

Building Your Web Site: HTML Basics

It's easier than you may think to produce your own Web site. Here are the basics.

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In a previous article, we presented design guidelines to consider when developing your Web site. As you move into the production phase of your site, it's a good idea to develop design sketches of how you expect each page to look. There are several ways to approach the production process.

For example, some people make rough sketches on paper to serve as guidelines during production. Another option is to design pages in a layout program (such as Quark Xpress) and later translate those pages to the Web. Web development professionals typically design Web sites in graphics programs such as Adobe Illustrator, Macromedia's FreeHand, or Adobe Photoshop, and then translate their work into final Web-ready files. Whether you choose to work on paper or the computer, you'll find a visual guide helpful while you're actually building your Web site pages.

HTML: What Is It?

As you move from site design to production, you'll need some knowledge of HTML. HTML stands for Hypertext Markup Language. "Hypertext" refers to the ability to offer not just static text but also connections between words, phrases, and sentences, regardless of their location.

For example, the word "knowledge" presented here is a flat word without any interactivity. You can read it and move on to the next word in the sentence. What

you can't do is use it to link directly to other information about "knowledge." If this article were on the Web, we could underline "knowledge," making it a hypertext link, and you could click on it, navigate to another location, and learn more about "knowledge."

Hypertext was most useful for Tim Berners-Lee, who is credited with inventing the World Wide Web. Berners-Lee faced the challenge of managing information for a large number of employees, using a wide range of computer operating systems at geographically diverse publications. Berners-Lee proposed a system of linking documents across a computer network, or "Web," allowing users to navigate from one location and document to another anywhere on the network. This network, of course, later became the Web that we know today, and hypertext became the way to connect Web documents to one another.

HTML is the method that makes hypertext work. You'll hear HTML referred to as a language, a code, or computer programming. The important thing to know is that HTML is how you "mark up" your files (hence, Markup Language) so that they can be viewed on the Web.

HTML: What Does It Look Like?

HTML is a language which you insert as codes or "tags" to mark up the structure of a file for viewing on the Web. Figure 1 shows what people see when they access the home page of Metropolis, an architecture and design magazine. Figure 2 shows some of the HTML



Figure 1

required to make the Metropolis home page look the way it does. This page is a little complicated because the Metropolis home page presents an animation and a few elaborate programming techniques (called Javascripts).




```

<HEAD>
<TITLE>My First HTML Page</TITLE>
<BODY>
<H1>My First HTML Page</H1>
<P>This is my first HTML page. It contains a heading, some text, and an image.</P>
<img alt="A small graphic of a hand pointing upwards." data-bbox="100 100 150 150"/>

```

Figure 2

HTML: How Does It Work and Why Is It Important?

You can create an HTML file in any standard word-processing document (most now on the market include an option to "save as HTML"). That file contains text, all of your hypertext links to other documents, and links to any graphics (such as pictures) that you've included on your page. You then load that HTML file (as well as any graphics files) into a folder on a Web server. Web servers are the computers connected to the Internet which "host" HTML pages and deliver them to people "surfing" the Internet through a browser, such as Microsoft's Internet Explorer or Netscape's Navigator.

For example, suppose CNN has a story about a speech by President Clinton. A staff member at CNN creates an HTML file of the story and loads it onto the CNN Web server. When someone navigating the Internet goes to the CNN Web site (www.cnn.com), the CNN Web server sends the HTML code over the Internet to the user's computer where the code is downloaded into the computer's Web browser. The browser interprets the code; it understands that certain

codes should be formatted as titles, others as body text, still others as pictures (of course, browsers can also interpret sound files and video images, but that uses a different technique).

While its codes are fairly simple (you can learn the basic ones in a few hours), HTML can be a very powerful format for delivering information. Because HTML is a standard language, it lets you create an HTML document that can then be read on any computer with an Internet browser. The kind of computer doesn't matter; nor does its location. Using hypertext, your HTML document can be linked to and from any other document on the Internet from anywhere in the entire world.

Creating Your First HTML Document

Creating a basic HTML file is easy. Follow these simple instructions.

Step One: Open a Document.

Open any word-processor application that you have on your computer—Microsoft Word, Word Perfect, SimpleText (if you are on a Macintosh), or Wordpad (for Windows 95 users).

Step Two: Create an HTML Document.

The first part of this step is to create an HTML document which will let a Web browser recognize and interpret the file. To do this, type the following:

<HTML>

The brackets are the bookends which contain the HTML command. Most HTML tags have a beginning tag (such as the <HTML> tag we have here) and an end tag. We'll add the end tag later.

Next, tell the browser that the document has a head, or a top section containing information. To indicate this, type:

<HEAD>

To create a title at the top of the viewer's page, type the following:

<TITLE>My First HTML Page

Before you move on, you need to tell the browser you're done with the title and header section of your document. To do so, type the following closing codes:

</HEAD>

</TITLE>

The slash in front of a command tells the browser to stop what it was doing and look for a new command.

At this point, you should have the following in your document:

<HTML>

<HEAD>

<TITLE>

My First HTML Page

</TITLE>

</HEAD>

Next, move on to the body of your page. To begin the body section, type:

<BODY>

To insert a header describing the body copy, type the following:

<H1>

NONPROFIT WORLD Makes It Easy

</H1>

There are a number of headers you could use, ranging from the largest, <H1>, to one that is much smaller, such as <H6>.

Before typing the text of your page, you need to insert some space between your header and your text. To do so, insert a paragraph return by typing the following:

<P>

Note that your paragraph return (<P>) doesn't need a closing code (a command with a slash in front of it to tell the browser to look for a new command). It's one of the few tags that doesn't need such an end code.

Next, type your body copy: "I used to think HTML was hard. But in just 15 minutes I created my own simple Web page."

Now, you need to indicate that the body section of your document is complete. To do so, insert the closing tag:

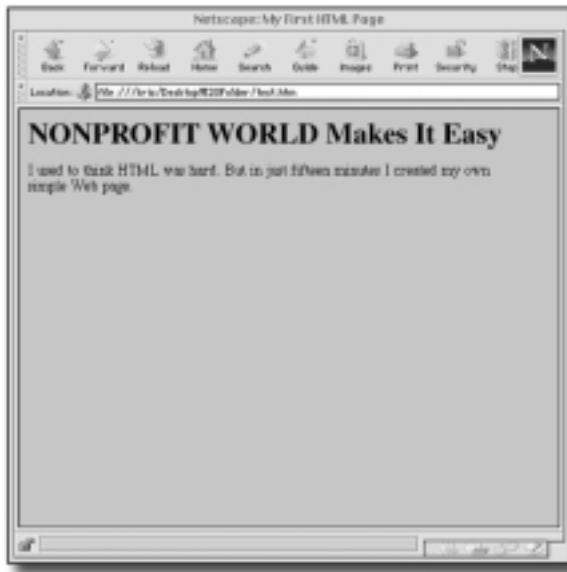


Figure 3

```
</BODY>
```

The last thing you need to do is tell the browser that you're finished with your document. If you initially told the browser that your document started with <HTML>, can you guess how you would end the document?

If you guessed </HTML> you're right. Here's what the final document should look like:

```
<BODY>
```

```
<H1>
```

NONPROFIT WORLD Makes It Easy

```
</H1>
```

```
<P>
```

I used to think HTML was hard.

But in just 15 minutes I created my own simple Web page.

```
</BODY>
```

```
</HTML>
```

Step Three: Save Your Document.

This procedure is basically the same no matter what word-processing software you use. Under the file menu, choose the option for "Save As." Select the "text only" option. Some word processors give you the option to choose a "Save As HTML" file. Both work fine (although we prefer "Save as Text"). In the dialog box that asks you to name the file, type "test.htm". This is the name of

your document. For the purposes of our example, save this file to the desktop of your computer.

Step Four: Check Your Document.

Now that you've created and saved your document, the final step is to check it. First, launch your browser. When the application is open, look under the file menu and select the option that says "Open File." A dialog box should appear. Choose the option that lets you look at files on your desktop. Locate your file ("test.htm") and open it.

The file you've created should look like Figure 3.

Congratulations, you've created your first HTML document!

Good News, Bad News

The good news is that creating simple Web pages is easy and there are plenty of books offering excellent instruction on HTML page creation. Two of our favorites are Larry Aronson's *The HTML Manual of Style* and Laura Lemay's *Teach Yourself HTML in Seven Days*. Both books are available at major bookstores.

The bad news is that creating complicated Web pages, such as those that involve complex graphics and layouts, is a far more difficult task.

Fortunately, the computer software industry recognizes that most of us would rather spend time accomplishing our goals than learning codes to mark up our pages for the Internet. In the past year a host of excellent software products have emerged, making it possible to design Web pages in HTML as easily as designing a newsletter in Pagemaker, Quark, or Microsoft Publisher. It really is becoming as easy as "point and click."

In the next article in our series, we'll take a look at the most popular graphic-

oriented HTML layout programs and help you find the right tools for producing your site. If you have a question or comment you'd like to see covered in future columns, send an e-mail to jpfrenza@earthpledge.org or contact JP Frenza c/o *Nonprofit World*, 6314 Odana Road, Suite 1, Madison, Wisconsin 53719. ■

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*Starred publications are available through the Society for Nonprofit Organizations' Resource Center. For ordering information, see the Society's *Resource Center Catalog*, included in this issue, or contact the Society at 6314 Odana Road, Suite 1, Madison, Wisconsin 53719 (800) 424-7367.

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