Magento 1.4 Themes Design

Richard Carter

Community Experience Distilled
Magento 1.4
Themes Design
Customize the appearance of your Magento 1.4 e-commerce store with Magento's powerful theming engine
Richard Carter
[PACKT] open source

Chapter No. 4

"Magento Theme Layouts"

In this package, you will find:

A Biography of the author of the book

A preview chapter from the book, Chapter NO.4 "Magento Theme Layouts"

A synopsis of the book's content

Information on where to buy this book

About the Author

Richard Carter is a frontend web developer with a passion for integrating designs in a range of open source e-commerce and content management systems, including Magento, MediaWiki, Joomla!, and Drupal. His expertise has led clients including University College Dublin, Directgov, NHS Choices, and BusinessLink (`http://www.businesslink.gov.uk`), to consult his knowledge on open source systems.

Richard is Creative Director at Peacock Carter Ltd (`http://peacockcarter.co.uk`), a web design and development agency based in the North East of England. He graduated from the University of Durham in Software Engineering, and currently lives in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. He blogs at `http://www.earlgreyandbattenburg.co.uk/` and tweets at `http://twitter.com/RichardCarter`.

Magento 1.4 Theme Design is the author's fourth book: Richard has previously written *MediaWiki Skins Design*, *Magento 1.3 Theme Design*, and *Joomla! 1.5 Templates Cookbook*, and has acted as a technical reviewer on *MediaWiki 1.1 Beginners Guide* and *Inkscape Illustrator's Guide*.

Thanks to Magento for creating such a versatile e-commerce system—this book wouldn't exist without it—and for those who took the time to review *Magento 1.3 Theme Design*, as your comments were valuable in updating the content for this book.

Thanks are also due to my family and friends, whose constant support has proved both useful and welcome. In particular, my thanks are due to EJ and, of course, Alexandra, who have put up with months of inane mumbling and cursing at the screen!

Magento 1.4 Themes Design

Magento is a popular open source e-commerce project. While it comes with a number of 'default' themes to change the look and feel of your store, many people both new and old to Magento struggle with even the more basic aspects of customizing Magento themes. When you read this book you'll see how to change the basics of your Magento theme, create a new custom theme, and much more.

The book is a step-by-step guide to theming Magento, aimed at readers with little technical expertise.

In short, the book guides the common aspects of theming and customizing Magento 1.4 and an equally useful step-by-step walkthrough of integrating more unusual items into your Magento store.

What This Book Covers

Chapter 1, Introduction to Magento, introduces Magento, including the installation of the software and avoiding common pitfalls in this process. This chapter is an invaluable guide for those who are new to everything in Magento, or just those who are new to Magento 1.4.

Chapter 2, Exploring Magento Themes, introduces theming in the context of Magento and covers terminology used within the Magento project that relates to Magento in a wider context—from interfaces to packages—and more specifically, theme terminology, from skins to layouts, and template fi les.

Chapter 3, Magento Theme Basics, covers the basics of Magento theming, from changing your store's color scheme to updating your store's logo. This chapter concentrates on altering existing Magento themes to achieve the theming aims for your store.

Chapter 4, Magento Theme Layouts, provides an overview of what a layout is in the context of the Magento system, related terminology including layout handles and layout actions, and uses a number of useful step-by-step guides to common tasks you may need to use within Magento to create your theme.

Chapter 5, Non-default Magento Themes, covers the building blocks of creating your own Magento 1.4 theme, from replicating the necessary file hierarchy for your theme to enabling your new theme, styling your store's search feature, and altering your store's footer area.

Chapter 6, More Magento Theming, built on the previous chapter's content, from integrating `@font-face` fonts into your Magento store for higher-fidelity typography in your Magento store to customizing your store's navigation.

Chapter 7, Customizing Advanced Magento Layout, looks into more advanced customization and manipulation of Magento layout in order to customize your Magento store.

Chapter 8, Magento E-mail Templates, looks at customizing e-mail templates that are used to contact customers during key processes of their interaction with your Magento store, as well as integrating the well-known e-mail newsletter system-CampaignMonitor.

Chapter 9, Social Media and Magento, guides you through integrating popular social media websites—Twitter and Facebook—with your Magento store, from adding a Facebook **Like** button to your store to adding your latest tweets to your Magento store.

Chapter 10, Magento Print Style, sees you creating a custom print stylesheet to better allow your store's customers to print key pages from your store.

4
Magento Theme Layouts

You've seen some reasonably simple techniques to customize your Magento store, so now is the time to delve deeper into Magento theming. This chapter covers the following:

- Definitions for layout terminology in Magento
- Enabling template path hints to help you customize more easily
- Enabling block name hints
- An introduction to XML
- Changing page layout in Magento through XML layout

This chapter will focus on customizing an existing Magento theme more, subsequent chapters cover beginning a Magento theme from scratch.

Magento layout terminology

Layout files in Magento define which content blocks, as defined in Magento template files (`.phtml`), are positioned within Magento skeleton templates (which are also in the `.phtml` format), that define the overall structure of your store's theme. Magento layout files are in the XML format (`.xml`) and are located in the `app/design/frontend/your_interface/your_theme/layout/` directory of your Magento installation.

While you will encounter more definitions used to differentiate between aspects of layout within Magento, there are two definitions of use at this point:

1. Default layout
2. Layout updates

Default layout

Default layout in Magento refers to the pre-existing layout that defines the blocks throughout your Magento theme: default layout tells your store exactly in which structural block (for example, header, footer, left-column) to place the smaller blocks (for example, search box, **My Cart** block, newsletter subscription form, page content) and is generally defined in your Magento installation's base theme.

Layout updates

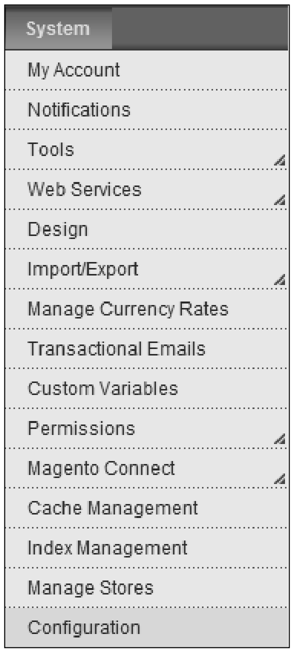
Layout updates in Magento overwrite the default layout for specific views in Magento, such as the checkout page or the product details view. In Magento, layout updates are used to change the base theme's layout part by part instead of entirely overwriting the layout defined. For instance, your theme may use a layout update to change the blocks displayed in a column in your theme for a specific page such as your store's homepage, but for other pages Magento's default layout will be used to determine which blocks appear where in your page.

Template Path Hints and Block Name Hints

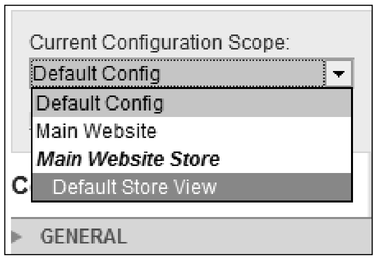
As you've seen, Magento themes can be baffling to those who are unfamiliar with how Magento and Magento themes work. Useful tools to help overcome this when developing Magento themes are **Template Path Hints** and **Block Name Hints**. The Template Path Hints displays the (relative) path to each of your store's blocks within Magento's theme directory structure, that makes it easier for you as a Magento theme designer to customize the necessary files to change your Magento theme.

Enabling Template Path Hints

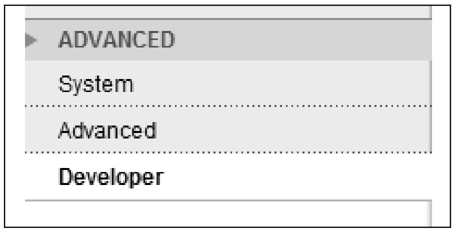
Enabling **Template Path Hints** displays the path to each template used within your Magento theme. To enable this feature of Magento, log in to your Magento store's administration panel and navigate to **System** | **Configuration**:



Next, you will need to change the **Current Configuration Scope** to **Main Website** or **Default Store View** as the option is unavailable in the **Default Config** scope:



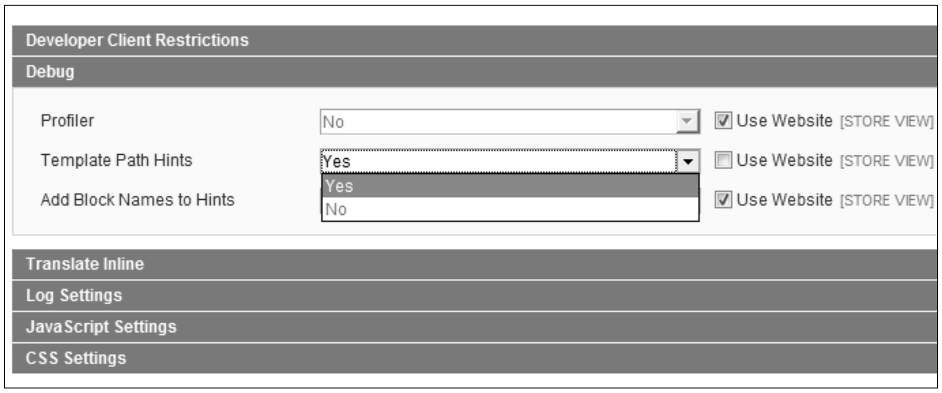
From the left-hand column, select **Developer** from under the **ADVANCED** options:



If you now enlarge the **Debug** section in the right-hand column of the page, you should see three options as follows:

- **Profiler**
- **Template Path Hints**
- **Add Block Names to Hints**

At the moment, you only need to use the **Template Path Hints** option, so uncheck the checkbox next to it and select **Yes** from the drop-down field to enable this feature:



Developer Client Restrictions

Debug

Profiler	No	✓ Use Website [STORE VIEW]
Template Path Hints	Yes (Yes / No)	Use Website [STORE VIEW]
Add Block Names to Hints		✓ Use Website [STORE VIEW]

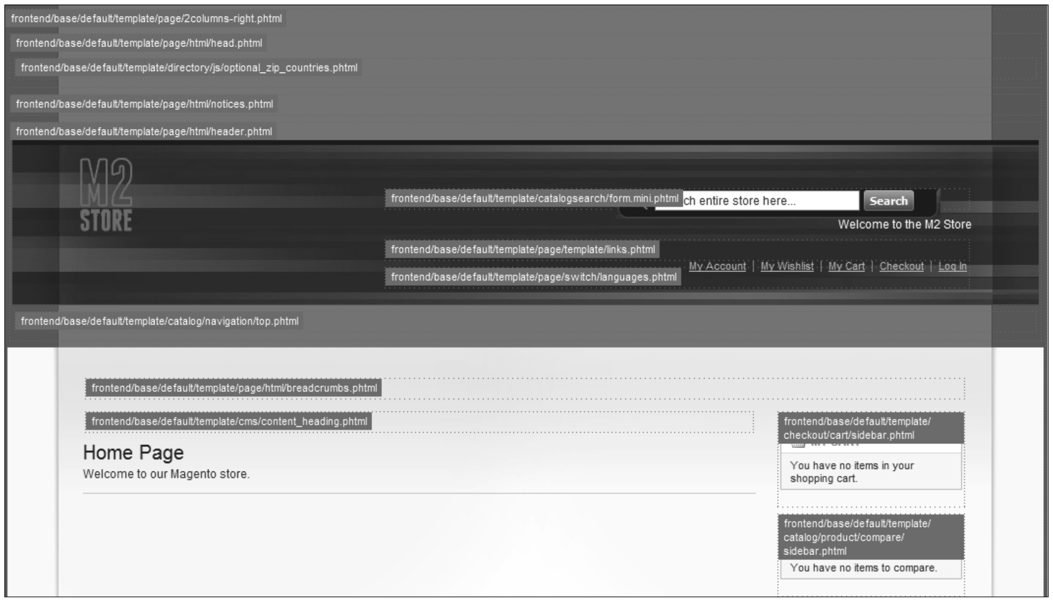
Translate Inline

Log Settings

JavaScript Settings

CSS Settings

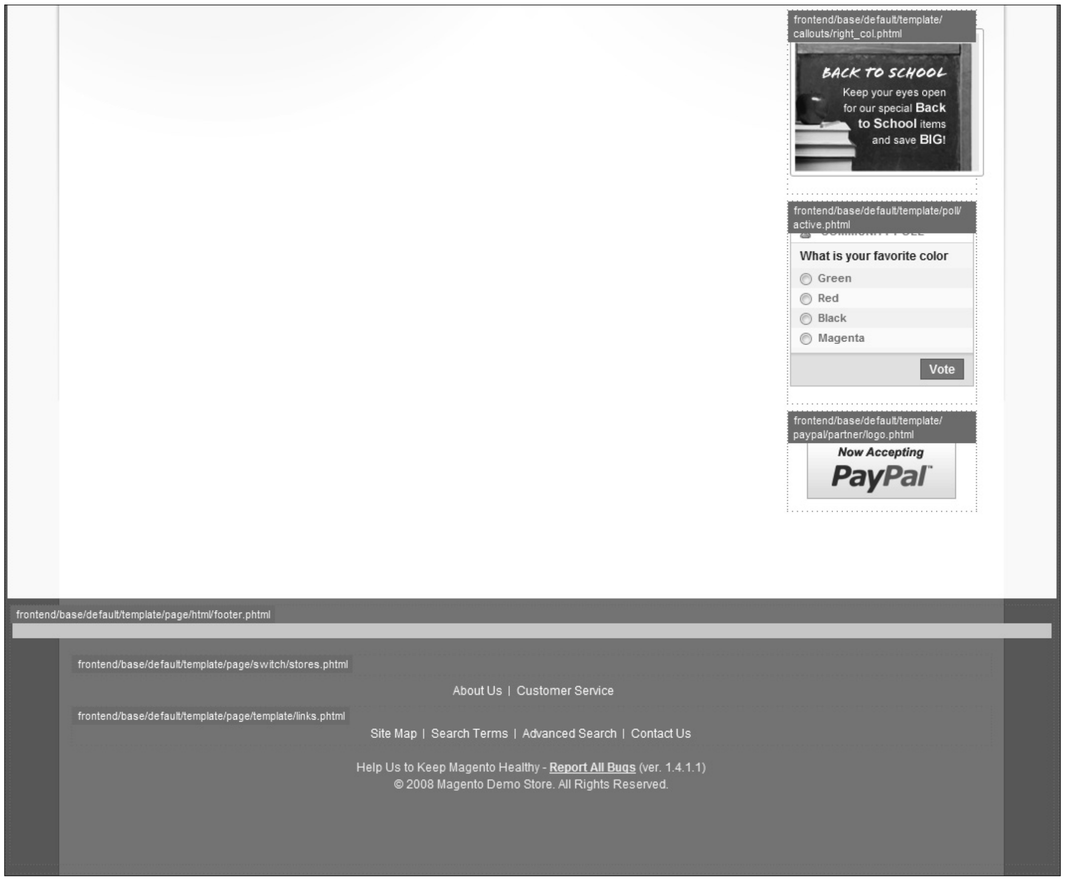
If you now click the **Save Config** button at the top-right of your screen, **Template Path Hints** should be enabled. To see them, simply refresh your Magento store's frontend:



frontend/base/default/template/page/2columns-right.phtml
frontend/base/default/template/page/html/head.phtml
frontend/base/default/template/directory/js/optional_zip_countries.phtml
frontend/base/default/template/page/html/notices.phtml
frontend/base/default/template/page/html/header.phtml
frontend/base/default/template/catalogsearch/form.mini.phtml
frontend/base/default/template/page/template/links.phtml
frontend/base/default/template/page/switch/languages.phtml
frontend/base/default/template/catalog/navigation/top.phtml
frontend/base/default/template/page/html/breadcrumbs.phtml
frontend/base/default/template/cms/content_heading.phtml
frontend/base/default/template/checkout/cart/sidebar.phtml
frontend/base/default/template/catalog/product/compare/sidebar.phtml

M2 STORE
ch entire store here...
Search
Welcome to the M2 Store
My Account | My Wishlist | My Cart | Checkout | Log In
Home Page
Welcome to our Magento store.
You have no items in your shopping cart.
You have no items to compare.

You'll also see that the footer has the relevant file paths displayed:


frontend/base/default/template/callouts/right_col.phtml

frontend/base/default/template/poll/active.phtml

What is your favorite color

Green

Red

Black

Magenta

frontend/base/default/template/paypal/partner/logo.phtml

frontend/base/default/template/page/html/footer.phtml

frontend/base/default/template/page/switch/stores.phtml

About Us | Customer Service

frontend/base/default/template/page/template/links.phtml

Site Map | Search Terms | Advanced Search | Contact Us

Help Us to Keep Magento Healthy - Report All Bugs (ver. 1.4.1.1)

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Keep your eyes open for our special Back to School items and save BIG!
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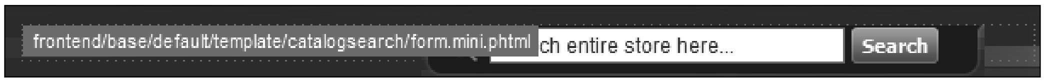
That's it, Magento **Template Path Hints** are enabled now. If you look at the search form, you'll see that the template path displayed relates to the path relative to the root of your Magento installation, the value is: **frontend/base/default/template/catalogsearch/form.mini.phtml**:

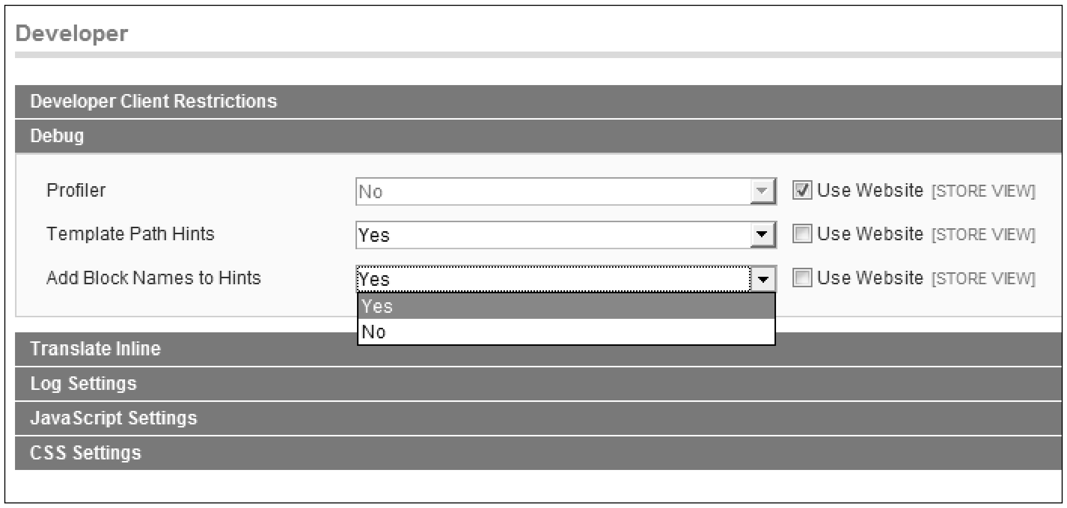

frontend/base/default/template/catalogsearch/form.mini.phtml

Other templates are displayed similarly, allowing you to see exactly where specific blocks in your Magento theme are held, which can greatly help when developing simple Magento themes.

Enabling Block Name Hints

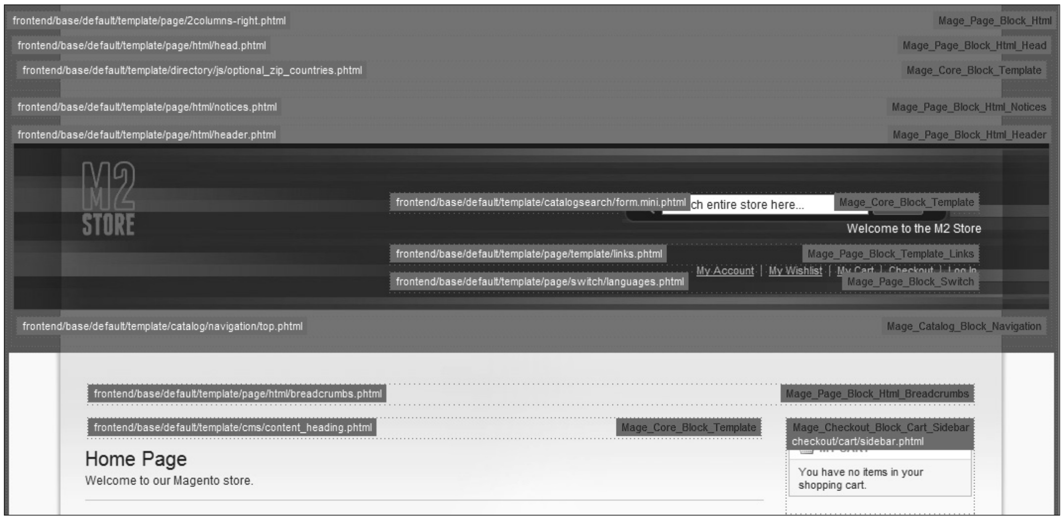
As an additional layer of help when creating and modifying themes, Magento also has a **Block Name Hints** option, which is useful in debugging a Magento theme's layout, as it displays the `name` attribute used in Magento layout files. Remaining in the **System** | **Configuration** | **Advanced** | **Developer** section of your Magento store's administration panel, open the **Debug** section in the right-hand column of the page, ensuring that you are either in the **Default Store View** or **Main Website** scope instead of the **Default Config** scope.

Uncheck the checkbox next to **Add Block Names to Hints** and select **Yes** from the drop-down field to enable this feature.



Profiler	No	✓ Use Website [STORE VIEW]
Template Path Hints	Yes	☐ Use Website [STORE VIEW]
Add Block Names to Hints	Yes (Yes / No)	☐ Use Website [STORE VIEW]

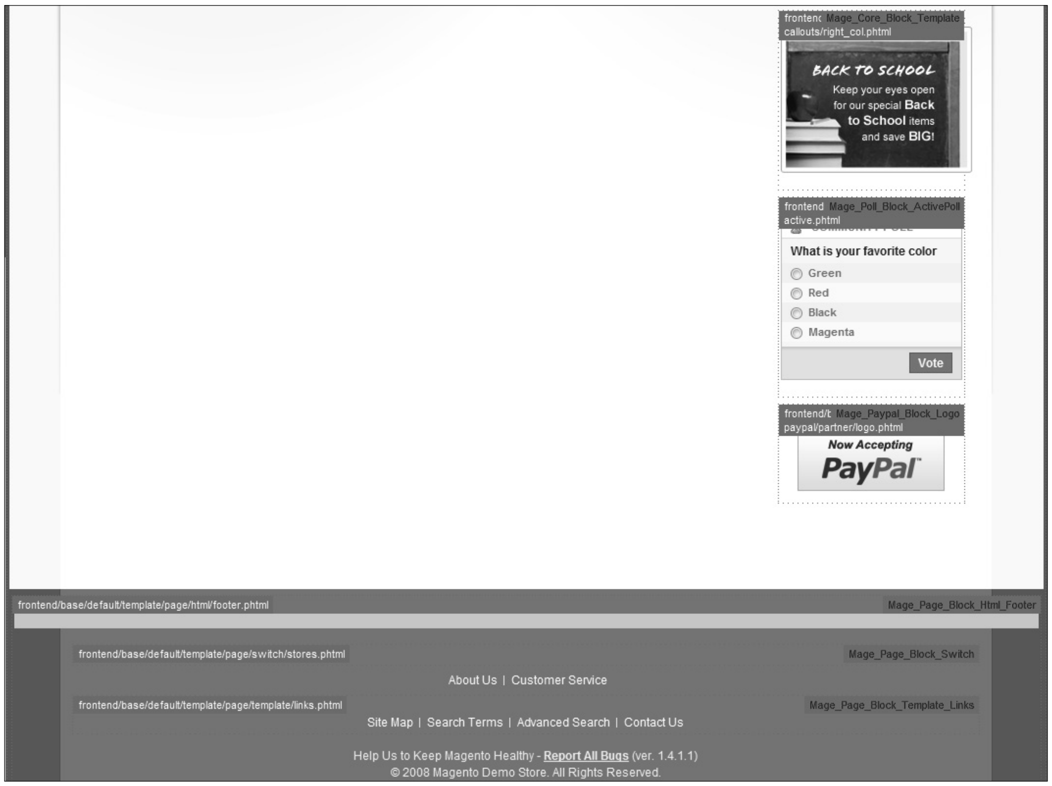
Save this change by clicking **Save Config** at the top-right of your screen (you can leave **Template Path Hints** set to **Yes**). If you now look at the frontend of your Magento store, you'll see that the block name hints have appeared, displayed to the top-right of each block:



frontend/base/default/template/page/2columns-right.phtml Mage_Page_Block_Html
frontend/base/default/template/page/html/head.phtml Mage_Page_Block_Html_Head
frontend/base/default/template/directory/js/optional_zip_countries.phtml Mage_Core_Block_Template
frontend/base/default/template/page/html/notices.phtml Mage_Page_Block_Html_Notices
frontend/base/default/template/page/html/header.phtml Mage_Page_Block_Html_Header
frontend/base/default/template/catalogsearch/form.mini.phtml Mage_Core_Block_Template
frontend/base/default/template/page/template/links.phtml Mage_Page_Block_Template_Links
frontend/base/default/template/page/switch/languages.phtml Mage_Page_Block_Switch
frontend/base/default/template/catalog/navigation/top.phtml Mage_Catalog_Block_Navigation
frontend/base/default/template/page/html/breadcrumbs.phtml Mage_Page_Block_Html_Breadcrumbs
frontend/base/default/template/cms/content_heading.phtml Mage_Core_Block_Template
Mage_Checkout_Block_Cart_Sidebar checkout/cart/sidebar.phtml

M2 STORE
ch entire store here...
Welcome to the M2 Store
My Account | My Wishlist | My Cart | Checkout | Log In
Home Page
Welcome to our Magento store.
You have no items in your shopping cart.

The footer area also has the block and template path name values displayed in a similar manner:



frontenc Mage_Core_Block_Template callouts/right_col.phtml
frontend Mage_Poll_Block_ActivePoll active.phtml
frontend/t Mage_Paypal_Block_Logo paypal/partner/logo.phtml
frontend/base/default/template/page/html/footer.phtml Mage_Page_Block_Html_Footer
frontend/base/default/template/page/switch/stores.phtml Mage_Page_Block_Switch
frontend/base/default/template/page/template/links.phtml Mage_Page_Block_Template_Links

BACK TO SCHOOL
Keep your eyes open for our special Back to School items and save BIG!
What is your favorite color
Green
Red
Black
Magenta
Vote
Now Accepting PayPal
About Us | Customer Service
Site Map | Search Terms | Advanced Search | Contact Us
Help Us to Keep Magento Healthy - Report All Bugs (ver. 1.4.1.1)
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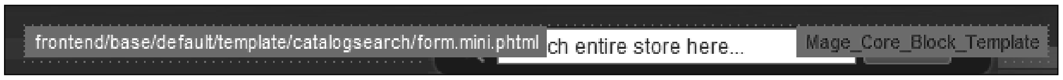
If you again look at the search feature, now with **Block Name Hints** enabled, you see that the value for the block name is displayed as **Mage_Core_Block_Template**:


frontend/base/default/template/catalogsearch/form.mini.phtml
ch entire store here...
Mage_Core_Block_Template

The block name hints show you how the block is classed within the framework used to build Magento. So, `Mage_Core_Block_Template` tells you that this block is classed as a 'block template' within Magento, which is useful when it comes to defining the `type` attribute in your theme's layout files. Corresponding layout for this block may look like the following example taken from the `catalogsearch.xml` file in the `/app/design/frontend/base/default/layout` directory, with the `type` attribute defined as `core/template`:

```
<reference name="header">
 <block
  type=”core/template”
  name=»top.search»
  as="topSearch"
  template="catalogsearch/form.mini.phtml"/>
</reference>
```

More information on block names

You can find more information on block names and others in the Magento documentation at `http://docs.magentocommerce.com`.

As an additional example, take the following XML layout file, that adds a static block called `widget` created in Magento's CMS at the right-hand column of your theme:

```
<reference name="right">
 <block type="cms/block" name="widget" after="-">
  <action method="setBlockId">
   <block_id>widget</block_id>
  </action>
   </block>
</reference>
```

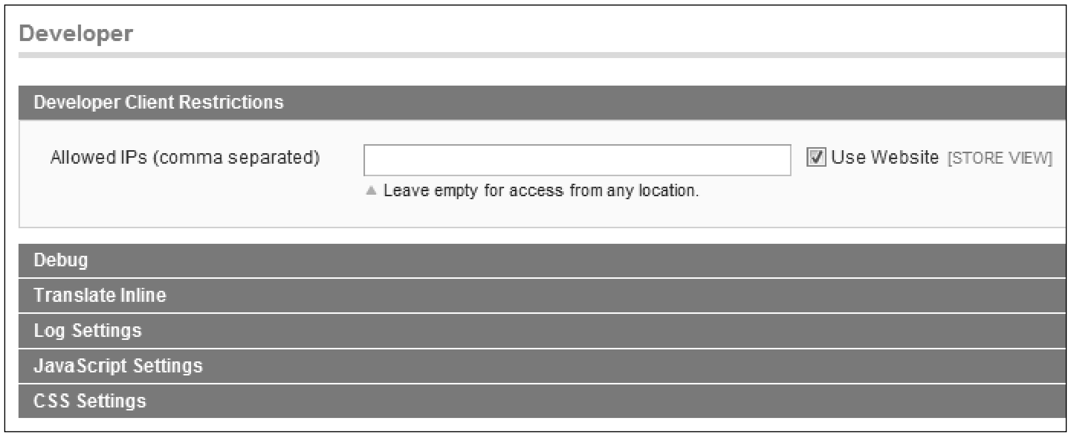
Here the **type** attribute tells Magento to expect `cms/block` type content, that is displayed in the block name hints tools as `Mage_Cms_Block_Widget_Block`.

In contrast to the template path hints, which displayed the relative path within your Magento installation, the block name hints display a more abstract value which is used in Magento XML layout files.

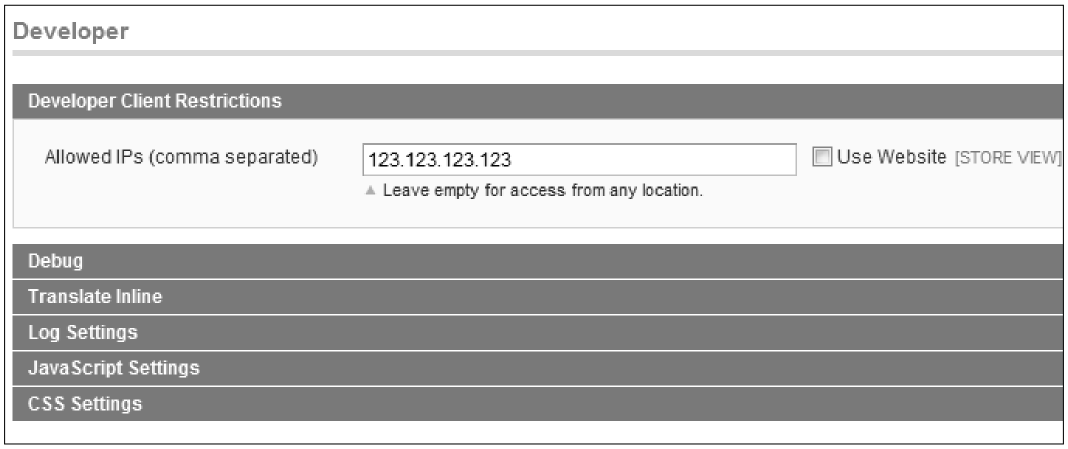
Restricting who can see the hints

The template path hints and block name hints are really useful for theme designers such as yourself, but they could cause confusion if you're working on a live Magento store to make minor changes. Luckily, Magento allows you to specify IP addresses that are able to see these hints, leaving usual customers to browse your store uninterrupted.

Within the **System** | **Configuration** area of Magento's administration panel, remain in the **Advanced** | **Developer** area you were previously viewing to enable template path hints and block name hints. Expand the **Developer Client Restrictions** section of the page:


Developer
Developer Client Restrictions
Allowed IPs (comma separated)
Use Website [STORE VIEW]
Leave empty for access from any location.
Debug
Translate Inline
Log Settings
JavaScript Settings
CSS Settings

Uncheck the checkbox for the **Use Website** field, and enter your IP address(es) in to the **Allowed IPs (comma separated)** field:



Allowed IPs (comma separated): 123.123.123.123
☐ Use Website [STORE VIEW]
Leave empty for access from any location.

If you want to allow multiple IP addresses to view this feature of Magento, simply separate them with a comma, such as `123.123.123.123,123.123.123.124`.

Finding your own IP

You can detect your IP by using a service such as **What Is My IP?** (`http://www.whatismyip.com`) or **What Is My IP Address?** (`http://whatismyipaddress.com`).

You should now be able to see the block name hints and template path hints, while others looking at your Magento store will not see these.

A brief guide to XML

Layout files in Magento make use of XML—eXtensible Markup Language. It can be baffling to see XML for the first time—especially if you're not familiar with XHTML, but it's quite simple.

There is one simple rule to creating well-formed XML: every element must close. An element in XML can close in two ways.

- The element can *self-close*
- The element can be *closed with a closing tag of its own type*

Self-closing elements in XML

A self-closing element in XML is an element which closes itself. Take as an example, the XML element `<thing>`. Normally, this element would look like the following:

```
<thing>Some optional data</thing>
```

If this element self-closed, it would look like the following:

```
<thing />
```

If you want to encapsulate data in the `<thing>` element, it might look like the following:

```
<thing data= "some data " />
```

Closing XML elements normally

The other way to close an XML element is with a closing tag of the opening tag's type. So, with the `<thing>` tag, a valid XML element would look like:

```
<thing>Value (if any)</thing>
```

Entity escapes in XML

As in HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language) and XHTML, XML requires some characters to be escaped to prevent data in the XML file from being misinterpreted. The characters that you'll need to watch out for in your XML file are:

Character	Description	Escape
&	Ampersand	&amp;
<	Less than	&lt;
>	Greater than	&gt;
'	Apostrophe	&apos;
"	Quotation mark	&quot;

For example, if you wanted to display **A & B > C < D 'E' "F"** in our XML file, it would look like the following:

```
A &amp; B &gt; C &lt; D &apos;E&apos; &quot;F&quot;
```

Now that we have a better grasp of XML, we can look more closely at changing the layout using Magento's XML layout.

Changing a page's layout

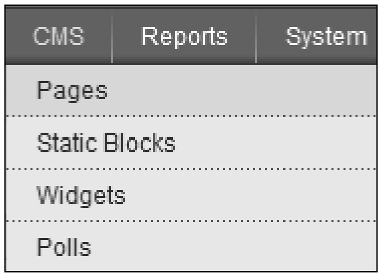
There are three ways you can change the layout of a page within Magento:

1. On a page-per-page basis, if it is controlled through Magento's content management system (CMS), through a drop-down list of selectable page layouts
2. Through Magento's CMS, in the **Design** tab's **Layout Update XML** field
3. Through Magento's XML layout files

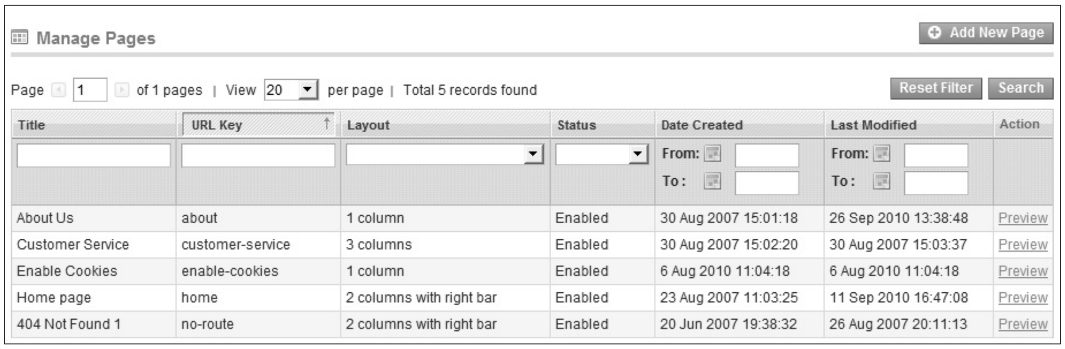
For your reference, both of these methods are covered next.

Changing a page's layout through Magento's administration panel

Log in to your Magento installation's administration panel (located at `http://www.example.com/magento/admin` if your installation of Magento is located at `http://www.example.com/magento`). Navigate to **CMS** | **Pages**:



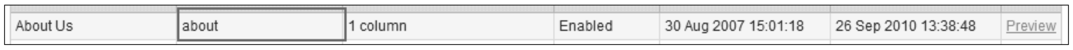
Here, you'll see a list of pages that are managed by Magento's CMS:



Page 1 of 1 pages | View 20 per page | Total 5 records found

Title	URL Key	Layout	Status	Date Created	Last Modified	Action
				From: To:	From: To:	
About Us	about	1 column	Enabled	30 Aug 2007 15:01:18	26 Sep 2010 13:38:48	Preview
Customer Service	customer-service	3 columns	Enabled	30 Aug 2007 15:02:20	30 Aug 2007 15:03:37	Preview
Enable Cookies	enable-cookies	1 column	Enabled	6 Aug 2010 11:04:18	6 Aug 2010 11:04:18	Preview
Home page	home	2 columns with right bar	Enabled	23 Aug 2007 11:03:25	11 Sep 2010 16:47:08	Preview
404 Not Found 1	no-route	2 columns with right bar	Enabled	20 Jun 2007 19:38:32	26 Aug 2007 20:11:13	Preview

Take a note of the value **URL Key** that corresponds to the page with a value in the **Title** column of **About Us.** In this case, the value we need is **about**:



About Us	about	1 column	Enabled	30 Aug 2007 15:01:18	26 Sep 2010 13:38:48	Preview

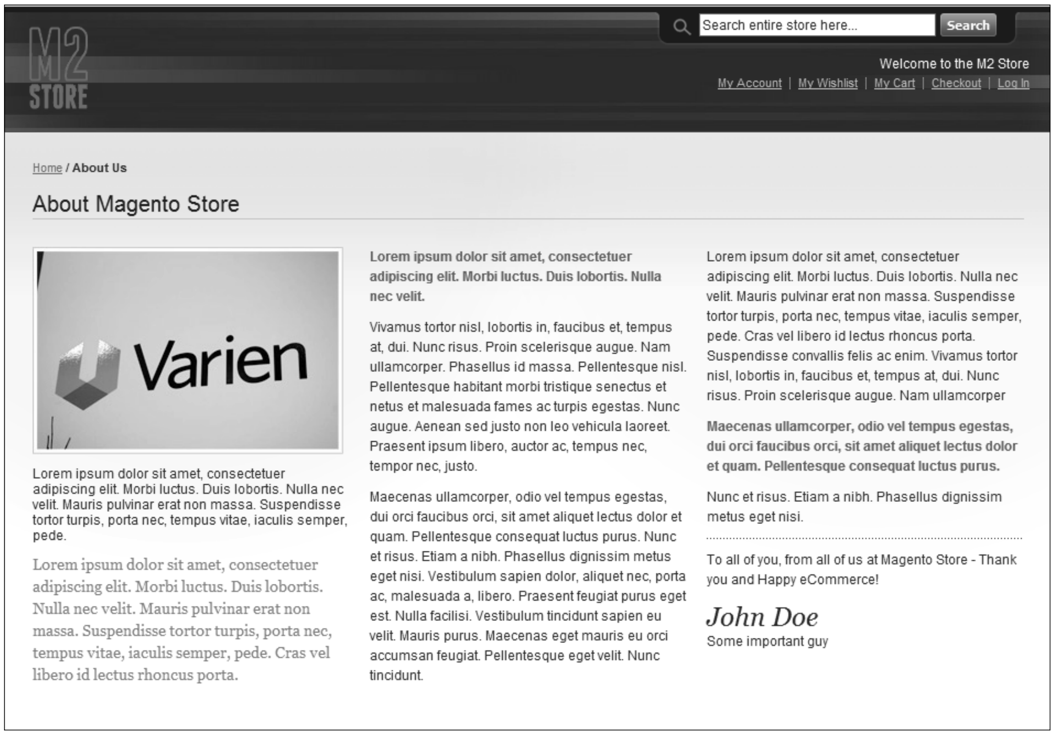
By default: imported sample data

This value is set to `about-magento-demo-store` if you've imported Magento's sample data in to your store.

To view this page in the frontend of your store (that is, the view that your customers will see), type the address of your Magento installation in to your browser's address bar and then append the value displayed in the **URL Key** column you just saw:

http://www.example.com/magento/about

Once the page is loaded, you will see that the **About Us** page has a three-column layout:



M2 STORE
Search entire store here...
Search
Welcome to the M2 Store
My Account | My Wishlist | My Cart | Checkout | Log In
Home / About Us
Varien

About Magento Store

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetuer adipiscing elit. Morbi luctus. Duis lobortis. Nulla nec velit. Mauris pulvinar erat non massa. Suspendisse tortor turpis, porta nec, tempus vitae, iaculis semper, pede.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetuer adipiscing elit. Morbi luctus. Duis lobortis. Nulla nec velit. Mauris pulvinar erat non massa. Suspendisse tortor turpis, porta nec, tempus vitae, iaculis semper, pede. Cras vel libero id lectus rhoncus porta.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetuer adipiscing elit. Morbi luctus. Duis lobortis. Nulla nec velit.

Vivamus tortor nisl, lobortis in, faucibus et, tempus at, dui. Nunc risus. Proin scelerisque augue. Nam ullamcorper. Phasellus id massa. Pellentesque nisl. Pellentesque habitant morbi tristique senectus et netus et malesuada fames ac turpis egestas. Nunc augue. Aenean sed justo non leo vehicula laoreet. Praesent ipsum libero, auctor ac, tempus nec, tempor nec, justo.

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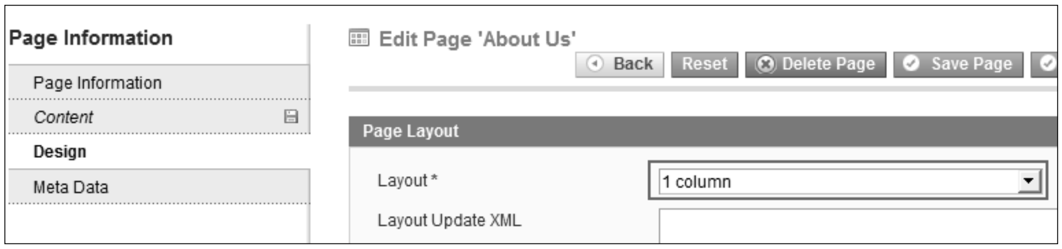
Nunc et risus. Etiam a nibh. Phasellus dignissim metus eget nisi.

To all of you, from all of us at Magento Store - Thank you and Happy eCommerce!

John Doe
Some important guy

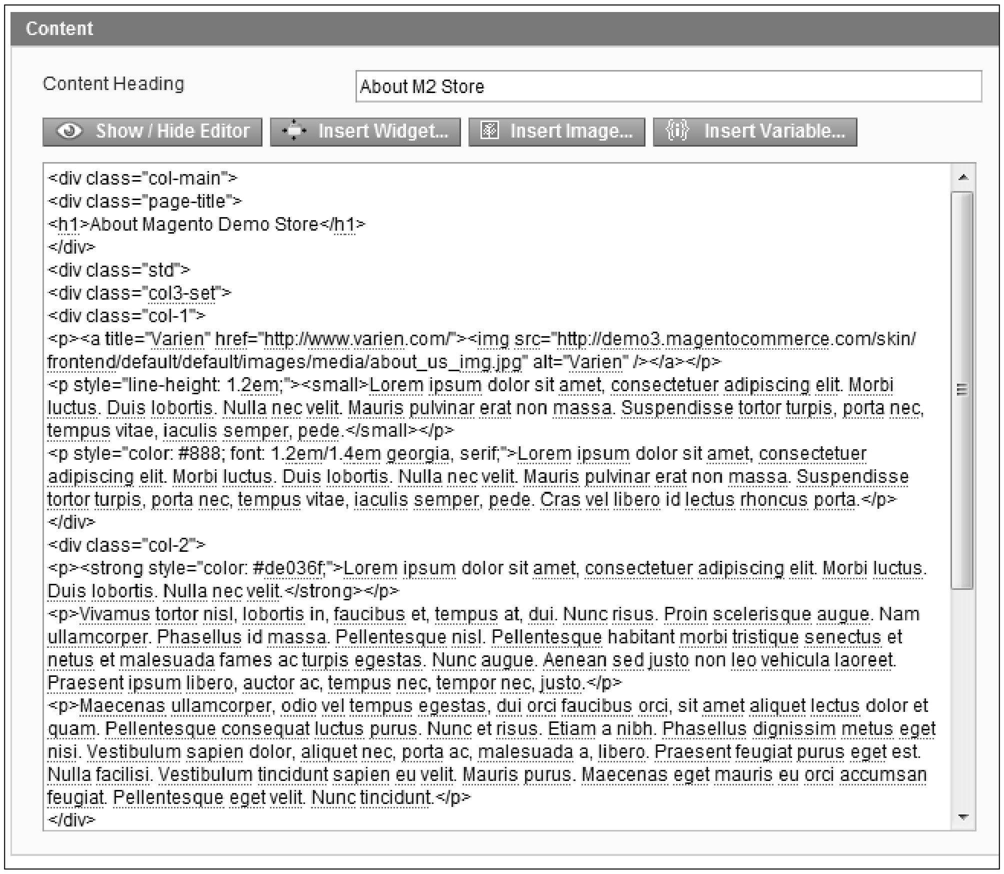
If you look more closely in Magento's administration panel, under the **Design** tab at the left-hand side (displayed once you are editing the page in Magento's CMS), however, you'll see that this page's layout is set to **1 column**:



Layout * 1 column

Layout Update XML

If you disable the editor with the **Show/Hide Editor** button and look at the HTML view in the text editor provided, you will see that the three columns are created within the content in the CMS, referencing CSS classes `.col3-set` that surrounds three `<div>`s; `.col-1`, `.col-2`, and `.col-3`:



Content Heading: About M2 Store

```
<div class="col-main">
<div class="page-title">
<h1>About Magento Demo Store</h1>
</div>
<div class="std">
<div class="col3-set">
<div class="col-1">
<p><a title="Varien" href="http://www.varien.com/"><img src="http://demo3.magentocommerce.com/skin/
frontend/default/default/images/media/about_us_img.jpg" alt="Varien" /></a></p>
<p style="line-height: 1.2em;"><small>Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetuer adipiscing elit. Morbi
luctus. Duis lobortis. Nulla nec velit. Mauris pulvinar erat non massa. Suspendisse tortor turpis, porta nec,
tempus vitae, iaculis semper, pede.</small></p>
<p style="color: #888; font: 1.2em/1.4em georgia, serif;">Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetuer
adipiscing elit. Morbi luctus. Duis lobortis. Nulla nec velit. Mauris pulvinar erat non massa. Suspendisse
tortor turpis, porta nec, tempus vitae, iaculis semper, pede. Cras vel libero id lectus rhoncus porta.</p>
</div>
<div class="col-2">
<p><strong style="color: #de036f;">Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetuer adipiscing elit. Morbi luctus.
Duis lobortis. Nulla nec velit.</strong></p>
<p>Vivamus tortor nisl, lobortis in, faucibus et, tempus at, dui. Nunc risus. Proin scelerisque augue. Nam
ullamcorper. Phasellus id massa. Pellentesque nisl. Pellentesque habitant morbi tristique senectus et
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Praesent ipsum libero, auctor ac, tempus nec, tempor nec, justo.</p>
<p>Maecenas ullamcorper, odio vel tempus egestas, dui orci faucibus orci, sit amet aliquet lectus dolor et
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Nulla facilisi. Vestibulum tincidunt sapien eu velit. Mauris purus. Maecenas eget mauris eu orci accumsan
feugiat. Pellentesque eget velit. Nunc tincidunt.</p>
</div>
```
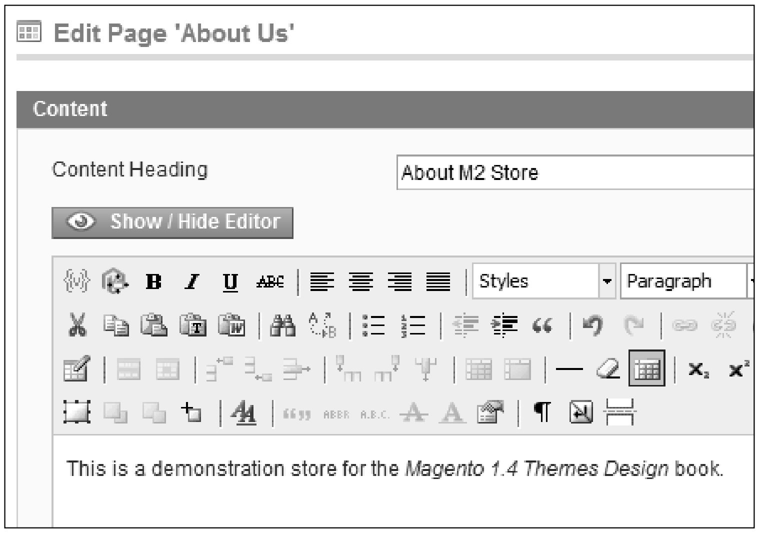
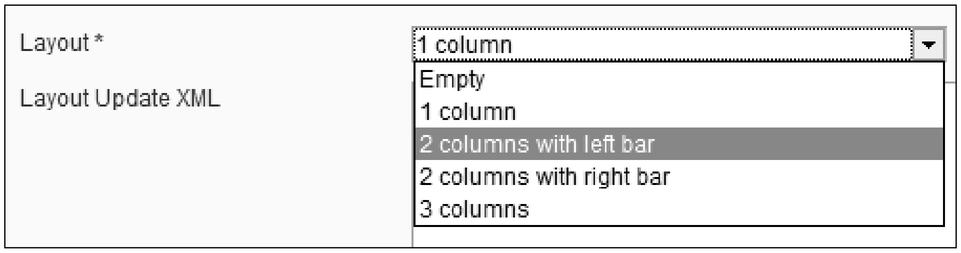

Switch back to the editor by clicking the **Show/Hide Editor** button again, replace the filler content for the about page with something relevant to your store:



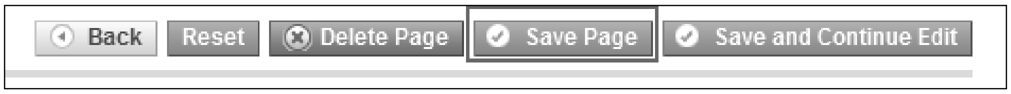
Content Heading: About M2 Store

This is a demonstration store for the *Magento 1.4 Themes Design* book.

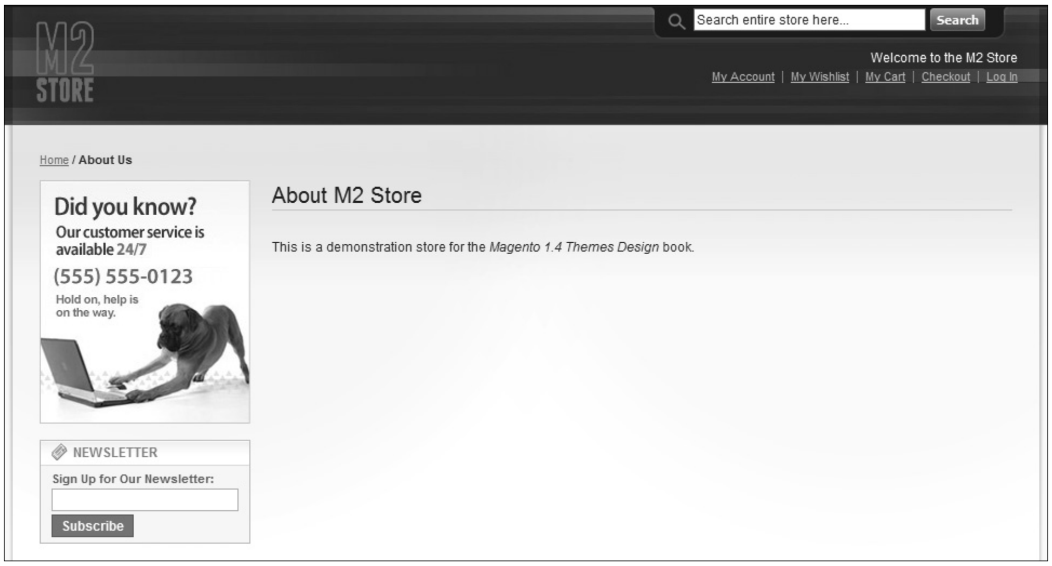
To change the page's layout, select the **Layout** drop-down list and select the **2 columns with left bar** option:



Click on the **Save Page** button to the top-right of the screen to complete the change:



If you now refresh the page on the frontend of your Magento store, you'll see the left column, containing a callout (advertisement) and a registration form for the newsletter feature of Magento:

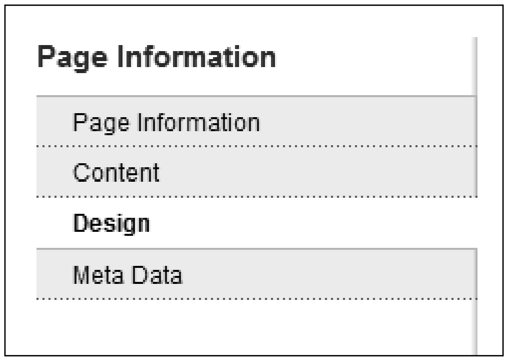

Search entire store here...
Search
Welcome to the M2 Store
My Account | My Wishlist | My Cart | Checkout | Log In
Home / About Us
Did you know?
Our customer service is available 24/7
(555) 555-0123
Hold on, help is on the way.
NEWSLETTER
Sign Up for Our Newsletter:
Subscribe

About M2 Store

This is a demonstration store for the *Magento 1.4 Themes Design* book.

Customizing a Magento page through Layout Update XML field

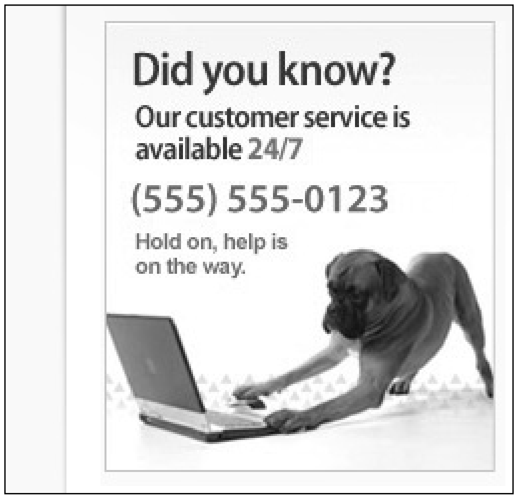
To change a page's layout through the Magento CMS's **Layout Update XML** field, navigate to the page you wish to change within the **CMS** section of your Magento administration panel. In the left-hand side of your screen, select the **Design** tab:



Prepare the XML layout you wish to use to change this specific page. In this case, you will add the 'callout' advertisement back to the left-hand column of your store:

```
<reference name="left">
 <block type=”core/template” name=”left.permanent.callout”
template=”callouts/left_col.phtml” />
</reference>
```

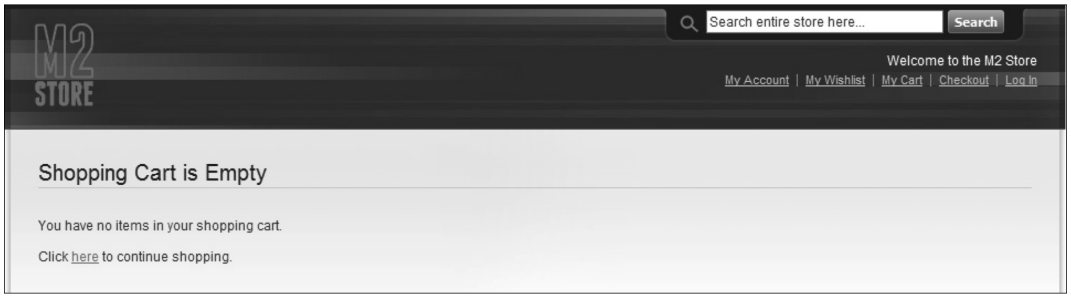
If you now click on the **Save Page** button at the top-right of your administration panel and return to your Magento store's frontend to view the page you have just edited (in this example, it was the **About Us** page), you should see the callout appear in the page's left-hand column:


Did you know?
Our customer service is available 24/7
(555) 555-0123
Hold on, help is on the way.

You successfully used the **Layout Update XML** field in Magento's CMS to change your store's layout!

Customizing a Magento page through layout files

While some pages in your Magento store can have their layout altered through the CMS, other pages must have their layout modified through Magento XML files. In this example, you will see how to change the layout of the checkout page in Magento. Firstly, look at the frontend of your store's **Checkout**:


M2 STORE
Search entire store here...
Search
Welcome to the M2 Store
My Account | My Wishlist | My Cart | Checkout | Log In

Shopping Cart is Empty

You have no items in your shopping cart.

Click here to continue shopping.

> **Locating Magento's checkout**
>
> You can locate the checkout in your Magento store by clicking the link labeled **Checkout** below the search box in Magento's Default theme, or by visiting `http://www.example.com/magento/checkout/cart`, assuming your Magento installation is at `http://www.example.com/magento/`.

If you wanted to change the layout of this view in your Magento store to display two columns, we need to locate the layout file that controls this particular view. To do this, you may find it helpful to (re)enable the template path hints tool as described previously.

As the Default theme is currently in use on the store, the default layout for the checkout view is defined in the `checkout.xml` file in the `app/design/frontend/base/default/layout` directory. If you open this file, you'll see that the layout is defined within the `shopping_cart_index` handle with the following XML:

```
<reference name="root">
 <action method="setTemplate"><template>page/1column.phtml</
template></action>
</reference>
```

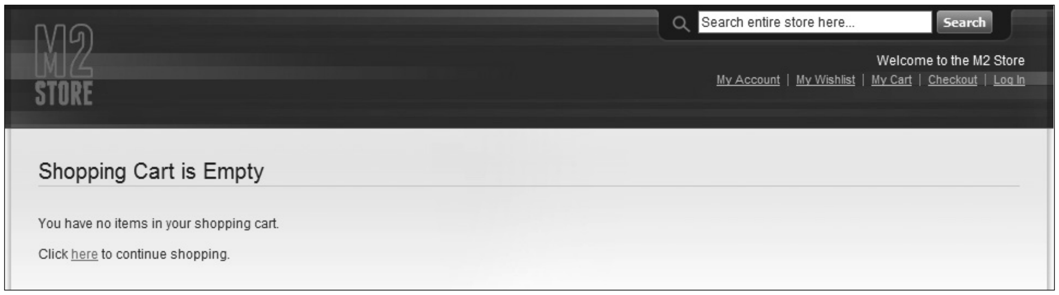
While in Magento 1.3 you might have edited the layout in this file directly, to make sure our version of Magento 1.4 is as upgrade-proof as possible, you will need to create a `checkout.xml` file in the Default package's directory: `app/design/frontend/default/default/layout`. You may find that you need to create the `/layout` sub-directory here, if no other layout changes have been made in this theme. In the new `checkout.xml` file, copy and paste the entirety of the old `checkout.xml` in the `app/design/frontend/base/default/layout` directory and locate the following XML:

```
<action method="setTemplate">
<template>page/1column.phtml</template>
</action>
```

Replace the value in the `<template>` element by changing this to the following:

```
<action method="setTemplate">
<template>page/2columns-left.phtml</template>
</action>
```

The path set within the `<template>` element is relative to the `/template` directory, following Magento's hierarchy you saw described in an earlier chapter. If you now refresh the checkout page once uploading the `checkout.xml` to the `app/design/frontend/default/default/layout` in your Magento installation, you should see the updated layout affect it:


M2 STORE
Search entire store here...
Search
Welcome to the M2 Store
My Account | My Wishlist | My Cart | Checkout | Log In

Shopping Cart is Empty

You have no items in your shopping cart.

Click here to continue shopping.

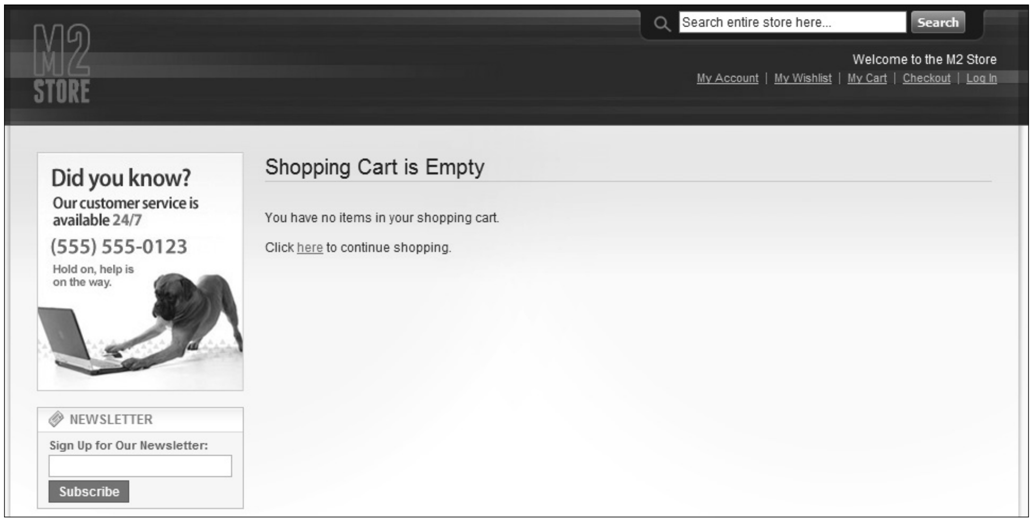
Notice that the left-hand column is empty: you will need to remove another line from the new `checkout.xml` file to see content appear here. Locate the lines that read:

```
<checkout_cart_index translate="label">
 <label>Shopping Cart</label>
 <remove name="right"/>
 <remove name="left"/>
```

Comment out the line that reads `<remove name="left"/>` as follows:

```
<checkout_cart_index translate="label">
 <label>Shopping Cart</label>
 <remove name="right"/>
 <!--<remove name="left"/>-->
```

If you now upload this file again and refresh the **Checkout** page, you'll see the fully updated layout changes:


M2 STORE
Search entire store here...
Search
Welcome to the M2 Store
My Account | My Wishlist | My Cart | Checkout | Log In
Did you know?
Our customer service is available 24/7
(555) 555-0123
Hold on, help is on the way.
NEWSLETTER
Sign Up for Our Newsletter:
Subscribe

Shopping Cart is Empty

You have no items in your shopping cart.

Click here to continue shopping.

Default and non-default handles in Magento layout

As you saw previously, Magento has two types of **handles** that it uses within layout files:

1. **Default handles**, which affect (almost) every page in your Magento store
2. **Non-default handles**, which can be used to affect the layout of specific pages within your Magento store

What is a handle?

A handle is a reference name that Magento uses to refer to a particular view (or cluster of views) in your Magento store. For example, the `<cms_page>` handle used later controls the layout of pages in your Magento store created through the content management system (CMS).

The default handle

The `<default>` handle defines what is the default behavior for a layout within a particular view. So, if layout for the **Checkout** view in Magento is defined for the default handle to show a left-hand column in a two column layout, this is the layout that you will see in your store, unless you use a non-default handle to change the layout for a particular view in that Magento feature. For example, you could change the one-page **Checkout**'s view with a non-default handle to help simplify a customer's options when it comes to checking out from your store.

Non-default handles

If the handle is not `<default>`, the updates in the nested XML beneath it will apply to the relevant page(s) in your Magento store. Let's have a look at part of the `cms.xml` XML layout file from Magento, located in the `app/design/frontend/base/default/layout` directory:

```
<layout version="0.1.0">
<!-- omitted layout XML -->
    <cms_page>
        <!-- omitted layout XML -->
        <reference name="content">
            <block type="cms/page" name="cms_page"/>
        </reference>
<!-- omitted layout XML -->
    </cms_page>
<!-- omitted layout XML -->
</layout>
```

Layout handles for CMS pages

Magento does not provide a layout handle for each page in your Magento store, so it's actually only possible to affect all CMS-controlled pages in your store through XML layout file changes, though you can change individual page's layout through the CMS interface as described previously.

The `<default>` handle applies layout to any page which has its layout defined by the `cms.xml` file. The non-default handle in the layout is `<cms_page>`, which controls the layout for pages created in Magento's CMS. The previous layout simply tells Magento where to insert the page's content.

Useful handles in Magento

Some useful layout handles in Magento—the identifiers which allow you to single out a particular page or section of your Magento store are as follows:

XML handle	Page it identifies in Magento	XML layout file the XML handle is referenced in
`catalog_category_default`	The default view for a category of products.	`catalog.xml`
`customer_account`	The customer account page, shown when a customer is logged in to their account on your store.	`customer.xml`
`catalog_product_view`	The product page view (that is, a page which displays an individual product).	`catalog.xml`
`cms_page`	Pages created with Magento's content management system.	`cms.xml`
`checkout_cart_index`	The checkout's 'index' (that is, default) view	`checkout.xml`
`cms_index_defaultnoroute`	The default error page for the 404 'not found' error	`cms.xml`
`cms_index_defaultindex`	The homepage of your Magento store	`cms.xml`

There are many other handles available to you, but as Magento expands these will change and evolve.

As you're only wanting to theme Magento, you shouldn't have to change these handles (instead, you will be referencing them in layout files), but it can still be useful to know what they do.

Summary

In this chapter, you've looked into what template path hints and block name hints can do to help us theme Magento and in to the basics of a Magento theme's layout files:

- Some useful definitions used in Magento for layout
- Customizing layout using the CMS and by editing Magento XML layout files
- A guide to handles within Magento layout files
- An introduction to XML
- Changing page layout in Magento through XML layout

In the coming chapters, you will begin to create a Magento theme from scratch.