

# HOW TO USE FRONTPAGE TO DESIGN A CORPORATE INTRANET

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*Microsoft FrontPage is used extensively in small and medium-sized companies to create both Intranet and Internet Web sites, even though professional Web designers turn up their noses at it.*

*This paper reviews some of the factors that led to its widespread usage, and gives some pointers to non-professional Web Mistresses.*

## INTRODUCTION

While professionals may be involved in creating an Intranet, the actual updating of an Intranet is almost always in the hands of non-professional, Web-responsible employees. Often each department has an Internet group, which discusses and reviews content, and one person responsible for actually updating the department's section of the Intranet. This person is often an administrative assistant who has taken a class or two on using FrontPage.

I have been using FrontPage since it came out in the Beta Version in 1997, and currently use the 2000 edition—although I also have some experience with the 2002 version. I have used FrontPage to create Internet sites for small businesses and organizations, and worked within the confines of larger corporate Intranets using templates and style guides. I used Macromedia DreamWeaver in a classroom situation in 2000, so I am somewhat familiar with its capabilities for advanced design projects.

## Reasons for Using FrontPage

### Easy to Learn

Web Mistresses find it very easy to learn how to use FrontPage, since they are already using other Microsoft products. Almost all formatting is done with the same tools as Microsoft Word, while more specific Web tools are accessed by right-clicking.

### What You See Is What You Get

The program has an excellent WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) working screen, with easy access to checking the page, both in preview form and in a browser. Furthermore, a user who has learned some HTML (Hypertext Markup Language) can easily access the page's code. This is rarely needed, but may be used for troubleshooting by the company IT department.

## Access Control

FrontPage enables easy division of the Intranet into separate departmental Webs, to which write-permission can be limited to the responsible Web Mistresses. Thus there is less chance that larger areas can be damaged.

## Shared Borders

FrontPage pioneered the concept of Shared Borders, which is a great improvement on frames for navigation. Each page in a Web can have the same borders, e.g., a top border with company and corporate links, a side border with navigation, and a bottom border with details like revision date and author.

Unlike frames, the borders scroll along with the page, so they cannot be seen if the page is long, but their advantage far exceeds this disadvantage. Shared borders are part of the page itself, so you can link directly to a page, which is displayed with the correct border (Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Examples of the uses of shared borders**

Shared borders are a quick and easy way to give your pages a consistent look. The following are examples of ways to use shared borders:

- Add a page banner to a shared top border to ensure each page has a title.
- Add the company logo to a shared top border.
- Add a navigation bar to let site visitors get to the main pages in your web.
- Add a copyright notice in a shared bottom border.
- Add the date and time the web was last modified.
- Add an e-mail address for feedback, such as the Web Mistress' address.

## **Navigation View**

FrontPage also offers a navigation view, where the Web Mistress organizes page relationships in a flowchart that does not need to conform to file structure. This structure can be displayed automatically in navigation text or buttons on the shared borders.

## **Criticism of the HTML Generated by FrontPage**

Detractors of FrontPage often point out that it generates excessive HTML code, which makes pages take longer to load in a browser than they need to. This has not been my experience for pages produced entirely within FrontPage. However, if you save a Word document as an HTML file before importing it into FrontPage, the code is oppressive and difficult to work with. See the tips below for importing from Word.

## **Comparing FrontPage with Other Programs**

Although professional Web programs such as Macromedia DreamWeaver, Adobe GoLive, and Quark XPress have facilities to produce exciting and creative Web sites, this is not necessary or even desirable in most Intranets. FrontPage is excellent for non-professionals who produce Intranets to provide information rather than sell a product, because FrontPage is easy to learn and makes it easy to update Intranet content.

## **Tips for Using FrontPage**

### **Templates and Style Sheets**

- Before you design a template for an Intranet, visit other Web sites and note what works and what doesn't, in particular:
    - Which color combinations work. Make sure that there is distinct contrast between background and text colors. Blue text on a black background is very difficult to read!
    - How much scrolling you can tolerate.
    - How pictures enhance or distract from the text.
    - How long it takes pages to load.
    - Ease to find the information you are looking for.
  - Use templates and a cascading style sheet (CSS) to ensure a standard appearance throughout the site, and make it easier to change formatting in the future.
  - Use the corporate logo on each page. If the company colors are appropriate, use them for headings and other decoration.
  - Assign Departments certain details to distinguish their Web from the others. In one company, each department used different color for lines, buttons, table outlines, and such within its own Web.
- Use a legible font. Arial or another standard sans serif font (without leading lines) is best on screen. The size should be 10 or 12 points. Check on screens with various resolutions before deciding.
  - Ensure navigation to all departments from each department's Web. This can be on the top border, leaving the side borders to the individual departments.

### **Page Layout**

- Lay out the pages in two or three columns, depending on the width of the side border. Your readers will be much happier reading short lines on the screen.
- Use tables with invisible borders to organize the material on the screen. FrontPage has a way of sliding things around on a page if they are not contained. Create the table with the number of columns you want on your page. Make new tables for new sections, rather than one long table for the entire page; this gives you more flexibility.
- Divide your information where possible into screen-sized chunks, using navigational links to other sections.
- Make sure that your page does not need horizontal scrolling. Check the page on several screens of different size and resolution to be sure that it will fit on all of them. It is often easiest to assign the page width to 100%
- In most cases, do not use long pages that have to be scrolled forever, unless the page is a single document that the reader might want to print in its entirety. Or provide a printable version separately.
- Provide a table of contents at the top of long documents, linking to bookmarks in the text. You may want to include navigation throughout the text.
- To avoid excessive code when converting a WORD doc to FrontPage:
  - Use styles in WORD that have the same names as HTML tags.
  - Copy the text directly on to the page rather than save it as HTML.
  - In the WYSIWYG view, you can then apply “default font” and “default size” to clean up some of the extra code.
  - Even better: save the document as RTF first.
  - Copy images into the FrontPage WSYSYG view, but be careful of size (see the next tip).
- Prepare all images in another program before adding them to your FrontPage file.
  - In general, save diagrams and drawings as GIF or PNG and photos as JPG.
  - Use as low resolution as possible while keeping a clear screen picture.
  - Size images appropriately. I have found that 150x200 pixels is large enough.
  - If you want your readers to have access to the picture in greater detail (for example if you

- expect the reader to print it), you can link to a larger picture, which takes longer to open.
- Importing tables usually creates problems.
  - Re-create small tables within FrontPage.
  - Copy larger table (with all the code) directly into the Web page.
  - I try to avoid the typical Web tables with broad borders. Set cell spacing to 0, padding to about 5, and border to 0 (if it is to be invisible) or 1-2 and maybe colored (if not).
  - Place tables within tables to get special effects.

## ***Options for Serving and Accessing Intranets***

In a very small company, the Intranet could be placed on a computer that is part of the regular network, giving employees read-only access to that particular file. You can create a shortcut with a special icon that they can place on their desktop or status bar.

In most companies, the Intranet is best placed on a separate server. The Web Mistresses make their initial updates in a draft version, which is then easily published to the server from FrontPage. This Intranet will be accessible as usual in a browser, although it is advisable to create a shortcut for the site, or to make the department home page the employees' standard start page to ensure that employees find and use it.

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Bonnie's Web site at [www.byelverton.net](http://www.byelverton.net) has links to some of her Web sites and PDFs from an Intranet site (some of these are in Danish).