FrontPage 2000 Tips And Tricks

It's well worth getting to know FrontPage in detail in order to support your users effectively. We present a fistful of useful support tips.

By Dennis Jarrett
IT Journalist

Web Content

Importing Formatted Documents

FrontPage frequently can't handle complex formatting when you try to import a word-processed document, so in general it makes sense to strip out the formatting. Copy the text into a FrontPage page, select it, then press Ctrl+Spacebar (or choose Format | Remove Formatting). This removes all previous formatting.

Custom Counters

You can produce a custom image for the hit counter in FrontPage simply by creating a GIF with the numbers "0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9". It can be any size and any colour, but the numbers must be evenly spaced. Put this GIF into the root of your Web. Then use Insert | Component | Hit Counter and select that file as the Custom Picture. FrontPage will separate the image automatically into 10 pieces and will use the appropriate number accordingly.

Instant Quiz

Well, not quite instant; but Microsoft has an add-in for FrontPage 2000 which definitely simplifies the construction of computer-based quizzes and questionnaires with multiple choice and true/false questions. The results are scored automatically, and the FrontPage 2000 Quizzing Engine has a variety of options for administering quizzes. Questions and answers can contain anything that is supported by a Web browser - various media types, dynamic effects using dynamic HTML, and more. It's a 2.8 MB download; information at **www.microsoft.com/education/planning/online/Score.asp**.

Importing From Excel

When you paste or drag from Excel 2000 into a new FrontPage 2000 page, all the formatting for text in the cells will be lost. That's because Excel creates an embedded style sheet that writes the formatting code for the document; this embedded style sheet is not copied when you copy or drag part of a worksheet into FrontPage. The workaround is to use Word 2000 as an intermediate step - copy or drag from Excel into a new Word document, select it, then drag into FrontPage.

Task Management

Alternative Download Times

In Page view you get a status bar at the foot of the display that estimates the time that page will take to download at 28.8 Kbits/sec. These days that may be unrealistically slow - or you may want to be sure that the hapless few stuck with 14.4 Kbits/sec modems will still see your work in reasonable time. Click on the 28.8 estimate in the status bar and you'll get a pop-up menu from which you can select another connection speed, from 14.4 to T3. The new speed selection will be shown as the default for all pages you edit or create in the session, but next time you start up FrontPage it will have reverted to 28.8.

External Style Sheets

Creating a consistent look for a large Web site can be a difficult task, but style

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sheets can help. External style sheets can be especially useful since one file can be used throughout every page on your site. It's easy in FrontPage 2000 to set a "house style" for a group of Web sites by using a common style sheet. In Page view, select Format|Style Sheet Links and use Add to reference a style file from anywhere in your current site, your hard drive, or the Internet. Select the master style sheet and click OK.

HTML Validators

HTML code checkers generally return the line number of code that needs to be fixed. Once that meant laborious counting by hand or workarounds involving copying to a text editor with line numbering. In FrontPage 2000 you right-click anywhere in the HTML view, select Go To on the shortcut menu, and type in a line number.

Print Task List

FrontPage doesn't let you print out the task list associated with a Web. You can however read the .htm pages on which the information is stored, and can print the list from your browser. Fire up your browser and use File|Open to locate the _vti_pvt directory within your Web, where there are two documents - _x_todo.htm, which is the active task list, and _x_todoh.htm, which contains the task history (completed tasks).

Navigation

Updateable Navigational Pages

It is essential to have simple, effective and accurate navigational tools on a Web site, of course. But it can be tricky to maintain their accuracy if new pages and new sections are added. Much the easiest option is to create pages that contain the navigational elements and then include them as a frame. Use Insert|Component|Include Page to add the navigation to each page on which it is needed. Thereafter a single update of the navigational page will provide an update to the entire site.

Navigation View Tools

A more powerful way to include navigational tools is to create them directly in FrontPage through the Insert|Navigation Bar command. This feature automatically creates a navigation bar that you can customise to suit your exact needs, with navigation elements created either in text or with graphical buttons based on any theme being used for the entire site. The drawback is that the Navigation Bar command is available only if the entire site is being created in the FrontPage Navigation View. That's not necessarily a problem, but it means you can't normally use the facility if you're editing someone else's site.

Shared Borders

Another option for navigational tools is through the use of Shared Borders, a defined area of the page that will be reserved for a common set of navigation elements. You can set up to four shared borders, using the Format|Shared Borders command. Shared borders do require some planning ahead, since you cannot alter their position, but you can switch any or all of the shared borders off on specific pages. Although Shared Borders can make use of the Navigation Bar facility, that is not mandatory; you can design your own navigational elements. Nor does the Shared Border option require that a site be built using the Navigational View.

Compatibility

Choose Target Browsers

Get used to setting the browser type, browser version and the server type that you are designing pages for. Go to Tools|Page Options|Compatibility for a dialog box that specifies those settings and more; you will not be able to create anything that uses any functionality that has not been selected here (unless you choose to code it directly into the HTML). If you want to be certain that your site is viewable on as many different browsers as possible, uncheck all the options.

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FrontPage Extensions

Not all Web hosts support FrontPage extensions. You can check whether a particular host does have FP extensions installed by going to **www.Webdev.net/-fpexist.asp**. If you're building a site with FP extensions and you haven't signed up with a Web host yet, there are a few free ISPs on which you can test your pages. Try Tripod at **www.tripod.com/build/frontpage/** or Angelfire at **angelfire.ly-cos.com/**; you do of course carry their advertising, which can distort the balance of the page, but some services do let you opt for pop-up windows rather than on-page banners.

Disable FrontPage Extensions

To ensure compatibility with servers that don't use the FrontPage Server Extensions you can disable that functionality. Go to Tools | Page Options | Compatibility and deselect the Enabled With Microsoft FrontPage Server Extensions checkbox. These commands will now be unavailable (greyed out on the Insert | Component menus):

Hit Counter; Confirmation Field; Include Page; Scheduled Include Page; Categories; Search Form; Additional Components.

And you won't be able to use these new-page templates:

Confirmation Form; Feedback Form; Form Page Wizard; Guest Book; Search Page; Table of Contents; User Registration.

Additionally, these Wizards are unavailable:

Corporate Presence Wizard; Customer Support Web; Discussion Web Wizard; Personal Web; Project Web.

Incidentally, when you disable FP Extensions by clearing the Enabled With Microsoft FrontPage Server Extensions checkbox in the Page Options dialog, you may find that some of the templates and wizards that insert Web elements which rely on FP Extensions are not disabled. This is a known bug.

ftp To Hosts Without FP Extensions

In order to use any functionality that requires FrontPage Extensions on the server, you'll need to use File | Publish to upload the files - that way you don't run the risk of corrupting the FP Extensions. But uploading to hosts without FP Server Extensions requires an ftp utility. Any will do, but check KISSfp; it integrates with FrontPage, installing a new set of options under a Custom menu item. KISSfp also compresses HTML to reduce download time for your site visitors and save space on your host. Details (and 21-day shareware download) can be found at **www.kissfp.com**.

It is possible to publish a Web just as you would any FrontPage site and so avoid using a separate ftp program: publish it to ftp://hostpath, where hostpath is the URL your host has given you for the site.

Wordwrap In Form Fields

Another irritating difference between IE and Navigator is the way they handle scrolling text boxes in forms. With IE, text will automatically wrap round on to the next line, as you'd expect. In Navigator, the text simply scrolls horizontally as a single line. You can fix this and force sensible wrapping for both by adding the wrap="virtual" attribute after the cols= attribute in the <textarea> tag for the field.

Editing

Quick Link

Ctrl+O is a quick way to open a new file, but you can open a specific page from a hyperlink by holding down Ctrl while clicking on the link.

Work In Two Windows

In FrontPage 2000, you can open more than one instance of the application simply by selecting Window | New Window. You can then open a different project or page and drag and drop or copy and paste content from one to the other.

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Easier HTML

Microsoft has a free download called HTML Tools which allows you to access and modify HTML tags directly while you're editing a page in Normal view. It's not as easy as entering HTML code directly, but you do get to see the effect of the HTML on a WYSIWYG view. Install the download, and the next time you use FrontPage a new toolbar will be available at the foot of the Normal display. Move the insertion point to the area you want to edit and the HTML Tools toolbar will show the tags relating to your current selection; on the toolbar, click the tag you want to edit and the elements affected will be selected on the page.

You can now use the toolbar to wrap a new tag around the one that is currently selected; you can edit the tag; and you can remove it altogether. There's also an Insert HTML button for applying new tags. There are a couple of caveats: you can't edit tags that were created by applying a theme, and you can't use the HTML Tools with an Input Method Editor (IME, used for entering Asian text). Find it on the Web at **officeupdate.microsoft.com/2000/downloadDetails/fphtml.htm**; the download is only 160 KB.

Quick DHTML

As with other Office applications, the Format Painter tool lets you format text by copying attributes from one piece of text and pasting it on to another. In FrontPage 2000, the Format Painter also lets you copy Dynamic HTML effects. If you use a lot of DHTML it makes sense to create a whole page containing your most frequently used DHTML effects; that way you can easily format-paint by picking up the format from the template page and pasting it on to text in a work-in-progress page.

Global Change

Some information appears several times across your Web site - a company address, for instance, or maybe a disclaimer. When this information changes it can be a hassle to update every occurrence on the Web. One option is to use search and replace in the HTML. Use Edit | Replace, enter the search text and its replacement, and click the All Pages checkbox before starting the process. Or you could create a variable for the common information to be displayed on more than one page. Variables act as placeholders; when you modify the variable, FrontPage will automatically update every instance of that variable. Variables are defined from Tools | Web Settings | Parameters tab; there may be several listed already. Click the Add button to enter some more. You place the variable in Page Normal view by taking the cursor to insertion point, then using Insert | FrontPage Component | Substitution. The drop-down list on the arrow next to the Substitute With box will list all the variables available; select the one you want. Changing a variable simply means going back to the Parameters dialog box and changing the value against a particular variable.

Underlining On Hyperlinks

If you don't care for underlined hyperlinks you can remove them in the HTML by adding a style="text-decoration:none" qualifier to the HREF as follows:

Text to click on .

Remove the style to restore underlining. There's an easy FrontPage add-in that does the same thing available on the Web at **Web.nova1.net/Webbink**.

Images

Cut Image File Sizes

When you resize an image in the Page view by dragging on its handles, you don't actually make the image itself any smaller (and so the estimated download time indicator won't change). You can reduce the file size once you've resized the image, though: click the Resample button on the Pictures toolbar. That should also improve the image's appearance.

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New Reviews from Tech Support Alert

Anti-Trojan Software Reviews

A detailed review of six of the best anti trojan software programs. Two products were impressive with a clear gap between these and other contenders in their ability to detect and remove dangerous modern trojans.

Inkjet Printer Cartridge Suppliers

Everyone gets inundated by hundreds of ads for inkjet printer cartridges, all claiming to be the cheapest or best. But which vendor do you believe? Our editors decided to put them to the test by anonymously buying printer cartridges and testing them in our office inkjet printers. Many suppliers disappointed but we came up with several web sites that offer good quality cheap inkjet cartridges with impressive customer service.

Windows Backup Software

In this review we looked at 18 different backup software products for home or SOHO use. In the end we could only recommend six though only two were good enough to get our "Editor's Choice" award

The 46 Best Freeware Programs

There are many free utilities that perform as well or better than expensive commercial products. Our Editor Ian Richards picks out his selection of the very best freeware programs and he comes up with some real gems.