ew people will not know BBEdit published by Bare Bones Software. It's freeware version, currently at 4.1, has been included on countless CDs included with countless magazines. BBEdit has always been popular among programmers and since the rise of the World Wide Web, it has become one of the leading professional HTML editors. This articles takes a look at the professional version 4.5.2 of BBEdit.

Because of the popularity of BBEdit as HTML editor, several interesting plug-ins are available. For example, Digital Comet has its SiteManager and CometPage available as plug-ins and HexMac publishes HexWeb CSS Edit as plug-in. On the Bare Bones web site you will find a wide range of plug-ins for many different purposes.

The main advantages of the professional version over the freeware version are:
PowerPC Native; build in FTP enables BBEdit to save a document directly to a remote web server;
BBEdit 4.5.2 is fully scriptable using AppleScript;
full HTML tools included;
HTML-aware spelling check that speaks English, US English, Dutch, Spanish and French;
BBEdit speaks several languages, including HTML, and can index documents in a known language;
syntax colouring in known languages such as HTML, C, Pascal, Perl, etc;
PopupFuncs technology that recognises headers in your HTML documents or functions in programming languages and lets you jump directly to these;
The possibility to set markers anywhere in the document and jump to these from the menu.

BBEdit has everything you can expect form a good text editor. It makes automatic back ups for you. There is a multiple undo tool, the numbers of "undos" only limited by the available memory.

Finding & Replacing

One of the strengths of BBEdit is finding and replacing. It can search for text in the open document or it can search multiple documents. You can use BBEdit to find and replace text in all

documents in a given folder with or without including nested folders. You can include or exclude files based on their name. This makes it a breeze to search for all occurrences of, for example, your old e-mail address in a bunch of HTML files and replace them with your new address.

To add to the power of its find and replace facilities, BBEdit supports GREP searching. GREP, which has its roots in the Unix world, allows you to search for patterns. For example, the character # represents any figure. Searching for <H#> will find <H1> as well as <H2>, <H3>, etc. The pattern "[a-z]+\.[c]*[s]*html" will find "aboutme.html" "index.chtml", "includes.shtml", etc. You can use the same patterns in the replace box. For example, you can find all occurrences of an html filename using this pattern and replace these with a link to that file.

HTML Tools

BBEdit comes with an extensive set of HTML tools. The tools cover just about every tag and attribute in the (HTML 3.2) book. BBEdit is not a "wisywig" tool, if there is such a thing in HTML. However, the HTML tools offer a preview button that will load your page into the browser of your choice.

The tools offer an HTML checker that will go through your document and report things like missing attributes, missing closing tags, etc. There is a table builder that makes designing a table very easy. If you insert a link, the tools verify that the document you link to actually exists. If you link directly to a name in a document, for example to aboutme.html#myCV, it will verify the existence of the document as well as the name myCV. If you insert an image, the tools will verify the image exists and extract its width and height for you.

The HTML tools can keep templates for you. These are very useful if you regularly have to publish the same sort of document with basically the same lay-out, headers and footers. Think for example about regular press releases or weekly progress reports. Using a template, you only have to change the title and paste in the text and your document is done.

Whether you prefer a text editor or a dedicated application for your HTML is a matter of taste. Personally, I have not seen any dedicated HTML editor that offers the power of BBEdit.

Drawbacks

The only serious drawback of BBEdit 4.5.2 I can think of is that it's HTML tools only support HTML 3.2. The latest official standards of the World Wide Web Consortium, HTML 4.0 and CCS level 2, are currently not supported. Then again, these standards are currently only supported by Explorer 4 and Netscape 4 and even then only with plenty of problems and incompatibilities.

In the HTML tools there are only a few minor bugs. For example, the HTML checker does not correctly recognise <DFN> and <VAR> tags, claiming they cannot be used within <BODY> tags. As these elements are not exactly commonly used, this is really not a major problem.

Conclusion

At £86.50 (or £57 is you upgrade from BBEdit lite) BBEdit is well worth every penny you pay. Its powerful HTML tools, unrivalled find and replace power and support by other suppliers that provide plug-in make it the most powerful HTML editor around. If you do anything more than basic text or HTML editing, you will find BBEdit a useful and practical tool.

Among programmers BBEdit is already the standard and it interacts with integrated development environments (IDEs) such as Metrowerks Codewarrior.

If you do not want to fork out for BBEdit 4.5.2 at least get the freeware version to do your finding and replacing for you.

References

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http://www.weijers.net/ (author)

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