The Business of Art/The Art of Business

by Sylvia Bokor

This issue: Creating Your Own Webpage with Dorothy Meister

I am pleased to introduce Dorothy Meister as my co-author this issue. She supplied all of the computer information dealing with the process of designing a Web page, and did all the research regarding provider s prices and jargon. Dorothy is an artist, a laser technician for Sandia National Laboratories, an auto mechanic, an accountant, a photographer, a wife and mother, and a computer enthusiast. After designing her own Web page on which to advertise her paintings, she designed the Web pages for her research department at Sandia Labs. Dorothy s URL is http://www.flash.net/~dcmeis. You are invited to visit her Web site.

Step 1: Learning "the code"

In most Internet browsers, there is a pull-down menu labeled "View" which contains an option called "View Document Source." When you're on a Web page and curious to know how some effect was achieved, you can select that option to see the written code. This is a good way not only to get your feet wet with the process of creating a Web page but also can be instructive in helping you to figure out how to do what you want to do. However, printing out Web pages and copying the code is slow and tedious work. Dorothy bought the book *HTML for Dummies* and devoured it.

HTML is a relatively easy-to-learn, highly repetitive way of telling a computer where to locate, copy and position text and/or graphics—i.e., pictures, decorative signs and symbols—on a screen. (There are new software programs available which state "no knowlege of HTML is necessary to design a Web page." They seem to work okay, but lack some flexibility for a more elaborate, customized page.)

If you learn HTML, a simple word processor such as a text editor will do. This requires that every single use of the tag* be typed in by hand or by copy/paste. For example, the tag meaning line break must be typed in as <BR>. This is how it was done in "the old days" i.e., two or three years ago. With the introduction of HTML Editors, tags are available as a unit. You simply click on the symbol in a toolbar and the program adds the chosen tag to the selected portion of your document. (Yes, you may type in the instruction if you want to.) The latest versions do not show the tags at all. You merely answer questions and fill in forms.

But learning HTML gives you a financial edge since generic software is inexpensive or free, and it gives you flexiblity for designing pages tailored to your specific needs. Besides, it's fun.

Step 2: Design your page.

Decide what you want to say, what you want to show, and how you want these things arranged. A lot of people work directly on the computer. Some do sketches with pencil and paper first to get an idea of what they're after. Dorothy used a combination of these.

She wanted her logo side by side with her address and phone number. Below this and positioned in a row, she wanted little pictures (called thumbnails) of her paintings. She wanted each thumbnail to be clickable, linking** it to a larger view of the painting and to more information about it. Using this type of linking is a good way to give a viewer a lot of information quickly. She wanted her opening page to load pretty fast. People hate to wait, and graphics take a lot of time and memory to load. Using clickable links reduces initial loading time and immediate memory requirements.

Once her page was designed, the work of tagging it began. Every item, its position, and appearance, the relationship of each item to one another, and so forth, has to be stated using tags so that the computer can interpret the design. This is what you learn when you learn HTML.

Step 3: Tagging

To begin, load your HTML editing software such as Hotdog, Hotmetal, Pagemill, Homepage, Fusion, or any freeware you can find. When you first install the software a blank page comes up on your screen. Name the page and save it as an HTML file. The suffix will be mydocument.htm. Use this file to create your Web page document by typing or selecting tags onto that page.

To give you an idea of what's involved, here is a

(Continued on next page)

* Tags are marks that enclose HTML commands. The tags for HTML are the lesser than (<) and the greater than symbols (>). Each command is bracketed by this set of symbols.

** Linking refers to a way of connecting documents so that you can view one document and click on particular items within it to view another.

schematic of Dorothy's first page (the page a viewer sees first when he accesses her URL).

MEISTER ENTERPRISES
ON-LINE GALLERY
Dorothy Meister - Artist
P.O. Box 5186
Albuquerque, NM 87185-5186
[505]797-4233
E-mail: artmeis@flash.net

In computer lingo, the logo and the name and address information is a table* consisting, in this case, of one row and two columns forming two cells. The first cell contains her logo; the second cell contains her name and address. Tables may be any size and have any number of rows.

Here are the commands she typed to tell her computer to display her logo.

<TABLE ALIGN=CENTER> <TR ALIGN=CENTER VALIGN=TOP> <TD> <IMG SRC="logow150.gif" ALT="monogram"WIDTH=150 HEIGHT=139> </TD>

Notice that each set of commands is enclosed within the HTML tags. The first set, <TABLE ALIGN=CENTER>, told the computer to begin a table and center it horizontally. The second set, <TR ALIGN=CENTER VALIGN=TOP>, told the computer to begin the first row, center it horizontally and vertically, starting at the top of the page under any previous text or images; in this case there are none. (TR = Table Row.) The third set, <TD>, told the computer to begin data. (TD=Table Data.) Such a command creates an invisible cell that is filled with whatever text or images/graphics you're using as data. The data in this first tag is Dorothy's logo, a mongram of MEISTER, her last name. The logo is a graphical image saved as a GIF file. The fourth set, <IMG SRC="logow150.gif" ALT="monogram"WIDTH=150 HEIGHT=139>, tells the computer to display in the cell between <TD> and </TD> an image which is in a file called logow150.gif. Dorothy included optional attributes within this tag, i.e., ALT = "monogram" means that if the image is slow to load, display the word "monogram" so the viewer will know what sort of image he'll see there. The logo image is 150 pixels wide and 139 pixels high. Dorothy included these measurements because some browsers use such information to pre-allocate memory space so the files load faster. The fifth set, </TD>, told the computer to end the monogram data. The forward slash (/) indicates it is a closing tag.

* A table is a way of organizing data into columns and rows. The spaces formed by the columns and rows are called "cells." You, as the HTML writer, decide what to put in the cells. You may also choose to have visible or invisible borders. In her design, Dorothy chose to make the cell's borders invisible.

The set of tags <TD> </TD> create a cell that will be as large as the image file is in width and height. Most tags require a beginning tag *and* a closing tag. To omit the closing tag causes unpredictable effects when the document is viewed with a browser.

She now types in another set of commands in order to display her name and address beside her logo.

<TD> <FONTSIZE=+2> <B> MEISTER ENTERPRISES </FONT>
 <FONT SIZE=+0> ON-LINE GALLERY </FONT>
 Dorothy Meister - Artist
 P.O. Box 5186
 Albuquerque, NM 87185-5186
 (505) 797-4233
<A HREF="mailto: artmeis@flash.net"> </A> </B> </TD> </TR> </TABLE>

Here's what the above means: <TD> means begin Table Data. This adds another cell. The data in this case is her name and address. (If your data is very large thereby requiring huge cells, it will be necessary for a viewer looking at it on a browser to scroll horizontally. This is not desirable.) <FONTSIZE=+2> means display the text in a font size larger than the HTML default size; <B> means make the text boldface; </FONT> means stop the font use and the attributes of +2. This returns HTML to the default text.
 means start a new line; <FONT SIZE=+0> means begin font with attiribute of size+0 (i.e., the HTML default size) for the following text: ON-LINE GALLERY; </FONT> means stop font and attributes +0 and <BR> means start a new line; Dorothy Meister - Artist <BR> means start a new line after the text "Artist"; P.O.Box 5186 <BR> means start a new line after the address; Albuquerque, NM 87185-5186 <BR> means start a new line after the zip code; (505) 797-4233 <BR> means start a new line after the phone number; <A HREF="mailto: artmeis@flash.net"> tells the computer to underscore the line to make it a clickable link. This command gets the e-mail form from the viewer's browser and inserts Dorothy's e-mail address so they can type their comments and send her a message. (A HREF = Anchor Hyper Reference). </A> means end A HREF; </B> means end all boldface to fonts; </TD> means end this data; </TR> means end this row; </TABLE> means end this table.

The next step is to give your Web page document to an internet service (IS), e.g., FlashNet, or an Internet provider (ISP), e.g., America On Line, so you can get on the Net. If you can't afford a Web page, all the work of learning HTML and designing your page will be wasted. So, you need to know what's offered and for how much.

Step 4: Finding out prices, providers and learning the jargon:

You need to know what kind of service you want. If you know little or nothing about Web page design, and you have no time to spend learning it, then you'll have to