

A Quick Look at Web Authoring Tools

Writing "raw html" is OK if you just want to create some effects for a Forum posting, but no one in his right mind writes entire web pages that way.

What we want is a WYSIWYG (What you see is what you get) editor, so you can type something that looks more or less like a Word document, and the software creates the html for you.

There are several ways of doing this.

1. You can save Microsoft Office documents (from Word, Excel, Powerpoint etc.) as html by using the "Save as" feature. This usually produces very cumbersome, poor quality html. But it works +/-.
[Dreamweaver (see below) has a special function just to "clean up" Microsoft Word html !]

2. Netscape is generally known as a web browser, but the full Netscape Communicator includes the "Netscape Composer".

This is quite a decent little WYSIWYG html editor: I created several web sites with it years ago. And it's free ! You should be able to download it from one of these sites:

<http://cgi.netscape.com/cgi-bin/upgrade.cgi> or
<http://sillydog.org/narchive/> or
http://www.soft32.com/download_8.html

Eastern Connecticut State University has a great online (and free) instruction manual for using Netscape Composer:

"How to Create Web Pages Using Netscape Composer" located at
<http://www.easternct.edu/depts/dc/docs/composer/>

3. Dreamweaver

To my mind, this is the Rolls Royce of html editors. I have used it for 10 years and would stop writing web pages if I couldn't use Dreamweaver.

I am still using Vers 4.01 - it has a few bugs (doesn't always like to connect and synchronise). I suggest either Version 3 (if you can find it) or Version 6 or later. The current Version is 8.

You can get a (30 day?) free trial at <http://www.adobe.com/downloads/?sdid=CHVB>

Is this on the DET software list of software that teachers can get free? It should be !

Full purchase price is A\$ 605 (OUCH !) And it's a HUGE (56 MB) download.

Curtin used to sell students a full version "For Educational Use Only" for around A\$ 150. I suspect local educational software dealers can provide such a Ed Use Only version for around A\$ 200. [The Ed Use Only version is identical to the full-priced one: the difference is that only educational institutions, teachers and enrolled students can purchase it.]

Anyway, Dreamweaver gives you TOTAL control over everything. As you create WYSIWYG, it creates the html. AND you can go into the html to "fine-tune". You can display both the WYSIWYG and raw html on the same screen. [Many professional web designers use two screens to do this.] It also provides dead-easy creation of frames, tables, templates, objects, forms, special "invisible" tags, roll-over images, image maps, inserting Flash movies etc. etc. etc.

One button checks for broken links across the entire site. One button "clean up" html code [combines redundant tags, etc.]. There's even a special button for "cleaning up html produced by Microsoft Word".

One button "synchronises" the site: that is, anything newer on your hard drive is uploaded to the server automatically and/or anything newer on the server is downloaded to your hard drive automatically.

Rename or move a file, and it not only checks to see if you've broken any links in other files, one button lets you fix all the affected links. [Now "Synchronise" and all the altered files are uploaded.] Try to delete a file, it checks to see if it's linked from anywhere else. You get the picture...

There are dozens of books and manuals published about using Dreamweaver, but there are also a lot of free instructions available on the web.

Dreamweaver is so intuitive that years ago my daughter, then aged 9, created a pretty spectacular site using DW over the school hols: she never looked at a manual.

In conclusion, it's very easy to use, very powerful and recommended highly: its only drawback is the cost.

4. Microsoft Front Page

I haven't used Front Page for 10 years. I found it to be an absolute dog and hated it. So I can't tell you any more about it.

You can read about it at <http://www.microsoft.com/Frontpage/>