

Setting Up Your Web Site

by Joe Stoddard

In the June column, we looked at a little of the theory behind the Internet and examined how to find a good hosting service and register your domain name. Now it's time to create (or maybe rethink) your Web site.

More Than a Billboard

Many small businesses create an electronic copy of their newspaper ad on the Internet and then expect business to come breaking down the door. It won't happen. Instead, you should be approaching the Internet for what it is — a computer network that will connect you with subs, suppliers, clients, and yes — the public. Making the day-to-day progress of your projects the focus of your Web site will have the same kind of marketing impact as a well-maintained

job site and a clean work truck.

Todd Wacome of Wynwood Associates has harnessed the power of the Internet about as well as any custom builder in business today. His site, <http://www.wynwood.net> is “project central” for every home his firm builds. Pictures, schedules, job logs, specifications, and, most important, a client journal are all there for the world to see (see Figure 1). I asked Todd why he made all this information public instead of protecting it with passwords. He said, “Potential customers can see the whole project unfold, warts and all. They can see how we handle problems as they come up and can read our customers' responses. It's probably been our strongest marketing tool.”

Doing It Yourself

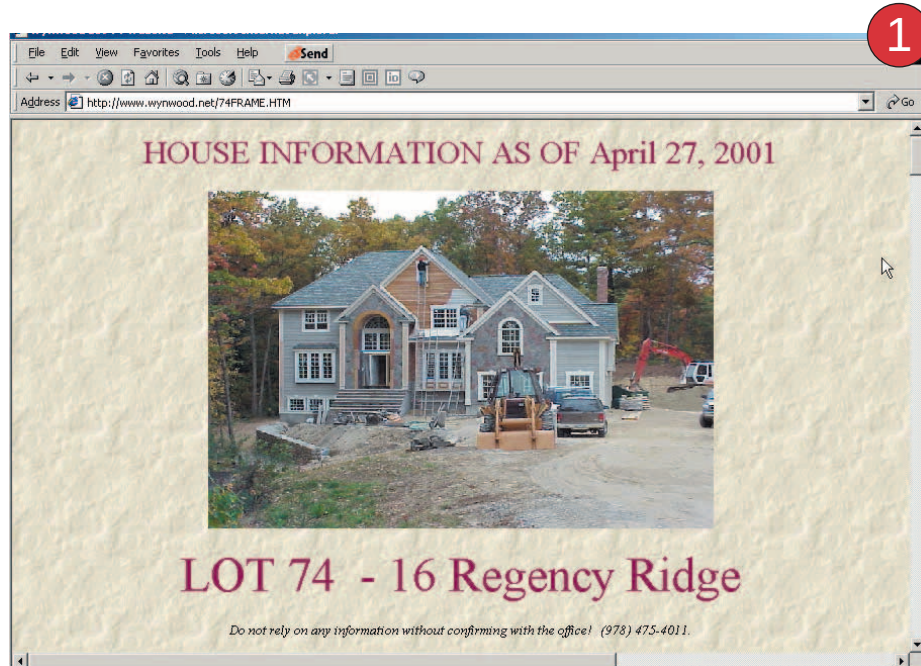
You might be thinking that building a site like [wynwood.net](http://www.wynwood.net) would require a big investment with a Web developer or hours of effort every day to maintain — but it won't. One advantage of the do-it-yourself approach is that you and your project information won't be at the mercy of some construction dot-com that could be dot-gone tomorrow. You'll be in control. Besides, WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) Web-authoring software will do 90% of the work for you, so there's no reason not to do it yourself. Packages like Microsoft FrontPage are as easy to use as any word processor yet have the power to add advanced features to your Web site in the future. The examples in this article were created with FrontPage 2000, but FrontPage 2002 was released right at press time. The new version has an updated interface and a few new features, so if you're using 2002, your screens won't look exactly like the examples in this article. Don't let that throw you; the concepts are the same.

Getting Started With FrontPage 2000

Before you can make a Web site that others can see on the Internet, you'll need to have a domain name registered with Network Solutions and an account set up at the Web-hosting service of your choice. If you want to use many of the special features of FrontPage 2000 discussed below, you will also need to have “FrontPage Extensions” installed at your Web host (see *Computer Solutions*, 6/01).

In FrontPage 2000, select FILE→NEW→WEB. Highlight “Corporate Presence Web Wizard” and type in the URL (uniform resource locator) of your

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Wynwood Associates' Web site makes every project an open book, right down to detailed job journals. This allows prospects to see exactly how the company resolves disputes as they arise — a powerful marketing tool.

continued from page 1

domain, as shown in Figure 2. When prompted, enter the account name and password you were assigned by your Web host.

As you move from screen to screen in the Wizard, fill in the questions and checkboxes to the best of your ability. Don't worry — everything can be easily changed after the Web site is created (Figure 3).

One of the final screens in the Wizard prompts you to select a "theme" for your Web site. FrontPage themes are a group of navigation graphics, backgrounds, and other settings that provide a "just add water" approach to Web building. Scroll through the list of available themes and select one that suits you. We picked "Construction Zone" for our sample Web site (Figure 4). Themes also can be changed after the Web is created, so don't worry about making a mistake.

When done, click OK, and FrontPage will go to work at your Web server creating the individual pages based on your specs in the Wizard and will list them in the folder list for you.

Working With Views

You can switch between views using the "Views" toolbar on the left of the FrontPage 2000 screen. "Page View" is for working on individual pages in your Web site, as you would in a word processor (Figure 5). "Folders View" is a lot like Windows Explorer; it lets you manipulate the folders and files in your Web site (Figure 6), and "Navigation View" is a flowchart-like tool that lets you determine how pages will appear on the navigation buttons in your Web site (Figure 7).

Temporary Home Page

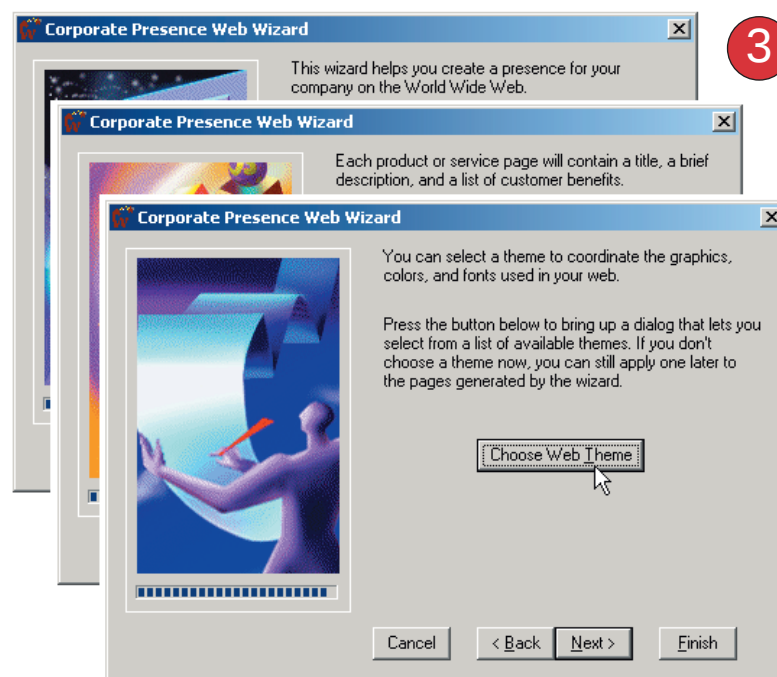
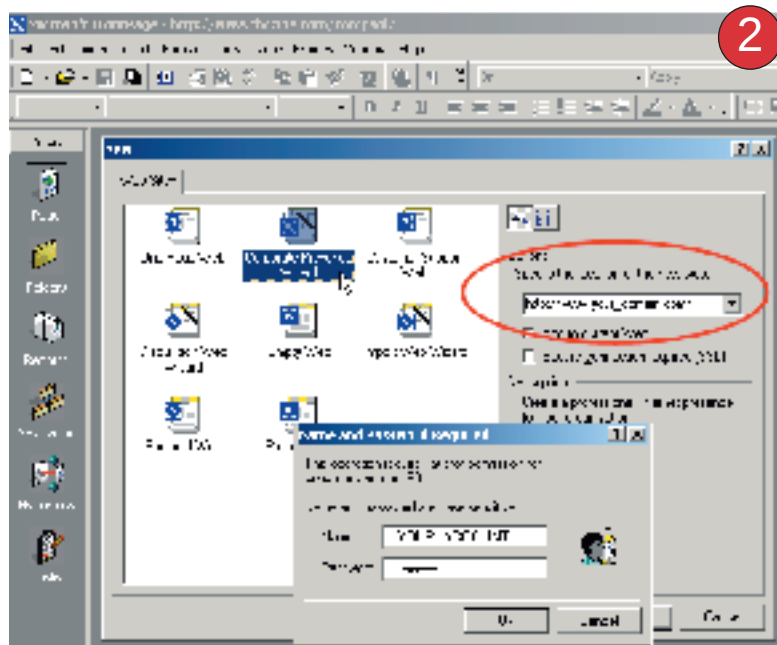
You need to create a temporary home page to greet users while the rest of your site is "under construction."

First, hide the "real" home page from the world by renaming it:

1. From "Folders View" right-click the page and select "Rename," as shown in Figure 6.
2. Add your initials to the page name so it now reads "index-xyz.htm."
3. When prompted if you want to maintain the existing links, select "Yes."

Next, create your temporary home page:

1. Select FILE→NEW→PAGE from the menu bar (or press CNTRL-N) to create a new page.
2. Right-click the new page and rename it "index.htm."
3. Right-click again, select "properties," and give the new page a title like "Future Home of (your site)."
4. In "Navigation View," right-click the newly created index.htm file and clear the "Included in Navigation Bars" checkbox. This ensures that Web surfers have no way to find the other pages in your site until you're ready for them.



5. Double-click the new index.htm page from any view to open it for editing. Add a simple message by typing directly in the page and formatting the text as you would in any word processor (Figure 8).
6. Save it (CNTRL-S), and then click the "Preview in Browser" button to view the page in your Web browser. Note that the words in italics are automatic comments inserted by FrontPage and will not show up on the Internet.

Creating the Navigation Scheme

Creating Web navigation that is both easy to use and easy to manage is a challenge for even the most experienced Web developers. FrontPage 2000 does a respectable job by letting you either drag pages around a "flowchart" to change their

position in the navigation or right-click to add pages or rename the buttons they represent. To make the original navigation buttons more construction specific, right-click each box and rename “Products” to “Projects,” “Services” to “Our Services,” and so forth.

Next, you can add additional subcategories:

1. Right-click the “Projects” box to add specific jobs like “Smith Home” and “Jones Remodel.”
2. Right-click each job to add subcategories like “Specs,” “Job Log,” “Photos,” and “Change Orders.”
3. Repeat the process to add subitems to “Services,” “About,” and so forth.

When complete, your Navigation View window should look something like Figure 7.

Fine-Tuning Page Titles and File Names

Renaming a navigation element does not rename the Web page the button refers to, and it doesn’t affect the page titles your visitors will see in their Web browser.

To change page titles. While still in “Navigation View,” right-click on each of the boxes and select “Properties” (or press ALT-ENTER on your keyboard). Make a new title for each of the page files to match the navigation buttons. For example, “service1” might be changed to “Services — Remodeling.”

To change file names. Switch back to “Folders View” and rename the page files. You could use actual job names or the accounting codes used to track your jobs. By now you should know the drill — right-click on the page and select “Rename” from the menu. Keep the names as short as practical and always avoid spaces when naming files destined for the Web.

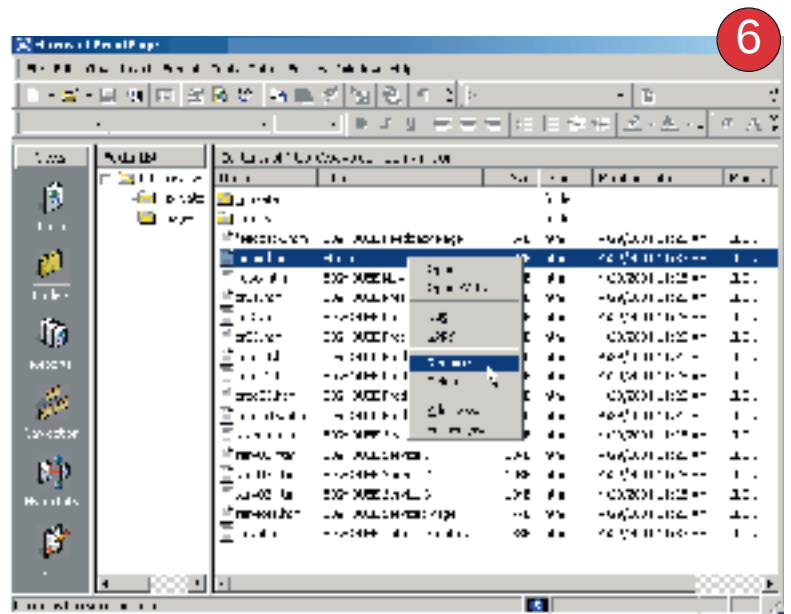
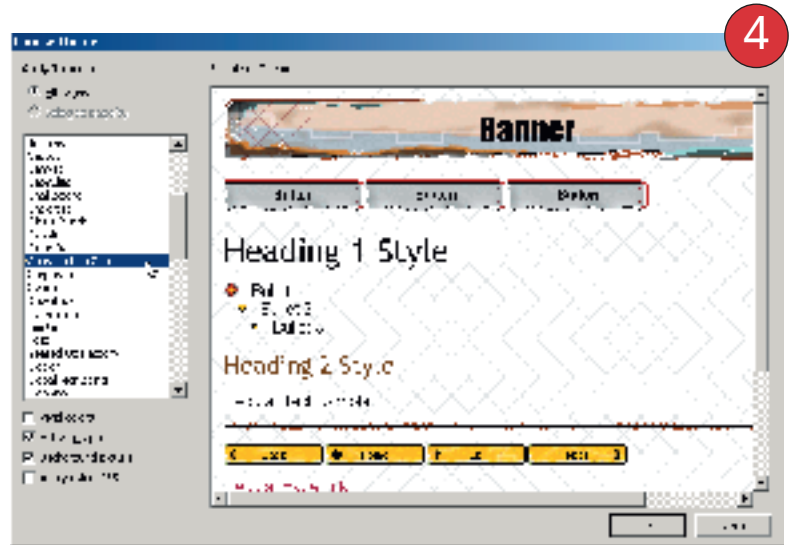
Add Organization With Folders

You could leave all your pages in the root directory of your Web site, but as your site grows, you’ll have a mess if you don’t do something to organize them. FrontPage 2000 lets you drag and drop pages to folders without affecting your navigation scheme.

1. Create a folder for each of the major subtopics “Projects,” “Services,” and “About.”
2. Drag and drop appropriate files into those folders using the mouse (similar to using Windows Explorer).
3. While you’re at it, create some extra folders for “staging” files that you’ll be uploading before you make them “live.” Make a folder called “xyz-working,” using your initials in place of “xyz,” and create other “working” folders the same way for anyone else who might be working with your Web pages. Your final folder list should look something like the example in Figure 5.

Adding Content

Now that the bones of your Web site are created and organized, you can add your content:



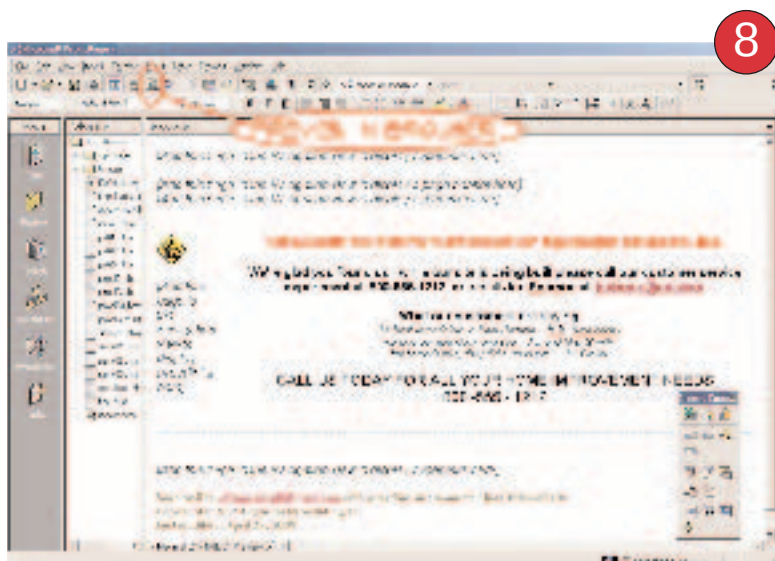
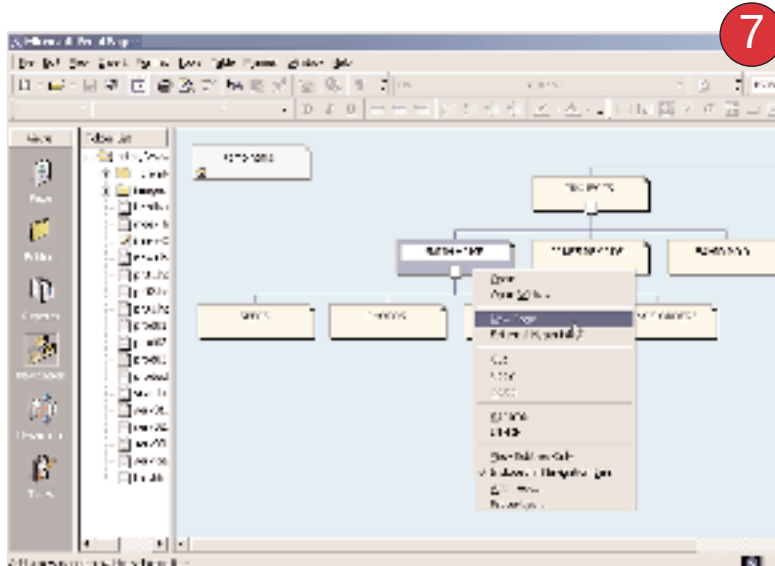
- A word about images.** Prepping images for the Web is more than we can cover here, but take a look back at *Computer Solutions*, 12/99, for a quick overview.

When you're satisfied with how your Web site looks, it's time to go live by reversing the steps you took to hide it:

- ## Stay Tuned

In future columns, we'll explore some of the advanced features in FrontPage that make it easier to maintain the content on your Web site, and we'll take a more detailed look at image processing for the Web. 

Joe Stoddard is a technology consultant specializing in the needs of the construction industry. He is a contributing editor at The Journal of Light Construction and can be reached at the Computer Solutions forum at www.jlconline.com/forums/computers.



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