What’s New in Dreamweaver 8

Longevity in software, like in many other things, is a double-edged sword: on one hand, survival is to be congratulated and honored, on the other there’s always the question of “What else can you do?” In many ways, Dreamweaver 8 is a return to the core philosophy of fulfilling customer demand while exceeding expectations. Many of the new features are to be greeted with a cry of “Finally!” Others emerge as a delightful technogeek surprise.

I like to think of version 8 as the give-them-what-they-want release. Let’s start with the name, shall we? Although Dreamweaver MX and MX 2004 were certainly classy, they weren’t immediately informative. Macromedia realized that the simplicity of version numbering was far more valuable than high-end branding and thus Dreamweaver 8, and Studio 8, were born. This back-to-basics attitude carried through with an ongoing commitment to squash as many legacy bugs as possible while putting out the most stable release in recent years. Although bug fixes and performance enhancements are essential, they don’t tip the scale for existing or new customers. New features do. New features are the driving force of any upgrade, and this release has them in spades. Dreamweaver 8’s enhancements fit the needs of most every Web professional, no matter if their primary focus is as a coder, designer, developer, or just someone who needs to balance on the cutting edge.

Coding Enhancements

Normally new features added to Dreamweaver’s coding engine tend to be hidden under the hood. Though coders will notice a great number of changes as they work—like the improved code hinting—one feature jumps off the screen the first time you switch to Code view. The new Coding toolbar, shown in Figure 1-1, brings access to a slew of brand-new technologies to the forefront while promoting a number of existing features up-front and center. One highlight of the Coding toolbar is how it makes the new code collapse implementation even more useful. Not only can any tag or selection be reduced to a single,
still available line, but with a single modifier key, coders can inverse their selection to hide everything except the code they want to concentrate on. The Coding toolbar also makes applying comments — to HTML, CSS, JavaScript, XML, and any supported application server — a one-click operation; removing comments is just as easy.

![Image of the Coding toolbar]

**Figure 1-1:** Collapse a single tag or any selection with the options found on the new Coding toolbar.

Hand coders will relish the intuitiveness and sophistication of the revamped code completion feature. Previously, Dreamweaver would present the closing tag immediately after you entered the final character of the opening tag, resulting in an instant tag pair, like `<p></p>`. Like many coders, I found that I ended up cutting and pasting the closing tag way too often. To overcome this workflow impediment, Dreamweaver now waits to insert the closing tag until you signal that you’re ready by entering the first two characters of every HTML closing tag, `</`. The code completion algorithm is smart enough to understand which closing tag is needed and supplies it. This new style of code completion even works with deeply nested code. Best of all, if you prefer the previous code completion techniques — or none at all — it’s waiting for your selection in Preferences.

You see how all the new coding features integrate into Dreamweaver in Chapter 6.

**Design Upgrades**

Since the first version, design in Dreamweaver has always been a unique experience, unlike that of any other layout tool. Because Dreamweaver was for Web and not printed page authoring, standard options in the designer’s toolbox were forgivingly absent.

No more. Dreamweaver 8 introduces a number of design-oriented tools that will be instantly recognized and indispensable. One of these features, guides, allows designers to more easily apply a key tenet of good design: alignment. Both horizontal and vertical guides can be
dragged out of the rulers and placed anywhere on the page — just as in other industry-leading graphic programs like Adobe Photoshop or Macromedia Fireworks. You can set your guides to snap to objects like divs or layers and/or your objects to snap to guides. Toggle them in and out of view with a quick keyboard shortcut or a centrally placed toolbar control.

But what use are guides without some means of ensuring that your alignment is pixel-perfect? The complementary new feature, zoom, gives you complete visual feedback throughout the page (see Figure 1-2). Magnify your page to a preset level or use the Zoom tool to select an area of interest. Apply the Fit All setting to see how your page works as a whole — and continue editing it at the same time.

![Figure 1-2: Zoom in or out via preset magnification levels or use the Zoom tool.](image)

Dreamweaver’s overall view, whether magnified or not, has undergone significant improvement as well, especially regarding CSS rendering. Dreamweaver maintains a striking balance between rendering for the most popular browser and standards-based output. Styled form elements — even the under-used, but enormously powerful ones like the `<fieldset>` tag — are displayed properly. Designers playing further out on the edge with CSS pseudo-elements like `:first-letter` and `:first-line` will be thrilled to see their experimentation rendered clear as a bell.

Best of all, CSS-based layouts — long unusable in Dreamweaver — look great in 8. More and more Web professionals are turning to CSS layouts as their de facto technique. Anyone working in this area will welcome the CSS layout tools now available in Dreamweaver 8. Inserting `<div>` tags — the cornerstone of CSS layouts — is easier than ever with one-click access from the Common category of the Insert bar. Once your `<div>` tags are in place, Dreamweaver provides a range of visualization tools to bring your vision into reality. See how all the `<div>` tags interrelate with a click of the CSS Layout Backgrounds option. Keep your `<div>` tags outlined at design-time for quick selection and manipulation. Turn on the CSS Layout Box Model feature to visually grasp the essential margin, border, padding, and width values of any selected `<div>`, as shown in Figure 1-3. Like many Dreamweaver tools, the CSS visualization commands are a great learning tool as well as a superb design aid.
Workflow and Technology Advancements

Macromedia recognizes that the CSS revolution is in full force and has taken the improvements in Dreamweaver 8 well beyond the Document window. The CSS workflow has been totally rethought, as is evident in the rejuvenated CSS Styles panel. By splitting style sheet functions into two parts—one an overview of all styles and the other a tight focus on styles impacting on the current selection—the CSS Styles panel becomes much greater than the sum of its parts. The All and Current modes have both unique and shared aspects. In All mode, you can see the full complement of style sheets and styles assigned to a page, whether they're embedded or external. Current mode drills-down to the selected tag and displays all the associated properties; a toggle allows you to see where a selected property originates from or the full cascade of applicable rules. Hover over any rule to see where it's stored and its specificity, an indicator of how the rule is applied.

Both modes share a common Properties pane, which now gives you three different ways to list a rule's properties: by category, alphabetically, and set properties. The final option is an innovation in Dreamweaver 8 that shows just the properties and values that have been previously defined. Even better, the set properties view provides an option for adding more properties directly into the panel (see Figure 1-4).

Mac users finally got to see why so many PC Dreamweaver users were in love with the tabbed interface. Starting with Dreamweaver 8, multiple open documents appear as tabs across the top. As with the PC versions, you can switch between documents with a single click and tell at a glance which files are currently available. This feature really ramps up productivity on the Mac.

Speaking of productivity—what was designated as designers' number 1 time-waster? Uploading files via FTP. Previously in Dreamweaver, uploading a site was either considered a moment to kick back and enjoy some enforced down-time or a frustrating, when-will-this-be-over experience. In Dreamweaver 8, FTP (and Secure FTP) transfers have been isolated as an independent process and can run in the background. Designers are free to set their site publishing in motion and return to work whenever they like. A progress bar keeps you up-to-date on what's happening and a log is ready for viewing at any time.
Figure 1-4: No need to reopen a dialog box or external style sheet with the revised CSS Styles panel: just click the Add Property link.

So what will you do with all that free time? Why not master an emerging technology like XML/XSLT? Dreamweaver 8 makes it easy with full support for integrating XML data via XSLT (Extensible Style Sheet Transformation). And when I say full, I mean everyone can use them: both client-side and server-side integrations are included. Application servers (ASP, ColdFusion, PHP, and ASP.NET) can either display a full XSLT page dynamically transformed or an XSLT fragment—like an RSS feed from a blog or other service—within a server-side page. All the necessary code is supplied so you can create repeat regions, conditional regions, and even multiple conditional regions (see Figure 1-5).

Figure 1-5: Integrate XML data converted with XSLT into any type of page, client-side or server-side.
Flash video is not so much emergent as roaring-out-of-the-gate technology — and now it’s drag and drop easy in Dreamweaver 8. Choose from progressive download or streaming video formats and Dreamweaver adapts to request the necessary information, including a choice of player skins; you’ll even get a chance to customize the message for folks who don’t have the necessary player installed. Once you’ve published your Flash video (.flv) file to the server — standard for progressive download, Flash Media Server for streaming — your video is ready to roll. The integration between the new Flash video format possible in Flash 8 Professional (part of Studio 8) and Dreamweaver 8 is a thing of beauty. Just like Dreamweaver 8.

![Figure 1-6: Inserting video on a Web page just got as easy as dropping in a Flash file.](image)

**Summary**

Improvements in Dreamweaver 8 have been applied across the board with benefits for any type of user.

- Web professionals who spend more time in Code view will greatly appreciate the new Coding toolbar and all of its highly accessible features, including code collapse.
- Code completion has been revamped to perform more like most coders work.
- On the design front, guides and zoom levels make sophisticated, clean, professional-level layouts more possible.
- CSS rendering has been kicked up a notch with a greater rendering facility for many types of page constructs, including form elements and CSS pseudo-elements such as :first-letter for drop-cap effects.
- CSS layouts have become increasingly important and a series of tools for helping the designer are available in Dreamweaver 8, including CSS Layout Background and CSS Box Model Layout.
All the CSS development and management tools have been consolidated into a single area, the CSS Styles panel. The panel displays both an overview and a close-up look at all the styles applied to the page. New properties for existing styles can be added easily and directly.

Dreamweaver 8 now offers tools for displaying XML data in an XSLT format through client- or server-side pages.

Flash video files can be easily inserted into any Web page in either progressive download or streaming format; Dreamweaver’s dialog box adjusts to your choice and presents just the options you’ll need.

In the next chapter, you get an overview of Dreamweaver from top to bottom.