

Paul Smith takes issue with **techno-snobs** and decries shortsightedness in the digital age.

Hold the FrontPage



I'd like to start this month's column by describing, in joyful and ebullient prose, what a wonderful online month I've had. I would like to tell you about the ways in which the New Year has brought with it such sweet promise. And it

would give me great pleasure to announce all the exciting techno-developments that have kept me on the edge of my mousemat.

Of course, I can't. My so-called life being just that — so-called, i.e. tragic — means that I have spent the last few weeks burning the normal amount of rubber getting nowhere. For a start, my web site became somewhat out of date as the, literally, several visitors will have realised. I've now updated the content, removing phrases such as 'Best viewed with NCSA Mosaic' and 'Optimised for colour SVGA'. I've also been using FrontPage 2000 (FP), part of the beta for Office 2000. FP2000 is better than FP98 — although not, as its name might suggest, by a score of 1,902. It has a better interface, more themes and an easier way of creating your own theme.

For those who've never used FP, here's the cool thing about it: it automatically handles all the nav bars between pages in your site, even including the creation of active graphic buttons for those links. Add a page, and all the nav bars are updated automatically. And you can add a 'theme', a set of button graphics, text, colours and background which are all thought, down Redmond-way, to be enticing. Just choose one, and its beauty is instantaneously propagated throughout your web site.

Having been brought up on Notepad, 'the HTML editor for *real* men', I rather feel that I'm somehow cheating by using FP. It's just *too* easy. Still, never having practiced donated-equine dentistry, I now use it exactly *because* it's too easy. It's a controversial opinion, but good software should be easy to use, shouldn't it? But its use has uncovered a surprising level of techno-snobbery. About half the emails I get from PCW readers who have come across the site, begin: 'Much as I hate tools like FrontPage...' I'm not yet sure what's wrong with 'tools like FrontPage' or even what that actually means. Like Microsoft products?... like easy to use?... like rigidly imposing certain designs?

I presume it's something to do with the pioneering spirit of the web's illuminators. Me, I think FP is just a start. It can't do things which I think are important. For example, you can't make those nav bars point to bookmarks on the same page. And, while you can have as many fonts as you like in your site, there should be a facility for rendering them into graphics if you're not sure your viewers will have the same fonts. Still, as I write, the site is up to date.

➔ **My other techno-news** has to do with television. Sony lent me one of those 32in Wega widescreen TVs — very cool, very flat. I had it in for review for about a month. Now, this may come as a surprise, but those Sony folks must be short of a TV or two because *they wanted it back!* Which was not nice. So now I've gone to Granada which has, bless it, stumped up a Panasonic widescreen and an OnDigital box.

The TV is a 28in, or what is known in televisual circles as a 'portable'. I then went to see the nice folks at OnDigital down near Battersea Power Station. Apparently, OnDigital, with its limited selection of channels and its simple, dish-less installation, is aimed

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at those who want satellite TV but don't want their neighbours to *realise* that they want satellite TV; there's something just a bit C2DE about Sky, apparently.

Anyway, the interesting feature of OnDigital is that it has no support for the internet, and none in the works. 'We'll keep an eye on it,' Andrew Marre, the PR bloke at OnDigital tells me, 'but it's not something we see as key at the moment.'

Not key? Here's the planet's biggest communications revolution since sliced bread — bigger, actually, when you consider bread's complete failure as a communications medium — and digital TV offers an exciting delivery method but it's not big enough for the OnDigital viewers. Hmmm... who wants to put money on them changing that tune by the end of next year?

• See p138 for our feature on digital broadcasting.

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