by Bill Jahnel

I promised last month in my
article on distribution to talk
some about marketing your game
products over the web.   Therefore,
to accompany that marketing advice,
Tools of the Trade will focus primarily
on visual web creation tools under $100.

But first, a blast from the past. . . .

examining the tools

list, since I did

report it is still

for under

Last month, I spent a rather exhaustive period of time

for internet gaming connectivity.   However, I left one off the

not know if it would still be something needed or not.   Sad to

needed, but glad to report it does its job cleanly, invisibly, and

fifteen dollars.

message than

been idle, do

egregious, which at

stay online

five minute

clear of

room on its

For America Online users, there is perhaps no more annoying

that of the perennial popup window that exclaims, "You have

you wish to stay online?"   The other offender was more

45 minutes online would show and ask if you REALLY wanted to

whether you were idle or not.   Known derisively as the forty-

timer, the window was created to try and help keep AOL's lines

people who signed on and forgot they were online, to make

network for active users.

(internet

The conundrum is that AOL now bills itself as a full-fledged ISP

internet

chaos of the

existence of

no way to

Ergo, right

dwarf drop the

connectionless

to your woes:

many

invisible

open, but now it

Who could ask

last few

its timers and

Rampell, AOL

just suggested,

live without it.

tends to be split

game designers, a

professional

support.   For the

fond of

world, with

of the America

service provider) in addition to being a "content provider" (an

service with stuff on it, organized in more useful forms than the

web).   While I personally love AOL, the timer is the bane of the

all people who play internet games through AOL, since AOL has

track if you are using its TCP/IP pipeline in another program.

in the middle of sacking a village in Warcraft or having your

coup de explosive in Myth, you might suddenly find yourself

and without your soon-to-be vanquished prey.   What to do?

Enter the genius of Alex Rampell, who has constructed the cure

Always Online 1.7b.   This extremely smart program has had

generations, but with its 1.7 release Rampell has made it the

friend.   Always Online used to have to keep your menubar

monitors the background silently.   Run it and forget about it.

for more?   At $12, this program is a steal.   The question in the

months would be whether or not AOL might internally disable

render this program a moot point.   Alas for users but good for

remains a timed zone, and for AOL users, this program is not

it's crucial. Try it out free for 15 days and then see if you can

Who Needs Web Page Design Tools?

The desire for the gaming market to get into web page design

evenly among the game players and game designers.   For

web page is an easy and cheap way to set up a virtual store, a

presence, and a way to offer cheap and up-to-date customer

average game player, and especially for those gamers who are

internet gaming, the desire to create "your slice" of the gaming

hints, strategies, and tactics is a compelling desire.   As a part

Online Gaming Forum senior staff, I receive about one email a

week or two

(and now

designer who does

the web) from

basic choices

tools has been

mean those tools

Adobe

tremendous share of

Pagemill was

its kind for

Homepage 1.0 did not

Pagemill had gained.

released version

Sitemill,

you had not

the most

and replace

some ways

2.0 release was

However, for

Pagemill

broken up.

asking how to create a home page in order to share Warcraft Diablo, Deadlock, etc.) tips.   For the beginning web page not know html (hyper text markup language, the language of pig Latin (the language of five year old boys), there are two that you can get away with for just under $100.

The Great Web Clash: The history of Pagemill and Homepage

For Mac users, the low-end market for visual web page design dominated by Adobe and Claris.   (By "visual design tool" I that let you design web pages without benefit of knowing html.) Pagemill 1.0, when it came to the Mac public, grabbed a the market and had a lot of loyal enthusiasts, including myself. a groundbreaking product, and in many ways one of the first of the Mac platform.   Claris Homepage appeared later, but receive as much popular support or press laudations as Pagemill looked like it had a solid advantage when it then 2.0, which also incorporated what had been a separate product, into the Pagemill 2.0 package.   This meant that for under $100 only a web designing tool but also a tool that could upload only recent files you changed by FTP and perform universal search over an entire web site project.   Claris Homepage 2.0 was in more elegant web page designing tool than Pagemill, and its strong enough to start causing people' loyalties to switch. people with large sites or needs for the site management tools, remained the only game in town for the under-$100 price tag.

The State of the Nation Today

Claris, as many folks know, recently had their product line

(which is still

Apple.   When

with

tough for

Parent company Filemaker has kept the Homepage product
being called Claris Homepage) and sent Claris emailer on to
Claris released Homepage 3.0, though, they not only caught up
Pagemill, but also incorporated a new technology that will be
Pagemill to compete with.

Enough history, what can I do with them?

Well, Homepage and Pagemill have a lot more in common than

they differ.

Both tools give you the opportunity to create a web page in a

manner very

similar to a word processor.   You can type in text, change its

format and

style with a toolbar, drag and drop pictures into your page and

generally

create web pages without knowing a lick of html.   Both have

some small

graphic tools and both allow you to create transparent GIFs

(pictures with

spaces in them that show the back of the web page through

them, so not all of

your pictures have to be "square").

What are the Advantages and Disadvantages of each?

Since this is not a technically review column, I did not want to

spend five

pages going over each individual feature.   Instead, the

following comparisons

should give you an overview of the main strengths and

weaknesses of the two

products so that you may more easily choose the one that

works best for you.

Please note I have in mind the basic gamer who wants to put up

a small

webpage and the small business or shareware author who

needs to create a

marketing presence on the web.   If your needs are different,

my advice

mileage may vary for you.

Adobe Pagemill 2.0

I have been a veteran Pagemill user since its original

incarnation, and in

many ways Adobe got a lot of it right the first time.   Its

interface is

text and

later caught

under

and replace

large sites can

that reason, it

background

design work

cranky: It doesn't

made from

key all of

has a

Even though

limits for

will

the bottom of

Pagemill more

programs age so fast

changing and

version of

"at some point

time to let

features are

as easy to work

relatively easy to understand, and with 2.0 the ability to color

elegantly handle frames and tables won me over.   While Claris

up in the frames department, I still prefer the handling of tables

Pagemill.   Pagemill was the first to have a program for search

functions with Sitemill, but searching or making changes on

cause glacial slowdowns even on the zippiest computers.   For

is also not considered a good idea to always run Sitemill in the

when designing in Pagemill, or you might think you were doing

on an SE/30.   Pagemill also has a few spots where it gets

equate hitting return to the <BR> html tag (a change Adobe

version 1 to version 2), which means that if you hit the return

your work will look double-spaced by default.   Pagemill also

distressing habit of rewriting custom code such as CGIs on you.

it has a "No Edit" feature where you can tag areas as being off

Pagemill to rewrite, I have had some instances where Pagemill

duplicate code so I end up with, say, two counters running at

my main page sometimes.   All this said, though, I have used

than any other web designing program.

At the same time, Pagemill is long ground quickly.   Few

as those whose work is designed to be presented on the ever-

super-competitive internet.   Adobe's recently-released 3.0

Pagemill was for Windows only, with a Mac release scheduled

this summer."   As a result, Adobe gave Claris Homepage a long

people salivate over Homepage 3.0's new features; and those

powerful vodoo indeed.

Claris Homepage 3.0

I have only had Homepage now for a month but I have found it

Homepage uses a

extensive

and easy for

Claris has

it site

and these

Overall, 3.0 was a

any difference

is especially

some powerful

Whether on

small

based interface

game designer

for their RPG

functions could be

categories, you

give the edge to

favorite.   Homepage

Mac platform,

powerful

integration

"Lasso

integrated

with as Pagemill and for some projects much easier.

"Wizard-template" metaphor for designing new pages. Its

libraries of examples and template pages makes it very quick

the novice to get a new page and then site up and running.

incorporated a set global search and replace commands to give

management tools similar to those originally found in Sitemill,

tools appear to have the speed edge as well on large sites.

tremendously powerful upgrade to 2.0's features.

The most crowed-about feature of Homepage 3.0 won't make

to the average user, but if you run off an Apple server (and this

true for games designers and small companies) Homepage has

new tools for integrating Filemaker Pro databases onto the web.

a company intranet or serving out to the internet, with a very

learning curve on the part of the user you can create a web-

to access and even update a Filemaker Pro database.   For the

interested, say, in creating a searchable online hint database

or a company store, Homepage's database integration

very, very attractive indeed.

Which one's for me?

To be perfectly honest, unless you fall into a few specific

can't go wrong with either product.   At the moment I have to

Claris Homepage, even though Pagemill is a sentimental

not only is demonstrating continued and full support for the

but it also has enhanced tools for the very novice user with its

wizard setup and has some tools for high-end users in database

that I doubt we'll see Pagemill even try and compete with.

technology" (Lasso was the name of the original program that

party but is now

the most

owns Claris

this direction.

and Pagemill

tools still have

would love to see

like the

for terms for

used to activate

and then sending

but its

Available

FrontPage for Mac

there is one

choice.

runs under

FrontPage will

"WebBots") that are

tool, which is a

The other

actually update your

site later.   Just

your website

Filemaker and the web) was originally developed by a third

licensed by Filemaker. Since Filemaker holds the honor of being

popular of the Mac database programs, and since Filemaker

Homepage, Adobe does not seem to have anywhere to go in

On the other hand, I still prefer making my tables on Pagemill,

3.0's release this summer could up the ante once again.   Both

a ways to go in keep up with the newest html protocols and I

them also create a support library of commonly used meta tags

refresh tag.   Meta tags usually act like comments or are places

search engines to use in indexing your page, but some can be

special browser functions, such as showing someone a page

them to another web page automatically.

Microsoft FrontPage: the Dark Horse from the Evil Empire

Microsoft's FrontPage has a strangehold over the Wintel market,

existence as a Mac product has been virtually overlooked.

separately or with the Gold edition of Microsoft Office 98,

just doesn't feel as finished as its two competitors.   However,

specialized circumstance where FrontPage will be your best

If (and only if) the server where your web page is hosted from

Windows and has the "FrontPage extensions" plugged in,

allow you to create certain custom search forms (called

activated on the web.   This includes a simple search engine

powerful addition to FrontPage's arsenal for the game designer.

advantage is that FrontPage, on these same servers, can

page directly over the web without having to upload it to the

run FrontPage, change the text and it is dynamically saving on

detriments.   I have one

admit

search

cause you come

dynamically updating

can so its

large sites you

drops in small

those folders

you try and

server, mirroring

be a sometimes

are, they are not

with the search

index a single

to the boolean

windows platform,

to TYPE IN the

you and

primary design work

search engine

without uploading.

as you make the changes.   This has both benefits and

website on an NT server that has these extensions and I must

FrontPage made my life a lot easier, since no other tool made

databases easier to integrate on my site.

FontPage has some important weaknesses, however, that may

pause before making it your primary design tool. When

on a server, FrontPage needs to read your entire site before it

magic when you connect to your site area, and as a result on

get a noticeable lag before you can make changes. FrontPage

folders (directories) into your project, and for some reason

can sometimes cause programs like Fetch to be unhappy when

download the whole site at one time.   If you don't own the

changes with FrontPage and keeping a copy on your drive can

time-consuming experience.   Also, as great as the WebBots

as customizable as I would like.   I have to index all of my site

bot, for example; there is no easy way to tell the bot to only

folder, or to create default pulldown menu search items to add

search.   Much of the interface still is reminiscent of the

and some features, including the save as function, require you

directory path of where you are saving a file, rather than giving

open/save dialog box in which to navigate.   I still do my

in one of the other two products and use FrontPage only for its

and the ability to alter by recent site news page on the fly

Are We having Fun Yet?

For an example of fun with these web page designers, please

my Warcraft 2 booster site at

feel free to visit

http://members.aol.com/grannywii.   Also

known as "Granny's Warcraft 2 Home Page," you can take a

look at frames,

both Pagemill

her fanny and

mentioned in this

according to

series of

that fall into

the "Burning

shoelaces

that.

tables, and the integration of cgi code.   The current site uses

and Claris Homepage, though Granny (ie., me) needs to get off

make some more changes and additions to the page.

Rating the Tools

Though I don't do a formal rating of each of the titles

article, I can't help but feel I need to classify the following tools

my own, idiosyncratic rating system.   That said, I present a

categories (ranked from highest to lowest) and list the tools

those categories after it.   The most coveted honor is to receive

Nun" Award.

Get these tools, even if it means setting fire to a nun:

• Claris Homepage 3.0
• Always Online 1.7b

Great tools, seasoned veterans from the wars:
• Adobe Pagemill 2.0

Not worth flaming a nun to own, but worth tying a nun's

together, and only if your server runs frontpage extensions:
• Microsoft FrontPage 1.0 for the Mac

Software Listing

All three titles below retail at almost exactly $99 each. Imagine

Always Online 1.7b
Author: Alex Rampell
Cost: $12 Shareware Fee
Website: http://www.rampell.com/software/

Claris Homepage 3.0
Author: Filemaker
Cost: $99 street / retail
Website: http://www.claris.com

Adobe Pagemill 2.0 for the Mac
Author: Adobe
Cost: $99 street / retail
Website: http://www.adobe.com

Microsoft FrontPage 1.0 for the Mac
Author: Microsoft
Cost: $99 street / retail
Website: http://www.microsoft.com/products/mac.htm