



Examples of Web pages that were designed using Fusion, an editing program created by Netobjects Inc.

Fusion's hot Web sites

Editing program lets even novices design stunning pages / **Simson L. Garfinkel**

Q VER THE PAST TWO YEARS, a plethora of programs for creating Internet Web pages have hit the market. The first were simple editors that could read and write HTML, the actual language that Web pages are created in. Then there was a volley of programs like Adobe's PageMill, Microsoft's Front Page, and Netscape's Navigator Gold, which feel like word processors for the Web.

Fusion, created by a small Silicon Valley start-up called Netobjects Inc. (<http://www.netobjects.com>), is a new kind

of Web editor.

It doesn't feel like a word processor. Instead, it feels like QuarkXPress, a popular program for creating printed pages. Instead of typing in text and then formatting it, with Fusion you assemble a page by dragging out graphical elements such as pictures, rectangles, tables, or columns of text from a palette. The result is a more readable Web page with more white space and more design. Although designed for graphics arts professionals who are making the transition from the world of print to the World Wide Web, Fusion is reasonably easy for anybody with some graphics arts

experience. Even better, Fusion lets even beginners create high-end Web sites thanks to a number of built-in templates.

While programs like Navigator Gold are really focused on editing pages, Fusion's emphasis is the Web site as a whole. Your Web site has a characteristic look, enforced by a style and a set of "master pages." You can change the look of your entire site all at once by selecting a new style or editing the master pages. This brings a look of consistency to your Web site. Besides making things look better, this helps readers figure out when they've left your site and entered another.

Besides page design, Fusion has powerful tools for managing your site as a whole. The program's "site view" displays all of the pages in your Web site in an easy-to-understand tree. You can change the titles on pages, move them around, or drop in new pages according to templates (use one of the predefined templates or create your own). If you want navigation bars on your Web pages, Fusion will create and update them automatically. That alone can save the Web designer literally hours of work.

Unlike other Web editors, Fusion doesn't lock you in. The system makes it easy to type raw HTML or JavaScript, should you really want to do that.

Fusion also has a "component" architecture that lets you plug Java applets or ActiveX controls into your page.

To show off their product, Netobjects has created the "fusionaries" Web site, which has points to some of the many companies that have built complicated sites with the Fusion product. You can find it at <http://www.fusionaries.com>.

To make all of this magic work, Fusion uses an object-oriented database to store the Web pages while they are being edited by the designer. This database makes it possible for the program to store additional information about each page. For instance, if you want to create an HTML link in Netobjects, you don't give the system the name of the page that you are linking to. Instead,

you simply select the page from a list. The page's name gets filled in when the site is published to your Web server. Thus, you can rename your pages or move them around, and your links will never break.

The disadvantage of this technique is that you must "publish" the pages before you can view them with a Web browser. Another disadvantage is that if you edit your Web pages after you've published them and then publish them a second time, you'll lose all of your changes. On the other hand, Fusion's publishing process opens up some interesting possibilities. You can, for example, have the system publish a "text only" version of your site. Or you can have it automatically shrink all of the images on your site, so that they won't take a long time to load over a slow modem connection.

One of the guiding forces behind Fusion is Bernard Desarnauts, the company's director of program management. Before joining the company, Desarnauts was a self-described "frustrated Web-site designer." He wanted to work on Fusion to give his fellow designers a tool that would let them concentrate on design, rather than HTML programming.

"I think that we just have a very hot product," he says like a proud father. And he's right.

Fusion 1.0 (\$695 list) has been out for about five months on Windows and nearly two months on the Macintosh platform. Version 2.0 is in beta testing right now on Windows. It has the ability to import an existing site from the Web and to generate Web pages that use frames, and ships with eight plug-in modules or chat rooms, threaded discussion lists, feedback forms, and more.

I would like to see automated support for building sites in multiple languages — click here for our site in French, Spanish, or German. I'd also like to see faster performance on the Mac. But even with those two caveats, Fusion is the best Web publishing program that I've seen. And you can download a 30-day demo from the company's Web site.

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