



Two web feats

Look what the web has turned up — another add-in, Internet Assistant Wizard, which converts Excel worksheets into web pages. Stephen Wells strides out.

I mentioned four add-ins last month which are compatible with Excel 5 and 7, and which you can download with a mouse-click from www.microsoft.com/msexcel/fs_x1.htm

I concentrated on the Lookup Wizard, recounted my dilemma with it, and gave the formula that you can use instead.

Another of the four add-ins is the Internet Assistant Wizard which converts an Excel worksheet into a web page. I'll tell you how it's supposed to work, the problems I had, and give you an alternative solution.

There was a time when people just used their copper line connection to the world for a telephone. A postal strike some years ago spurred the growth of home fax machines. Then came the eagerness for email. Now it seems that everybody is preparing their own web page.

You might ask why anyone in this country would display a photo of their caravan for sale, or news of their hiking club, to people in Pakistan, Poland and Peru? But that's what media types would call "throw-away circulation". With services like CompuServe's Our World, it can be so inexpensive to have a personal web page that it doesn't matter that you reach millions of extra people who don't share your interests.

The Our World Home Page Project is included in CompuServe membership although you are limited to 1Mb of disk space when uploading your web pages, but there is no additional cost involved to publish and maintain them. Additional space can be leased.

The basic language of the web is HTML (HyperText Markup Language) and if you

have the patience, there is no reason why you shouldn't use it if you want to. You can precede a line of text with and end it with and it appears in bold. The slash mark signifies the end of any formatting, so <i> and </i> start and end an italicised word or phrase.

Just as Windows started as a shell over DOS, rather than the programming language it is today, so HTML editors now make it possible to create a web page without writing any of this code. The old battles are being fought again. The experienced web page designers say the editors are for newbies, while the latest editors permit special effects which are hard

to create from scratch in standard code.

The Internet Assistant Wizard for Excel is installed just like any other add-in. This one downloads to the desktop. Then you just choose Tools, Add-Ins, Browse and select this new .XLA file. After that, the name Internet Assistant Wizard appears at the bottom of the Tools menu.

My worksheet (Fig 1) shows a menu for a fictional café. There is an embedded Word Picture logo then several headings and entrées, formatted in various sizes and colours. No worksheet gridlines or row and column headings are displayed. To use the Wizard, you select the required range of your worksheet then start the new add-in. It has five steps.

Step One simply confirms the selected range and gives you the opportunity to change it. Step Two offers you the choice of creating a complete web page or copying just a table into an existing HTML template.

If the first option is taken, Step Three will ask you to enter header and footer information such as a title and description text, the update date, your name and email address (if you want them on the page). If the second option is taken in Step Two, enter the path and filename of the template you wish to amend with the new data. Step Four lets you convert the table with or without formatting. Step Five is for entering the name of the new file to save to.

The first thing I found was that the Wizard ignored my graphic — maybe it's only meant to be used for text? The bigger

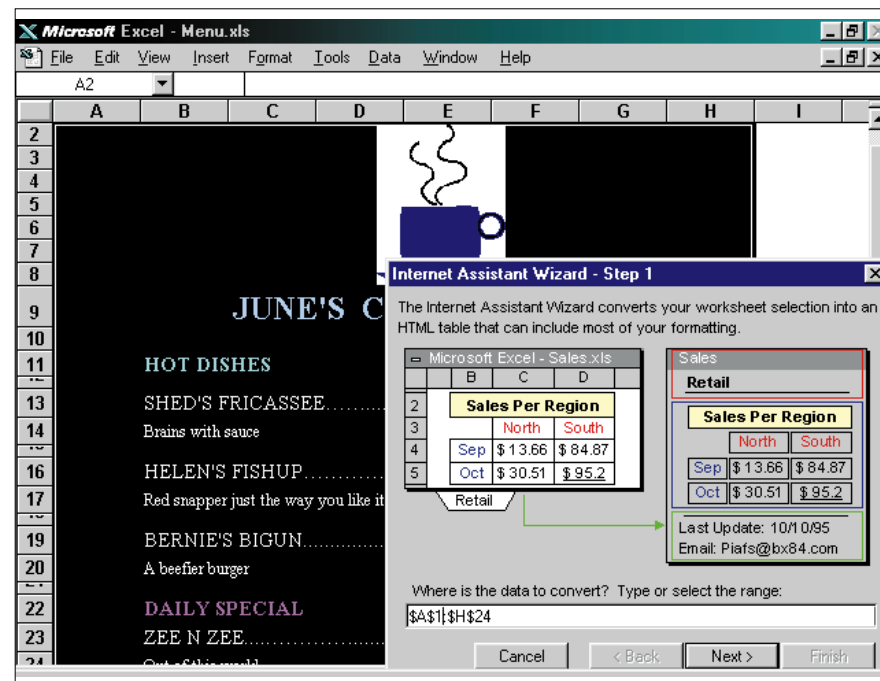


Fig 1 The Internet Assistant Wizard is intended to translate an Excel worksheet into an HTML document

problem was that the web page had visible web page cells in odd-sized columns and the Wizard stacked the main heading in three rows. While Excel will run a heading into adjacent blank cells, this Wizard doesn't appear to.

The kindest thing to say is that the Wizard is insufficiently intuitive and can only cope with simpler worksheets than the one I used. Or that it takes more training time than I allowed for. It may be unfair to compare this simple little Wizard with a serious piece of kit, but then I tried the Microsoft FrontPage Editor. At the time of writing, a free trial copy was also downloadable. Well, free after the hour of download time, that is.

FrontPage really is intuitive. I didn't read any of its help files or anything else of an instructional nature. I just minimised my Excel worksheet and FrontPage onto the Windows 95 Taskbar and switched between them.

I successfully transferred everything on the worksheet by copying and pasting (Fig 2). The graphic was no problem. FrontPage recognises all the most common graphic file types and converts them to 8-bit GIF (Graphic Image File) or 24-bit JPEG (Joint Photographic Experts Group), which are the formats acceptable for servers and browsers at present.

I could rave on about FrontPage for the rest of this column, but I must get into my second web subject this month.

Fair shares

Several readers have asked me about downloading stock price information into spreadsheets. Spreadsheets are the primary software tool for recording results of personal portfolios and can help with one aspect of stock analysis. Although many traders lean towards fundamental research, like new products, management, or acquisitions when evaluating companies, others put great store in technical data. This depends on the availability of historical pricing and sales volumes as well as access to realtime stockmarket prices.

One of the first companies to offer this information, plus individual trading in UK shares through an authorised broker over the internet, is Electronic Share Information (ESI). Its URL is <http://www.esi.co.uk>

I have found Debbie Reay (in ESI's technical support department) to be most efficient and genuinely helpful, responding to emails with alacrity. After registering,

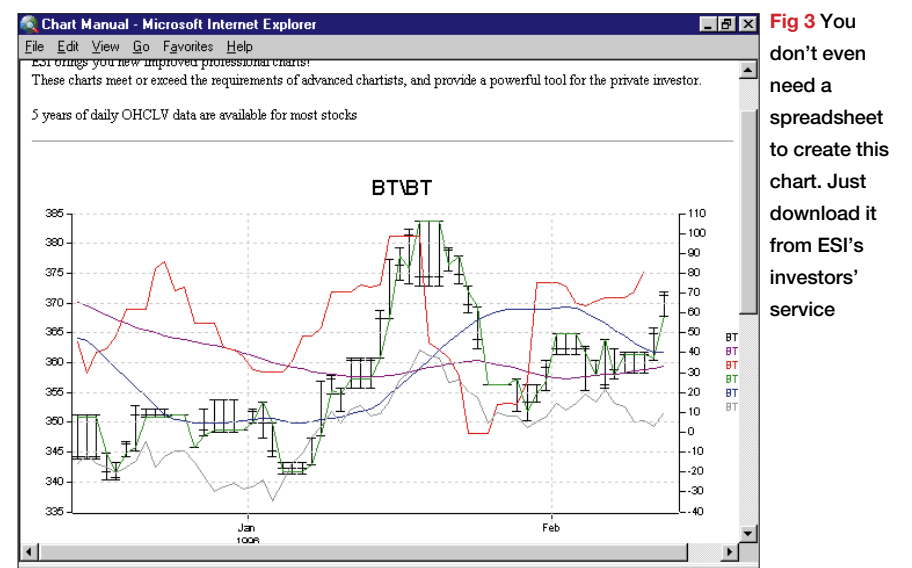
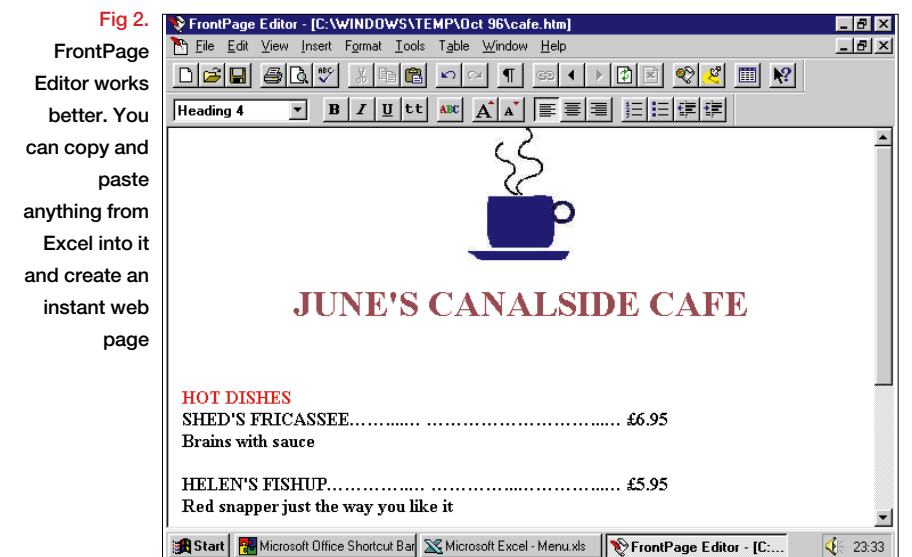


Fig 3 You don't even need a spreadsheet to create this chart. Just download it from ESI's investors' service

which is free for some basic services and inexpensive for others, you can download data in a choice of formats, including CSV, and then load this straight into an Excel worksheet. You can see a lot of information already in chart form (Fig 3), and this can save a lot of time.

For unit and investment trust information, as well as PEPs and offshore funds, try the Interactive Investor at <http://www.iii.co.uk>

For no charge, you can view its Micropal fund league tables which show the top performing funds over one, three and five years.

If you are interested in currency information, the ECU Group is at <http://www.bogo.co.uk/ecu/ecu/8charts.htm>

ECU offers data on short term interest rates, the bond markets and global stock market prices from Investment Data Service. The data is not currently importable

to a spreadsheet but the pages are worth viewing because they are so beautifully designed.

A prime source for fundamental information is the *Financial Times*. Following (free) registration, you can look at that paper's main daily business news stories at <http://www.ft.com>

A comprehensive personal finance site is MoneyWeb, run by Ian Dickson at <http://www.demon.co.uk/moneyweb>

Ian also takes the time to answer individual questions on his specialist subject — you meet the nicest people on the internet!

I'd like to hear from more readers about their experiences of downloading information of any kind into spreadsheets, and also about using spreadsheets to help with investments.

It's a mystery

A reader says he saves his Excel workbook

files to his hard disk during the day, then, come the hush of eventide, he tries to save to a floppy and there is no sign of yesterday's version of the files. If he saves the files anyway, and later, with Explorer, looks at the files, he finds they have been updated properly.

A little investigation reveals that, out of habit from using earlier versions, he calls his files NAME.XLW. There was a time when worksheet files used the .XLS extension and workbooks were .XLW. These days there are only two workbook types, the .XLS and .XLA (a fully-compiled add-in). You can call a normal workbook whatever you like and Excel will save it and load it in that name, but it treats it as it would an .XLS file. A worksheet file is now a workbook with one sheet in it.

If you choose File, Save As, the default type is "Microsoft Excel Workbook (*.XLS)." Any file called NAME.XLW in the selected directory or disk doesn't appear in the Name column above. But you can save your file with that name.

I suggested to this reader that either he uses the .XLS extension or none at all, from now on.

Calculated criteria

Shane Devenshire, of California, has been kind enough to send me another stack of helpful spreadsheet hints, so I'll pass on a couple here. The first is a group of formulas which you can apply when using Excel as a database.

Excel's criteria ranges are not case sensitive. If your criteria cell contains Melissa, it would report melissa, Mellssa or Melissa Jane as true when it should return false. If your criteria cell is B2, the following calculated criteria will solve the problem:

```
=EXACT(B2,"Melissa")
```

If you want to check that your criteria cell entry begins with a capital letter use:

```
=AND(CODE(LEFT(B2,1))>64,CODE(LEFT(B2,1))<91)
```

That formula checks to see whether all the characters are in the ASCII code range 65 to 90, which represent the capital letters A to Z.

Similarly, the following formula will see if the first letter is lower case.

```
=AND(CODE(LEFT(B2,1))>96,CODE(LEFT(B2,1))<123)
```

If you want to see if it's true or false that the first letter in your criteria cell agrees with the same letter in another cell, you could use the following formula:

```
=EXACT(LEFT(B2,1),B$3)
```

EXCELlent shortcuts and longshots

■ What's happening?

With Excel 7, choose Help, About Microsoft Excel, System Info.

This opens a special file, MS System Info Version 2.0, which tells you everything you could wish to know about your system right now, including physical and disk memory available, swap-file size, and your temporary directory.

Other categories give the details of available printers and their drivers; system DLLs (dynamic link libraries); available fonts; dictionaries; graphic filter settings (which applications are associated with every file extension); text converters (associated extensions again); and lists all applications running.

■ Copycat

Any changes made to Page Setup for one worksheet in a workbook can easily be applied to another. It might be the margins, headers, or orientation (portrait

versus landscape).

Select the settings you want on one sheet, click the tab of another sheet and press F4. You can make the same changes to several worksheets by holding down the Ctrl key as you click on the appropriate worksheet tabs.

■ More data series?

To create a chart that has more data series than categories in Excel 5 or 7, select the cells that contain the data and labels to plot.

Choose Insert, Chart, As New Sheet. The Chart Wizard dialogue box appears. Click Next until Step Four appears.

Under Data Series In, click Rows. In the Use First Row(s) For Category (X) Axis Labels box, accept the default of 1, or insert it.

Under Use First Column(s) for Legend Text also insert 1. Click Finish for Step Four, then Finish for Step Five.

The initial letter to check for is in cell B3.

You could even check to see whether a name has a capital P as the third letter, as in McPherson. Put a P in cell B3 and this is the formula:

```
=EXACT(MID(B2,3,1),B$3)
```

New sheets

The basic way to add a new worksheet in Excel is to choose Insert, Worksheet. You can also right-click a sheet tab and be offered the same choice.

Shane reminds us that you can also press Shift+F11 or add the Insert Worksheet button to one of your toolbars. Each of these methods only adds one worksheet, so he has written a VBA subroutine which displays an Input Box so that you can create a dozen or more in one go.

Just choose Input, Macro, Module and then enter the listing below. It will automatically be added to the Tools, Macro menu. From there you can choose Options

and then specify a shortcut key if you wish. The error message runs if you press Cancel in the Input Box instead of OK.

Personally, I use a couple of other methods. Say you have six sheets. Hold down Shift and then click the far left and right sheet tabs. Then right-click, choose Insert, and six new sheets will be added.

My other method of doing this, if I know that I want to have a lot of worksheets when I start a new workbook, is to choose Tools, Options, General Sheets in New Workbook, then twiddle the arrows to the number I want. As every sheet adds memory, the normal default I maintain here is one worksheet.

•PCW Contacts

Stephen Wells welcomes comments on spreadsheets and solutions to be shared, via PCW Editorial at the usual address or at Stephen_Wells@msn.com. Files can be attached if you're on MSN or Demon.

Sub NewSheets()

```
On Error GoTo ErrorMessage
Answer = InputBox("How many sheets do you want?")
If Answer = "" Then Exit Sub
ActiveWorkbook.Sheets.Add Count:=Answer
Exit Sub
ErrorMessage: MsgBox "You must enter a number"
End Sub
```