

The Best Becomes Even Better: BBEdit 5.0.1

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Pros: The Web designers' (and programmers') text editor bar none. However this upgrade may not be big enough to justify the price for those on a budget

Cons: It is addictive, quality

Categories: Web design

Developer: BareBones, Inc. <http://www.barebones.com/>

I love things that are done well, with beauty and precision and an understated elegance. Stuff that gets the job done but lends it an aesthetic quality you don't get by using cruder tools. That is why I collect German-made stainless steel kitchenware, brands like Rösle and WMF and Fissler, and use cameras like the Leica M6. I love computer hardware and software that has the same kinds of qualities: that is why I use Macs. It is also why I love BBEdit to bits, and I am over the moon with this new version of it. The very best has just become even better.

here is a but behind it, though

But, and this is a big but, you may choose not to upgrade to 5.0.1 if you are already using any of the 4.5.x versions and HTML munging is not your biggest use of BBEdit, given the \$Oz to \$US exchange rate right now. I have had a few colleagues express that opinion and I have to support them in it. The £UK to \$US exchange is far more attractive, and for those in that part of the world I have no hesitation in recommending an upgrade.

If you are completely new to BBEdit and live anywhere however, my best recommendation is simply to go for it right now. You will never regret spending the cash, and you will be getting a far better tool for writing HTML than all the common alternatives like PageSpinner, Alpha or Nisus Writer.

The manual gives little away about exactly what has been improved in version 5 and how. It does tell us that, "the BBEdit HTML Tools have been completely redesigned in version 5.0. The new HTML tools streamline the process of creating HTML documents, help you check for common usage errors, and speed up development time,..." and that is true enough, given how much they have cleaned up the organisation of the tools and the HTML-related menu bar items. No longer do you have to rely solely on the one tools palette, as a number of click-off subpalettes are available if you are editing particular kinds of elements in your document.

So what else is new?

The label on the box hints tantalisingly at "Integrated Support for Anarchie Pro, Code Warrior, Cumulus, DreamWeaver, Frontier, VOODOO," but the manual says nothing about them and what the nature of this integration is.

True, Frontier is a more complex scripting system than AppleScript and the developers of BBEdit and Frontier have been cooperating for years; VOODOO is an excellent version control tool for programmers made by the same folks who brought us the estimable PopChar Pro; Code Warrior is an excellent programmer's toolset that many use in conjunction with BBEdit, and DreamWeaver is famous for using BBEdit as its integrated HTML text editor, but I want to know more about this mysterious integration with Anarchie Pro and Cumulus.

Canto Cumulus is a media management system for those who use and shift around a lot of digital files - images moving or still, sounds, layouts, presentations, 3D models, and even the more mundane types of documents - and appears to be especially good for those doing so on a local network.

So far I have not committed to any of the three popular brands of media management tools, Cumulus, Extensis Portfolio 4.0 or iView Multimedia 3.0 because I want to do a back to back comparison and I have only just now obtained a copy of Portfolio version 4.0.

So, I am intrigued. BareBones, just what does this integration with Cumulus consist of and why have you chosen to do so with Canto's product and not Extensis' or Script Software's? The same question applies to this integration with Anarchie Pro. How does

that work?

BEdit already has a very fine built-in FTP tool that I have used many a time to burrow in to a Web site and change text on the fly. I don't currently use Anarchie, though I should on the principle of "support your local sheriff" and Anarchie genius Peter N. Lewis is just a stone's throw away, but I fired it up just now and could see no obvious pointers to BEdit. Or vice versa. Some questions to be answered and when they are I will post an addendum to this article.

The other good stuff...

First off is that this version gives you a choice of SGML DTDs (Document Type Definitions) that recognise our current condition of transition from HTML 3.2 to HTML 4.0.

BEdit's error checking facility has always been justly famous for how accurately it conforms to the DTDs. In previous versions you had no choice in which DTD you could specify, though, and that was problematic given how HTML is always in a state of transition. Now, even more standards are being promulgated for our future Web design use. BareBones has wisely recognised that, and as in Figure 3 above gives you the choice of HTML 3.2, HTML 4.0 Transitional, strict HTML 4.0 or HTML 4.0 Frameset.

The two major Web browsers, Navigator and Internet Explorer, have been renowned for the degree of sloppiness with which they interpret HTML code. So forgiving were they in the past that this gave rise to some truly apallingly bad coding habits. As code becomes more standardised and coders must essentially become tighter in their coding, BEdit 5.0's strict error checking becomes an asset rather than the hindrance it sometimes was in the past. Being able to specify the degree of its conformity is useful indeed.

... includes a contextual TagMaker...

The contextual TagMaker, called up with the key combination Command-M, is a new and rather intriguing facility that enables you to insert your cursor into a section of code, then hit the above key combo, and the TagMaker appears with a scrollable list of possible code choices. It is a kind of intelligent reminder and a mouse travel shortcut in one, and may a sign of things to come in BareBones' development efforts. Given how complex coding is becoming, this kind of expert programming is even more necessary than ever. I hope BareBones is going to introduce more such tools.

... and an HTML entities palette...

What some reference books call Special Characters (such as the Visual QuickStart Guide BEdit 4 for Macintosh) but are more properly named HTML Entities as BEdit does, are essential for anyone whose HTML coding mindset is anything other than blindly Anglocentric. Previously I had to rely on memory, exchanges on Web design mailing lists, or a reference book. No longer.

Note the Euro currency symbol: BEdit and Apple recognise the new situation in Europe, even if Microsoft fails to. Apple also recognises that the century is about to end, whilst Microsoft is being sued for allegedly purposefully ignoring that fact to enable it to

sell more operating systems after the clock ticks over!

With version 5.0.1 BBEdit is so much more useful than before, and hints at even better things to come. BBEdit newbies will not regret purchasing this version, and HTML newbies should note that BBEdit is still the best way of learning though veteran users will have to evaluate just how useful its additions are, and balance that added productivity against an upgrade price that translates prohibitively into weaker currencies. Those lucky enough to live in strong currency areas will have nothing to lose.

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