

Network Programming and Design

Unit 7

Reading



香港公開大學
THE OPEN UNIVERSITY
OF HONG KONG

Reading

Reading 7.1

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Wagner, R and Mansfield, R (2007) *Creating Web Pages All-in-One Desk Reference for Dummies*, 3rd edn, Wiley Publishing, 9–37.

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Chapter 1: Getting Started with Your Web Site

In This Chapter

- ✓ Getting to know the lingo for creating Web sites
- ✓ Understanding how a Web site is published
- ✓ Discovering Web sites that work and ones that don't

Perhaps you created a simple Web site in the past and are now ready for the next step.

Or, maybe you always wanted to build your first site but don't know the first place to start.

Either way, in this chapter, we outfit you with the basics you need to get you on the road to achieving the goals, purposes, hopes, dreams, imaginings, and hankerings that you have for your Web site. (The “hankerings” part may be difficult to pull off, but we'll do our best.)

In this chapter, we introduce you to all of the important terms, technologies, and tools that you use along the way.

Knowing the Lingo and the Basics

Anytime you start doing something new, one challenge is picking up the lingo. The Web has so many new terms floating about every day that you can easily pick up some terms, but you might find that other, more techie concepts or technologies go right over your head. So, here's a crash course to make sure that we're all on the same page.

Navigating the Web

A *Web site* is a collection of pages, usually formatted in HTML (Hypertext Markup Language), that contains text, graphics, and multimedia elements, such as Flash, audio, or video files. The main page of a site is known as a *home page*, which links to other documents in the site by using hyperlinks. All these pages are stored on a *Web server*, which is the name for a computer that hosts the site.

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A variety of sites are on the Web, including

- ◆ Corporate sites
- ◆ Personal home pages
- ◆ Blogs
- ◆ MySpace profiles
- ◆ Special-interest sites

Every Web site has a unique address, known as a *URL* (Uniform Resource Locator). A URL looks like

```
http://www.cnn.com  
http://www.myspace.com/everestdude  
http://www.digitalwalk.net/index.html
```

The main part of the URL (cnn.com, digitalwalk.net) is known as a *domain name*.

A user enters the URL in a browser, such as Microsoft Internet Explorer. The browser sends the request across the Internet, and through the magic of Disney Imagineering, it winds up at the doorsteps of the Web server. (Okay, although the underlying technology is magical, Mickey Mouse has nothing to do with it.) The Web server then responds by sending the requested page back to the browser.

The Web server is often hosted by an Internet service provider (ISP) or Web hosting provider. Some providers are free, but generally most of the more reliable ones charge a fee for their services. Fortunately, intense competition has driven down the monthly fees to generally be the equivalent of three or four grande cappuccinos (our preferred form of currency).

If you have the right Internet connection (such as a T1 line), you can host a Web site on your own computer. Most cable and DSL customers, however, are prohibited from doing this.



Creating and publishing a Web site

When you create a Web site, you work with HTML (Hypertext Markup Language) documents. The HTML tag-based programming language is used for presenting information. It intermixes content with instructions for how and where to present it on the page.

These pages, which have a `.html` or `.htm` extension, look different depending on the software you use to view them. When you view an HTML document in a text editor like Notepad, you see a bunch of weird-looking code, as shown in Figure 1-1. However, a browser knows what all these instructions mean and can then *render* (a fancy word for processing and displaying) the document in all its visual glory, as shown in Figure 1-2.

Creating Web pages: The alternatives

When you create a presence on the Web, you can either put on a geek hat and write the HTML code for your Web site or let a piece of software (such as Dreamweaver) or an online service (such as MySpace) do this work for you. Most of these solutions allow you to work inside a visual environment to design your pages. Figure 1-3 shows you the visual editor inside Dreamweaver.

Because everyone's needs are different and can evolve over time, we show you all these alternatives in this book. Book II walks you through the online alternatives, such as MySpace and Blogger. Books III and IV show you how to work with the two major Web site builders that you can install on your computer. And, Book VI gives you the lowdown on how to successfully work with HTML code without getting a migraine.

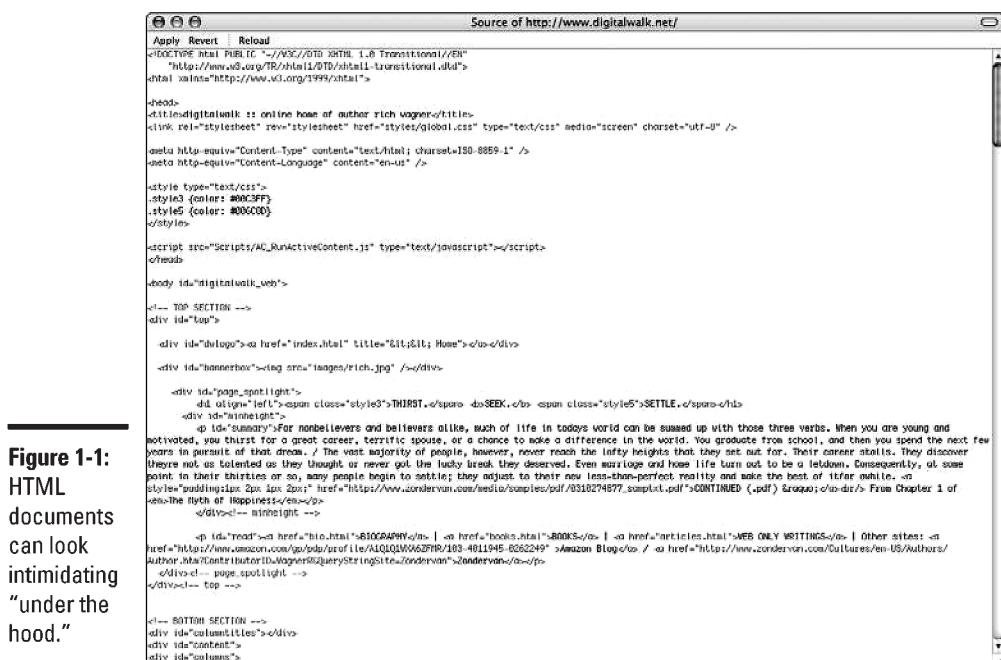


Figure 1-1:
HTML
documents
can look
intimidating
“under the
hood.”

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Figure 1-2:
HTML documents, however, can look visually attractive when viewed in a browser.

Adding graphics and other media files

If you're used to working with Microsoft Word or other word processors, you've probably added a graphical image to a document. When you perform this action in Word, it embeds a copy of the graphic from its original file into the document. Therefore, if you were to e-mail the file to a friend, the image would be displayed on your friend's computer when the document is opened.

In contrast, although HTML documents display graphics, video, and other media as content, this media is never stored inside the HTML file itself. Instead, the HTML document links to external image files or Flash media. Therefore, the Web site includes not only HTML documents but also any other media file that you add to your page layout.

The other common types of files you work with include

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- ◆ Cascading Style Sheets (.css); see Book V
- ◆ Graphics (.jpg, .gif, and .png); see Book VII
- ◆ JavaScript files (.js); see Book VIII
- ◆ Flash movies (.swf); see Book IX

Publishing your site

When you're done creating your Web site, you *publish* your files to your Web site hosting server. If you're creating the pages on your own computer, publishing involves uploading all the HTML, graphic, and other media files. When the files have been successfully added to the Web server, the Web site is considered *live*, or open for all the world to see.

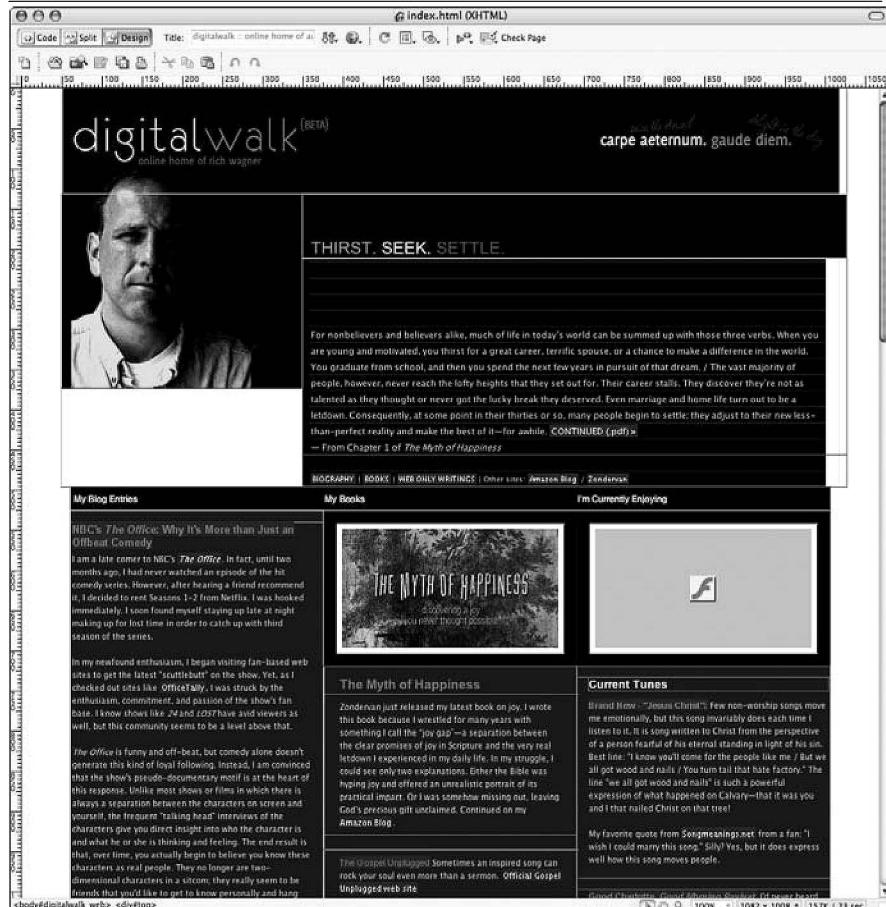


Figure 1-3:
Dream-weaver enables you to work with HTML documents visually.

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Browsing the browsers

The software that we all use to navigate the Web is a *browser*, and you can choose from a few:

- ✓ **Microsoft Internet Explorer** is now the dominant browser; roughly 7 in 10 people use it as their main entryway to the World Wide Web.
- ✓ **Firefox**, a free open source browser, has emerged as the number-two browser. It not only works on all major platforms (Windows, Mac, and Linux) but also has an amazing number of free extensions that you can add to it, to greatly enhance your browsing experience. We have to recommend one extension in particular as an essential part of your Web site building toolkit. The Web Developer toolbar provides an amazing number of capabilities that help you test the design and functionality of your Web pages. To download Firefox and extensions, visit www.mozilla.org.

✓ **Safari**, the dominant browser on the Mac platform, is included as part of the Mac OS X operating system.

✓ **Opera** (www.opera.com) is a commercially available browser that sports powerful functionality.

No matter which browser you prefer, you should have at least two or three browsers installed on your computer that you can use for testing your Web site. Each browser has idiosyncrasies that can occasionally affect your page design. Having these on hand helps you catch the problem before your visitors do!

Rich, for example, works with Safari to test his pages initially, and then later checks it against Firefox for Mac. However, before publishing, he crosschecks his pages on Internet Explorer and Firefox for Windows.

Surf and Study: Discovering What Works and What Doesn't

Before you begin creating your Web site, we recommend that you spend some time surfing to various Web sites. Rather than browse the site, however, *study* it. Consider each of these issues:

- ♦ **Identify what you like and dislike about the design of the site.** If you like it, jot down styling concepts you want to emulate. If you dislike it, make sure to avoid these mistakes yourself. (See Chapter 2 of this mini-book for more on design strategy.)
- ♦ **Consider the overall “tone” of the site.** Does the site look overly formal or informal? Professional or amateurish? You should set a tone for your site and make sure that your content, design, color, and font selection all work together in support of it.

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- ◆ **Look for the overall messaging of the site.** What's being communicated through the design, graphics, and text of the home page? Is there a single theme? Are you getting mixed messages? Is it successful? For your Web site, develop a consistent, coherent theme or message and then create the site around it.
- ◆ **Check out the site's navigation.** Can you easily find the information you're looking for? Can you get lost in the site? You should develop a site that's easy to navigate. (See Chapter 3 of this minibook for more on site organization.)
- ◆ **Identify the technologies being used.** When you come across an effect or interactive feature that you really like, dive under the hood and identify the technology that the site is using to pull off the effect.

To do so, right-click the page and choose View Source from the pop-up menu, a feature that's available in most browsers. Inside the HTML source, you can find all the nitty-gritty details of the technology behind the scenes. Be sure to read Book VI first, to help you navigate your way through the source.



When you come across a site you really like, don't blatantly copy its design or actual files. Instead, use other sites as inspirations to spawn your own creative ideas.

If you get into a rut trying to find interesting Web sites to explore, we recommend checking out www.coolhomepage.com and www.cssbeauty.com/gallery. Both sites feature a gallery of well-designed sites that can inspire you.



If you feel intimidated by the high level of expertise necessary to pull off a good Web site design, don't sweat it. Most of these sites are created by design professionals. The idea is to learn from their designs and techniques, not to try to copy or compete with them.

Chapter 2: Best Practices in Web Design

In This Chapter

- ✓ Keeping your design simple
- ✓ Maintaining consistency
- ✓ Applying the rule of thirds to your site design
- ✓ Avoiding the nine most common site design problems

Because the Web is a visual medium, the design of your Web site can be as important as the content you offer on your site. If your design is tacky, amateurish, and annoying, visitors might not treat you seriously or might hit the Back button before you can cry out “But I tried!”

Therefore, even before we get into the specifics of how to create a Web site, we spend some time talking about how to design it. In this chapter, we explore several proven design principles that you should understand. In addition, we also talk about what not to do — those errors that you should avoid from the start.

Applying Three Proven Design Principles to Your Site

Back in the mid-1990s, the Web was filled with sites that were dense with information. They were functional, but they often looked like they had been designed by a trash compactor — smashing as much content inside the page as possible. However, sometime over the past decade, the world of design caught up with the Web.

In Chapter 1 of this minibook, we recommend that you begin by spending some time analyzing other well-designed sites. If you find several candidates, we’re willing to bet that, in spite of their visual differences, they employ many of the same proven design principles. Here are several to consider.

Simplicity: Less is more

If the past century has stressed any single aesthetic principle, it is that less is more. You see it in glass-box architecture, Hemingway’s sparse sentences, minimalist painting — and, indeed, throughout the Web.

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You would expect contemporary design in a Web page devoted to one of today's most respected fashion houses. Armani (www.armani.com) delivers, as you can see in Figure 2-1.

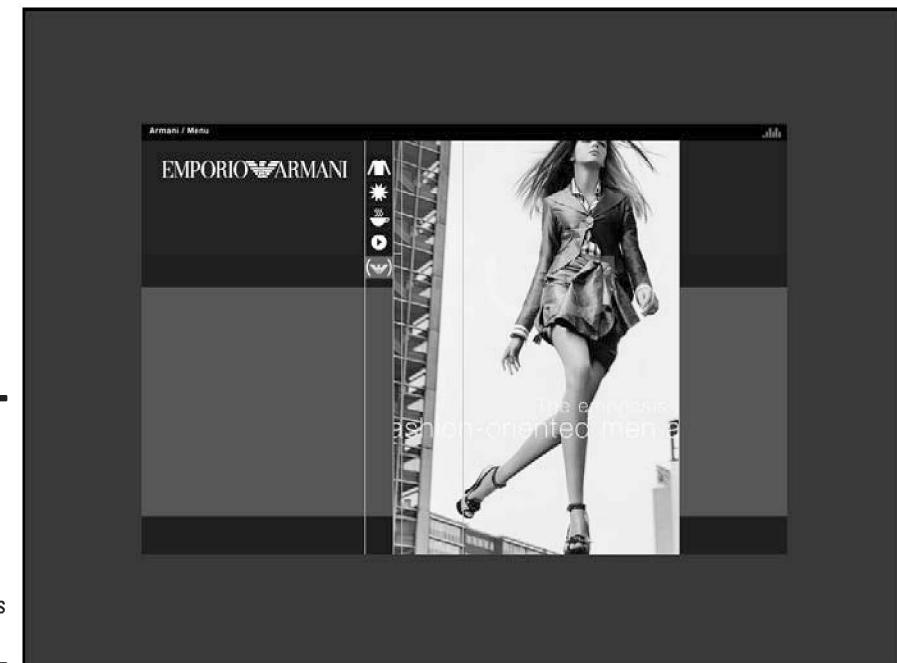


Figure 2-1:
Armani's
clean,
elegant
design
sense
pervades his
Web site.

This figure shows how minimal content can create a highly effective Web page: one photo, one menu, five icons, and some nearly transparent text scrolling across the photo. Note the use of few words here. Most of the page is, in fact, white space (discussed in the next section).

A second example of minimalist design is Google (www.google.com). The popular search engine's home page is famous for its refusal to include anything considered unnecessary.

Consider the opposite extreme — the Web site of a major news outlet, such as the BBC (news.bbc.co.uk), as shown in Figure 2-2. An Armani-like site wouldn't make any sense, but the site aims to keep the overall design as simple as possible, in spite of the complexity of information it's presenting. This site generally displays three columns plus a side panel of links; dozens of stories, many photos, and headline links are all displayed at once.

The reality is, however, that most of us aren't Armani, Google, or the BBC. We can't get by with just placing a couple words here or there on the page

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and living with a minimalist design. But we don't need to deal with the constant flood of content of a news service. Our aim, therefore, should be to strike a balance by following the age-old advice to *keep it simple*.

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Figure 2-2:
The BBC
News site
aims to
present a
wealth of
information
in a simple
manner.

Here are some ideas to consider:

- ◆ **Have a center point of focus, particularly for your home page.** Your primary focus — the thing that catches a visitor's eye first — should have considerable punch. Make it big, sharp, and forceful. By contrast, other elements of the page can tend toward the paler, softer-focused, and smaller. In other words, the majority of your page should be visually gentle, with one main exception.
- ◆ **Include lots of white space, and also try to simplify the organization of the page.** We discuss using white space in the next section.
- ◆ **Go easy on the overall number of links.**
- ◆ **Use two or three columns.**
- ◆ **Give the visitor a simple, obvious pathway down through your page.** Don't make them flit around because your page is confusing and complex.
- ◆ **Consider putting your main symbol (whether an image or a headline) in a vibrant color.**

20*Applying Three Proven Design Principles to Your Site***Avoiding background noise**

One of the most important parts of a page to follow the *keep it simple* rule is your background. It should be a single color (often white, gray, or black) or a gradual gradient (a gradual blend from one color or shade to another) that

doesn't compete visually with the content of your page. Nothing is more annoying to visitors than having bright colors or flashing images in the background.

Keeping things clean with white space

White space, also called *negative space*, is a design term that refers to regions that are empty of text or graphics. It doesn't necessarily mean that the space is colored white. Empty areas can be any color or even a gradient (a visual transition between colors). For example, the white space shown in Figure 2-1 is colored black. White space serves several purposes:

- ◆ **Increase readability:** Text on computer screens can be more difficult to read than paper. Give your viewers plenty of white space, to make the content more readable.
- ◆ **Keep things clean:** Viewers aren't overwhelmed with the feeling that they must buckle down and work to get through all the information you're cramming into their view.
- ◆ **Emphasize your content:** When your page is less crowded, each image and paragraph has greater value and doesn't compete with the others.
- ◆ **Free you for an effective design:** By using more white space, you have greater freedom to move items around, which helps build an effective design.

Consider, for example, Deepblue.com, the site for a Web design firm (see Figure 2-3). As you can see, its home page is very clean, containing a minimal amount of information surrounded by lots of white space.

Being consistent across the site

Although the home page of a site often has a page layout that's different from the rest of the pages, the overall site design should be consistent in terms of colors, fonts, font sizes, margins, and other elements.

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Figure 2-3:
A generous
use of white
space.

Several technologies are available that can help you simplify this task. First, the Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) technology allows you to set styles and formatting rules for your site in one location and attach every page of your site to those rules. We cover CSS fully in Book V.

Understanding the Rule of Thirds

Growing up, we had a “rule of thirds” that we always followed around the dinner table. After we quickly scarfed down two helpings of the meal, our rule was that the first person to ask for thirds could eat the remainder of the food portions. However, that rule of thirds became unfashionable after our pants no longer fit around our waistlines.

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Several years ago, we discovered a design principle of the same name. Although it may not help your waistline, this rule helps you create a well-designed Web site.

The *rule of thirds* is one of the most persistent and pervasive tenets of Western art: This rule has been employed successfully by everyone from brilliant Greek sculptors to contemporary greeting card designers, with good reason. When an image or a page is divided into thirds vertically and horizontally and objects are positioned on those lines, the image is simply more pleasing to the eye. (For an example, check out Figure 2-6, coming up in the “Tweaking your page design with the rule of thirds” section.)

When you apply the rule of thirds to your Web site, the main subject is rarely in the center of your page or image. Too much symmetry makes for a bad overall composition. In addition, you avoid centering the horizon line — that is, equal amounts of sky and land — which would divide the visual in the middle horizontally.



Therefore, as you design a page, we recommend experimenting. Move elements around. Tweak your original ideas and see what happens. When you feel pretty good about a page, pull back to take a dispassionate look at it with the rule of thirds in mind. More likely than not, you'll find that adjusting your page design with the rule of thirds in mind improves the look of your Web page.

You don't need to employ the rule of thirds in every last photograph you take or Web page you design. If you regularly follow this rule of composition, though, your designs will benefit.

Tweaking your page design with the rule of thirds

Consider how a page design can be modified by following the rule of thirds. To start, you need a focal point. Like any good painting or photograph, your Web pages benefit from having an object that's the main topic or the most prominent visual element — whatever the viewer is supposed to notice first.

Figure 2-4 illustrates a Web page displayed in an abstract way to highlight its primary zones: some text (gray blocks), some bold text (the dark block), and headlines (black bars). Overall, this isn't a bad design because it has variety and is also balanced. Note that it's not symmetrical: It's balanced. That's an important difference.

However, Figure 2-4 lacks a focal point. Nothing really punchy or extraordinary exists on the page to draw the viewer's attention. Remember that a focal point stands out from the rest of the page. It can even be as simple as an unusual shape — something that doesn't match the other shapes on the page, as shown in Figure 2-5.

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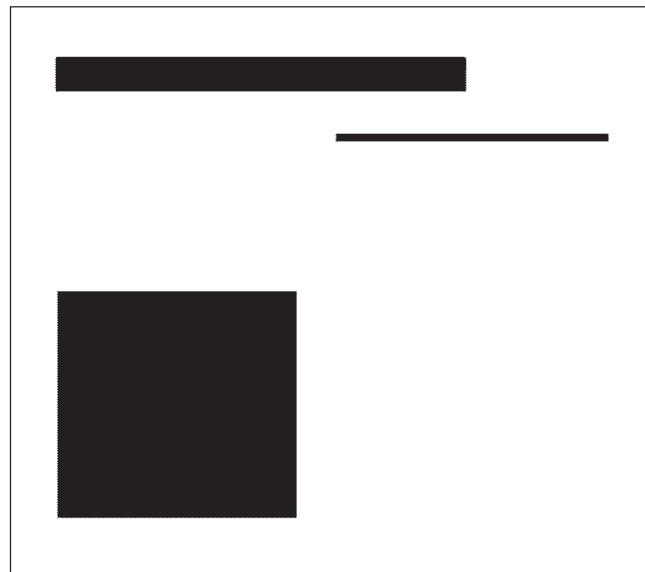


Figure 2-4:
This nicely balanced page lacks a focus.

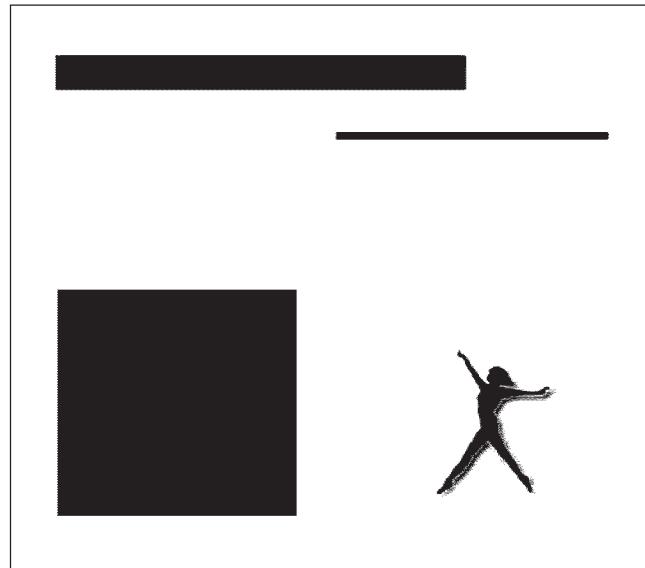
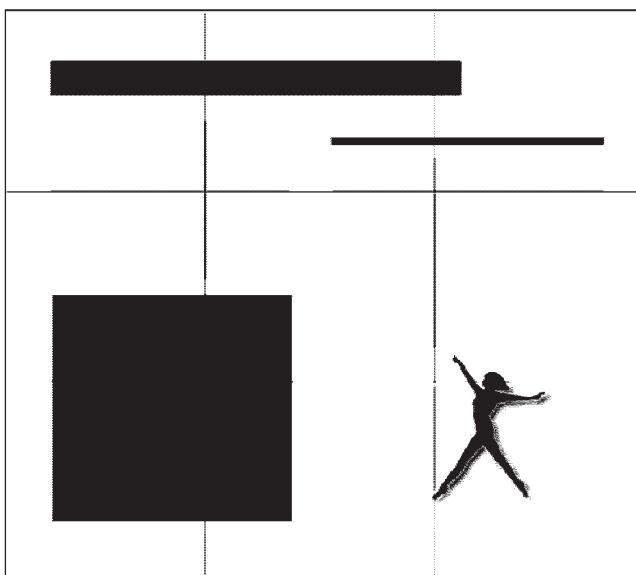


Figure 2-5:
A new shape provides a focus.

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Figure 2-5 looks like an improvement over Figure 2-4, but invoking the rule of thirds can strengthen the composition even more. To apply the rule, draw imaginary lines dividing your Web page into thirds vertically and horizontally, as shown in Figure 2-6.

Figure 2-6:
Divide your
image or
Web page
into nine
imaginary
zones.



Place straight lines (walls and horizons, for example) along any of these lines.

The points in which these lines intersect are the best places to put your focus: the subject of the picture. The four spots where the lines intersect are *hotspots*. Figure 2-7 is a further improvement to the design with the dancer now moved to a hotspot.

Next, we move the focal point to one of the other hotspots. You see that it looks good in those locations as well. Remember that you have four hotspots to experiment with. In Figure 2-8, the dancer is positioned in the upper left hotspot. Also notice that the dancer has been reversed from her position in Figure 2-7; now, she dances *into* the page shown in Figure 2-8.



When you have *motion* in your composition (an arrow, a dancer, or anything that points or “moves”), good design emphasizes ensuring that the motion moves into — not out of — your page. The focal point is the first thing the viewer sees, and it should lead the eye into the page.

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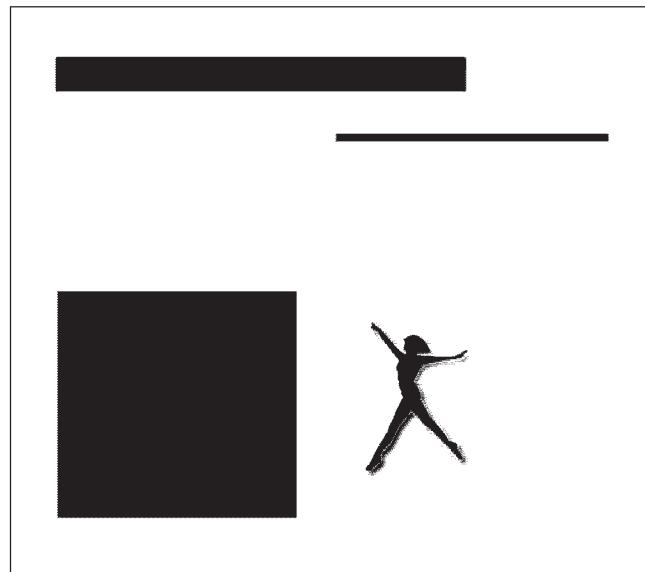


Figure 2-7:
The focal
point is
moved onto
a hotspot.

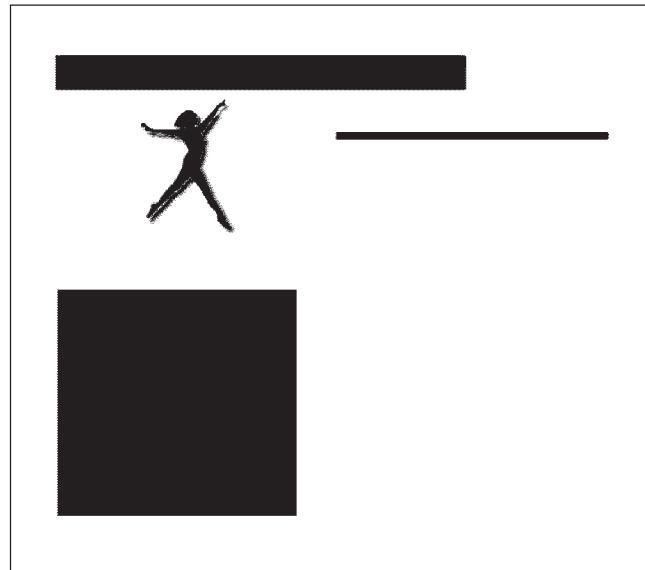


Figure 2-8:
The dancer
looks good
in this other
hotspot.

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Balancing the rule of thirds with the background

When tinkering with object focus placement according to the rule of thirds, pay attention to the background you use. You can see that the design shown in Figure 2-9 isn't nearly as successful as the one in Figure 2-8 even though the dancer is positioned on a hotspot. With this design, the focal point is swallowed by the dark background.



Figure 2-9:
The focal
point is
swallowed
by the dark
background.

Another rule of good composition is that you should violate white space: That is, move a focal point so that it isn't framed or sunk into its background but instead pokes into the surrounding white space. In Figures 2-7 and 2-8, the dancer leaps out of the background into the white space. That's the better choice.

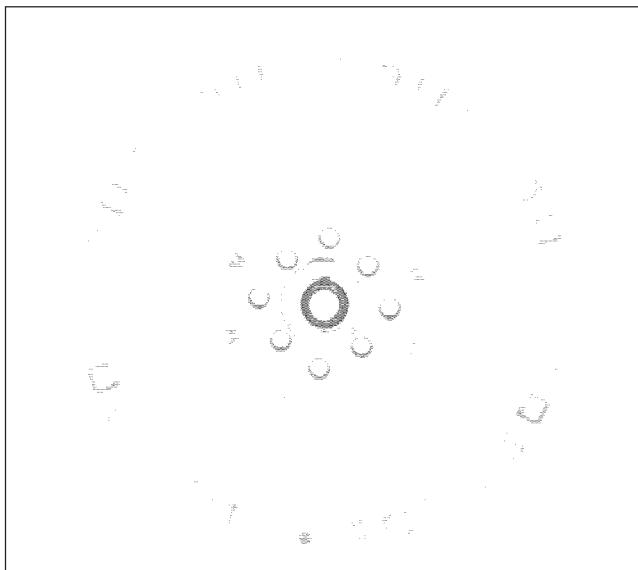
Of all these page designs, Figure 2-7 is arguably the best. It's the most balanced because the dancer counteracts the weight of the large headline at the top of the page. The final choice is, of course, up to you.

Background image positioning

You should also employ rule of thirds hotspots with your background images. You might be tempted to center the background image shown in Figure 2-10, thinking that the page is balanced if the background image is in the middle. Although that's true, also remember that balance should be combined with interest, and unity combined with variety.

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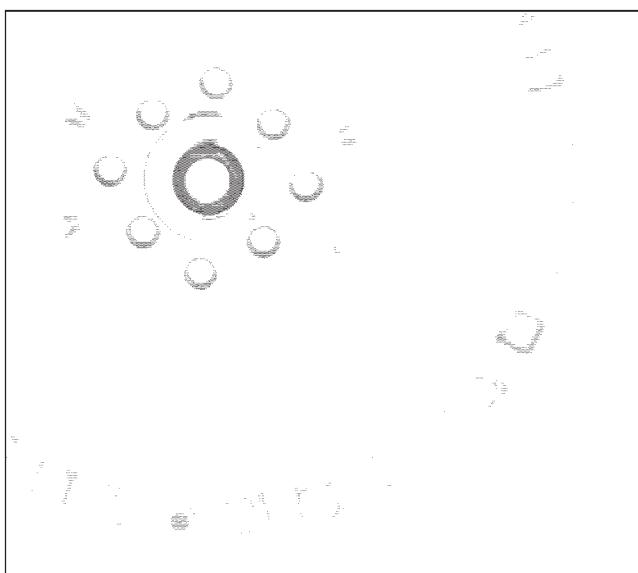
Figure 2-10:
Avoid
centering a
symmetrical
background.



When you move your background over to a rule of thirds hotspot, you maintain balance while adding interest to your composition.

With that in mind, we try moving around the background image from Figure 2-10. Notice the overall improvement in Figure 2-11. The background now radiates from the hotspot, not from the center.

Figure 2-11:
Move the
background
for a better
composition.



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Photoshop plug-ins

While Adobe Photoshop has no built-in feature to help you employ the rule of thirds, powerretouche.com offers some helpful *plug-ins* (third-party components that can add functionality), which you can add into Photoshop for this purpose.

Finessing graphics

Using the rule of thirds applies to more than the overall design on your page. For added visual appeal, remember to apply it with the graphics that you add to the page. See Book VII, Chapter 1 for applying the rule of thirds to your graphics.

Avoiding Eight Common Web Design Problems

As you consider the good design principles we discuss in this chapter, we also want to tell you about the “bad stuff,” the common mistakes that Web designers often make. Sometimes these problems occur from the start, and sometimes they creep in slowly as you update and modify your site over time.

Clutter eats your site alive

Clutter makes visitors uncomfortable and gives them the impression that your site is disorganized. Avoid it. You want your site easy for visitors to get the information that they’re looking for, not feel like they’re lost in a Dharma experiment.

Unless you’re adding a blog or personal home page that you’re using as your digital dumping grounds, ditch useless content that doesn’t add anything to your goals for your site.



If you have a tendency to create a cluttered design, take the reins and throw out everything possible. Then throw out even more, or move items to pages deeper within the site.

Overwhelming your visitors at the start

This error sometimes results from being so enthusiastic about what’s on your site that you overwhelm your visitors by throwing everything at them on the home page. Determine what’s most essential and highlight it, but be disciplined enough to place other content on other pages. As long as you have a good navigation scheme (see Chapter 3 of this minibook), you’ll be fine.

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Confusion comes with complexity

Visitors make instant decisions the moment they arrive on your site. If they're confused or annoyed, they click the Back button and never return. If you can't simplify by eliminating clutter (see the "Clutter eats your site alive" section), you have to employ your design skills to clarify by design.

Divide your page into logical areas, to make clear what goes with what. Traditionally, horizontal and vertical lines were used to fence off various areas on a Web page, just like newspapers continue to do now. However, contemporary Web design often eliminates lines in favor of bars of color zones in the background, multimedia areas (audio and animation using Flash, for example), navigation bars, and other visually distinct areas. Figure 2-12 illustrates how a variety of textures, colors, and multimedia zones can separate content into recognizable categories.

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Figure 2-12:
The page is organized with zones of texture, color, and animation.

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Mixing and matching design ideas never works

Avoid creating a Web design that mixes and matches various styles, no matter how strong they are by themselves. Instead, use a visual theme that's coherent and organized and helps give you a unique identity. Whether it's the *New York Times* famous gothic typeface, Martha Stewart's beloved pale aquamarine, or the NBC peacock, visual themes are indispensable in identifying a person or organization.

By carefully selecting graphics, font typefaces, and colors that work together and match your tone and messaging, you can create a design that holds together visually and gives your site personality.



For deciding which colors work well together, we recommend checking out www.colorschemer.com/schemes and www.colourlovers.com.

For comparing and contrasting font typefaces, check out typetester.maratz.com.

Extreme symmetry is a yawner

As we mention in the rule-of-thirds discussion earlier in the chapter, a major graphical design rule — for magazine ads, interior decorating, photography, Web pages, and many other fields — is to avoid using extreme symmetry. Simply, don't position the *focus* (the main item) of your page or photo smack dab in the center. If a lit Christmas tree is the focus of a snapshot, don't have the tree right in the middle of the picture. If you're photographing the sea, don't have the horizon line where water meets sky in the middle of your shot.

The problem with symmetry is that it removes quite a bit of the life, the subtle conflict, that is necessary for successful contemporary design. It's the visual equivalent of the newspaper story "People Strolled through the Park Yesterday."

From the Dept. of Redundancy Dept.: Self-linking pages

Avoid linking to the same page in your Web site. If, for example, you display a common navigation bar at the top of each page, make sure to highlight the link for the current page through special formatting. This effect helps visitors

easily identify their location in the Web site visually. At the same time, disable that link so that nothing happens if the user clicks it. Self-linked pages confuse people.

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Forgetting about the visitor

Some site design errors result from an inadequate site navigation structure. You might recall from the earlier section “Overwhelming your visitors at the start” that you should resist the urge to put all your eggs in the home page basket. Divide what you’re selling into categories and create separate pages (or whole groups of pages) for those categories.

Double-check navigation. Having links to pages that don’t exist is sloppy. Ask outsiders unfamiliar with your site to see whether they can quickly and intuitively locate precisely what they’re after. Although a Search feature can be helpful, your customer should ideally be able to click visual cues — icons, photos, and navigation bars — to locate subcategories, such as Antique Quilts or Under-\$200 Quilts. For example, if your major categories group products by cost, even something as simple as four tabs with \$, \$\$, \$\$\$, and \$\$\$ symbols on them can assist visitors. Then, when they click one of these selections, perhaps they’ll find their chosen cost group further divided by tabs indicating age, size, color, or whatever. The idea is to let them get to their particular wishes — perhaps the page displaying your second-most-expensive, large, blue quilts — with only two or three mouse clicks.

Negligence is like moldy bread

Don’t work hard creating your Web site and then forget about it and let it waste away. Just as successful stores continually keep themselves up to date, you need to do the same with your Web site. Follow these tips:

- ◆ **Update your blog or news section.** If you have a blog or What’s New section, be sure to regularly post new information. At minimum, even if you don’t add new material, be sure to take off content that’s outdated.
- ◆ **Keep your copyright date current.** Few things date your site more than an old copyright date at the bottom of the page. If visitors see a two-year-old date on your site, they assume that you’ve stopped updating it.
- ◆ **Check links.** Periodically test both internal and external links you provide. Delete broken links or update them to the new URLs.

Insecurity makes people nervous

You wouldn’t enjoy shopping at a nasty store where suspicious characters are peeking over your shoulder as you enter your PIN code, or are stuffing copies of your Visa charge receipt into their pockets. Likewise, if you’re selling goods on eBay or directly on your Web site, you must reassure your customers on the Internet that you’re trustworthy and will provide secure financial transactions.

Chapter 3: Organizing and Navigating Your Web Site

In This Chapter

- ✓ Deciding between random or sequential access
- ✓ Combining structures
- ✓ Navigating via bars

We've always thought that a well-organized Web site is much like a GPS for your automobile. A road map or atlas throws all the possible routes and destinations at you, leaving you all alone to figure out where you are and how to best get there. A GPS, on the other hand, gives you just the facts you need at your exact location to successfully navigate to your intended destination.

In much the same way, your Web site needs to be GPS-enabled, so to speak. Visitors should feel like they're navigating your Web site with a GPS in hand rather than simply being tossed a road atlas. They need to be able to intuitively locate the content that they're looking for without bombarding them with every possible option.

In this chapter, you explore the important concepts to consider as you organize your site.

Creating a Site Hierarchy

Web sites usually have a logical, tree-like hierarchy to them. A home page branches out into four to six section pages, some of which might have sub-pages or even subsections under them. Larger sites might have several of these subsections, whereas smaller sites might have little beyond the original section pages.

When you organize your site as a tree-like structure, some branches quickly and easily fall into place. However, other pages might take much more work before you can figure out exactly where they fall into place.

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As you organize your site, make sure that you put on a visitor's hat and look at the overall structure like a newcomer would. As the creator of the site, you have the "inside scoop" and understand the various interrelationships that exist among the content. However, be aware of how this content logically fits together to the uninformed.

To organize your site structure, follow these steps:

1. Make a flat list of all the pages you want to add to your Web site.

If you have an existing site, don't automatically reuse the same hierarchy. Start from scratch this time around and see where you end up.

2. Put the pages into broad topical groups.

Organize the pages into various groups that naturally fit together.

For example, a small consulting firm that sells goods and services might have 30 pages that the owners want to include on their site. The pages might naturally fall under just five distinctive topics, such as News, About Us, Services, Portfolio, and Products.

Avoid using too many groups because they turn into the main sections of your site. You should be able to organize your site into five to eight clearly defined and distinct topical categories.

3. Label the group with a prosaic name that clearly and effectively describes it.

These group names will be the names of your Level 2 pages (just under the home page) that you will want to include on the navigation menu of the site. (See the next section for more about navigation menus.)

Avoid being too clever, abstract, vague, or generic in your labeling. You simply want a term that can people can intuitively understand without having to think much about it. For example, if you're selling cars, label it Cars, not Automatic Transport Vehicles or Your New Transportation Device.

4. Identify subgroups within each broad group.

Check to see whether your topics can be further subdivided. If so, group them together and name the subgroup according to the conventions described in Step 3.

If you have a really large Web site, you can repeat this step as needed. However, work to limit the number of tiers on your site structure to three under the home page. When visitors have to plunge much deeper than that, they easily get lost.

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- 5. Go through each page on your site and identify pages that must be linked directly from the home page, even if the link doesn't neatly fit within the hierarchy you established.**

Web sites normally function best when you have a well-defined site organization, but never be so rigid that you hurt the site's usefulness.

Analyze each of the pages you identified and determine their overall importance. If they're *very* important, you might want to move them to a separate first-level category. Or, if not, there are various places on the home page that you can highlight these special pages, even if they don't work being on the main navigation menu.

- 6. Create each of the pages in the software package you're using.**

If you're using Expression Web, flip over to Book III. Or, if you're using Dreamweaver, you can find what you're looking for in Book IV.



When you finish organizing your Web site hierarchy, we recommend getting a friend or person off the street to look it over and provide feedback. (We find that the cappuccino bribe is particularly effective.)

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Navigating Your Site with a Navigation Menu

Web site design goes beyond the page layout, colors and fonts, and other visual elements. Your design should also encompass the organization of your site.

Sites almost always display a *navigation menu* (or *menu bar*), which is a set of graphical or textual links to the major sections of your site. Although the home page might have its own navigation scheme, the rest of the Web site usually has a common navigation bar found at one of two locations on each page:

- ◆ A horizontal menu bar is located at the top of the page, usually under a banner or logo.
- ◆ A vertical menu bar is placed along the left side.

Whichever main navigation you decide to use, a text-only menu bar is traditionally placed at the bottom of the page, to eliminate the need to scroll up to change pages. In Book VII, Chapter 4, we show you how to create a navigation menu bar with rollovers.

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Figure 3-1 illustrates a travel site where the home page is essentially just one large navigation bar. The user has no trouble understanding how to use this site or how to navigate it.

When you move to any of the other pages of the site, these same links are placed on a menu bar, as shown in Figure 3-2.

Notice that the page shown in Figure 3-2 uses a horizontal menu for top-level navigation and a vertical menu for navigation within that section.

You can create a navigation menu manually. Even better, Dreamweaver and Expression Web offer features that create navigation menus for you.



Figure 3-1:
With an
uncluttered
home page,
a visitor
understands
how to
navigate
your site.

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Figure 3-2:
A menu bar
on each
page of your
site offers a
consistent
way for
visitors to
navigate.

