

Web Page Construction Kit

By Brian Smither



Macmillan Software has collected three individual software titles and has released them collectively as the Web Page Construction Kit Deluxe. The three applications stand alone, but WebExpress can send and retrieve graphics with the other applications. The kit also includes the electronic form of the book *creative html design* by Lynda and William Weinman and a large collection of graphics. The kit comprises MicroVision Development's WebExpress 4.0, TGS's 3Space Publisher Interactive 3D Suite 2.01, and Stoik Software's PictureMan Painter Brush 2.0. The "Kit" is the sixth version of kits assembled and published by Macmillan over the years.

WebExpress

An extremely easy-to-use Web page builder, its simplicity unfortunately indicates its lack of sophistication. It has numerous good and unique points—a WYSIWYG editor, a Web manager, a few toolbars, the ability to insert a text file or include another HTML file as a single object, a spell checker, and the ability to embed multimedia objects, JavaScripts, VBScripts, and ActiveX controls, but not Java applets.

WebExpress has a single-level undo/redo command but it becomes invalid when you save the document. It functions much as you would expect of a modern editor: selecting a range of text,

table cells, or images will apply any property changes to the entire selection.

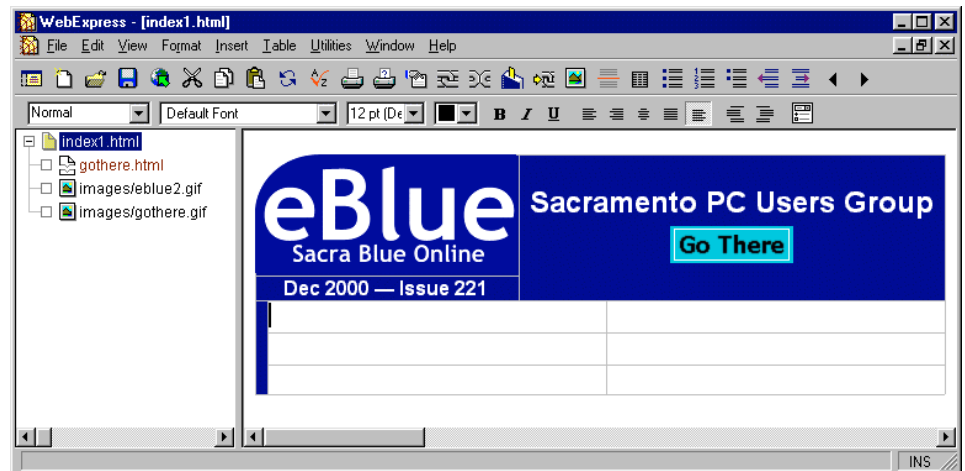
There is a lot more I wish from WebExpress's layout, toolbars, and markup indicators. For example, one trick to forcing a certain spacing in tables is to embed a transparent image and size it to the dimensions needed. Later, when this object is selected, I would want an object properties window to pop up identifying the object and enabling me to edit the properties then and there, instead of having to guess if I selected the intended object among several and manually bringing up a properties dialog box.

Selecting objects is executed as expected, but since one can "nest" certain objects, like tables within tables, the displayed selection can be confusing. I wish a selected table would be indicated by highlighting just the table borders but not its contents. For another example,

cannot handle UNC* notation on networked directories, even though the Browse Directory dialog windows permit it. The solution was to map that network directory to a drive letter, then use regular path notation.

Instead of creating an index page from scratch, I opened an existing page from a different Web and saved it as the index page for this Web. Even though the entire page, with graphics, was displayed for editing, saving that page did not also transfer or save the graphics to the new location. Comparing the file before and after the save revealed that WebExpress does a very good job of formatting the source code.

The WYSIWYG editing window is not a perfect match with what you would see in a browser. For example, WebExpress keeps table cells inflated to the size they would be if text had been entered. This can be misleading, because table



joining ("spanning") several cells is easily accomplished but there is no residual indicator as to which resultant cell contains the joined cells. Thus, if you change your mind, you will have to hunt for that cell which can be re-split.

Well, the first order of business was to follow the book's instructions and create a new Web*. The Web Site Wizard presented me several screens about where I wanted the site's working directory to be located and what default properties the Web pages should have. The Wizard accepted all the parameters but refused to "finish." The problem, as best as I can guess, is that WebExpress

cells having absolutely no content in them may collapse to nothing when viewed in a browser. WebExpress gives you the ability to call any and all browsers you may have installed on your system to see how the page will actually display, as well as a text editor to see the code. For background colors, the color picker does not show values in hex while the "color-safe" palette shows the color codes in hex but in a BGR sequence.

Other than the above, WebExpress is a most capable page builder.

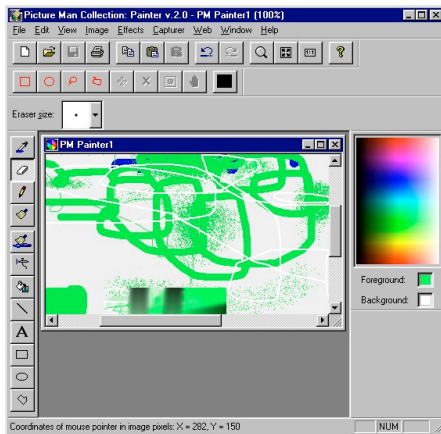
WebExpress

MicroVision Development
<http://www.mvd.com/webexpress/>

Picture Man Painter 2.0

For a graphics application packaged as a component of a Web site construction kit, it puzzles me why Macmillan Software chose PM Painter, since support for GIF image files is missing. (If you weren't aware, Unisys got stingy with the GIF format, requiring any application that could generate that format to pay a licensing fee—this, after GIF had become one of the two default image formats for the Internet.) Macmillan Software's support staff stated they intentionally removed GIF support precisely because of those licensing requirements.

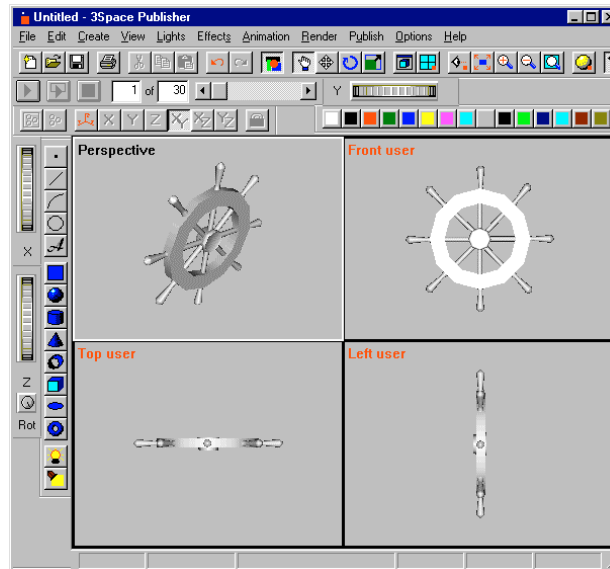
The box makes no mention of GIF support but much of the documentation and the help files do. Macmillan Software offered to have their third-party fulfillment center issue a refund if I was unhappy with this limitation. If you were to obtain PM Painter directly from Stoik Software, GIF support would be included.



PM Painter superficially resembles Paint Shop Pro. However, version 2.0 has a rather limited feature set and during my evaluation, it wasn't too long before I found a couple of bugs. (The black smudges are from the WaterColor brush stroking over the selection marquee*—the marquee is not supposed to affect the image.) PM Painter has all the requisite features such as screen capture, pressure-sensitive pen/tablets and interfaces with scanner software. It has a good range of effects, with the ability to add more through plug-ins. It comes with a batch file converter that handles several image formats, changing palette sizes and file formats, but again not GIFs. There is also a fairly good tutorial.

Picture Man Painter 2.0

Template Graphics Software (TGS)
<http://www.tgs.com/3SpacePub>



3Space Publisher Graphics Suite

Getting this application installed may take a few minutes. The initial install file is 47 megabytes, and the process will slow to a crawl if you inadvertently try to invoke the installer a second time, which is easy to do when it appears that nothing is happening. You will just have to be patient. It will install. (The finish button is actually the start button.)

This very sophisticated application allows you to create graphics, including GIFs, that have a three-dimensional quality to them. You essentially start with any one of several forms (3D shapes), deform it, add color and texture, and place it in a 'scene.' You add more forms, positioning and sizing them, orient the lighting as you want it, and set how you are looking into the scene. You can add very complicated spins to the objects.

Finally, you add ambient effects like backdrops and backgrounds, fog, or other effects as if the scene were projected onto fabric or wood. The finished rendering is then saved as, or published to, any of several different image formats.

3Space Publisher can publish scenes to animated images, Java applets, VRML scenes, screen savers, video clips, and ActiveX controls. There is a wizard that creates the necessary HTML code to display the object in a browser. Not to leave the new user completely stranded, 3Space includes numerous pre-made objects and an elementary tutorial.

3Space Publisher Graphics Suite

Stoik Software
www.stoik.com/products/painter/pt_first.htm

Web Page Construction Kit 6.0 Deluxe

WebExpress has an easy to fair learning curve. Figure out how to do the simple stuff first, then add more complexity to your pages as you deem fit. Picture Man Painter is very easy to use (but be aware of its quirks). Anyone with a smudge of artistic vision and who can release their inner child playing with crayons can enjoy this program. But 3Space Publisher is a brain-breaker. Expect to spend several evenings with a pot of

hot coffee getting the feel of the power of this application.

*WEB: A collection of Web pages that will be stored at a specified Web site. Many times the term "Web site" is used erroneously to refer to the pages. The "site" is the location.

*UNC: Universal Naming Convention—an example would be \\LAPTOP1\WEBS\INDEX.HTM. Regular path notation would map that specific directory to a drive letter to give L:\INDEX.HTM. (You must enable "sharing" on the WEBS directory.)

*WYSIWYG: "What you see is what you get," pronounced "wizzy-wig," essentially means the image placement, text wrapping, font selection, colors, etc., are displayed on the monitor just as they will be when printed or published in the document's final form.

*Selection Marquee: When a desired area of an image is "selected," a dashed line surrounding the selected area moves similar to the way lighted bulbs blink around a theater billboard. Sometimes called "dancing ants."

There is a mail-in rebate form good until March 31, 2001.

Web Page Construction Kit 6.0 Deluxe

(ISBN: 1-57595-393-5) \$49.95

Web Page Construction Kit 6.0 (Regular)

(ISBN: 1-57595-392-7) \$29.95

Macmillan Software

<http://www.macmillansoftware.com/>

(Check the Web site for updates.)

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