

Add some spice to your Web site, not just with pics of Geri and co (though that'd be nice) but with colour, fonts and animation. David Sikk takes you through stage three of his tutorial.



Missed the first two parts? Don't worry! If you have the CD edition of .net, you can catch up. First, install the Acrobat reader from the CD, then run it and load the PDF files from the Issue 29 and Issue 30 folders. You can then read the Hands-on HTML features on your screen.

This month

Adding images, background pictures, animations, text styles, colours, image maps.

Next month

Frames, forms and how CGI scripts work.

Create your own Web site

Part three

Web site visitors love colourful pages which feature tasteful graphics and fonts, whizz-bang animations and smart image maps. Much of the Web's success is due to a seemingly simple but brilliant ability to display graphics. However, as usual when you are trying to create simple but brilliant things, there is a catch.

Designing for the Web is always a compromise. The more picture-heavy your pages are, the longer they take to download, and this may determine whether they are read or simply passed by. Readers can be impatient and this is totally understandable

when they are paying good money to wait for ages to download someone's badly designed logo.

It's vital that you are careful when you use graphics on your pages. If you have no idea about painting packages or image formats, or even if you feel that you lack artistic flair, fear not. This third installment of our six part saga on creating your own Web site will fill you in on the favourite methods, programs and tricks of the trade. After reading this, you will be able to add striking fonts, flashes of colour and oodles of style your site. Go on, get the crayons out, put your smock on and come over all arty. ●

PICTURES AND FORMATS

There are loads of graphics file formats available to you, but fortunately you only have to concentrate on two. They are the Graphics Interchange Format (GIF) and the Joint Photographic Experts Group (JPEG) and both are supported by nearly all Web browsers. Each one has its good and bad points and choosing the right one for the job is important.

GIF format

GIFs were created by CompuServe to provide a way of quickly exchanging graphic image files over phone lines. They are stored in a compressed format and do a good job of compressing areas of uniform colour so that the time to download them is minimal. The big plus is that GIFs can be displayed on UNIX, Mac and Windows platforms. But they are not so good at dealing with complicated images, therefore try to keep the GIF format for simpler images, such as logos, which don't involve too many colours.

Interlaced GIFs

If you have seen pictures on the Web which appear first in a low-resolution format and gradually sharpen up

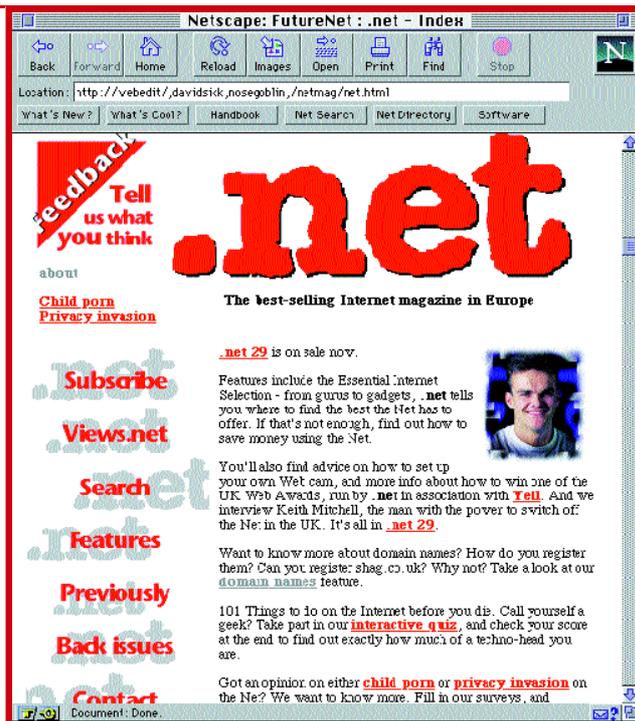
before your eyes, there is a good chance that the picture is an interlaced GIF. They have the advantage of enabling you to explore the rest of the page while the image is still downloading and are particularly smart and simple to achieve. Just specify it as an option in the SAVE AS dialog box of your graphics software.

JPEG

JPEG is a 'lossy' compression format – in other words it reduces the file size by reducing the quality of your image. This means it's great for photographs, but not so great for sharp borders and high-contrast areas. Leave those jobs for the GIF format.

A useful feature of the JPEG format is that you can specify the amount of compression you want for each image. Getting this right is a case of trial and error. High quality is less compressed with a ratio of about 5:1 to 15:1. JPEGs are decompressed when they are loaded into the browser. JPEG

Check out the Features area of .net's Web site at <http://www.futurenet.co.uk/> to see our HTML tips implemented before your very eyes. (And then nick the code for your pages.)



reduces images to about ten per cent of their original size or smaller.

Unfortunately, JPEGs don't support transparent colours, so you have to be careful when you are putting them on top of a background. Other drawbacks with JPEGs are that not all browsers are capable of displaying them and they don't interlace as well as GIFs.

Transparent GIFs

One of the problems of placing images such as logos on to a page with a background is that they have a tendency to appear in their own box instead of on top of the background colour. A handy feature of the GIF image format is the transparent colour option. When the browser shows one of these, the background will show through all the parts of the image specified as transparent. This is perfect if you want your image to neatly sit on top of the background instead of inside its own box. It's easy enough to achieve too. Just select the area you want made invisible with the transparent tool on your graphics software and save the image. Simple, fun and effective.

Including images

Once you have the image that you want, you can place it on the page with the following bit of HTML:

```
<IMG SRC="example.GIF"
width=30 height=60>
```

This will display the image at the specified size, aligned at the bottom. If you don't specify the image's size, it will appear as its actual size. This means that you can lay out the text on the page first, leaving spaces for the images to be

loaded in later. There are other specifications you can include between the IMG and SRC. For example:

```
ALIGN=right
```

aligns the image with the right-hand margin,

```
ALIGN=left
```

will align it to the left. No surprises there. Alternatively with

```
VALIGN=top and
VALIGN=bottom
```

you can align the vertical position of the image.

You can also turn images into links to other pages. One way to do this is to surround the code placing the image on the page with an anchor tag to another page like this:

```
<A HREF="anotherpage.
HTML"><IMG
SRC="example"></A>
```

Background GIFs

As well as being able to change the colour of the background, it is possible to float your images and text over a background graphic. To do this, insert the BACKGROUND extension into the BODY tag. For example,

```
<BODY BACKGROUND=
"background.GIF">
```

would copy the GIF called background over the screen. You can apply lots of fancy effects, but don't go overboard because it can make your document hard to read.

FONT STYLES

Back at the dawn of desktop publishing, designers went a bit technology crazy. All of a sudden it was possible to include all sorts of fonts on pages – so they did. Lots of them. And all on the same page. But have a quick leaf through this magazine or look at any other well-designed printed matter and you will discover that although each page looks different, there are actually only a handful of typefaces used throughout the entire publication. This less-is-more approach also applies to the Web.

Style tags

Style tags give an explicit direction to a Web browser about how to render a character of text. There are several style tags including bold, italic, underline and blinking text. The tags do not cause a line break in the text and you can use multiple styles in the same sentence. Character formatting tags always surround the text that is to appear formatted. For example, the tag for bold text is:

```
<B>example of bold text</B>
```

Some of the others include:

```
<I>italic text</I>
<U>underlined</U>
<EM>emphasis</EM>
<STRONG>Strong</STRONG>
```

The tag should be used instead of wherever possible, unless you want to ensure that only a bold font is used.

The tag should be used instead of <i> wherever possible unless you want to ensure that only an italic font is used. This will keep

Italic text

Underlined

Emphasis

Strong

Biggest heading - H1

Smaller heading - H2

Smaller heading - H3

Smaller heading - H4

Smaller heading - H5

Smaller heading - H6

TYPING IN CAPITAL LETTERS CAN HELP YOU GET YOUR MESSAGE ACROSS but it is rather wearing, go for a more subtle emphasis b y italicising your words.

your document as portable as possible.

Headings

Headings are a great way to display large text instead of creating a graphic banner. They are a bit like the style tags we talked about above but sit on their own line, with paragraph-size breaks above and below them. The six sizes of heading that there are available are:

```
<H1>Biggest heading</H1>
<H2>Smaller heading</H2>
<H3>Smaller heading </H3>
<H4>Smaller heading </H4>
<H5>Smaller heading </H5>
<H6>Smaller heading </H6>
```

There is one important thing to remember with headings: keep them short and to the point and they will have more impact on your readers.

HANDY HINTS

Tables

Tables are an important element in many pages and traditionally have been used to tabulate data. They are also useful for dividing pages up into defined sections where you can enter your pictures or text. Basic HTML table mark-up is pretty simple and looks like this:

```
<TABLE>
<TR>
<TD>cell 1, row one</TD>
<TD>cell 2, row 1</TD>
<TD>cell 3, row 1</TD>
</TR>
```

```
<TR>
<TD>cell 1, row2</TD>
<TD>cell2, row 2</TD>
<TD>cell 3, row 2</TD>
</TR>
</TABLE>
```

The TRs mark new rows, and the TDs mark the cells or boxes in the tables where the information goes. The cells can contain anything else, including images, links, text, even other tables.

When you are creating them, it might be handy to put a temporary border around the table so you can see what's going on. To do this, use

BORDER=1 inside the TABLE command. The higher the number you enter in this command, the thicker the border will become.

You can change the alignment of a cell's contents in the horizontal direction by adding align=left (or right), or in the vertical direction by adding valign=top(or bottom). It is also possible to define the overall width of the table:

```
<TABLE WIDTH=60%>
```

This will make the Web browser draw the table over 60 per cent of the window width.

If you want to build a table that isn't a perfect grid, you have to do the following:

```
<TD COLSPAN=number>
```

This will make the cell as wide as the "number" cells above or below it. Add the following, if you want to make a cell span more than one row:

```
<TD ROWSPAN=number>
```

This will attempt to make the cell cover the number of rows, until it runs out of space.

TOP ADVICE SITES

Adding graphics on to your Web pages can be a bit fiddly at the best of times. That's why you can thank .net for providing this guide to help make your on-line life a lot easier. As an extra bonus, we have listed some of our favourite helpful Web sites. Oh joy.

<http://www.rasberryhill.com/gifwizard.html>
This on-line utility will help you reduce the file size of your GIF files so that they load faster and take up less space in your homepage directory.

http://home.netscape.com/assist/net_sites/bg/index.html
The people at Netscape

have put together this concise reference about the HTML tags relating to colours on Web pages. There are also links with some backgrounds which can be downloaded.

<http://www.goldinc.com/Lemke/gc.html>
GraphicConverter is Macintosh shareware. It converts pictures to different formats and contains many useful features for image manipulation.

<http://www.jasc.com/>
Paint Shop Pro is one of the favoured image viewing, editing and converting programs for the PC and it's on this month's coverdisc.

Visit <http://www.rasberryhill.com/gifwizard.html> to find out how you can reduce the file size of your GIFs.

TIP OF THE MONTH

Another way to turn images into links, apart from wrapping a link tag around them, is to set up what are called image maps. These are graphic images that have defined "hot spots" where each "hot spot" is a link. Clicking on the graphic then becomes the same as clicking on a hyperlink taking the user to a different page.

Image maps are great for creating graphics with labelled buttons with each button image set to a different location. If you want to create the image map, you must have an image that you want to include hot spots in. Hot spots can be a variety of shapes including circles rectangles and polygons. An example image map would look like this in HTML:

```
<MAP NAME= "example">
<A HREF= "/cgi-bin/imagemap/imap/menuar.map"><IMG SRC= "picture.GIF" USEMAP= "#menu2" ISMAP border=0></A>
<area href= "macs.html" SHAPE= "RECT" COORDS= "3,4,58,22"
```

```
border=0>
</MAP>
```

The AREA SHAPE command specifies what part of the picture you want to make clickable. Here, the

hot area is a rectangle, as specified in the RECT variable. You should be able to get the top left (in this case 3,4) and the bottom right (58,22) coordinates. The HREF command

specifies the destination page. Clicking on the image then causes the coordinates to be sent to the server, along with the URL specified in the A HREF tag. Thus clicking on the hot

spot in the image causes the desired page to load up as if by magic. **.net**

The solid yellow bar in the middle is an image map, not text. Simply click on it to follow the link to the rest of the information.

