

Building Flash[®] Web Sites

FOR
DUMMIES[®]

by Doug Sahlin



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Web Sites***

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Doug Sahlin is a photographer, videographer, and Web designer living in Lakeland, Florida. He has written 16 books on computer graphics and office applications and co-authored 3 books on Photoshop and 1 book on digital video. Recent titles include *Digital Photography QuickSteps* and *How To Do Everything with Adobe Acrobat 7.0*. Many of his books have been bestsellers at Amazon.com. Doug's books have been translated into five languages. He uses Flash 8.0 Professional to create Web sites and multimedia presentations for his clients.

Dedication

Dedicated to the memory of my mother, Inez, my best friend and one of the kindest and wisest souls to walk the face of this earth.

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Introduction

So you want to be a Flash Web designer, but you can't design Flash Web sites in a flash? It all takes time. And it also requires a modicum of knowledge, which is where this book comes in. If you've read other Flash how-to books, you know that they cover the sundry topics like how to create really cool animations with Flash. However, this book takes you to the next level and shows you how to create a Flash Web site from soup to nuts.

About This Book

Here are some of the things you can do with this book:

- ✓ Use it as a doorstop. (Kidding!)
- ✓ Plan a Flash Web site.
- ✓ Create a lean, fast-loading Flash interface.
- ✓ Create content for your Flash Web site.
- ✓ Create interactive Web sites with Flash.
- ✓ Optimize and publish your Flash Web site.
- ✓ Add eye candy to your Flash Web site.
- ✓ Create an e-commerce Flash Web site.
- ✓ Debug your ActionScript.
- ✓ Sharpen your ability to deal with clients.

Foolish Assumptions

In order to do most anything, you need some specific tools, just a bit of know-how, and perchance a bit of luck mingled with creativity. When you need to design a Flash Web site, you need the proper tools. For this book, that tool is Flash 8. And if you're going to do cool stuff, like encode your own video, you need Flash 8 Professional.

You should know your way around the Flash workspace. But don't worry; I do give you a brief refresher course on some of the basic Flash stuff, like creating animations, working with text, and so on. When you create animations, and for that matter format text, choose colors, and so on, you use the Properties Inspector to set the parameters for the object with which you are working. Therefore, you should have a working knowledge of the Properties Inspector. I also show you how to work with ActionScript. However, in order to follow along, you should have a basic knowledge of the Actions panel.

Another thing you should know is how to manipulate HTML documents. Although your main work in this book uses Flash, you still have to do some editing to the HTML document in which your Flash Web site is embedded. If you have working knowledge of an HTML editor, such as Dreamweaver, you're one step ahead of the game. Another benefit of Dreamweaver is the fact that you can use the software to upload files to the Web provider that hosts the Web site.

Conventions Used in This Book

I'm not a conventional kind of guy. But of course, without some kind of conventions, such as punctuation and grammar, people wouldn't be able to understand each other. This book is no different. Without conventions, you'd have no idea of what to do or when to do it. Therefore, we use the following conventions in this book. When you're asked to input information — you know, type something — the required input is **boldfaced**. When you see examples of ActionScript code, URLs, and e-mail addresses, these are in a monofont typeface, like so: `myEmail@myserver.com`. New terms are *italicized*.

What You Don't Have to Read

This is one of those nonlinear type of books, which means that you don't have to read it in order. Although the book can be read as a whole, feel free to jump to the section that contains the information you need. You'll get a good idea of what's in each section by reading the tips and notes. And of course, a picture is always worth a thousand words: You can look at the figures to get an idea of what's presented in each section; if the picture doesn't relate to the information you're looking for, feel free to skip that section. Also, you can feel free to skip any sections wearing a *Technical Stuff* icon.

How This Book Is Organized

Building Flash Web Sites For Dummies is split into five parts. You don't have to read the book sequentially, and you don't even have to read all the sections in any particular chapter. You can use the Table of Contents and the Index to find the information you need and quickly get your answer. In this section, I briefly describe what you'll find in each part.

Part I: Building the Perfect Beast

In this part, I present information on how to plan your Flash Web site prior to building it. I show you several things you should consider prior to building the site, as well as techniques for working with clients. I show you how to create a mock-up for your client and how to begin gathering assets for your Web site before launching Flash.

Part II: Fleshing Out Your Design

After you're done with the preliminaries, you can start creating some actual content, which is what this part is all about. First, I show you how to make an interface. I know what you're thinking: Why just an interface? Well, in order to have a lean and mean Web site, you create a fast-loading interface into which you load other content. In this part, I also show you how to create text for the Web site and how to create some spiffy navigation bars and buttons, as well as how to animate your site.

Part III: Adding Bells and Whistles

So what's a Flash Web site without bells and whistles? *Boring!* In this part, I show you how to kick it up a notch. I introduce you to the wonders of ActionScript and what it can do for you, your site, or your client's site. I also show you how to create some spiffy things with ActionScript, like a clock that shows Web site visitors what time it is. Other interesting tidbits include how to create a Flash photo gallery, add video to your Web site, create an e-commerce site, and more.

Part IV: Sharing Your Site with the World

If you build it, they will come. But first you have to optimize the site for the viewing public and then publish it, the main topic of discussion in — you guessed it — this part of the book. First, I show you how to make your site lean and mean by getting rid of things that are not needed. I also give you other tips and techniques you can use to create a Skinny Minny Web site. Then I show you how to exterminate pesky little bugs in your ActionScript. And finally, I show you how to publish your site.

Part V: The Part of Tens

In the Part of Tens, you'll find three chapters. Each chapter contains ten tidbits — you know, useful nuggets of information — about creating Flash Web sites. I share with you some tips for creating trouble-free Flash Web sites, tips for dealing with clients, and tips for promoting your site. And I've done so much work on this introduction that I'm going to take this moment to take ten.

The appendix

Although Flash is super-popular, it's not the easiest application in the world to master. So I've added this handy appendix, which lists several Flash Internet resources. I waxed my board and actually surfed to each site to verify that it's still there as of this writing. But you know how the Net is . . . here today, gone tomorrow.

The color insert

Because this book is printed in black and white, I've included a color insert so that you can see at least some examples of what you can create with the techniques in the book in full, glorious color. In this section, you find screenshots of Flash Web sites under construction. You also find examples of images being optimized for use in Flash Web sites, as well as text being added to a Flash Web site. Because it's all in grand and glorious color, this section gives you, the reader, a visual feast and examples of what you can do when creating your own Flash Web site.

The companion Web site

I want to make Flash source files available to you, so this book has an accompanying Web site. The site is located at www.dummies.com/go/flashwebsites. There, you can find folders for the chapters in this book. In each chapter's folder, you can find FLA files that give you an example of a project created using the topics covered in that particular chapter.

Icons Used in This Book

What's a *For Dummies* book without icons pointing you in the direction of really great information that's sure to help you along your way? In this section, I briefly describe each icon I use in this book.



The Tip icon points out helpful information that is likely to make your job easier.



This icon marks a generally interesting and useful fact — something that you might want to remember for later use.



The Warning icon highlights lurking danger. With this icon, I'm telling you to pay attention and proceed with caution.



When you see this icon, you know that there's techie stuff nearby. If you're not feeling very techie, you can skip this info.



I've placed several files on the Web for your use. This icon denotes an activity where you might want to first download the named file before continuing.

Where to Go from Here

Okay. So now that you've read this far, or maybe you started with this section of the intro, and you need someone to tell you where to go. Not a problem. If you want to plan your site and get everything ready to rock and roll before launching Flash, check out Part I. In Chapter 1, I give you the skinny on everything you need to do while designing a Flash Web site. In Chapter 2, I show you how to get all your ducks in a row by gathering all the information and assets you need to hit the ground running.

If you're a take-charge, grab-the-bull-by-the-horns, press-on-regardless kind of person, you'll find the information you need to start designing your site in Part II. In Chapter 3, I show how to create the site interface, whereas in Chapter 4, I show you everything you ever wanted to know — well almost — about Flash text but were afraid to ask. In Chapter 5, I show you how to add site navigation, and if you need motion in your Flash Web site, I show you how to get animated in Chapter 6.

If bells and whistles are your thing, or your client's thing, you can easily include them using Flash. If you want cool Flash stuff, mosey on over to Part III. Here I show you how to add cool things to your Web site with ActionScript and also show you how to add Flash eye candy to your site. If your site is going to be commercial, check out Chapter 10.

Part IV is all about finalizing your site and then publishing it. In Chapter 12, I show you how to optimize your site and get the bugs out of your ActionScript. In Chapter 13, I show you how to publish your site.

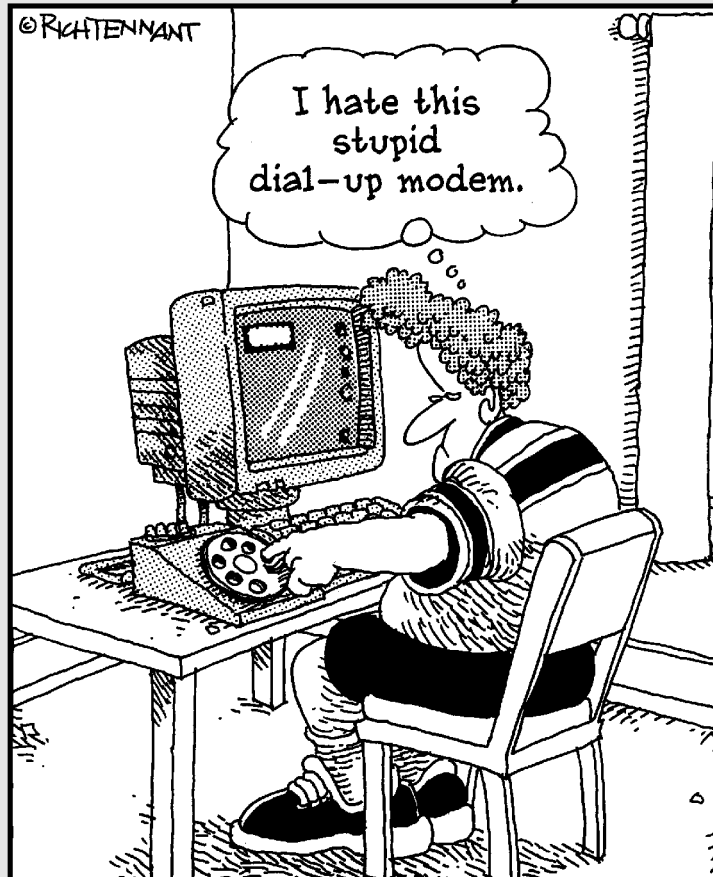
If you're in the mood for a hodge-podge of useful information about working with Flash, working with clients, and promoting your site, check out Part V, which is where you find the Part of Tens chapters. Each chapter contains ten — at least by my abacus — sections of useful information.

Part I

Building the Perfect Beast

The 5th Wave

By Rich Tennant



In this part . . .

I show you everything you need to know to hit the ground running. I show you all the steps involved in creating a Flash Web site and then show you how to begin laying out the Web site.

If you're working with clients, you'll find useful tidbits on how to deal with them and how to figure out exactly what they want. After you have that information in hand, you create a mockup for the client, a task I show you how to accomplish in this part.

Other topics of discussion include gathering materials for the Web site and optimizing images and video in other applications prior to working in Flash.

Chapter 1

Creating the Perfect Flash Site

In This Chapter

- ▶ Planning your Flash site
 - ▶ Assembling the site assets
 - ▶ Building the Flash site
 - ▶ Publishing your site
-

The first page of Chapter 1 is always an exciting place in any book. It's where you find out what's in store for you in the upcoming pages. Or hey, maybe you've already read three chapters and have just decided to restart at the beginning. (What a novel concept!) Well, you can get away with that when reading a book, but if you try to create an interface for your Flash site without first having done your homework, it's almost like trying to fly without knowing how to operate an airplane — but not nearly as hazardous to your health.

In this chapter, I show you the steps you go through to create a Flash site. And like anything else you build, there is a process. Whether you're creating a Flash site for your son's baseball team or for your boss — who plopped an unopened box on your desk that says "Flash Professional 8" and said, "Build me a Flash site" — if you don't approach the process logically, you're destined to have more than your share of headaches. Like the self-help gurus say, "Fail to plan, and you plan to fail."

Flash versus HTML . . . The Winner Is?

To Flash or not to Flash, that is the question. Whether 'tis nobler to create a ho-hum HTML Web site or to up the ante with a Flash design with more bells and whistles than . . . but I digress.

Flash has been around for a long time. In comparison, HTML is almost ancient. Flash has gone through a rapid growth and development spurt since Flash 4. HTML is now in version 4.0 and won't be developed anymore. In fact, HTML 4.0 has been around since 1998, which is practically the Jurassic age in regards to computers and Internet technology. Savvy designers have come up with all

kinds of imaginative coding and workarounds to create some really cool Web sites with HTML. HTML designers use JavaScript to add interactivity to their designs. They write complex code to embed video and audio in their designs, and they use form elements to create interactive forms to gather information, to create virtual shopping carts, and so on. Or maybe they're lucky and have a good WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) HTML application, like Dreamweaver, that takes care of a lot of the grunt work.

Either way, there's still a steep learning curve to create anything more complex than a hum-drum, text-only Web page sprinkled with the odd JPEG image or three. Simply put, modern-day Web designers need to know a lot. And they often have to resort to other colleagues in order to create the latest "all-singing, all-dancing" Web design that will blow the socks off their client's competitors.

However, when you want to have your cake and eat it too, nothing beats Flash. You have everything you need within the application to add all of the interactivity and WOW factor the law allows, and then some. Lots of people think of Flash as a really cool animation tool. But it's so much more than that. You can build high-powered, compelling Web sites with Flash. And the only time HTML comes into the picture is as the document within which you embed your Flash Web site. Figure 1-1 shows a cool Flash Web site.

Figure 1-1:
Flash makes
it possible
for you to
design
interactive
Web sites
with pizzazz.

