

Building



sites

When you visit some of the high-profile Web sites that are plugged all over the place these days, it's easy to think that there must be a lot of work involved in creating something for the World Wide Web. In fact, it's relatively simple to create a basic page. Hypertext Markup Language (HTML), which is used to create pages, is very basic, but you don't even need to worry about learning that any more.

As the Web has grown more and more popular, it's become accessible to virtually everyone who has some sort of Internet connection, and you'd be hard pushed to find a way of connecting to the Net that doesn't come with a free Web area included. This allows you to publish your own documents, whether it's a simple page to tell the world who you are, or a complete guide to a hobby, or the place where you live, or more or less anything you like.

And just as you'd expect, with so many people having the space to create their Web pages, there's now a huge range of programs that you can use to help make designing your home on the Internet much easier.

No longer do you have to know about HTML – the latest generation of tools come very close to letting you create Web pages in a way that's almost as straightforward as writing a letter in a word processor.

Creating your own Web pages is getting easier all the time, and you might not need to buy a Web editing package to do so – you could already have all you need in your office software. We test six products specifically intended to help you design your Web site, and look at the other options

Think before you link

Once you've decided what you want on a Web site – and it's a good idea to think about it a little first, so that you know which topics need different pages, and so on – then your next step is to write the words and use a Web editor to mark them up with headings, different types of text, and links. You'll also need to think about adding some graphics, such as buttons to lead people to other pages, or photographs.

With some Web editors, you'll be left out on your own, having to create everything yourself, and indeed some of them will be virtually impossible to use if you don't know any HTML. But with others you'll find templates, wizards and a large collection of clip-art to help you add instant colour, even if you've never been near a Web designer before.

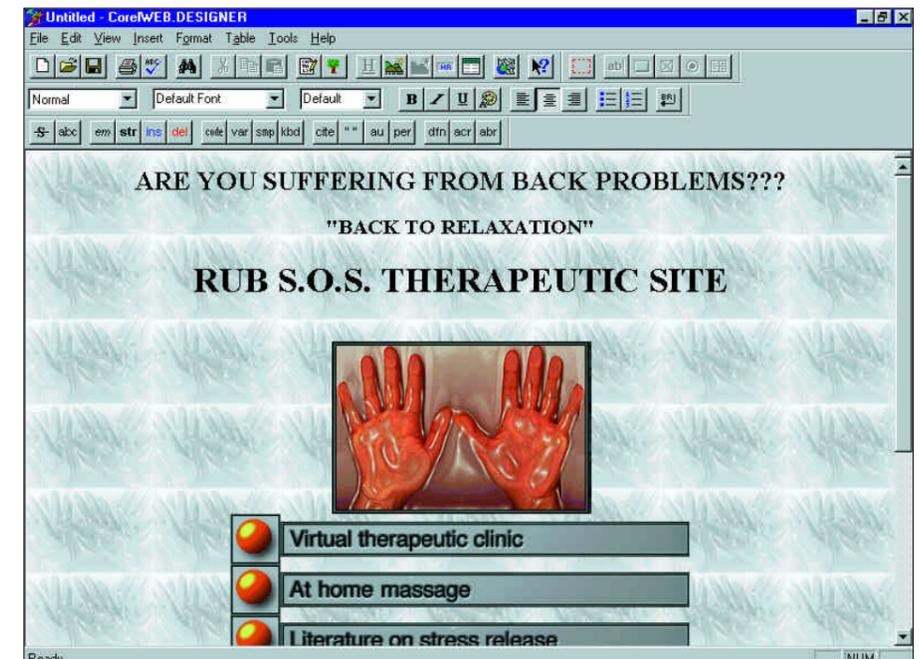
You'll even find some programs that will be able to take a word-processed document and turn it straight into a Web page that looks uncannily like the original.

Not all of these are essential parts of a Web editor, though, and you'll find it useful to have some extra tools in your armoury if you want to create Web pages. These extras include an image-editing program that can be used to create buttons, scan photographs and touch up images.

There are a few other things that, while not essential, may be useful to have. If you have a moderately powerful PC, then a Web server can help you to make sure your pages work properly before you upload them to the Internet Provider. And you'll need an FTP (File Transfer Protocol) program to do the actual upload.

When you start to look at the Web-editing packages that are on the market, and even the six that we've reviewed here, you'll find that some are little more than a simple way of marking your words as HTML, while others include megabytes of graphics to spice things up, automatic upload systems, and all the extra features that you're likely to need. Does that mean they're necessarily the best ones around? Perhaps not – when you can find all the extras really easily on the Net itself, and often free of charge, the bumper package that's on offer from MegaCorp may not be such a good deal as it seems at first sight.

The important thing, especially for the beginner, is the basic one – how easy is it to produce good-looking Web pages? The extras may look nice on paper, but this is one area where you shouldn't let them hide the task in hand.



Corel Web Graphics Suite

If you're looking for a package that comes with everything short of the kitchen sink, this could be the answer to your prayers. The suite comprises Web.Designer itself, a cut-down drawing package to help you create buttons and image maps, an animation tool, a large library of images (complete with a book so you can see them all easily), a conversion program for turning word processor files into Web pages, and a tool for creating VRML worlds – virtual reality for your Web pages, plus a Web server.

There's certainly more than most people will need here, but is it any good?

The extra tools are certainly nifty; they integrate well with the Web.Designer, so you can easily import new components from them into your page, and it's about the most painless way of creating detailed animations, either as Java applets or animated GIFs, so they'll be viewable by people with just about any browser.

Whether or not you'll find suitable material in the clip-art library or the templates is largely a matter of taste, but there's probably at least a little of something there for everyone.

The inclusion of a VRML editor is novel but, in practice, likely to be of little use to many people, as it can be quite hard work to construct a good-quality virtual world.

What you'll really want is the designer itself, and Web.Transit, which converts word processor files to Web pages. They're separate programs, but work well enough together, and you can customise

how the different style sheets in your documents are translated.

All of this is rather let down, unfortunately, by the Web editor itself, which while easy to use isn't as full-featured as the competition. It lacks some of the latest options, like the ability to set the colour of table cells, and support for frames – the ability to display more than one HTML page on the screen simultaneously. This is very handy for providing navigational controls – the controls can remain static while the other pages update.

The Web editor felt a little sluggish in use. However, if you're not looking to do work at the cutting edges of Web technology, it'll do quite well. Ultimately, the decision you have to make is whether or not you want all the extras from one source, or if you'd prefer to choose a more powerful editor and grab the other parts from elsewhere. An impressive array of extra facilities, but it's let down a little by having a slightly below par editor.

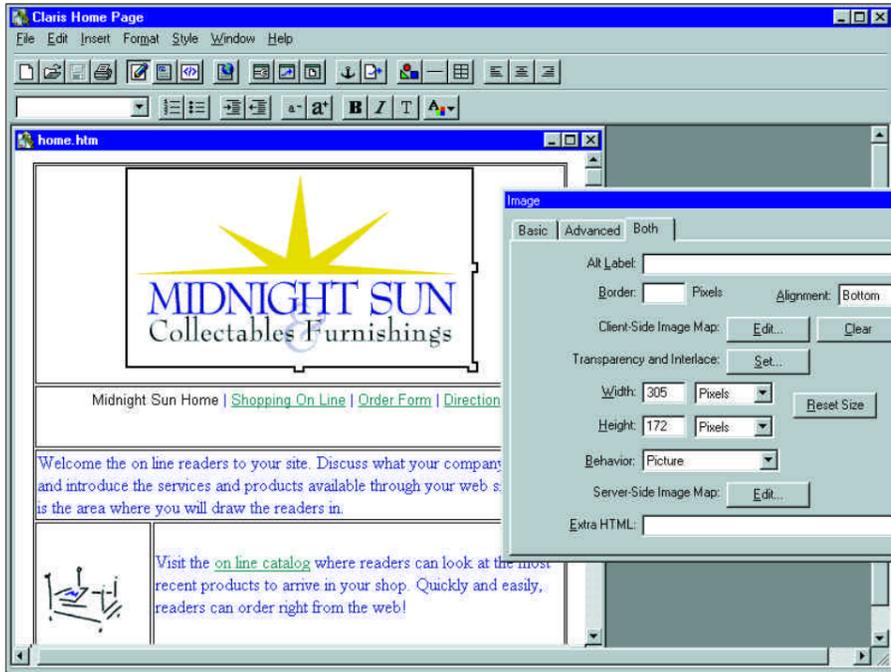
£187 (inc VAT)
Corel: 0800 581028

Corel Web Graphics Suite

Ease of use	★★★★
Features	★★★★
Documentation	★★★★
Value for money	★★★
Overall	★★★

Clarix Homepage 2.0

Clarix Homepage is another of the efforts by large software companies to muscle in on the Web editing market. The package includes a range of clip-art buttons and dividers, a tutorial (in Acrobat for-▶



colour of table cells. However, all the features that are there work very well, and there's also extensive help throughout.

There aren't as many of the bells and whistles that you'll find in Microsoft's FrontPage, but it's still a very worthy competitor; see for yourself with the downloadable trial.

£105.73 (inc VAT)
Claris: 0800 929005

Claris HomePage 2.0

Ease of use	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Documentation	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★

Microsoft FrontPage 97

FrontPage 97 is the latest update to Microsoft's Web authoring program. Although there are a number of new features, the guts of the program are still very much the same as the previous version, 1.1.

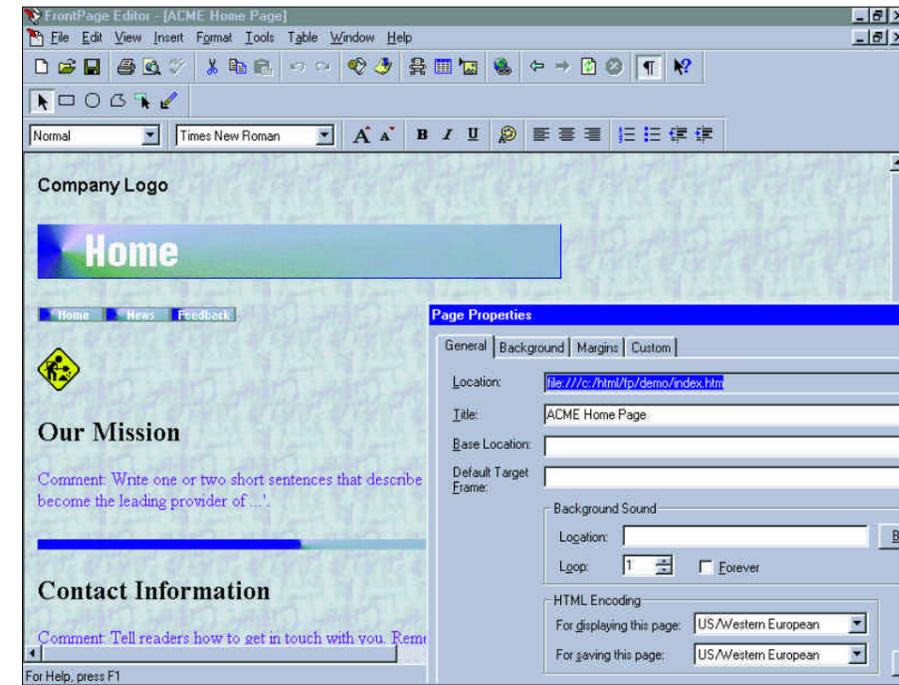
FrontPage is divided into two main sections: the Explorer and the Editor. Don't confuse FrontPage Explorer with Internet Explorer. The FP Explorer is a tool for managing your Web site, which is what helps to set FrontPage aside from most of the other tools that we've looked at, which just take a page-based view of your Web site.

As well as the Explorer, the Bonus Pack includes a photo editor and an image composer, designed to help you create complex images from separate parts, and the Publishing Wizard, which transfers your pages to a Web server. There's a Personal Web Server too, which can be used to test your pages.

What's site management, then? FrontPage works around the

concept of 'Webs' – collections of pages. The Explorer shows all the pages in your Web, and the links between them, so you have a proper overview of your whole site. It also provides some other useful features, like the ability to check the spelling in all your pages at the same time, and to import existing pages into the Web. It's also the mechanism by which pages can be transferred (in a non-standard, Microsoft sort of way) to a Web server at one of the very few UK providers that supports the FrontPage Web extensions – most people will need the wizard instead, so it's a shame it's not built in.

The actual editor is one of the



Microsoft FrontPage 97

Ease of use	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Documentation	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★

NetScape Communicator 4

Composer is the Web authoring section of NetScape Communicator, the bundle that includes NetScape Navigator 4. When you first start it up, the similarity with the older Navigator Gold product is quite noticeable.

There's a blank window, with word processor-like toolbars at the top, and the main concessions to Web design are buttons for creating links, anchors and inserting images – much of the HTML is handled by options from the Format and Insert menus, though you can create lists and set the common HTML styles from the toolbars.

As you'd expect from a Win-

mat, so you'll need a reader), some templates and samples.

Unlike its closest competitor, which is probably Microsoft FrontPage, there's no site overview. That's not to say, however, that there's no concept of sites; you can define a directory tree as a site, and the program will automatically consolidate it when necessary, ensuring images are all in the right place, and even uploading the pages via FTP to a remote server if you like – you just lose the overall view that FrontPage's Explorer gives you.

The interface is less slick, too, but nevertheless simple to get to grips with, and its context-sensitive menus appear with a right click. Like SoftQuad's HoTMetaL (see later), you can control most of the main attributes through the dialog

boxes that pop up with the mouse click, but you also have the option of seeing only Basic or Advanced items, which means that newcomers won't be as intimidated.

There's support for frames, through a wizard, but you'll have to create the pages to place in each frame first, which may not suit everyone, and you'll only see a real preview of frames by launching a browser. It's still fairly simple to get to grips with the technique, though, and specifying the target for a link is easy, thanks to the context-sensitive help that appears at the bottom of most dialogs.

Some other modern features are lacking – while there's support for plug-ins, Java applets and other modern features like text colour, you can't set the background

Multimedia on the Web

While the tools that we've looked at in this review can help you to create good-looking Web pages which include colours, tables and more, there are limits to the multimedia capabilities they have.

That's because HTML just describes the page; when you visit a lot of Web sites, the animations and graphics that you see may not even be part of the standard HTML – looking with an older browser would be much less interesting.

There are some things that you can do with the tools we've seen here: basic animations, like text that scrolls from side to side, can be added to a page with a few bits of HTML, or from the menu in some programs, like FrontPage and HoTMetaL. And in any program you can insert a special type of picture called an Animated GIF. That's a special version of an ordinary graphics file that contains more than one picture and cycles through them all, just like flipping the pages of a book. With shareware programs like GIF Construction Set, you can build your own GIFs to add simple animations to your pages.

However, much of the clever stuff that you'll see on the

Web relies on 'plug-ins' or scripts – things that aren't HTML at all. By placing appropriate HTML in your own page, a Web browser can be told to use a plug-in to display a particular type of file, or run a script, or even a program on your hard disk.

The HTML that makes this happen is easy, and some of the programs we've reviewed even generate it for you. But you'll still have to create the scripts, or the files to be displayed. In the case of Java or ActiveX, that means real computer programming to create a genuinely original effect, though you can use a Java 'applet' or an ActiveX control that someone else has written and just supply it with your own information. For other types of file, like ShockWave, which is a way of putting multimedia presentations on the Web, you'll have to learn how to use a separate tool to create the files.

So, while it's possible to pick up the basics of some of the latest multimedia Web technology, if you want to exploit it, you'll have to learn a lot more than HTML and invest in more than just a Web editor.

best around, with full support for drag and drop, and the ability to insert pictures, sounds and other multimedia components easily. It also has a comprehensive range of 'bots' which automate certain tasks, like hiding parts of your pages after a certain date, or handling responses from readers. It's a shame, however, that there's no prominent warning that these won't work unless your provider supports the FrontPage extensions.

That niggle aside, this is a good tool, with plenty of power, that's easy to use, and has some handy features like a ToDo list that make sure you don't forget which pages still need work. It's well worth a serious look.

A powerful tool, but the wizard for those of us without MS Web servers should be built in, not an afterthought.

£99 (inc VAT)
Microsoft: 0345 002000



dows 95 application, you can also alter the properties of page elements, like pictures, by clicking on them with the right mouse button and choosing options from the menu. However, when you do this you'll notice some rather odd things – though as this was a preview copy, they may be changed in the final release of the software.

With a modern HTML editor, you can push pictures over to the right-hand side of the page. However, even if you choose to do that in Composer, you won't see anything happen. Instead, you'll have to open the page in the browser to see what it's really going to look like.

Apart from that, this is a reasonable tool for creating basic pages, and it's clever enough to automatically transfer your work to the server for publishing. But it lacks the ease of use and ready access to features such as frames that you'll find on programs like HoTMetaL. That may change in future, and there's a mechanism for plug-ins which will allow new features to be added.

Web designers vs office suites

Do you really need a Web design program? If all your pages are fairly straightforward, or you want to publish documents that you've written already, then you may need to go no further than some of the programs already on your hard disk – or at least the next versions of them.

All the office suites, from Corel, Microsoft and Lotus, will include Web editing features in their next versions. Corel's is already shipping, and the others will be shortly. While none is the tool to use if you want a leading-edge Web site with Java, frames and the like, they'll all cope with tables, and can even take a document with embedded pictures and save it as a Web page with just a few clicks.

If you have one of these suites on your hard disk, don't rush out and buy a new Web tool – you certainly have all you need to get started, and you can always move up to a more full-featured package later.

If you want something that's all-singing-all-dancing, then you'll probably be better off looking elsewhere. But as a tool that's included with the browser, for people who want to create reasonable home pages, then it's quite good enough for the purpose. The templates (which are transferred from NetScape's server when you need them) will help you to get off to a good start, though since they come

from the server, you'll need to be connected to the Internet to use them – hardly ideal for people with modem connections.

A useful tool, with a good browser accompanying it, but it is not as straightforward as some of the competition.

ETBA
Netscape Communications:
home.netscape.com

Resources for Web authors

There is a tremendous amount of material available on the World Wide Web for people who want to create their own Web pages – this includes shareware and free software for editing pages and pictures, plus collections of buttons and art that you can use in your own pages to help spice them up. There are also tutorials that will teach you everything from the basics to how to create the latest, state-of-the-art Web pages.

Where can you find all this stuff? It's all on the Web. Here's where to find some of the most useful things.

GIF Construction Set

This is a useful piece of shareware, which you can use to create animated GIFs. All you need is a set of slightly different images, and the program will combine them into a single file that shows each of the images in turn. More details, including downloadable versions, are at www.mindworkshop.com/alchemy/gifcon.html.

HotDog

HotDog is one of the most popular HTML editors, and it's used by many people to create their Web pages. However, unlike the programs we've looked at here, you really are editing HTML, so you'll need to brush up with a tutorial first. If you just want to drag and drop, this isn't the program for you, but thousands swear by it. Visit www.sausage.com to find out more.

PaintShop Pro

This is one of the best tools that you can have for editing images, creating your own buttons for Web pages, and it'll also view just about anything that you can download from the Internet. You can download a trial version from www.digitalworkshop.co.uk/psp.htm.

Free graphics

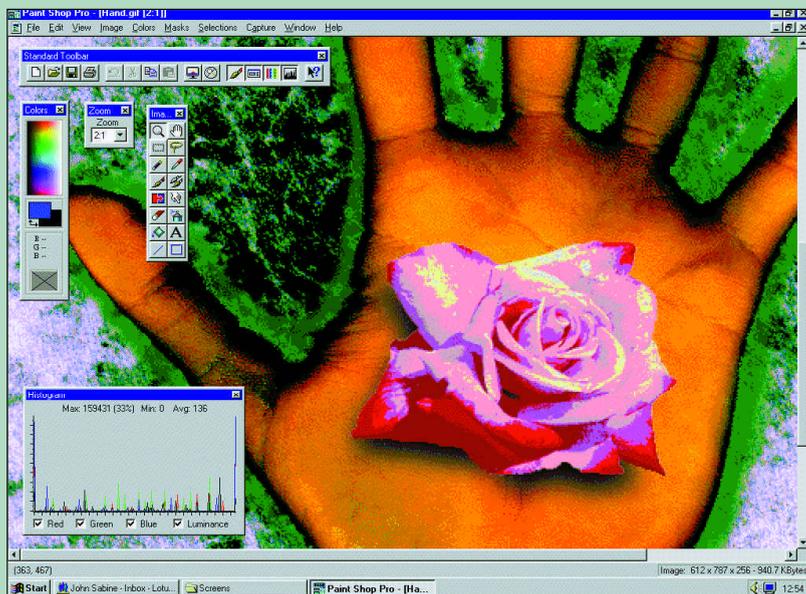
There's more in the way of free graphics on

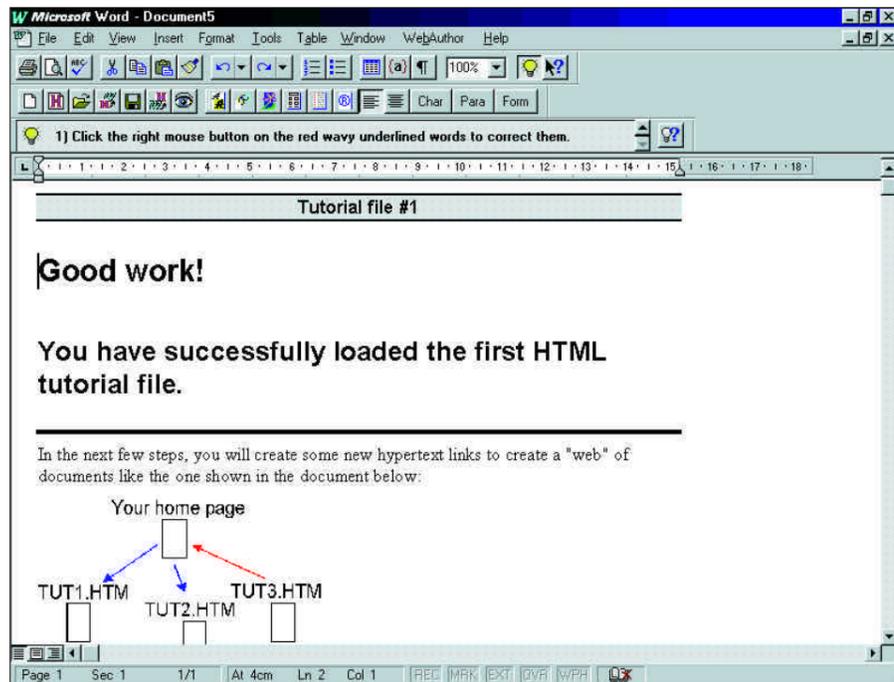
the Internet than you're likely to need, and if you don't fancy the idea of creating buttons and divider bars from scratch, why not check out the Yahoo list of icons and artwork, at

www.yahoo.com/Computers_and_Internet/Internet/World_Wide_Web/Page_Design_and_Layout/Icons/.

Tutorials

If you want to make the most of Web pages, it helps to understand a little bit about how HTML works. You can do worse than start with the HTML tutorial published last year in *What PC?*'s sister mag, *Personal Computer World*, at www.stonewall.demon.co.uk. There are many more, covering all sorts of aspects of the Web, so start at www.yahoo.com/Computers_and_Internet/Internet/World_Wide_Web/ and look under HTML or Tutorials and you'll also find helpful hints on creating your Web site at home.netscape.com/assist/net_sites/.





Netscape Communicator 4
 Ease of use ★★☆☆HH
 Features ★★☆☆HH
 Documentation ★★☆☆HH
 Value for money n/a
Overall ★★☆☆HH

Quarterdeck WebAuthor 2.5

If you want a Web editing tool that's as simple and straightforward as using a word processor, why not use a word processor? That's the thinking behind Quarterdeck's Web Author, designed to be used with Microsoft Word 6 or Word 7; if you already have one of those versions, all you need to do is install WebAuthor and you're away.

Since the guts of the package are Word, there's not much to install, though there's clip-art and an image-editing program to help you make a little more of things. Once everything has been set up, you'll find on starting Word that you have a couple of extra menu options, including WebAuthor at the bottom of the Tools menu.

In use, we found WebAuthor a little slow, and nowhere near as simple to get to grips with as the other packages. By default, the screen is split in two, with a narrow column on the left that shows which element of the page you're working on; while that may be helpful in some situations, it takes up space. Thankfully, it can be turned off. There are also some other serious irritations; if you want a list on your Web page, you can't just type items on successive lines, highlight them and click the list button. You'll have to choose list first, then type things in.

There's also a lack of control over many elements of the page, with no support for right alignment of text, for example, or coloured text – unless you want to change it for the whole document. On a more positive note, creating tables is very simple, using the standard Word tools, though again, colour control for the cells is absent.

If you have Word 6 or Word 7, and just want a simple way to do very basic pages, then this might be worth looking at, but it's really far too limited for anything more than the most basic, and many users will be better off spending their money on an upgrade to the latest version of Word, which beats WebAuthor

hands down on HTML facilities. This looks rather dated now, and many users will be better off with an upgrade to the latest version of Word, or an alternative package.

£49.99 (inc VAT)
 Quarterdeck: 0645 123521

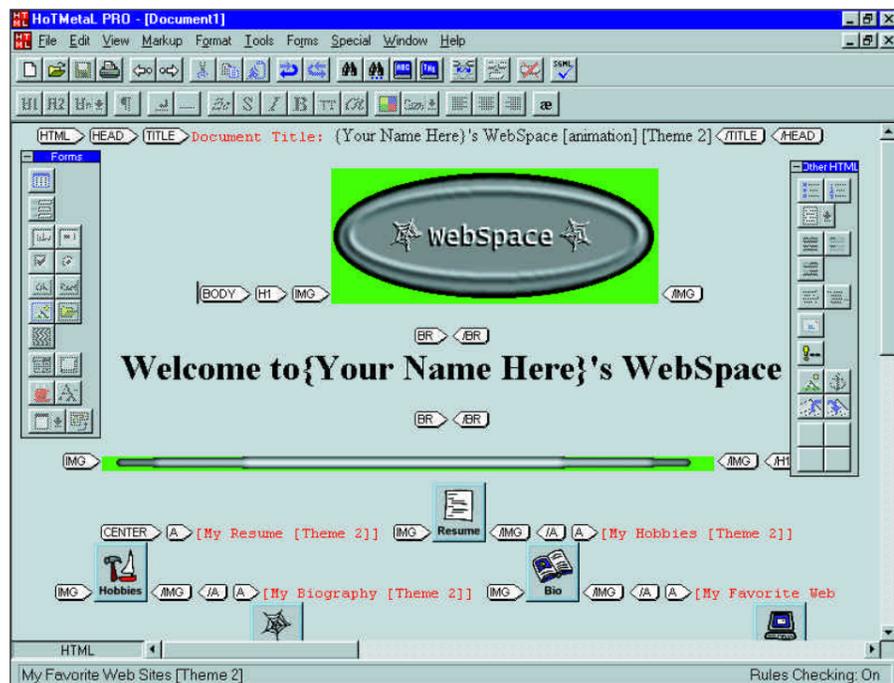
Quarterdeck WebAuthor 2.5
 Ease of use ★★☆☆HH
 Features ★★☆☆HH
 Documentation ★★☆☆HH
 Value for money ★★☆☆HH
Overall ★★☆☆HH

SoftQuad HoTMetal Pro 3.0

HoTMetal Pro is one of the most popular Web authoring tools around, and if you have a Demon Internet account, chances are you'll already have the Lite version.

Unlike Microsoft's FrontPage, HoTMetal doesn't attempt to hide the mechanics of HTML from you, and if you're a newcomer to Web design, you may be absolutely terrified by the interface, which has more buttons that you're ever likely to have seen before. As if that's not scary enough, every tag on your Web page is shown beside the text to which it applies, which can give a very technical intimidating feel. Fortunately, you can turn off the display of tags, which will give a much more Wysiwyg feel to everything, though it's still not as straightforward as using the browser.

There's support for every variation of HTML in the program, and you can even tell it to highlight which tags you've used that are specific to a certain Web browser



Web designer software compared						
	Corel Web Graphics Suite	Claris Homepage 2.0	Microsoft FrontPage 97	Netscape Communicator 4	Quarterdeck WebAuthor 2.5	SoftQuad HoTMetal Pro 3.0
Product features						
Tables	(no colours)	(no colours)			(no colours)	
Frames	m				m	
Edit HTML source	m			m (launch separate app)	m	
Insert Java/ActiveX	m				m	
Spell-checker	m			m		
Server upload	m				m	m
Word processor import	via separate program	m		m		
Site management	m	m		m	m	
Bundled extras						
Web server		m		m	m	m
Image editor		m		m	m	m
Animation		m	m	m	m	m
Drawing		m		m	m	m
Virtual reality editor		m	m	m	m	m
Clip-art & images				m		
Downloadable demo	m	www.claris.com	m	www.netscape.com	www.quarterdeck.com	previous version: www.softquad.com
Notes					Runs within MS Word, and inherits many features from it	

| = Yes m = No

so that you can be sure everything will be all right for your target audience. There's support for inserting Java applets and ActiveX controls in your pages, and updates for new technologies can be downloaded from SoftQuad's Web pages. By the time this review appears, there will also be a site management update to help keep track of all your pages.

Frames and forms can be designed graphically, though the frame editor isn't integrated into the main page editor, and specifying which frame a link should appear in is a little fiddly.

There are some other fiddly aspects too – for example, preparing a page for publication can be tricky, as references to images may all need to be changed. The publish function takes care of this, and is really a glorified search and replace facility, but it would be better to have it happen automatically.

However, if you're prepared to invest a little time in understanding HTML, you'll find that it's a great tool that allows you to do more or less everything you need. There's also a wide range of templates included to get you started, and documents can be converted automatically from word processor files, though we had some problems with tables in Word documents, which were solved by importing RTF versions of the same files. Unbeatable for sheer power, but HoTMetal is a little intimidating if you don't want to worry about the

HTML underlying your page.
 £116.32
 SoftQuad: 0181 387 4130

SoftQuad HoTMetal Pro 3.0
 Ease of use ★★☆☆HH
 Features ★★☆☆HH
 Documentation ★★☆☆HH
 Value for money ★★☆☆HH
Overall ★★☆☆HH



The market for Web editors is growing, and it's becoming easier than ever for the complete novice to put together a page without any knowledge of HTML – though none of the programs here has blurred the boundary between Web editor and DTP (desktop publishing) quite as much as Adobe's forthcoming PageMill.

If your main concern is simply to produce some basic pages, then you may find that the job is amply catered for by the next generation of office suites.

For those who want pages that sparkle without hours of HTML hacking, there are two Web designer packages that stand out for the beginner – Claris Homepage and Microsoft FrontPage97. The latter has a slight edge, largely by virtue of the extras on the

CD, including a Web server and photo-editing program, and so wins the Best Buy.



Moving in the opposite direction is SoftQuad's HoTMetal Pro which, while powerful, will require much more of an effort from users who want to make the most of it, and a knowledge of HTML. That may be enough to put off the casual user, but if you see Web editing as a career move, it's the best tool for the job and earns a What PC? Recommended award.

Nigel Whitfield

