

Review of Adobe Dreamweaver CS3

by Pam Raisanen

In addition to this review, you can view the website I created with Adobe Dreamweaver CS3 at <http://pamraisanen.com>. It still needs a bit of tweaking but it was what I was able to accomplish during a 30 day trial of Dreamweaver. I tried to explore as many features as time and my skill range would allow. I prefaced this experience with a bit of reading and by watching the excellent Lynda.com training videos Adobe provided. My previous experience has been with Microsoft's Front Page plus some time playing with Expression Web, Nvu and other freeware applications. I currently maintain two club websites on a volunteer basis and personal web spaces that I use as test sites while working on my web building skills. Although I've done some reading about HTML/XHTML and CSS, my coding skills are minimal. When I find it necessary to tweak code in a web authoring program, I do so with a book in my hand.

Installation was done from a copy of the downloaded 30 day trial version from Adobe that had been burned to a CD. It installed smoothly on my desktop computer which is a Pentium 4, 3 GHz, with 2 GB of RAM running Windows XP Pro. It would not install on my new laptop which runs 64 bit Vista Ultimate, the problem being the 64 bit system and not Vista.

The standards for web sites as set by the World Wide Web Consortium has changed from building and styling pages by writing them in HTML, Hyper Text Markup Language to writing the structure in XHTML, Extensible HyperText Markup Language and adding the style, such as color, text format etc., with Cascading Style Sheets. Using External Style Sheets keeps the code for the XHTML structure of the site clean and simple and allows styles from one Cascading Style Sheet to be applied to multiple pages. My goal was to build a modern, standards compliant website without having to write any HTML/XHTML or CSS and to become comfortable navigating through Dreamweaver's user interface. As I worked I referred to books for reference as well as Adobe's help files.

Adobe's Dreamweaver provides a wide variety of tools to build and style a web site using XHTML and CSS. They include templates for pre-made web sites that can be edited with user information. I opted to build a site from scratch to see what I was capable of doing with Dreamweaver. Opening, naming, and saving a site went well.

I was able to put together a several page site that included images, hyperlinks, flash buttons that change color when you hold the mouse over them, drop down menus, and a tabbed page.

The program has great support for CSS and I found it easy to style. Even working right in the document window as you would in a word processing program, Dreamweaver writes CSS rules for you. Creating external style sheets without having to actually write the code for them has been a problem for me in the past. Dreamweaver made it as simple as drag and drop to move individual styles into an external style sheet. It could then be attached to one or multiple pages with a click of the mouse. I found many helpful things in the program without having to search. Remembering what type of style rules can be applied several times (Class) or will be applied to every tag of that type (Tag) or to a section that occurs

only once on a page (ID) was made less difficult by the short descriptions offered in New CSS Rules window.

The three tools I used most were the Property Inspector which provides access to whatever part of the web page you are working on at the time, the Insert Bar from which you can add elements and the CSS Styles Panel from the Tools Panels which shows the styles applied to the site and holds buttons to add or create them. All can be closed, adjusted or minimized to give more screen real estate when needed. The Property Inspector is located at the bottom of the design window. It's contextual and adds tools as needed for the active item on the page. This eliminated a lot of normally wasted time searching for basic tools. The Insert Bar at the top of the Design Window adds elements such as images, tables, Spry Library items, etc. with a simple click

Access to more detailed tools is found on the top menu bar in the Window menu. This made it easy to open or close tool panels as needed.

One of the most exciting features offered is the Spry tool set library of JavaScript programs. It includes drop down menus, tabbed panels, accordions, and data sets. Again, no coding was needed for me to quickly add tabbed panels or a drop down menu bar to a web page. Styling the menu bar was a bit of a challenge due to the long list of elements added but with good instructions, the different parts began to make more sense.

Adobe includes a FTP program so sites can be uploaded right from Dreamweaver. Uploading the website to the remote server was a bit confusing. Dreamweaver provides a wizard for this. Setting it up for the first time I typed in ftp:// when all I needed was the site name. I got an error message but it didn't specify what was wrong. This was one place the help files weren't specific enough for my limited skill level. It took trial and error to figure it out. Once that was resolved, it went smoothly.

Once uploaded, I discovered the alternative text for images worked fine in IE7 but did not display in Firefox or Safari browsers. I couldn't find any different way of inputting it in Dreamweaver. Adobe Dreamweaver includes reports on this as well as many other design issues and gave links to help sites but not an actual solution. So far I have not resolved this.

Dreamweaver CS3 is an exciting and powerful program. There was a big learning curve to get through what I did and I barely scratched the surface of the programs capabilities. The web site I created still needs some things corrected and more added to it but I was pleased with what I was able to do. I look forward to expanding my knowledge with this program in the future.