



Present day Web editors promise to assist the designer in creating great-looking homepages. CHIP compares six packages that let you build your dream home in cyberspace

QUICK AND

Having a personal homepage on the Internet is no longer a big deal. Things were different a few years ago, when Web editing software was still evolving. At that time, a snazzy Web page was a rarity because one had to rely on a text editor such as Windows Notepad to create one—a most laborious process. Today, anyone who can wield a mouse can ‘design’ a Web page crammed with tables, frames, animated pictures and all.

Creating eye-catching home pages still requires talent... but Web editing software takes care of the rest. Yes, Web editors have greatly simplified the creation of

Web pages. The tedious task of generating code in HTML or in Javascript is no longer a required skill.

The demands made on the Web editor depend on the kind of Web page required. An MNC's corporate site will need to be designed very differently from that of, say, a 17-year-old's page of awesomely cool links. Therefore, this comparison test attempts to distinguish between products that are best suited for three levels of users: beginners, advanced and professionals.

Going it blindfolded

The test candidates had to promise a WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You

Get) presentation and ensure that the author does not, as far as possible, need to set see the actual HTML code at all. Previous versions of these programs were miles from being user friendly. The intricate menus of those days, together with a seemingly limited use of HTML commands, demanded considerable programming skills (not to say patience) from Web designers.

Some Web professionals continue to swear by manually written code and use graphics editors solely for planning and building the basic frame. CHIP tested the packages vis-à-vis this claim, and whether users without any programming



PAINLESS HOMEWORK

knowledge can create sophisticated Web pages after all. One problem that manufacturers of Web editors often run into is the running duel between the dominant browser manufacturers, Microsoft and Netscape. Though Internet Explorer adheres to HTML 4.0 specifications more closely than Netscape's Navigator does, Microsoft could not resist the temptation to include certain functions in FrontPage (its Web editing package) that cannot be displayed by other browsers. Ultimately, the designer suffers, as his Web editor has to recognise these discrepancies and match the HTML code accordingly.

'Click to Update'

As the sizes of Web pages increase, automatic site management becomes more and more important. 'Automatic' implies that the local Web site can be mirrored on the server at the click of a button. Ideally, all pages and links that have changed should be updated on the server. This function is especially important when a Web-hosting agency designs and programs your Web page and you have to maintain the site yourself. It should be possible to import the complete page without having to change the original code. All the editors in the test offer this function, even though they have different ideas how it is done.

The test field

CHIP tested five graphics Web editors and one text-based editor. The three conventional Web editors, Microsoft's FrontPage 98, Adobe's PageMill 3.0 and Softquad's HoTMetal PRO 5.0, took an early lead. All three have a common basic design. Other editors were more individualistic. Macromedia's Dreamweaver 2.0 appeared to be based on authoring systems for Multimedia applications, and Fusion 4.0 from NetObjects seemed to be on its own trip.

CHIP also tested the pure text editor Homesite 4.0 from Allaire that is supplied as additional tool with Dreamweaver and Fusion.

Macromedia Dreamweaver 2.0

It's a dream!



Dreamweaver 2.0 shines in comparison with the other editors. Not only does the number of functions outclass those of the competitors, it is the quality and ease with which complex tasks can be accomplished that is more impressive. Functions which are cumbersome to perform (such as those using JavaScripts and applets) can be done in Dreamweaver with a few mouse clicks.

Dreamweaver supports all features of HTML 4.0. Moreover, it masters all the special functions in the respective browsers. Before referring to these functions, one has to specify the desired validity range of the produced code: something like 'all browsers from Version 4' or 'only Internet Explorer from Version 3.5'.

A site designed for the browser you are currently working with can subsequently be optimised for earlier versions of the browser. In this way, you can generate several versions of a Web site. Even the browser query and the detour to the corresponding versions can be automated.

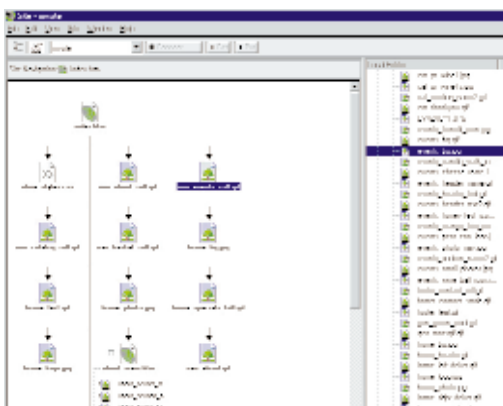
Unlike its previous versions, Dreamweaver 2.0 has a comfortable site management facility that allows easy transfer of modifications to an external server via FTP. With the help of filter functions, the system once configured can be updated by the press of a button.

Despite the diversity of functions, working with Dreamweaver is not more complex than working with the other competing products. However, some coaching and practice are required, as no assistants are provided. The manual, which includes a 'lesson' that helps you learn the most important functions, is integrated as a

Web site in the online help. The search functions help you find solutions quickly even to unique problems.

All the functions can be accessed through three main menus. The most important menu is the View Manager, with which you can switch between different view modes. While doing this, Dreamweaver automatically hides the unrequired functions.

Context-related dialog windows appear in several functions. One has to check out these functions thoroughly, as interesting minor details are often hidden there. Something like selecting whether images should already be preloaded on the surfer's PC before appearing in the memory, or whether certain initial positions should be reproduced



The Site Manager in DreamWeaver

after working with a function. These are certain automated options that no other program in the test offers.

A very interesting function is the animation of layers. Like a bezier curve, the animation path can be edited with a mouse. An animation can be started or stopped with any number of events (An event can be a mouse click or a simple movement with the mouse pointer). Sound effects can be arranged synchronously or events started in other frames. And all these functions without any need for a single peek at the HTML.


If you know how complicated it is to build a Mouse Over script manually in HTML code and thereafter undo the process with a similar script, you will find Dreamweaver unbelievably quick while carrying out this same process—two mouse clicks, and voilá!

In view of the several special functions, the code generated by Dreamweaver depends largely on the browser. But the program points this out while selecting the respective function. So if you set a very 'universal' compatibility, the scope of special functions is greatly limited and the code becomes universal.

Although the internal HTML Editor will suffice in most cases, Macromedia does provide Homesite, a text editor—just in case.

It can be accessed directly from HTML view and provides significant functions for those who want to edit the code manually. Dreamweaver leaves imported code untouched. As always, check out the result in different browsers, especially if your pages make extensive use of layers.

Dreamweaver 2.0 wins the test hands down. Professionals will certainly love the program. Unfortunately, ambitious beginners would find the price too high for their experiments.



- ◆ Clean code generation
- ◆ Expensive

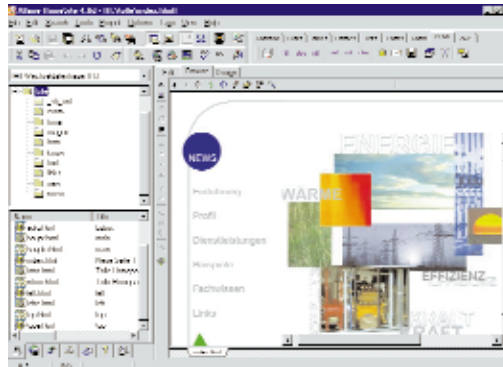
Contact : Wipro Software Products Division
 Phone : 080-2277436
 Fax : 080-2218590
 E-mail : infospd@wipsys.soft.net

Allaire Homesite 4.0

Are you a professional designer who prefers to edit your HTML code manually? Homesite is what you should go in for. The program is a combination of pure Script Editor and graphics menus. The entered code allows you to directly view your creation in the internal preview window. Homesite offers functions for site management and to upload Web pages to a server.

Though the structuring of individual Web pages is done only through text menus, Homesite does provide the elementary code for drop-down menus. It also offers commands for tables, frames, graphics or even scripts for special functions. These can be filed in the libraries.

For experienced users, tags (HTML command instructions) have as much validity as graphics objects in the menus. Homesite writes the code frame for each tag, which the programmer fills with



parameters. In Homesite, data objects such as images or text can be inserted through a File Manager.

Since Homesite is viewed as a text editor (unlike the other programs tested here) we did not subject it to the code quality test. But CHIP considered this tool important because of its code testing functions. It starts with a superficial syntax control and ends with a browser-specific validity test. To do this, Homesite refers to a database, which can also be extended.

Homesite also allows you to import, test and format code. Professionals always

knock a few Kilobytes off the code that is produced with graphics editors. Macromedia and NetObjects are aware of this and include Homesite as an additional tool.

For people who want to test HTML code manually, Homesite does a good job even if the pages are produced in a graphics editor. The code is displayed very concisely and the site management abilities are highly commended.

Homesite is suitable for practised Web designers and professional HTML programmers, not for beginners. It admirably complements graphics Web editors.

VERDICT A-

- ♦ Designed for professionals
- ♦ Intimidating for beginners

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 Fax: 080-5538728
 E-mail: djain@bangalore.imr.com

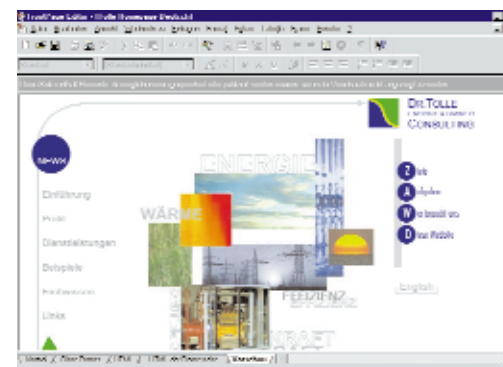
MS FrontPage 98

Ideal for beginners

The functions offered by FrontPage 98 are definitely satisfactory. Complicated functions like animations that require the use of Dynamic HTML are however not provided. A very good table editor, which can be operated like Word, should be enough for formatting. An additional feature is the excellent Image Composer with which you can produce Web-suitable buttons and photographs.

The user interface is exactly like what one would have wanted. FrontPage is primarily divided into two areas—the Site Management tool called FrontPage Explorer and the actual Editor. A Web site is fully displayed in the Explorer, similar to a File Manager. If required, links can also be displayed graphically. On double-clicking the desired page, it appears in the Editor. In order to display a site in the Explorer, it has to be imported or has to be stored there from the beginning.

As the Explorer requires no personal Web server for presentation, the Web site



can be saved in a network without further ado. The site should be physically located at the same place where FrontPage is installed. The transfer to the server is accomplished by pressing a button directly through the Internet as soon as the Provider installs the FrontPage Extensions. The toggling between different view modes is excellently designed.

The internal page preview is similar to the Internet Explorer. The view in Navigator can be arranged externally, likewise the preview in other Browsers, as soon as they are installed. But if you want to try out other possibilities—like the positioning of

pictures—you have to redo all changes made to the corresponding menu by three mouse clicks.

As the page setup in FrontPage is 'classical', with tables or margins, the HTML code is browser neutral. If you do not define the page margins, you will face no annoying surprises in external browsers due to the functions exclusive to FrontPage. While importing the HTML code, FrontPage changes the code only a little. However, manually written code can

be used unchanged in FrontPage.

FrontPage 98 is highly recommended for beginners, as it produces quick results. But advanced users and professionals will not be content with the functions for too long.

VERDICT A+

- ♦ Excellent Site Management Tool
- ♦ Lacks DHTML support

Contact: Microsoft India
 Phone: 011-6226420
 Fax: 011-6461117
 Web site: www.microsoft.com

Adobe PageMill 3.0

Adobe's PageMill 3.0 restricts itself to rudimentary functions. The user will search in vain for new options that are possible with HTML 4.0, as only those from the older standards are provided. PageMill comes with a light version of Photoshop for image editing, a large clipart and a small library of Java applets.

PageMill 3.0 is intended for experienced Web designers, and absolutely no assistants are provided to help through the initial steps of designing a Web page. There is nothing intuitive about the work environment. On launching the program, you get an almost completely blank screen and a cursor blinking expectantly. The only thing that can save you here is the fairly comprehensive 50-page manual.

The desktop of PageMill is rather tidy. You can place a File Manager on the left to give you an overview of the directory struc-



ture of the Web site. Double-clicking the file opens the page in the Editor. The bottom left of the screen has tables and graphics. Together, the two views give a good overview, even for large Web sites.

Working with frames in PageMill demands considerable experience and needs getting used to. Although each frame is displayed in its own window, the link of the window with the accompanying HTML page is rather complicated. To make matters worse, the HTML code for the frameset can be displayed only if the file is closed

and reopened again. Toggling between edit view and browser preview is done by a mouse click and is fortunately quick. Display can be selected in Adobe or Internet Explorer. To use Netscape Navigator, you have to link it as external browser.

As PageMill has no special functions to offer, the HTML code is quite neutral in all browsers. Somewhat annoying is the import of HTML code, the size of which suddenly increases after import.

Adobe PageMill 3.0, as it exists, cannot be unequivocally recommended for any specific user group.

VERDICT 

- ♦ Photoshop LE is bundled
- ♦ No Help feature for beginners

Contact: Wipro Software Products Division
Phone: 080-2277436
Fax: 080-2218590

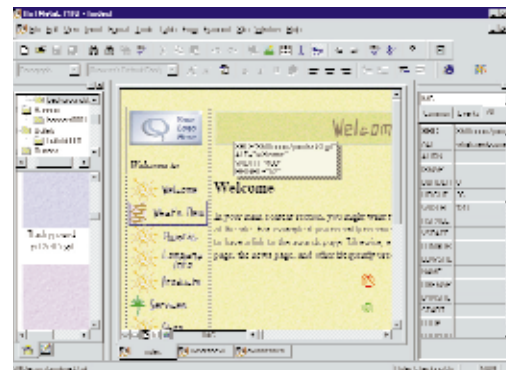
Softquad HoTMetal PRO 5.0

Hot favourite

HoTMetal PRO 5.0 is undoubtedly the most modern program in this trio, a fact that is obvious in the way it works. Although Softquad promises full support of Dynamic HTML, the user has to program the code himself. HoTMetal PRO does manage these scripts quite well in an Attribute Inspector, but automatic generated code is impossible.

A very useful feature is the Resources Manager, which manages buttons, background patterns, photographs and other objects in a Thumbnail View and allows placing objects through drag-and-drop. A Site Management tool is built-in. An upload can be local or to an external server. You can specify exactly which data to transfer through a filter.

Even beginners will find the program interface easy to use. A Site Maker makes it easy to launch the program, even if the value of this assistant is somewhat exaggerated at the beginning. After you reply



to precisely four questions, it generates a complete Web site with over 50 pages that are never likely to be ever used!

The basic concept of the user interface is ideal. Each open page can be presented independently in HTML view, in Edit view or as Preview. The same is true even for Framesets, where individual pages can be simultaneously opened and displayed for editing. The multiple settings possible for the basic configuration by HoTMetal PRO is similarly praiseworthy. In addition to various browsers, even diverse help programs (like those for image editing) can be directly integrated into the program.

HoTMetal provides a so-called Validator that is supposed to track and report errors in the HTML code. There is no browser-specific test for manufacturer or version, and no criteria can be entered. As a result, the most complicated part—testing the pages in various browsers—is left to the user. As the testing covers only standard problems, there is nothing to criticise in the code quality. You can change this if you

add your scripts. The help text is full of warnings about incompatibilities between browsers.

HoTMetal PRO 5.0 is a modern Web editor that can be recommended to all user groups. The professional will find all his requirements here and beginners will find their way around quite easily.

VERDICT 

- ♦ Excellent Resource Manager
- ♦ DHTML not fully supported

Contact: SoftQuad
Web site: www.softquad.com

NetObjects Fusion 4.0

Fusion 4.0 from NetObjects takes a path where the user, at least in the beginning, hardly ever sees the HTML code. The contents that one merges on the screen for a site are first saved in another file format that has nothing to do with HTML. It can be used on the Web only after the file is exported by HTML.

A Site Manager helps to structure the site and transfer it to a local or an external server. The entire site can be organised there. In this way, the basic structure is produced within seconds.

Parts of a Web site can be marked with the mouse and combined into function groups. You can assign a homogeneous design and a navigation bar to such a group. In no other program in this test is the Site Manager so intelligently incorporated into the design.

A large number of so-called styles are provided for the layout. These are templates containing the elements of a Web site in an integrated design. Buttons are furnished with different designs, like a depressed form or with colour changes. If you interchange the template with a mouse click, the entire Web site receives a new look with all the navigation elements.

Working with Fusion requires getting



used to, especially for users who have already worked with other Web editors. An interface that does not really conform to Windows aggravates the situation. But if you go through the introduction ('A Web site in 10 minutes') you will observe that the interface is actually well thought out.

The interface for editing pages corresponds better to a graphics program than to a Web editor constrained by HTML. All objects can be placed freely on the working area. You can place text and draw polygons.

When the user is satisfied with the settings, the page is converted to HTML and the result viewed in a pre-selected browser. Till this point, Fusion is an extremely simple program to operate, with an interesting design concept.

But there are a few snags which any user acquainted with the principal structure of HTML pages will notice immedi-

ately. Despite the ease, it is difficult to guess how Fusion will divide the page into frames. The corresponding menu does allow defaults, but they are limited. The same is true for the other functions.

So, if you want to extend the functions and are familiar with HTML, you won't be very happy with this program. Browsers today position objects primarily with layers and the result exactly corresponds to the defaults in the editor.

For older browser code, the formatting is done through tables and invisible bitmaps.

You can confidently disregard the import of existing HTML pages. The existing layout and the distribution in frames is completely misinterpreted at times. Fusion even completely ignores page centring or rows of frames.

Fusion 4.0 from Netobjects is okay for users who want quick results. Discerning users, however, will not get their money's worth.

VERDICT **B+**

- ◆ Excellent Site Manager
- ◆ Interface not conforming to Windows

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SCORE BOARD

PROGRAM	HOMESITE 4.0	DREAMWEAVER 2.0	FUSION 4.0	PAGEMILL 3.0	FRONTPAGE 98	HOT METAL PRO
5.0						
Manufacturer	Allaire	Macromedia	Netobjects	Adobe	Microsoft	Softquad
Web site	www.allaire.com	www.macromedia.com	www.netobjects.com	www.adobe.com	www.microsoft.com	www.softquad.com
FUNCTION						
Browser preview	Internal/External	External	External	Internal/External	Internal/External	Internal/External
Multiple browser	3	3	3	3	3	3
Global search/replace	3	3	3	3	3	3
Dynamic HTML (4.0)	3	3	3			3
Animations/Layers	3	3	3			3
Syntax test	3	3	3			3
Code validity test	3	3	3			3
Server upload http/ftp	3	/3	/3	/3	3/3	/3
Server download, http/ftp	3	/3	3/3	/	/3	/3
FEATURES						
Site Managers	3	3	3	3	3	3
Assistant			3		3	
Image processing			PhotoImage	Photoshop LE	Image Composer	
Style Sheets		3	3	3	3	3
Cliparts			3	3	3	3

CONCLUSION

The humble Notepad lives on

The verdict—at least for beginners—is somewhat discouraging. Without a certain amount of knowledge about HTML, the importance and purpose of frames and their limitations, it is not possible to design stunning Web pages. An exception is Fusion 4.0, which gets you decent results even if you

have no basic knowledge of Web designing. Fusion, to an extent, takes over the programming of Javascripts. FrontPage 98 is another good program for beginners and proves this with its diverse assistants.

FrontPage 98, PageMill 3.0 and HoT-Metal PRO 5.0 offer almost the same functions. HoTMetal PRO impresses with its ease-of-use and offers up-to-date functions. FrontPage 98, at times, resembles Microsoft Office, which would make beginners feel comfortable. The uploading that FrontPage

achieves through http is very practical especially for novice users, once the Provider has installed the server components.

The winner, however, is Dreamweaver 2.0 from Macromedia. The diversity of this Web editor outshines all other programs. It can be highly recommended for beginners as well as professionals. Dreamweaver helps you produce professional-looking Web pages without requiring any kind of programming knowledge.

CHIP TEST CENTRE

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