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BUILD YOUR OWN WEBSITE THE RIGHT WAY USING HTML & CSS

BY IAN LLOYD
3RD EDITION

Build Your Own Website The Right Way Using HTML & CSS

by Ian Lloyd

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About SitePoint

SitePoint specializes in publishing fun, practical, and easy-to-understand content for web professionals. Visit <http://www.sitepoint.com/> to access our books, newsletters, articles, and community forums.

*For Manda, my “better half.” This
book would not have been
possible without your continued
support. All my love, Lloyd.*

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Preface

Congratulations on buying this book. Oh, wait a minute—perhaps you’re yet to buy it. Perhaps you’ve just picked up this book in your local bookshop, and are trying to decide whether it’s right for you. Why should this be the book that makes it into your shopping basket? The answer can be found in the title of the book. It’s all about getting it right the first time and not learning bad habits—bad habits that you have to unlearn at a later date—for the purpose of a quick result.

Let’s take a step back for a moment, and look at another skill that many people learn at some point in their lives: learning to drive. Apologies if that particular experience is also new to you, but stick with me. For many people, their first driving lessons can be very confusing; they have to figure out which pedals to press and in what order, and then drive off without hitting anything. Meanwhile, other more experienced people just jump into their cars, start the engine, and drive from A to B without really thinking about what they’re doing. These drivers may have picked up a few bad habits along the way, but if they learned with a proper driving instructor, the chances are they were taught properly from the beginning—following a strict set of rules to ensure they stayed safe.

The driving instructor tells you to check your mirrors diligently, observe speed limits, and avoid cutting corners (literally as well as metaphorically!). Imagine, though, if the instructor told you to ignore the speed limit signs, to *put your foot down* because the road is clear, or that the one-way sign “wasn’t important at that time of night.” It’d be a miracle if you passed your driving test, and chances are those bad habits would stay with you (so long as you could manage to keep your license).

Learning to build web pages can be a bit like that.

I’ve been designing and building websites for over ten years now, but I can clearly remember the joy of creating my first site. Admittedly, in hindsight, it was quite a nasty-looking website, but it achieved the goal at the time—I had published a website, and I was able to create it with the bare minimum of tools. It gave me an enormous sense of achievement, and made me want to learn more and create even better websites.

At the time, there were a limited number of books available that provided what I wanted, but I lapped up everything I could find, learning some tricks from books, and gaining other ideas from visiting websites. But then I discovered that I'd been doing it all wrong. The books I'd learned from had given me what later turned out to be poor advice, while the websites I'd visited had been built by people learning from the same sources and hence, making use of similar, bad techniques. So, what had gone wrong?

In the early days of the Web, when people first started to properly embrace the technology—publishing home pages and developing online corporate presences for their companies—they all realized quickly that the medium was limited. Necessity is the mother of invention, though, so web developers began to coax tricks and displays out of their web pages that were never intended by the technologies they used. Browsers helped along the way, adding features that offered even more opportunities for this kind of behavior.

Numerous books have been written on the topics of web design and programming, as have many free tutorials that you can read on the Web. Many of them were written during those heady years, and were based on what seemed like best practices back then; however, their authors were constrained by browsers that often rendered the same well-designed pages in vastly different ways. This meant that the tutorials' authors needed to resort to *abusing* various features of these browsers, such as using data tables to lay out pages. This certainly encouraged many people to build their first web pages, but it ensured that bad habits were ingrained at an early stage, and many people are still using these bad practices years later.

Web developers the world over have learned bad habits (myself included) and must now try to unlearn them all. There's no longer a need for these practices—they often produce pages that are inflexible, slow to download, and difficult to maintain—but like the badly taught driver who insists on flouting the rules because it's worked for him so far, many developers find these outdated habits difficult to break.

I saw the light several years ago, and have tried to educate as many people as possible since. But for the eager beginner, those same old books are still peddling the same bad old ideas. This just *has* to stop. And it stops here and now.

You're not going to learn any bad habits in this book. Not one.

In this book, you'll learn the right way to build a website. If there's a wrong way to do things—a way that cuts corners to save time, but encourages bad techniques—I won't even tell you about it. Not even as a “by the way, you might try this ...” There's no need to avert your eyes—it will be taken care of for you!

What is a Browser?

If you use Microsoft Windows (Windows 7, Vista, or XP), you probably know the browser as the “little blue e on the desktop” (shown in Figure 1), commonly called Internet Explorer. A large number of people don't stray beyond using this program for the purposes of viewing web pages—for many, Internet Explorer *is* the Internet.



Figure 1. Internet Explorer—the “little blue e on the desktop”

Internet Explorer (or **IE**, as we'll refer to it from now on) is the most commonly used browser, largely because Microsoft included it as part of the Windows operating system as far back as Windows 95. As it's the first browser that many people use, they tend to stick with it because it's familiar.

However, there are other browsers that you can use instead of IE. Still riding a wave of popularity is Firefox,¹ an alternative browser with a number of attractive features not available in IE (at the time of writing). It also handles the features of some web pages better than IE. Since the second edition of this book, another browser has been released and become very popular in a short space of time—Chrome, by some company called Google (of which you may have heard). Both Firefox and Chrome are available for Windows, Mac OS X, and Linux operating systems; IE, however, is only available for Windows operating systems.

¹ <http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/new/>

The screenshots you'll see in this book were taken using Firefox on Windows 7, unless stated otherwise. Because of the cross-platform nature of Firefox and the excellent standards support, I recommend that you download a copy of Firefox for the purposes of working through the exercises in this book.

You might like to try another browser, other than Firefox or Chrome, that supports web standards (a topic we'll cover very soon). For Windows users, Opera's web browser² offers excellent standards support and a unique set of features; it also has a very loyal following and, like Firefox, can be freely downloaded. Mac users can also use the Opera browser, or simply stick with the Apple browser that's installed by default, Safari³, which again offers excellent support for web standards. A selection of Mac browser icons appears in Figure 2.



Figure 2. There are numerous browsers that you can try, as shown by the Mac dock

Happy with the browser you're currently using? If you're a Windows user and would prefer to stick with what you know, you can still use IE—as indeed the majority of people using the Web still do. In fact, you can be sure that almost everything you read in this book will work in all recent browsers, whatever your choice, without any real hiccups. Almost everything? I say *almost*, because there are still some differences in the way browsers handle the newer technologies; for example, CSS3. But even that's okay, as long as you know where to expect differences, and are happy that this doesn't adversely affect the end result. I'll be covering these differences in later chapters—no nasty surprises, I promise!

Who Should Read This Book

Does this sound like you?

- You're an absolute beginner—at least as far as creating web pages go.

² <http://www.opera.com/download/>

³ <http://apple.com/safari/>

- You are confident with using a computer, but wouldn't necessarily call yourself a *power user*.
- You use the Web a lot, enjoy other people's websites, and would like to create your own for a hobby, or a community you belong to.
- You're quickly put off by the technobabble that computer people tend to speak when you try to discuss a technical problem.
- You're perhaps a little daunted about learning this new skill, but still keen to learn (with some friendly hand-holding).

If any of the above descriptions strike a chord with you, this is the book to put in your shopping cart. You'll be eased in gently, and building web pages like a pro in no time!

There's no need to worry if you feel that the terminology your 15-year-old nephew keeps spouting is beyond you when you ask him about building websites. I've assumed readers have no prior knowledge of any of these terms, and I'll be guiding you through the process of creating a website from scratch. By the end of this book, you'll know how to build the site, obtain some hosting, promote the site, and keep it running once it's live.

The best part is this: what you learn in this book, you'll never have to discard. You'll be learning how to build sites the right way from the get-go.

What You'll Learn from This Book

By the time you finish reading this book and trying out the exercises contained within, you'll be able to build a complete website—the right way—without incurring any costs for expensive software or web hosting.

Using an example website, I'll guide you through the process of developing web pages from scratch. From these humble beginnings, great things will evolve! By the end of the book, you'll be able to create a website that includes the following features:

- easy-to-use navigation
- a professional-looking site header
- a Contact Us page
- tables—the presentation of data in neatly organized grids
- attractive web page forms

- a simple image gallery
- a search engine that covers your site, as well as related sites
- simple statistics that you can use; for example, being able to see who's using your site, how they found your site, and so on

You'll also learn how to manage your website effectively, without it becoming a chore or too technical. I'll show you how you can:

- establish your own dot-com (or dot-net, dot-org, or the like) web address
- find a place to host your website
- upload your files to your website
- gain feedback from visitors while avoiding spam emails

We'll also look at how your site can fit in with and complement other existing social networking sites, by covering how to:

- create a Facebook page and embed site updates on your own site
- sign up for a Twitter account and display status updates on your site
- add Facebook **Like** and Twitter **Follow** buttons on your site

How You'll Learn to Build Your Website

This book will take you through each new topic using a step-by-step approach. It provides a mixture of examples and practical exercises that will soon have you feeling confident enough to try a little HTML for yourself.

HTML, Markup, CSS ... Welcome to Your First Bits of Jargon!

From here on in, you're going to see these terms more and more. But what do they mean?

HTML

HTML stands for Hypertext Markup Language. It's the primary language that's used to create web pages, so you'll come to know it very well through the course of this book. We'll be using HTML5, the latest version of the language. There are many ways that you can write HTML5 for it to be valid, ranging from lazy and—dare we say—sloppy ways, to strict and ordered. In this book, we'll use the more formal syntax in the example website, XHTML, and avoid demonstrat-

ing the “slipshod” way of writing code. This will encourage a better approach to writing markup and code, and foster a more logical way of thinking that’s more likely to put you in better stead for future learning. The difference between HTML and XHTML is explained in the SitePoint HTML Reference.⁴

Markup

Imagine, if you will, that you’re a newspaper editor. You’ve been given a news story, but the text—from the heading through to the conclusion—is all the same size, with the headings, paragraphs, quotes, and other textual features not clearly indicated. It’s just one big block of text. For starters, you’d probably want to emphasize the headline, maybe by displaying it in bold or italic text (or in caps with an exclamation mark if you were working for a tabloid). As an editor, you’d probably grab a pen and start scribbling annotations on the printout: an *h* here to signify a heading, a *p* here, there, and everywhere to show where paragraphs start and end, and a *q* to denote quotations.

This is essentially what markup is—a set of simple tags that suggest the structure of a document: this section is a heading, this is a paragraph, and so on. We’ll cover the various tags that HTML uses in detail a little later.



Markup isn’t Computer Code

Markup is not the same as *code*. Often, people incorrectly refer to markup as code, but code goes beyond the basic abilities of markup. With code, you can create programs and make your web page more dynamic, while markup simply deals with the page’s structure. So, if you want to impress your friends and relatives, refer to it as markup rather than code. See, I told you I’d teach you good habits!

CSS

CSS stands for Cascading Style Sheets. We’ll be using a combination of HTML and CSS to create websites. CSS is a language that lets you control how your web pages look, but we’ll go over that in more detail later. For now, it’s important that you know what the abbreviation stands for. You’ll also learn that CSS, like HTML, evolves over time. As such, we’ll be covering some of the new CSS3 properties in this book and explaining how they work across the various

⁴ <http://reference.sitepoint.com/html/html-vs-xhtml>

browsers, while the bulk of it will be CSS2 (or CSS2.1, a minor update). Don't worry, you won't need to know the version numbers—there's no test at the end!

Web Standards

Web Standards advocate best practices for building websites. The term Web Standards may be used to describe a range of philosophies and specifications, but for our purposes, we're mostly referring to the recommendations published by the World Wide Web Consortium (**W3C**)—in their own words, “an international community where member organizations, full-time staff and the public work together ... to develop the Web to its maximum potential.”

At a practical level, compliance (or adherence) to web standards refers to the development of web pages that validate according to the W3C recommendations, like those for HTML, XHTML, or CSS, or to the guidelines for accessibility.

Building the Example Site

All examples presented in this book are backed up with a sample of the markup you need to write and a screenshot that shows how the results should look.

Each example is complete. You'll see the picture build gradually, so you won't be left guessing how the example website evolved to a particular stage. The files we'll use in all the examples are provided in a separate code archive (described in more detail in a moment).

What you can expect from the example website:

- a fun website project that will be built up through the chapters
- a complete site that demonstrates all the features you're likely to need in your own website
- all the HTML and CSS used to build the site in a single download

You can pick up the project at any point, so mistakes you might have made in a previous chapter's exercises won't come back to haunt you!

What This Book Won't Tell You

While it might be tempting to cram everything into one book and claim that the reader will learn everything in a short time frame, the truth is that this isn't necessarily the right approach for everyone.

This book doesn't try to force-feed you everything there is to know about creating web pages; instead, it focuses on the most beneficial aspects that you'll find yourself using over and over again.

This book does *not* cover:

- JavaScript in any depth (we will very briefly cover some simple JavaScript effects using jQuery, before pointing you in the direction of further learning that's more in-depth)
- server-based programming/scripting languages; for example, ASP, PHP, or Ruby
- creating Flash-based content
- search engine optimization techniques

By the time you've finished this book and had a chance to tackle your own website, you might want to take the next steps to increasing your site-building knowledge. I'll make recommendations where appropriate throughout the book, and suggest other resources that you might like to check out.

So, this is where the introductory bits end and the learning process begins—learning how to build websites the *right* way. So step this way, ladies and gentlemen ...

What's in This Book

Chapter 1: *Setting Up Shop*

In this chapter, we'll make sure that you have all the tools you're going to need to build your website. I'll explain where you can access the right tools—all of them for free! By the chapter's end, you'll be ready to get cracking on your first website.

Chapter 2: *Your First Web Pages*

Here, we'll learn what makes a web page. We'll explore HTML, understand the basic requirements of every web page, and investigate the common elements that you'll see on many web pages. Then, you'll start to create pages yourself. In fact, by the end of this chapter, you'll have the beginnings of your first website.

Chapter 3: *Adding Some Style*

Now we'll start to add a bit of polish to the web pages we created in Chapter 2. You'll learn what CSS is and why it's a good technology, before putting it into action for yourself. As the chapter progresses, you'll see the project website start

to take shape as we apply background and foreground colors, change the appearance of text, and make web links look different according to whether they've been visited or not.

Chapter 4: *Shaping Up with CSS*

This chapter builds on Chapter 3's introduction to the color and text-styling abilities of CSS to reveal what CSS can do for border styles and page layouts in general. First, we'll review the full range of border effects that you can apply to elements such as headings and paragraphs. We'll experiment with dotted borders, and big, bold borders, as well as some more subtle effects. In the second half of the chapter, we'll learn how it's possible to use CSS to position the elements of a web page—including blocks of navigation—anywhere on the screen.

Chapter 5: *Picture This! Using Images on Your Website*

As the chapter title suggests, this one's all about images. We'll discover the difference between inline images and background images, and look into the issue of making images accessible for blind or visually impaired web surfers. We'll also learn how to adjust pictures to suit your website using the software that we downloaded in Chapter 1. Then, we'll put all this knowledge together in a practical sense to create a photo gallery for the project site.

Chapter 6: *Tables: Tools for Organizing Data*

Here, we'll learn when tables should be used and, perhaps more importantly, when they should *not* be used. Once the basics are out of the way, I'll show how you can breathe life into an otherwise dull-looking table—again, using CSS—to make it more visually appealing.

Chapter 7: *Forms: Interacting with Your Audience*

In Chapter 7, we learn all about forms—what they're used for, what's required to build a form, and what you can do with the data you collect through your form. I'll teach you what the different form elements—text inputs, checkboxes, and so on—do, and show you how to use CSS to make a form look more attractive. Finally, I'll show you how you can use a free web service to have the data that's entered into your form emailed to you.

Chapter 8: *Interacting with Social Media*

With the website almost built, it's time to start thinking about other websites and services out there that you can use to your advantage. As (seemingly)

everyone is on Facebook or Twitter these days, it would be remiss of us not to look at the opportunities that those sites and their services can offer. We'll look at how you can embed your Facebook and Twitter updates on your site simply and easily and show how to add "Like" and "Follow" links.

Chapter 9: *Launching Your Website*

It's all well and good to build a website for fun, but you need a way for people to see it—that's what this chapter is all about. We'll learn about hosting plans, discuss the pros and cons of using free services, and look at the tools you'll need in order to transfer your files from your computer to a web server for the world to see.

Chapter 10: *Enhancing the Site with HTML5 and CSS3*

You will have already been using HTML5 up to this point, though not features that are new to HTML5. Likewise, you'll have a good grounding of CSS by this stage, but there are some new CSS3 features that you'll really love. In this chapter, we'll give the project site an HTML5 and CSS3 makeover, showing how you can enhance the site, but also pointing out some of the pitfalls and quirks to be aware of with these newer features.

Chapter 11: *Adding Interactivity with jQuery*

The days of static websites are well and truly over. You want to present a dynamic, interactive site that gives users a sense of ownership and inclusion—not to mention some seriously impressive effects. How do you add that all-important layer of "behavior" to your site? That's where jQuery—a downloadable JavaScript library brimming with functionality—comes in.

Chapter 12: *What to Do When Things Go Wrong*

In the previous chapters, you were guided through all the steps needed to build your website, but once you go off and do your own thing, you'll almost certainly encounter some problems. In this chapter, we'll look at some tools you can use in your browser to diagnose problems, find out the problem's source, and then rectify it.

Chapter 13: *Pimp My Site: Cool Stuff You Can Add for Free*

You've heard of the MTV reality program *Pimp My Ride*, right? No? Well, every week, these guys take an everyday car and transform it—with some well-placed and carefully executed cosmetic touches—into a real head-turner of a vehicle.

And that's the aim of this chapter for your website! You'll discover that there are all kinds of tools, plugins, and add-ons that you can build into your website to make it even more useful to you and your visitors. Among the tools on offer are site search facilities, statistics programs, and online discussion forums.

Chapter 14: *Where to Now? What You Can Learn Next*

In the final chapter, we summarize the skills you've learned in this book, and then consider your options for expanding on these. I'll recommend websites that can take you to the next level, and books that really should be on your bookshelf—or rather, open on your desk next to your computer! We want to ensure you continue to learn the good stuff once you've put this book down.

Where to Find Help

SitePoint has a thriving community of web designers and developers ready and waiting to help you out if you run into trouble. We also maintain a list of known errata for the book, which you can consult for the latest updates.

The SitePoint Forums

The SitePoint Forums⁵ are discussion forums where you can ask questions about anything related to web development. You may, of course, answer questions too. That's how a forum site works—some people ask, some people answer, and most people do a bit of both. Sharing your knowledge benefits others and strengthens the community. A lot of interesting and experienced web designers and developers hang out there. It's a good way to learn new stuff, have questions answered in a hurry, and generally have a blast.

The Book's Website

Located at <http://www.sitepoint.com/books/html3/>, the website supporting this book will give you access to the following facilities:

The Code Archive

As you progress through this book, you'll note a number of references to the code archive. This is a downloadable ZIP archive that contains complete every line of example source code printed in this book. If you want to cheat (or save yourself

⁵ <http://www.sitepoint.com/forums/>

from carpal tunnel syndrome), go ahead and download the archive⁶. It also includes a copy of the Bubble Under website, which we use as an example throughout the book.

Updates and Errata

No book is perfect, and I expect that watchful readers will be able to spot at least one or two mistakes before the end of this one. The Errata page⁷ on the book's website, will always have the latest information about known typographical and code errors, as well as necessary updates for new browser releases and versions of web standards.

In addition to the official site hosted and maintained by SitePoint, I have also put together some resources at <http://beginningwebdesign.com>. Here, you'll be able to find links to a Twitter account for the book, a Facebook page, and more.

The SitePoint Newsletters

In addition to books like this one, SitePoint publishes free email newsletters, such as the SitePoint *Tech Times*, SitePoint *Tribune*, and SitePoint *Design View*. In them, you'll read about the latest news, product releases, trends, tips, and techniques for all aspects of web development. Browse the archives or sign up to any of SitePoint's free newsletters on our website.⁸

The SitePoint Podcast

You can also join the SitePoint Podcast⁹ team for news, interviews, opinion, and fresh thinking for web developers and designers. We discuss the latest web industry topics, present guest speakers, and interview some of the best minds in the industry. You can catch up on all previous podcasts on our website, or subscribe via iTunes.

Your Feedback

If you're unable to find an answer through the forums, or you wish to contact SitePoint for any other reason, the best place to write is books@sitepoint.com. We have

⁶ <http://www.sitepoint.com/books/html3/code.php>

⁷ <http://www.sitepoint.com/books/html3/errata.php>

⁸ <http://www.sitepoint.com/newsletter/>

⁹ <http://www.sitepoint.com/podcast/>

a well-staffed email support system set up to track your inquiries, and if our support team members are unable to answer your question, they'll send it straight to us. Suggestions for improvements, as well as any mistakes you may find, are especially welcome. Finally, you can get in touch with me via my Facebook page if needed (although word of warning: I don't "do Facebook" all that often!).

Acknowledgements

While writing a book sometimes seems like a solitary process, the truth is that there are a lot of people who guide the hands that type the words on these pages. None of this would have been possible had I not been pointed in the direction of websites like [webmonkey.com](http://www.webmonkey.com),¹⁰ whose CSS tutorial first made me see the light, and individuals such as Jeffrey Zeldman, Molly Holzschlag, and Eric Meyer, whose pioneering work has benefited me (and many others) greatly. However, if I were to list the names of all the people who have inspired me in the last few years, this section would end up looking more like an index! You folks know who you are, keep up the good work!

I would like to acknowledge the work undertaken by the Web Standards Project¹¹ (of which I was once a member), in particular the InterAct team on the Web Standards Curriculum. I'd also like to give a little shout-out to my fellow *Britpackers*—wear those Union Jack pants with pride, folks!

Thanks to all those at SitePoint who have helped me craft each edition of this book over the years: Simon Mackie, Marc Garrett, Matthew Magain, Andrew Tetlaw, Georgina Laidlaw, Julian Carroll, Kelly Steele, Alex Walker, Lisa Lang, and Tom Museth.

Finally, thanks to Manda for putting up with me when deadlines loomed and I all but shut myself off from civilization to have the chapters in on time. Social life? Oh that! I remember ... At those times it seemed like it would never end, but finally we can both see the fruits of my labor.

¹⁰ <http://www.webmonkey.com/>

¹¹ <http://interact.webstandards.org/>

Conventions Used in This Book

You'll notice that we've used certain typographic and layout styles throughout the book to signify different types of information. Look out for the following items:

Markup Samples

Any markup—be that HTML or CSS—will be displayed using a fixed-width font, like so:

webpage.html (*excerpt*)

```
<h1>A perfect summer's day</h1>
<p>It was a lovely day for a walk in the park. The birds were
    singing and the kids were all back at school.</p>
```

If the code is to be found in the book's code archive, the name of the file will appear at the top of the program listing, like this:

example.css

```
.footer {
    background-color: #CCC;
    border-top: 1px solid #333;
}
```

If only part of the file is displayed, this is indicated by the word *excerpt*:

example.css (*excerpt*)

```
border-top: 1px solid #333;
```

If additional code is to be inserted into an existing example, the new code will be displayed in bold:

```
.footer {
    background-color: #CCC;
    border-top: 1px solid #333;
    padding: 5px;
}
```

Where existing code is required for context, rather than repeat all the code, a vertical ellipsis [⋮] will be displayed:

```
.footer {  
  ⋮  
  margin: 5px;  
}
```

Some lines of code are intended to be entered on one line, but we've had to wrap them because of page constraints. A ➤ indicates a line break that exists for formatting purposes only, and should be ignored:

```
URL.open("http://www.sitepoint.com/blogs/2007/05/28/user-style-she  
➤ets-come-of-age/");
```

Tips, Notes, and Warnings



Hey, You!

Tips will give you helpful little pointers.



Ahem, Excuse Me ...

Notes are useful asides that are related—but not critical—to the topic at hand. Think of them as extra tidbits of information.



Make Sure You Always ...

... pay attention to these important points.



Watch Out!

Warnings will highlight any gotchas that are likely to trip you up along the way.

Chapter 1

Setting Up Shop

Before you dive in and start to build your website, we need to set your computer up so that it's ready for the work that lies ahead. This is what this chapter is all about: ensuring that you have all the tools you need installed and are ready to go.

If you were to look at the hundreds of computing books for sale in your local bookstore, you'd be forgiven for thinking that you need to invest in a lot of different programs to build a website. However, the reality is that most of the tools required are probably sitting there on your computer, tucked away where you wouldn't think to look for them. And if ever you don't have the tool for the job, there's almost certain to be one or more free programs available that can handle the task.

I've assumed that you already have an internet connection, most likely broadband (or similar). There's no need to worry if you have a slower connection, though: it won't affect any of the tasks we'll undertake in this book. It will, however, mean that some of the suggested downloads or uploads may take longer to complete, but you probably knew that already.



Planning, Schmanning

At this point, it might be tempting to look at your motives for building a website. Do you have a project plan? What objectives do you have for the site?

While you probably have some objectives, and some idea of how long you want to spend creating your site, we're going to gloss over the nitty-gritty of project planning to some extent. Project planning is still an important aspect to consider, but because you've picked up a book entitled *Build Your Own Website The Right Way*, I'll assume you probably want to get right into the building part.

As this is your first website, it will be a fairly simple one, so we can overlook some of the more detailed aspects of site planning. Later, once you've learned—and moved beyond—the basics of building a site, you may feel ready to tackle a larger, more technically challenging site. When that time comes, proper planning will be a far more important aspect of the job. But now, let's gear up to build our first simple site.

The Basic Tools You Need

As I mentioned, many of the tools you'll need to build your first website are already on your computer. So, what tools *do* you need?

- The primary—and most basic—tool required is a **text editor**, which is a program that allows you to edit plain text files. You'll use this to write your web pages.
- Once you've written a web page, you can see how it looks in a **web browser**—that's the application you use to view websites.
- Finally, when you're happy with your new web page, you can put it on the Internet using an **FTP client**; this is a utility that allows you to transfer files across the Internet using the File Transfer Protocol. Using FTP may seem a little complicated at first but, thankfully, you won't need to do it too often. We'll discuss FTP clients in detail in Chapter 9.

You already have most of these programs on your computer, so let's go and find them.

Windows Basic Tools

In the following section—and indeed the rest of the book—where we refer to the Windows operating system, that’s a shorthand way of saying Windows 7 (in all its confusing varieties), Microsoft’s latest incarnation of its operating system. Any instructions and screenshots will be with Windows 7 in mind. However, we’ll also cater for people using older versions of Windows. There are still many people out there who use XP or Vista, so where instructions provided for Windows 7 differ from earlier versions, we’ll explain these for you.

Your Text Editor: Notepad

The first tool we’ll consider is the text editor. Windows comes with a very simple text editor called Notepad. Many professional web designers using complicated software packages first started out years ago using Notepad; indeed, many professionals using expensive pieces of software aimed to save time still resort to using Notepad for many tasks. Why? Well, because it’s so simple, little can go wrong. It also loads much more quickly than full-featured web development programs. Bells and whistles are definitely not featured.

You can find Notepad in the **Start** menu under **All Programs > Accessories**.



Shortcut to Notepad

To save yourself navigating to this location each time you want to open Notepad, create a shortcut on your desktop. With the **Start** menu open to display Notepad’s location, hold down the **Ctrl** key, and then click and hold down the mouse button. Now drag the Notepad icon to your desktop. When you release the mouse button, a shortcut to the application will appear on your desktop, as in Figure 1.1. The same goes for any other application you may find yourself using frequently in Windows.

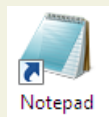


Figure 1.1. Creating a shortcut to Notepad

4 Build Your Own Website The Right Way Using HTML & CSS

Notepad is the most basic of applications, as you can see from Figure 1.2.

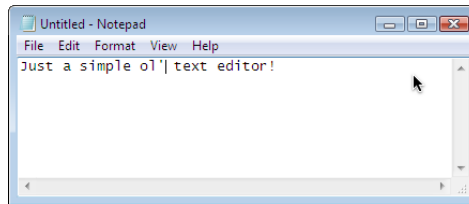


Figure 1.2. Notepad: a contender for the world's plainest program

Your Web Browser: Internet Explorer

Once you've created a web page using Notepad, you'll need a way to view the results of your handiwork. You'll remember that in the preface to this book, Internet Explorer (IE) was mentioned. Well, that's your viewer. As Figure 1.3 shows, Internet Explorer is in the **Programs** folder (accessed via **All Programs** from the **Start** menu, near the Windows logo), but a shortcut may also lurk on your desktop.

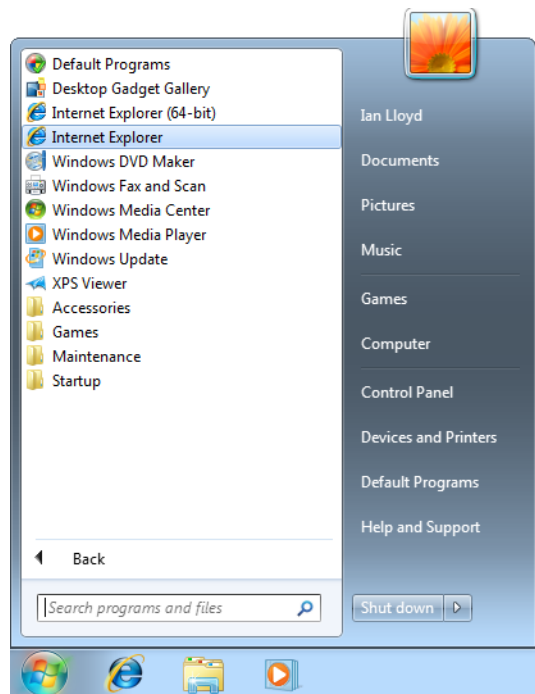


Figure 1.3. Internet Explorer: Microsoft's browser of choice

Mac OS X Basic Tools

Like Windows, the Mac operating system (specifically OS X; we won't be looking at previous versions of the Mac OS) has a number of tools that you can use straight out of the box. These tools are practically the equivalent to the Windows programs mentioned above.

Your Text Editor: TextEdit

While Windows has Notepad, the Mac has TextEdit, which can be found in the **Applications** folder, as Figure 1.4 illustrates.



Figure 1.4. TextEdit comes as part of Mac OS X's default installation

Unlike Notepad, TextEdit works as a rich text editor by default, which means we can work with fonts, make text bold and italic, and so on. However, we want to work with TextEdit as a plain text editor, so you'll need to adjust some of TextEdit's preferences. Start TextEdit, and then select **TextEdit > Preferences** from the menu to bring up the **Preferences** screen. Select **Plain text** within **New Document Attributes**; then close the **Preferences** screen. The next time you create a new file in TextEdit, it will be a plain text document.

Your Web Browser: Safari

The default browser for Mac users is Safari. You can usually find Safari in the **dock** (being the bar of icons at the bottom of your screen), but you can also access it through the **Applications** folder, as Figure 1.5 illustrates.



Figure 1.5. Safari is available via Mac's **Applications** folder



Stick It in the Dock

Just as you can drag shortcuts to programs onto the Windows desktop, you can add programs to the dock in Mac OS X. To add a program to the dock, just drag its icon from the **Applications** folder onto the dock, and *presto!* The application is now easily accessible whenever you need it.

If you're using a slightly older Mac, you may also have a copy of Internet Explorer installed. My advice on Internet Explorer for Mac? Send it to the Trash. The Mac version of IE was abandoned by Microsoft many years ago, so it is considerably outdated and rarely supported or used in the wider world. None of the newer Macs come with this application installed, and it bears no real resemblance to its Windows counterpart, for those more comfortable using IE.

Beyond the Basic Tools

You can certainly make a good start using the tools mentioned above. However, once you're dealing with a handful of web pages and other resources, you may want to go beyond the basics. We'll cover using some slightly more advanced applications later in the book.

Countless other text editors and web browsers are available for download, and many of them are free. Obviously, we don't have time to describe each and every one of them, so I've settled on a few options that have worked for me in the past that you might like to download and have at your disposal. And remember, they're all free!

Windows Tools

NoteTab

NoteTab's tabbed interface lets you have many different files open simultaneously without cluttering up your screen, as Figure 1.6 illustrates. Files that you've opened are remembered even after you close the program and open it again later, which is very useful when you're working on a batch of files over many days. You can download the free NoteTab, or its Light version, from <http://www.notetab.com/>.

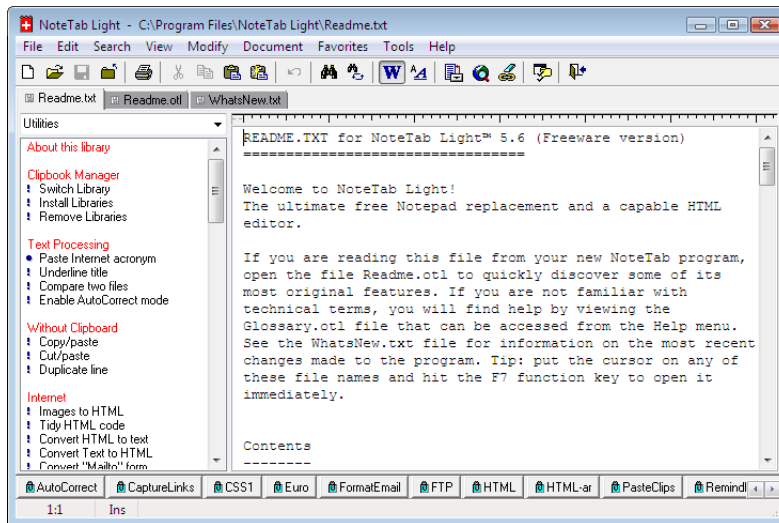


Figure 1.6. NoteTab Light's tabbed interface

Firefox

As mentioned in the preface, Firefox is a popular alternative to Internet Explorer and, as we proceed through this book, will be our browser of choice for a number of reasons. As with NoteTab, Firefox offers a tabbed interface that helps keep your computer free from window clutter. You can download Firefox from <http://www.mozilla.com/firefox/>; the browser is depicted in Figure 1.7.

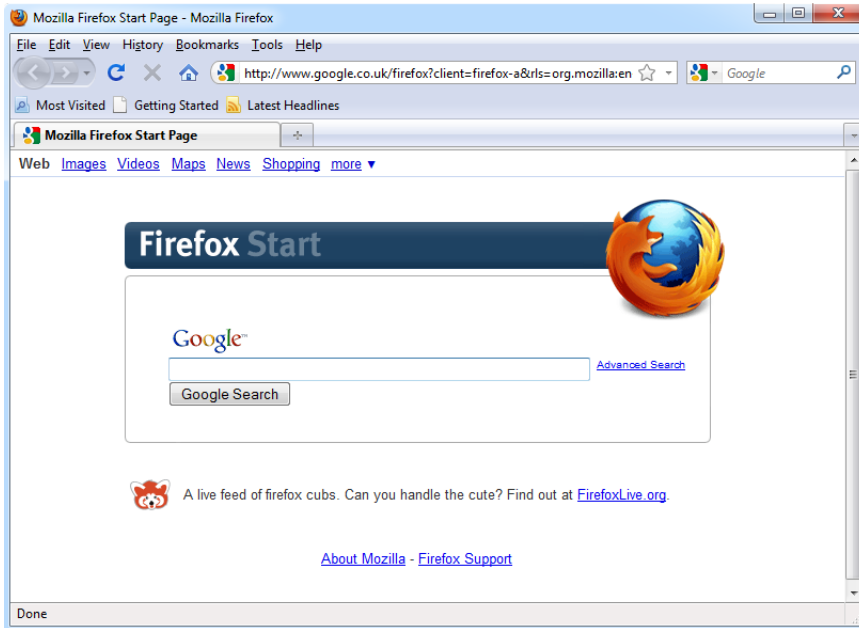


Figure 1.7. Firefox—this creature is worth hunting down

Mac OS X Tools

It is true that there are fewer free programs available for the Mac operating system than there are for Windows. However, there are a few programs that you might like to consider as you move beyond the basics.

TextWrangler

TextWrangler is a free, simple text editor made by BareBones Software. As with NoteTab for Windows, TextWrangler can tidy up your workspace by allowing several text files to be open for editing at the same time (the documents are listed in a pull-out *drawer* to one side of the interface, rather than in tabs). You can download

TextWrangler—shown in Figure 1.8—from the BareBones Software website,¹ or from the Mac App store.

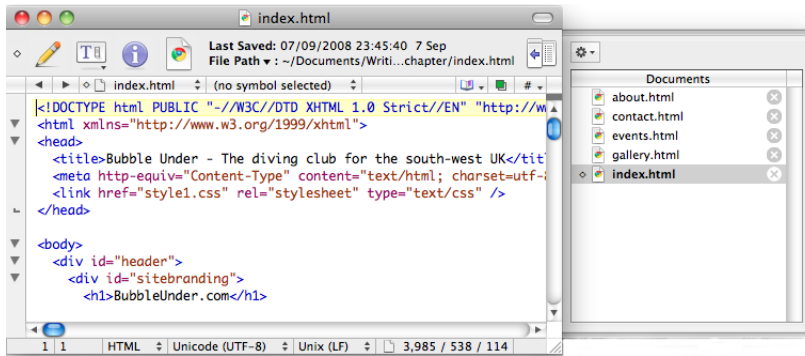


Figure 1.8. TextWrangler, a free text editor from BareBones Software

Firefox

Firefox is also popular with Mac users, many of whom prefer to use it instead of Safari (often because of the extra features—known as **add-ons**—that can be bolted on to the browser). A web page viewed in Firefox should display the same, regardless of whether the browser is installed on a PC running Windows, on a Mac running OS X, or on Linux, a free, open source operating system (generally favored by highly technical people who like to tinker with their computers a lot). The predictability of Firefox is a welcome change from the bad old days of endless browser competition, and is one very good reason why we’ll mainly use Firefox in the examples included in this book.

Not Just Text, Text, Text

You can build an entire website using just the tools mentioned above, but it won’t be the sexiest site on the Web. What’s missing are images. So far, the programs we’ve mentioned are used to manipulate plain text or view web pages. If your website is going to be visually appealing, you’ll need to create and manipulate images, either from scratch using photos you’ve taken, or by using images that you have the legal right to use on your website.

¹ <http://www.barebones.com/products/textwrangler/>

Unfortunately, when it comes to image-editing software, that old saying, “You get what you pay for” applies. A professional image-editing program that you install on your machine, like Photoshop or Fireworks, costs hundreds of dollars. While these programs offer some excellent capabilities, I’d only recommend that you buy them if you’re sure that they’re right for you. If you already have a copy of one of these, or a similar image-editing program, by all means use it and experiment with it. Programs like PaintShop Photo Pro X3 or Photoshop Elements (a cut-down version of Photoshop) are more reasonably priced; however, for the purposes of this book, we’ll only look at tools that are free to download and offer enough functionality to give you an idea of what’s possible.

Keep an eye open for free image editors that are included (usually as downloads, sometimes on disks) with internet, computing, and design magazines. Software vendors often give away older versions of their software in the hope that users might upgrade to a new version at a later date. Look out for PaintShop Photo Pro X3 (with a cheesy name like that, it’s hard to miss!), or any image editor that supports **layers**—a way to construct an image by stacking two or more layers, one on top of the other. We’ll keep our image editing fairly simple throughout this book, but it’s certainly worth keeping an eye open for free (and full-featured) image-editing software, as such offers will not always be available.



Taking the Big Boys for a Spin

The most commonly used image-editing packages are available for trial download. They are large downloads (hundreds of megabytes), and may need to be left to download overnight, even on a broadband connection.

These trial versions are typically available for 30 days’ use; after that time, you can decide whether you want to buy the full software or stop using the program. Those 30 days, however, might provide just enough time for you to use the software while you work through this book.

Adobe Photoshop

A trial of Photoshop’s latest version is available for download.² If you’d rather try the lighter Photoshop Elements, trial versions are available for Windows³ and Mac.⁴

² <http://www.adobe.com/products/photoshop/>

³ <http://www.adobe.com/products/photoshopelwin/>

⁴ <http://www.adobe.com/products/photoshopelmac/>

Adobe Fireworks

You can download a trial version of Fireworks from the Adobe website.⁵

PaintShop Photo Pro X3

PaintShop Photo Pro X3 is available for Windows only. To download a trial version, visit Corel's website⁶ and click the **Free Trials** link in the navigation bar.

Windows Tools

The standard Windows install hasn't always been blessed with image-editing software. Certainly this was the case with Windows XP, although, if you bought the computer as a bundle with PC, scanner, and digital camera, you might be lucky and find image-editing software included in the deal. (Scout around in your **Start > All Programs** menu to see what you can uncover).

In Windows Vista, the Photo Gallery application saw some big improvements over its previous XP incarnation and included some basic, but still useful, image manipulation tools, including cropping, color, and contrast adjustment. The Photo Gallery application can be found directly in the **Start** menu.

In Windows 7, however, those image adjustments were taken away again, at least from the default installation. You can choose to open the image from Photo Gallery into Paint, where you gain some *very* basic editing tools (cropping, rotating), as seen in Figure 1.9. Or, you could install these extra photo adjustment tools by grabbing the free Windows Live Photo Gallery.⁷

⁵ <http://www.adobe.com/products/fireworks/>

⁶ <http://www.corel.com/servlet/Satellite/au/en/Content/1150905725000>

⁷ <http://explore.live.com/windows-live-photo-gallery?os=mac>

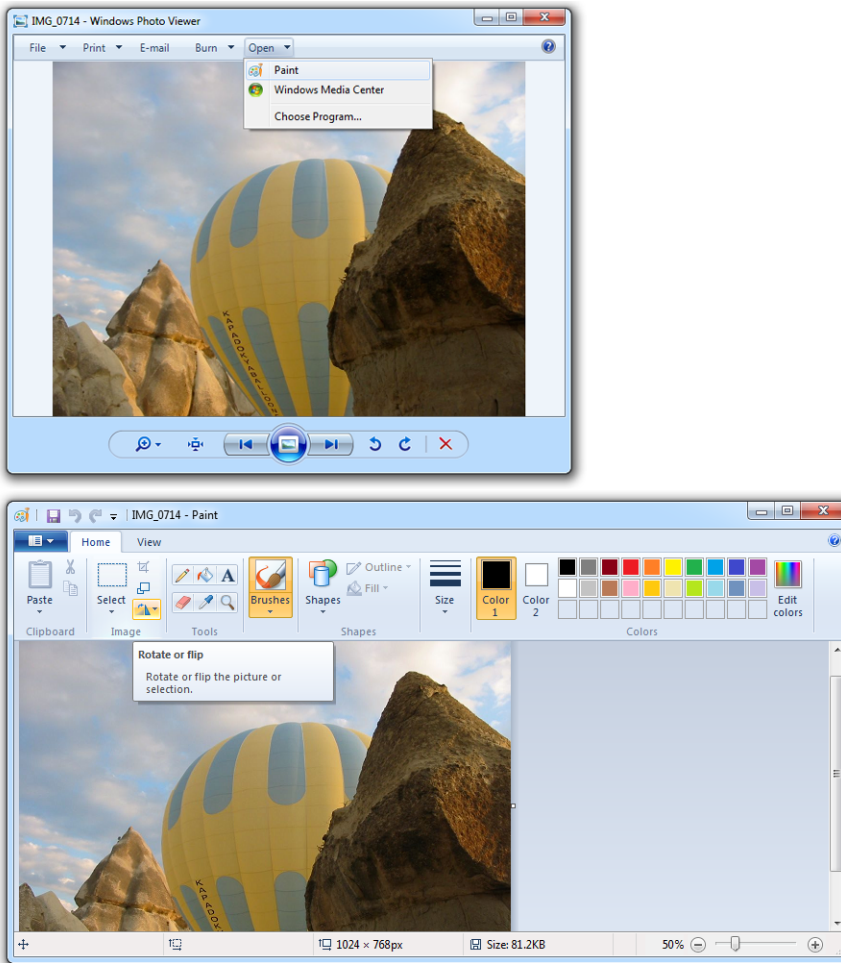


Figure 1.9. Windows' Photo Gallery application, which lets you open the image in Paint

Picasa

Whether you're using Windows 7, Vista, or XP, you may find the image-editing possibilities offered by the installed programs restrictive. With that in mind, you might like to try out an excellent image-management tool that Google offers for free download. The program is called Picasa (it's also available for Mac users), and it's well-equipped to handle most tasks that you're likely to encounter as you manage

imagery for your website. Download a copy from the Picasa website,⁸ and soon enough you'll be using this program to crop, rotate, add special effects, and catalog the images stored on your computer. Figure 1.10 gives you an idea of the program's interface.

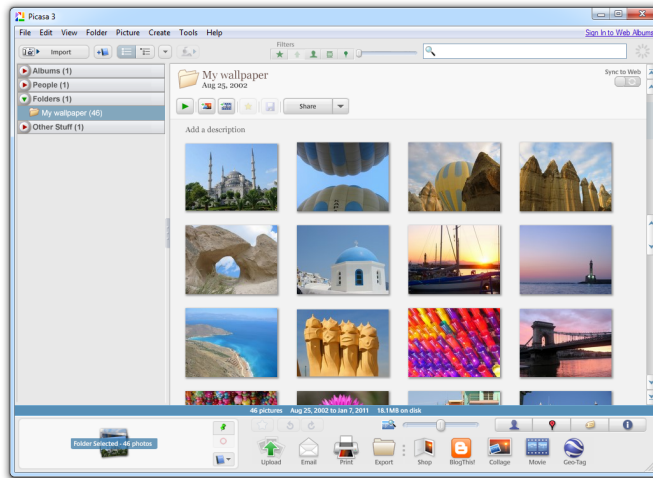


Figure 1.10. Picasa: Google's full-featured image-management tool

Mac OS X Tools

The Mac has a reputation for being favored by designers and creative types, and the platform makes many tools available to the budding artist; however, they usually come at a price, one that's higher than the Windows equivalents. So, what free software can we use on the Mac, assuming that we want a more permanent tool than a 30-day trial version of Photoshop or Fireworks?

Preview

Preinstalled on every Mac that you buy these days, Preview handles a raft of simple image amendments such as cropping and rotating, though you probably know it best as “the app that opens when I view a PDF.” We'll be explaining how to use it for some image changes in Chapter 5.

⁸ <http://picasa.google.com/mac/>



Figure 1.11. Preview handles the basics of image editing

iPhoto

Also included with Mac OS X is a program that probably needs no introduction to the experienced Mac user: iPhoto. This excellent program is not intended to be a fully featured image editor; it's really designed for managing and viewing large numbers of photos stored on a computer. It's great for organizing photo albums, but iPhoto also has some very useful editing facilities that take it beyond a mere cataloging tool.

Images can be rotated by arbitrary angles (using the Straighten tool in edit mode), and a whole range of color adjustments are possible, as seen in Figure 1.12. iPhoto can be found in the **Applications** folder, or in the dock.



Figure 1.12. Using the image-adjustment tools in iPhoto

Online Tools

I've focused on programs that you can download and install on your computer for the purposes of image editing, but there is another way that avoids this entirely. You can do a surprisingly large amount of editing online for free using Adobe's Photoshop Express⁹. The editor is accessed in the navigation menu under **Online Tools** and, once you've uploaded the image you want to tinker with, you'll discover a wide range of options. Removing red-eye, smoothing out blemishes, blurring or sharpening parts of the image: all of these are possible online. Then, when you're happy with your changes, you can save it back to your computer's hard drive.



Figure 1.13. Where to find Photoshop Express Editor

⁹ <http://www.photoshop.com/tools?wf=editor>

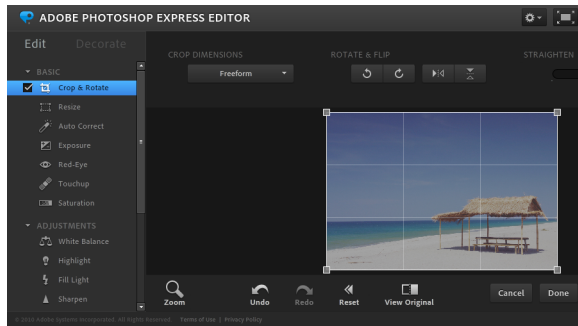


Figure 1.14. Using Photoshop Express to crop an image

Creating a Spot for Your Website

So far, we've covered some of the tools you'll need to create your website. We've looked at programs that are readily available, and where you can find them on your computer. And when the free tools that came with your computer are not up to the job, I've suggested other programs that you can download and use. Our next task on the to-do list is to create a space for your website on the hard drive.

Windows

The best place to keep your website files is in a dedicated folder that's easy to find within the Documents library (in Vista and XP, just **Documents** or **My Documents**, respectively). The **Documents** library can easily be found by clicking on the Windows Explorer icon that sits in the Taskbar (the icon looks like a tabbed folder you might find in a letter tray). In Windows Vista, you'll find the **Documents** folder inside **C:\Users\yourusername**; in XP it's under **C:\Documents and Settings\yourusername**.

Now create a new folder here called "Web" by selecting **File > New > Folder**.

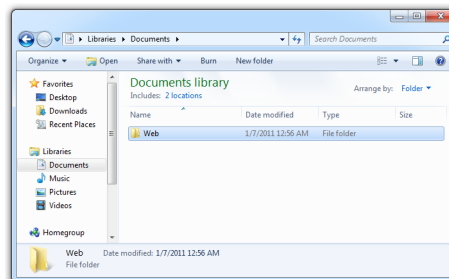


Figure 1.15. The Documents library in Windows 7 containing our new "Web" folder



Displaying the User Folder/My Documents Folder

Can't find your user folder on your Windows 7 or Vista desktop? Missing your **My Documents** folder in XP? You may have removed the icon by accident—it's easily done—or it may have never been set up in the first place. This is how you can place or return the folder to your desktop:

1. From the **Start Menu**, select **Control Panel**.
2. Select **Appearance and Personalization** (or **Appearance and Themes** in XP).
3. Windows 7 and Vista users: choose **Personalization**, and at top left is a list of options, including **Change Desktop Icons**. A new dialog box will appear, so check the **User's Files** option in the **Desktop Icons** section, and press **OK**. Close the **Appearance and Personalization** window. You can also access this feature by right-clicking on the desktop and choosing it from the pop-up menu, as seen in Figure 1.16
4. XP users: select **Change the desktop background** from the list of options, and click the **Customize Desktop...** button at the bottom. Check the **My Documents** option in the dialog box that appears and click **OK**. Close the **Appearance and Themes** window by pressing **OK**.
5. Your user folder/**My Documents** folder should now be on the desktop, as shown in Figure 1.17.

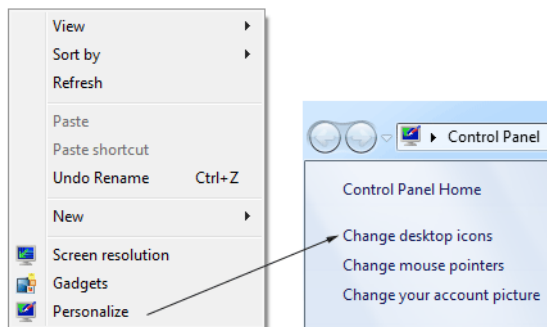


Figure 1.16. Getting to the Personalize options in Windows 7 is also possible by right-clicking on the desktop

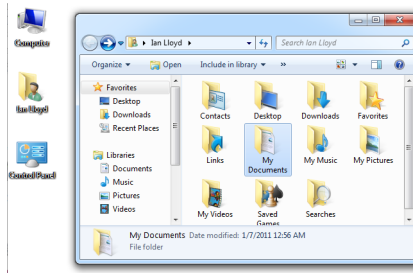


Figure 1.17. The user folder displayed on the desktop in Windows 7, which contains **My Documents** folder

Mac OS X

In Mac OS X, there's already a handy place for you to store your website files: the **Sites** folder, shown in Figure 1.18. Open your home directory (from **Finder**, select **Go > Home**), and there it is.

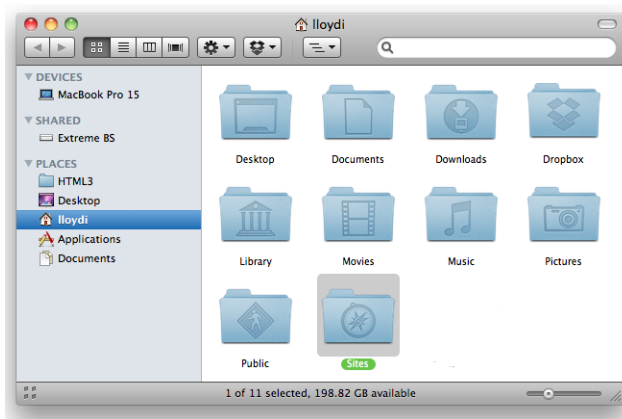


Figure 1.18. Displaying the **Sites** folder in the Mac OS X home directory

It's easy to add the **Sites** folder to your sidebar (seen in Figure 1.19) for quick access: just drag the folder to the sidebar in the same way you add items to the dock.

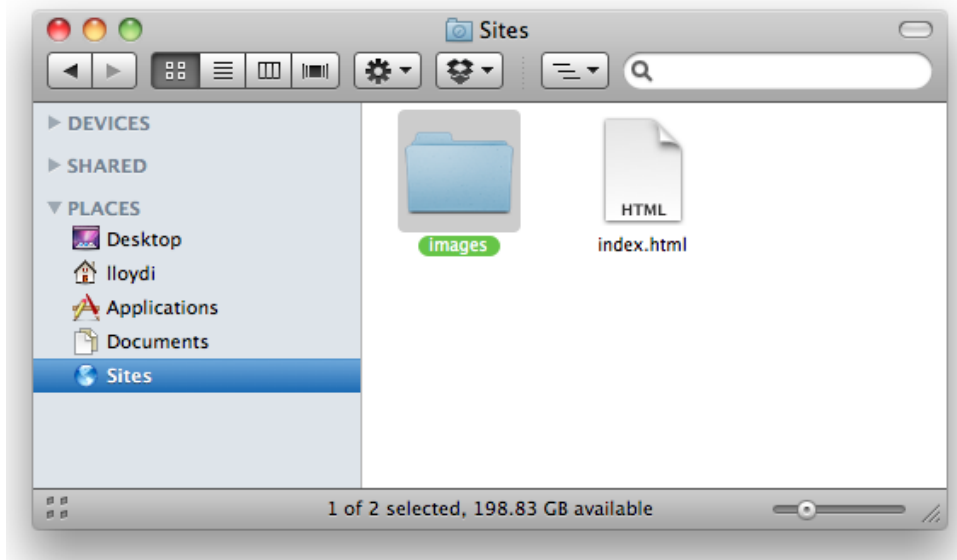


Figure 1.19. The **Sites** folder now placed in the sidebar

Summary

Believe it or not, we now have everything we need to build our own website—and all without spending a cent! Not only do we have the basic tools—our text editor (Notepad or TextEdit) and our web browser (Internet Explorer or Safari)—but we also know the alternatives that exist.

We've reviewed some simple and freely available image-editing programs that can help us spruce up our sites: Picasa for Windows, and Preview and iPhoto for Mac. Finally, we mentioned some more capable—and more expensive—options, such as Photoshop and PaintShop Pro X3.

Now we have the tools, let's learn how to use them!