough. Just click the Insert Table button on the Objects palette, then execute a series of drag-and-drop procedures. It's more complex than *Fusion* and *CyberStudio*-style layouts, but the payoff is substantial: you can produce lean, editable HTML.

As you make changes in the Document window, *Dreamweaver* instantaneously displays the changes in its HTML inspector, and vice versa. All tags relevant to a selection appear on the Document window's status bar. Click on a tag in the status bar, and everything affected by the tag is highlighted in your HTML. The status bar also estimates the current document's download time and size, including all linked elements. Also, *Dreamweaver* is integrated with two sophisticated external text editors: *HomeSite* (Windows) and *BEdit* (Macintosh).

As with tables, you can create and edit frames using drag-and-drop procedures. Just Alt-drag (Windows) or Option-drag (Macintosh) a frame border into the document window. When you split a document, *Dreamweaver* creates an untitled frameset file and untitled documents for the new frames. *Dreamweaver's* Frame inspector displays the framesets in the current document, lets you select frames and framesets, and indicates the hierarchy of the frameset structure.

Once you've selected a frame, you can use the Property inspector to load a document or create a new document in the empty frame. The application enables you save a document inside a frame, save a frameset file, or save all open files at once. Pretty slick.

The Object palette provides a pop-up menu for switching between three panels: Common, Forms and Invisibles. You can create a form, starting with insertion buttons on the Forms panel. In the Properties inspector, you

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assign a name to the form, making it possible to control it with a scripting language; enter the path, or browse for the server-side application that processes the form; and define how the form data is handled.

Dreamweaver supports JPEG, GIF and PNG image formats. And the Property inspector provides a Refresh Image button for updating modified files. It also opens the Image Map Editor, where you create and edit client-side image maps graphically: click one of several drawing tools, drag over the image to delineate hotspots, then set up a link. To make the linked document appear outside the current window or frame, choose a frame from the Target option. Couldn't be simpler.

To insert Shockwave, ActiveX, Java, and Netscape plug-ins, you simply click a button on the Object palette. The button inserts the necessary HTML to make the object appear on the page. *Dreamweaver* supports Shockwave movies created by *Director* and by *Flash*, using both OBJECT and EMBED tags for compatibility with *Internet Explorer* and *Navigator*.

DYNAMIC HTML FEATURES

Dreamweaver has four Dynamic HTML-related features: Layers, Styles, Timelines, and Behaviors.

Style sheets reside in the HEAD area of a document and can define the formatting attributes for HTML tags, ranges of text identified by a class attribute, or text that conforms to the Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) specification. They can also specify unique HTML attributes like positioning, special effects and mouse rollovers.

There are two different types of styles in *Dreamweaver*: HTML tag styles that redefine established tags, such as H1; and Custom styles that can be applied like the styles in a word processor. A style sheet can be applied to a single document or control several documents.

Anything you can put in an HTML document, can be put in a layer. Lay-

ers can be positioned at an exact location and can overlap. To create a layer, you simply click the Layer button in the Object palette and then drag an outline in the Document window. A layer marker, which enables you to select the layer, appears at the cursor location where the layer code has been inserted, and can be toggled on and off. The Layer inspector, *Dreamweaver's* most *Photoshop*-like palette, enables you to change the stacking order of layers, or nest them, by dragging up or down in the inspector.

A behavior is a JavaScript element that makes objects interactive without scripting, and can be attached to almost any HTML element. When creating a behavior, you specify an event that triggers an action and associate actions with the event. *Dreamweaver* can automatically add link tags to events such as onMouseDown, onMouseOver, and onMouseOut. You use the Behavior inspector to attach behaviors and select target browsers. A pop-up menu lists events that are relevant to the selected object.

Think of *Dreamweaver's* Timeline inspector as Macromedia *Director Light*. The playback head shows which frame of the timeline is currently displayed on the page. Animation bars show the duration of a selected object. And keyframes indicate where you have specified properties for the object.

To create a timeline you move the layer to its start point on the page, drag it into the Timeline inspector (a bar appears in the first channel of the timeline), click the keyframe marker at the end of the bar, then move the layer on the page to its end point. You can also use keyframes to change the source file of an image, the visibility of a layer, the size of a layer, and the stacking order of a layer.

All color pickers in *Dreamweaver* use browser-safe 216-color palettes common to *Navigator* and *Internet Explorer* on both Windows and Macintosh. Selecting a color from the palette

displays the color's hexadecimal value, which you can edit. If you need colors outside the browser-safe range, a button accesses your system's palettes.

SOME MINOR SHORTCOMINGS

Dreamweaver comes up short in two areas of site management: hyperlink management and visual site overview. But it has a *QuarkXPress*-like solution for handling repeating content — a palette that accesses a Library folder within the site root folder. (*Fusion* restricts repeating elements to Masterborder areas on the margins of the page.) You can drag elements from the page into the Library palette list, and vice versa. Placing a library item in a document creates a reference to the external file, making it possible to update the content on an entire site all at once by changing the library item.

To define a local site, you access *Dreamweaver's* Site window, enter a site name, and specify the folder on your hard drive where you want to store files for this site. You can then enter values to connect the local site to a remote site. When transferring files between local and remote sites, *Dreamweaver* maintains identical directory structures to ensure that links and references are not broken. The remote site appears in the Site window's left pane and the local site appears in the right pane. File transfers simply require dragging items between the panes and then clicking appropriate options. *Dreamweaver* records all file transfer activity. Also, the Site window enables you to run a target browser check.

Since *Dreamweaver's* Document window is only *near*-WYSIWYG, you'll want to preview often, keeping *Netscape* and/or *Internet Explorer* open. Plus you may want to run an external HTML editor. The memory allocation for *Dreamweaver* is 24,576 KB on a Power Macintosh (16 MB on Windows). *Dreamweaver's* online help uses Macromedia's Shockwave plug-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 47

more to learn here, but the net result is far more accurate masking in hairy situations. Magic Brush is able to distinguish between similar tones that befuddle Magic Paintbrush in *MagicMask*.

Another interface complication that took some playing to figure out was the two Brush and two Transition sliders. The brush sliders control brush softness and size, while the Transition controls change the weighting of Keep and Drop colors relative to each other. Varying these parameters as you brush



Mask Pro handles the fine strands much more convincingly, rejecting the background areas in between them and adding transparency where the colors mixed.

using the arrow keys on the keyboard gives the experienced user unparalleled intuitive control over masking production.

It also helps that the Magic Brush is producing a soft-edged grayscale mask. When you zoom in on a wispy area of the mask, you can see that *Mask Pro* has knocked out all the undesired colors and substituted transparency for them. This is the best way to do it. When composited over another background, the effect looks like you spent days on it instead of minutes.

Upon leaving the plug-in, *Mask Pro* will automatically generate a clipping path for you based on your mask. You can vary the parameters to give a looser or tighter path. The path generated can be extremely complex, but

the fact that the line segments are straight rather than bezier curves means that even the most dense path will still print.

The downside to *Mask Pro* is that it is not automatic. To use it effectively, you have to know what you are doing. As you brush the edge to be masked, you constantly have to resample the color areas which you are trying to separate. *MagicMask* tries to automate things more, but the quality of the automated work isn't good enough to use without tweaking, and then you're

right back to needing some color knowledge to make it work.

Both *Mask Pro* and *MagicMask* have additional fill and selection tools which assist in filling holes, restoring image areas and cleaning up ragged edges, but I have tried to concentrate here on the

essential tools that are at their cores.

ONE OR BOTH A MUST FOR PHOTOSHOPPERS

MagicMask is a fine tool for occasional retouchers. It's Magic Lasso tool would be fantastic for users who are masking a lot of hard-edged images, as in product photography. In tandem with the *EdgeWizard* plug-in, *MagicMask* is likely to become a more polished and useful tool.

Mask Pro is a heavy-duty masking application, with a steeper learning curve. If your subject matter is mainly portraits or soft-edged objects, you'll be happier with your results from *Mask Pro*. Of course, if you're one of those who spend so much time in *Photoshop* that you didn't understand my earlier innuendo about availability of co-workers, you are in serious trouble. You will only be happy if you get both of these plug-ins and own *all* the tools.

Whether you choose one or both, you'll find that your time spent on the chore of masking will go way down. Tell your production manager that your productivity will double: that way you'll get them installed tomorrow. While their operation still requires a brain in the head of the user, they are a big improvement over the way you've done it before.

For more information about *MagicMask* (list \$99.95 US), check Chroma Graphics' website at www.chromagraphics.com.

A free demo of Extensis *Mask Pro* (priced at \$299.95 US) is available at www.extensis.com/products/MaskPro. *

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Dreamweaver

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 44

in, which raises Netscape *Communicator's* requirement to near 14,000 KB. With all the above open, my system consumption is in the 25 MB range. You can make do with much less, but I would want 100+ Mb of RAM available when using *Dreamweaver*.

My enthusiasm for *Dreamweaver* is slightly tempered by the fact that it's pretty buggy for a post-beta release. And some of *Dreamweaver's* DHTML code produces quirky results, even in version 4 browsers.

Fusion 3.0 will support DHTML, but only *Dreamweaver* has Roundtrip HTML technology. HTML pros, who generally advise building pages manually for control and compatibility, may now have a visual editor they can love.

Dreamweaver for Windows 95, Windows NT and Power Macintosh lists for \$499 (US), but is available for \$299 (US) until March 1998. Go to www.macromedia.com/software/dreamweaver to download a free demo version. *