

MACROMEDIA DREAMWEAVER TIPS AND TRICKS

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICES
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INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SERVICES

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The Latest

The most current version of Dreamweaver is MX 2004 release 7.01. If you don't have the update and are still running version 7.0, then you can visit http://www.macromedia.com/support/dreamweaver/downloads_updaters.html for the free download. If you're not sure what version you have right now, go to Help → About Dreamweaver.

Creating a Web Photo Album

One great way of integrating one Macromedia product with another—for example, Fireworks with Dreamweaver—is to make a Web Photo Album using both Fireworks and Dreamweaver. You must have both applications installed in order to run this feature.

To accomplish this, you'll need to begin in Dreamweaver with a blank document. Select Commands → Create Web Photo Album. A screen will come up requesting the appropriate information for the photo album. You will need to give your album a title, tell it where your source images are, and where the destination folder is for compilation of the new Web folder. You'll also need to specify the thumbnail size you wish to see (I use 144x144), the number of thumbnail columns you want on your page, and the format in which you'd like the pictures.

Lastly, you will need to check whether or not you want a navigation page for each photo. This is a good idea for viewers who look at the full-sized photos and navigate forward without returning to the thumbnail page. Once you've made your selections, click OK and Fireworks will open and prepare your images. This may take a while depending on the volume of your source folder. Dreamweaver will pop back up once Fireworks is finished and show you your newly created page of thumbnails.

This Web Photo Album feature is a nice alternative to using Adobe Photoshop or iPhoto on the Macintosh. It provides a quick way for you to display your photos for family and friends in an organized, creative, and dynamic format.

Applying Templates

On one end you have templates, and on the other you have Web files (e.g. .html and .php pages). Merge the two by fitting the elements of your file into the editable regions of your template.

In our example, you have an editable region called “content” in your template. Any main content goes into that area. In your file (filename.html), select Modify → Templates → Apply Template to Page. Select the template you'd like to use as a basis for your file. Then, connect the parts of your file with the appropriate editable region. In our case, you'll want your document to fit into the “content” region. Click okay and watch your main content seamlessly fit into your specified region.

If you want to have template-based pages, but you don't want to go through the trouble of designing your own templates, then the Internet abounds with pre-made template resources. Some are free, some are not.

Dreamweaver comes with pre-built templates. To access these, File → New Page and make sure you're within the "General" tab. Select the Page Design (Accessible) category and then browse the listing of options on the right. Each single mouse click on one of the document names brings up an image of that option on the right. Select the one you like, create the file as a template (as opposed to a document), and click Create.

Working with templates makes your site's design more uniform and makes updating and maintaining your site more efficient. Every time you update non-editable regions of a template, all pages based on that template will be updated.

Creating Flash Text

If you want to have a navigation bar on your Web page, but you don't want to make all of the buttons for the bar from scratch, then Dreamweaver's Flash Text resource will help you make dynamic images that you can use.

Before you begin using the Flash Text feature, create a table on your Web page into which you can insert your new buttons. If you want a horizontal navigation bar, then create a table with five columns, one row, five pixels of cell padding, no cell spacing, and a border of zero. If you want a vertical navigation bar, then make sure you invert the row and column values above.

Place your cursor in the first cell and go Insert → Media → Flash Text. You'll have a bunch of choices for customizing your flash text. Select the font you'd like to use, type the text for your button, select the font and font size, add a link, and click OK. If you don't have some of your items ready—like you don't have pages to link to yet—then you can simply leave it blank for now. Double-click on the item when you're ready to come back to it and edit.

Please note that in creating Flash Text, a Flash item (*.swf) will be saved along with your page. **This item (and all other Flash items accompanying other buttons you may create) must be in each of the directories using them and must be uploaded along with your page in order to function properly once your page is live.** Move to each table cell and repeat the above to create a navigation bar that links to each of your desired pages.

Color Matching

Have you ever wanted your Web page background to match the background of an image that you're including on your page? Dreamweaver makes this kind of color matching very easy.

Go to Modify → Page Properties and click once on the shaded square next to the Background option. Notice that your cursor turns into an eyedropper. Move your mouse

to the color that you'd like to match and click once on that color. Notice that your background color now is set to that color, down to the shade.

Adding Video

Alas, there you are on your Hawaiian vacation and you'd like all of your friends and family to see your pictures without having to fumble through slide after slide in that Web Photo Album. So you've converted your pictures into a slideshow (using iPhoto, for example) and now you need to upload the file to a Web page so that others have viewing access.

Dreamweaver makes adding video to a Web page very simple. To begin, choose Insert → Media → Plugin. Select the movie file you want to use. (Very important: your file must have a *.mov extension.) With the item still selected, go to the Property Inspector and select a size for your movie display window. I normally use 640x480, but it depends on whatever size parameters your original movie file was set to. In the Plg URL box, type <http://www.apple.com/quicktime> so that those trying to view your movie without QuickTime will be directed to the Apple Web site for downloading the application.

You can set more parameters for your movie by pressing the Parameters button in the Property Inspector. Some useful parameters and corresponding values you might want to use are:

- **Autoplay** (value: true) means your movie will start playing as soon as the page loads. If you want the viewer to press play when the page loads, then set the value to false instead.
- **Cache** (value: true) will allow your movie to be stored in the cache so that it does not need to be reloaded with each viewing. This saves bandwidth, and your Webmaster will thank you!
- **Loop** (value: true) causes your movie to restart continuously after each viewing.
- **Volume** (value: 0-100) sets the volume of your movie from softest (zero) to loudest (one hundred).

Optimizing Your Code

Checking Links Sitewide

Dreamweaver allows you to make certain that **internal** links are functional before you publish your site. Should you have any errors, Dreamweaver will tell you where so that you can make corrections and changes. Better that Dreamweaver tells you rather than a site visitor!

Please note, Dreamweaver unfortunately cannot verify broken **external** links, that is, links that point outside of the current site. For this, there are other tools that can help

such as W3C Link Check, which is a free Web-based link checker (<http://validator.w3.org/checklink>).

Dreamweaver will allow you to check for both broken links (links that don't work when your site is live) and orphaned files (files in your site that don't have anything linked to them).

To try this on your site, go to Site → Check Links Sitewide.

Checking Links Per Page

Dreamweaver also allows you to check for broken links on a single page rather than an entire site. This is useful for quickly verifying that your links are functional without having to upload your Web page (along with any related materials).

To try this, go to File → Check Page → Check Links

Clean up Word HTML

If you've ever created a Web page in Microsoft Word and then actually looked at the HTML code behind it, then you know that Word inserts a few hundred unnecessary lines of code for every HTML tag. This slows down your page tremendously, since browsers read code from top to bottom and it will take a while for the browser to read through the unnecessary additions. To delete all of this unwanted junk without having to manually go in and edit the code, use the Clean Up Word HTML feature in Dreamweaver.

Open your Word document saved as HTML in Dreamweaver. Then, select Commands → Clean Up Word HTML. Work from the basic menu and select the version of Word you are using as well as the exact attributes you would like to clean up. It's good to leave everything checked, but if not, always make sure to leave the first option checked at minimum, which is to remove all Word specific mark up. You'll have cleaner code and your Web page viewers will thank you when they see how quickly your page loads!

Clean up HTML/XHTML

This feature is similar to Clean up Word HTML, but it focuses on cleaning up extraneous HTML code. Using this feature might be helpful if you're moving a site previously designed in Microsoft FrontPage into Dreamweaver. Programs like FrontPage normally tend to add globs of extra unnecessary code to your files, and running Clean up HTML will take care of this problem and make your code as light as possible. You'll find that your pages load faster, since the browser doesn't have to work as hard to load your pages.

Common things this command fixes are: empty tags, redundant nested tags, HTML comments, or any specific tags. For example, you might want to run this command to eliminate the unnecessary or tags.

To use this command, select Commands → Clean up HTML

Unfortunately this feature only works on a page-by-page basis. However, you can run a site report (Site → Reports) which can help identify pages with common problems and narrow down the number of pages to clean.

Cascading Style Sheets

Templates, tables, and layouts are all cool, but cascading style sheets are cooler. Every publication, whether it's electronic or paper-based, needs some sort of balance between style and content in order to be effective. Cascading style sheets help streamline your content while enhancing and designing the underlying style—such as backgrounds, text sizes and weights, and borders. No tables, bordered cells, or heavy HTML needed!

Some sites are built completely upon CSS nowadays. Check out Wired News (<http://www.wired.com>), ESPN (<http://www.espn.com>), and Playlist Magazine (<http://www.playlistmag.com>) for some examples. Another site, CSS Vault (<http://www.cssvault.com>), has a directory of sites done with CSS.

The key components behind css are selectors. A selector defines *when* a browser defines a style. For example, when the selector is p (for the <p> tag), the rule you specify will be applied to every <p> tag. You can create a CSS document, add the styles to the selectors you want to modify, and then apply the style sheet to your pages when you are ready.

In edit mode of the CSS panel (accessible via the Window menu), begin defining how you want to use CSS. One fun use of CSS is to change the way a link looks when moused over. For this, you'll have to modify the link (<a>) tag.

Create a new style and check off the "Use CSS Selector" option. In the Selector area, choose "a: hover" and name the style (filename.css) after clicking OK. You will be presented with a style definition wizard to select the parameters for your newly created style. For a:hover, I usually like to set the decoration to none and then choose a grayish background color for the link. When live, the link will be lightly colored and not underlined when the mouse rolls over it. It will look like a standard link at all other times.

Extension Treasures

If there is a Dreamweaver function that you wish you could modify a bit, or if there's a feature that you don't see in your usage of the application at all, then check out the extensions library on Macromedia's Exchange site for free programs that help you modify Dreamweaver to your liking. There are a lot of free extensions available, but there's a price to pay for some higher level ones that really enhance your usage of Dreamweaver.

I'll demonstrate one example. Keep in mind that extensions are their own little programs so this won't be true of all extensions, but it will give you some idea of what's possible by using them. Your Extensions Manager will give you instructions along with each item you download.

One simple downloadable extension from Macromedia Exchange is called Mail Spam Blocker. This allows you to hide e-mail addresses in the code of your document,

meaning crawlers and robots rumaging the Web for valid e-mail addresses to spam will come up short when it comes to your pages.

Download this particular extension from the Macromedia Web site. Once installed, you'll see a new menu in Dreamweaver if you visit Insert → Mail Spam Blocker. You'll need to input the e-mail address that you wish to hide and click OK. If you look at the source code behind this address, you'll see that the usual "mailto:email@address.com" format is not there. The e-mail address, however, still functions properly when you double click on it in a browser in order to send the person a message.

Cloaking

Have you ever stored Microsoft Word or Adobe Photoshop files in your sites folder but they're not files that you wish to upload to the server? Fine: just cloak them, and you can still store them in the sites folder (where they're handy in case you need to refer to them) but they won't cause you problems when you're uploading your entire site. You also won't have to worry about those large image files taking up too much space on the remote server.

Cloaked files will be in your site's folder, yet they will be completely ignored by the uploader when you are putting files to the remote site.

To cloak, right click the file or folder in the Files panel and select Cloaking → Cloak. A red slash will then appear on the file or folder you have chosen. To uncloak, right click once again on the file or folder that you wish to uncloak and select Cloaking → Uncloak.

Select Recently Modified

This is a great feature hidden away in Dreamweaver MX 2004. It lets you select files you've modified during a particular period of time, or for the past number of days. It is a great way to select a bunch of files you've modified for uploading to the Web server without having to go one by one or uploading the entire site.

To use this feature, go to the Files Panel → right-click on the root site folder → Select Recently Modified. You can select criteria here and then upload any files modified within your specified timeframe.

Linking by Pointing

Rather than browsing for a file or typing in a file name, Dreamweaver provides an alternative method to creating links by allowing the Web designer to point to a file that needs to be linked. This feature will take care of the relative link to another file in your account so that you don't run the risk of mistyping or mislinking it by hand.

To begin, make sure your Property Inspector is open beneath your page and that your site panel is open in the right-hand portion of your screen. Highlight a piece of text that you would like to link, locate the small Point-to-File icon in the Property Inspector, click once, and drag your mouse to the file that you would like to link. Your cursor will drag a

line from the Point-to-File icon to the link that you select to visually demonstrate that you are linking that file.

Adding Image Descriptions

Not everyone is going to be using a graphical Web browser to view your Web page. Think of those using lynx, for example, who see nothing but textual Web pages. For these people, graphical images are not an effective means of communication. That is why you must insert an image description, normally designated by an alt tag, along with each of your images.

To insert an alt tag, simply insert an image and with the image still selected, type a word or two of text into the alt text window in the Property Inspector. Then, when your graphic loads on the Web, your text will appear whenever you move your mouse over the image. More importantly, the text will appear in place of the image in the event that the page is not being viewed in a graphical Web browser.

This feature is also useful for assisting the visually impaired. For those who have their Web browser set to speak Web contents to them, the alt tag is what the computer will read. Obviously, if you have not set your images to have descriptions, then there will be nothing to read, meaning that some of your Web site visitors will not be able to get the full benefit of your page.

Behaviors

Technically speaking, a behavior in Dreamweaver is the combination of an action and an event. You do something such as click a link (the action) and a new window pops up (the event) as a result. By adding behaviors, you add both HTML and JavaScript to your Web page, meaning content will be dynamically enhanced as a result. A standard linked image, for example, might result in a different image when you mouse over it. This is dynamic and functional at the same time.

There are four steps to adding a behavior: picking a tag (one tag may harbor several behaviors), choosing target browsers in which you want the behavior to function, selecting an action, and entering the parameters of the behavior. One downside of behaviors is not all browsers will be able to carry out all behaviors, and the browser that you select in Dreamweaver in your Behaviors panel is the browser for which your behaviors will be shown.

Dreamweaver makes adding behaviors ranging from time-stamping to rollovers very easy and convenient. And that's just the beginning. The behaviors that you'll see available depend upon what browsers you're targeting as well as whether you're trying to enhance a graphic or text.

Use the Behaviors panel accessible from the Window menu to start experimenting with some possibilities. Other behaviors you can apply (for 4.0 and later browsers) include the following:

- **Set Text of Status Bar** sets the status bar to read text of your choosing while page is loaded in the browser
- **Open Browser Window** displays content in a new window set to your specifications.
- **Popup Message** shows a quick message to your viewers in a pop-up window.
- **Swap Image** sets one image to change once another image on the page is moused over or clicked.

Meta Tags

On their own meta tags are a simplistic concept, but when you combine them with some neat tricks, you can make sure that your Web pages are better cataloged by various search engines—or not at all—depending on the visibility you wish your site to have.

Dreamweaver has several meta tag menu items that can help you catalog your page to the extent that you would like.

To begin adding meta tags to the head portion of your Web page, select Insert → Head Tags → Meta. You will see areas for inputting a value and content. For value, insert "Author" and for content, insert your own name. This is a meta tag that I find useful, since it includes your name in the code in case your source code is ever stolen. Another useful tag usage concerns robots, which travel around Web sites and index content. If you don't want your page being indexed at all, then use "Robots" as your value and insert "no index, no follow" as your content. This means that when robots come across your page, they are instructed to leave without cataloging it for search engine use.

If you do want your page to show up in search engine queries, then select Insert → HTML → Head Tapes and start inputting keywords that pertain to the content of your Web site. Your site will be indexed according to these keywords and will score higher in search engine queries pertaining to your subject.

Find and Replace

Find and replace is the most overlooked power tool in Dreamweaver. There are four types of find and replace: source code, text, advanced text, and specific tags. We'll review two of these here.

Source Code and Text Searches

Source code find and replace searches all characters in the file including tags, JavaScript, and any server-side programming.

Text searches only look for text that appears in the body of the page (i.e. content) and not in any of the tags. It will not search the title of the page (within the <title> tag) nor will it search inside tags so something like the alt attribute of the image tag is not searched. It also won't affect HTML tags, so searching for the word "table" won't find—or change—any table tags.

Advanced Text Searches

Advanced text searches allow you to find text that's enclosed by a specific tag. You can narrow down the search by specifying certain properties of the tag. This feature also lets you search within the <head> as well as the <body> of the document.

Keyboard Shortcuts

Keyboard shortcuts can make your workflow much more efficient in any application you are using. Some of the following are the shortcuts for steps you'd routinely take in Dreamweaver.

- **Preview in browser:** F12 for primary browser, Control-F12 for secondary browser
- **Cycle through open documents:** Control-Tab
- **Cycle between design and code views:** Control-~
- **Insert image:** Control-Alt-i
- **Insert table:** Control-Alt-t
- **Insert link:** Control-l

You can also make your own keyboard shortcuts. To do this, go to Edit → Keyboard Shorts. To begin, select the item you wish to change. Type the new keyboard shortcut name into the “Press Key” box. Dreamweaver will list any other command that might already use that name, if any. If the name's not already taken, then press the Change button to save your new shortcut.