

The Weaver of Dreams – A Software Review

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Dreamweaver[®] 8, by Macromedia/Adobe, \$399, for PC & Mac.

Free 30-day trail version at: www.adobe.com

The word *Dreamweaver* evokes images of dreams floating around in the hidden recesses of the mind. Though seemingly unrelated, these images can be captured, then woven together to create a tapestry that can be shared with others. *Dreamweaver* invites the imagination and invites possibilities. *Dreamweaver*[®] is also the name of the "industry of choice" Web-designing software program used by professionals.

The action of creating a Website with *Dreamweaver*[®] is not as easy as dreaming. Using *Dreamweaver*[®] takes work, just as interpreting a dream takes work. And, although dreaming is intuitive and circuitous, creating a website is practical and linear. You have to be organized, specific, and committed to the process in order to create a successful website. And, what makes a successful website is having returning visitors.

You cannot just open up *Dreamweaver*[®] and intuitively create a website. But, if you have experience and an understanding of how the "file system" works on your computer—like creating, naming and moving files and folders—you're a step ahead. Add experience working with tables, style sheets, text boxes, picture boxes, and inserting images—tools found in other programs—you're another step closer. And, if you're an avid Web surfer and can identify good, mediocre, and bad websites—believing you can do better—then move another step closer. Mother may I? Yes, you may! And, if you have ever done programming and like it—you have reached your destiny! *Dreamweaver*[®] will be a wonderful dream for you! (Note: you no longer have to learn HTML to create websites with Dreamweaver, though it does help for "tweaking".)

Even with all these skills—which I have, except the programming—and almost 20 years experience working with computers, including desktop publishing, I still couldn't just jump in and start designing with *Dreamweaver*[®]. I first had to read instructions on how to begin, and I needed to understand the "do's" and "don'ts" protocols. As can be expected, *Dreamweaver*[®] comes with the typical digital Help files. But surprisingly, there is also a book (232 pages) that comes with the software. A rarity.

Personally, I hate reading digital files on my computer to learn how to use a program, especially since these digital files compete for screen space with the program I'm trying to learn. Kudos for Macromedia/Adobe for providing the book - an invaluable tool. The "Getting Started with *Dreamweaver*[®]" digital and book tutorials appear identical. Both give you a hands-on experience of creating a fictitious website.

The tutorial chapters are short and simple, the pages uncluttered, and the instructions clear and easy to follow. The book did not go in-depth, but gave you enough information to have a general understanding of how Web design and development work with *Dreamweaver*[®].

For more in-depth training you can then migrate to the other digital manual called "Using Dreamweaver[®]" found in the *Dreamweaver[®] Help* menu. Unfortunately, there is no free companion book to this digital manual. To fully master this high-end program, you should take a course and/or supplement your training with how-to books. For one such resource, see the book review on *Macromedia Dreamweaver[®] 8: Training from the Source* in this issue, page ___.

Before you can have a Web presence you need to register your www domain name and find a web hosting (server) company. The tutorials don't cover how to do this. A Web designer friend directed me to a www.fatcow.com, a user-friendly company located in Arizona. I paid \$20 for a domain name and \$99 for the web hosting—both require annual renewals.

If you need a Web presence "Now!", but don't have time to learn, design, and create your website, *Dreamweaver[®]* comes with nicely designed Website templates called "Starter Pages". Everything is set up for you; you just replace their text with yours. Use their images or insert yours. That's what I did. And, with the knowledge I gained from the book I recently reviewed, *Dreamweaver 8 Training From the Source*, I was able to modify the template pages by creating cascading style sheets to change the fonts, font sizes, and color scheme. See my website www.ComputerTutorMarin.com. Now that I have web presence, I can leisurely and thoughtfully design my website to suit my needs without feeling pressured to rush cuz' everyone else is already doing it.

Dreamweaver is a high-end program with many advanced features that will take time to master. When you sit in front of your monitor facing the program for the first time, it's like climbing into the cockpit of a jet airplane that you're supposed to learn to fly. Your stomach may do flip-flops because you can't believe you'll ever get off the ground! But with a good instructor (class or book), dedication, and believing in possibilities, you'll be flying in no time!

4 Stars

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Other recommended how-to books on Web designing:

The Non-Designer's Web Book, 3rd Edition, by Robin Williams and John Tollett; Peachpit Press; ©2006, ISBN: 0321303377, \$31.49

Small Websites, Great Results, by Doug Addison, Paraglyph Press; ©2005, ISBN 1932111905, \$29.99