MAChinations

A personal view from Bob
Easy Web Design with Freeway 5
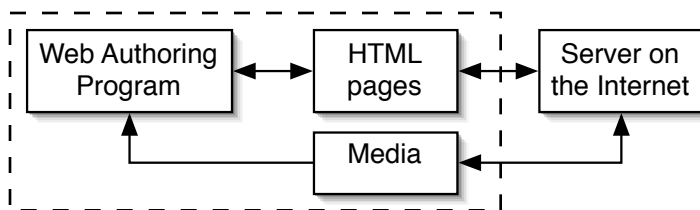
Freeway 5 is the latest version of the website layout program for the Mac from softpress.com. It is very easy to use, creates compact code (for fast-loading pages) and yet is rich in features. It works like a page layout program. You don't have to know HTML (hypertext markup language), CSS (cascading style sheets) or Javascript.

Background: A web page is nothing more than a text file with an html extension, e.g. page.html, and individual media files — graphics, PDF, SVG, movies, audio and flash. A web site is a collection of linked pages. All you need to create a web page is a text editor. The HTML pages contain the text that's displayed plus tags that tell a web browser how to display it. A simple HTML example:
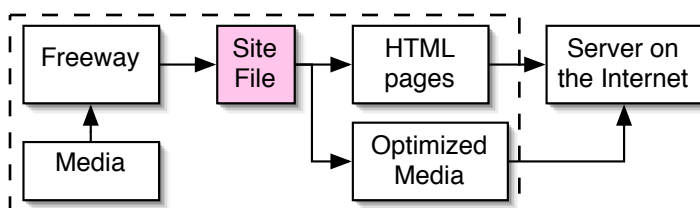
bold text appears as **bold text** where and are the bold tags.

Writing HTML code in a text editor is called hand coding, something professionals do, but a task most of us would like to avoid. Web authoring programs give a friendly, page layout view, and hide the HTML code.

Traditional Web Authoring: Web authoring programs, like Adobe GoLive or Dreamweaver, work as shown below. The program creates the HTML pages which, along with the media files, are uploaded to a server that can be accessed on the Internet.

Freeway works differently. A web site created in Freeway is stored in a "Site File". When you upload the site, Freeway creates optimized HTML pages and graphics. Each time you publish it, any changes to the site are saved to the site file and the pages are re-optimized. No more patched pages or bloated code.

The downside is that it's a one-way street. It's not suited to collaboration and you can't tweak or hand code the HTML. If you're the only person editing the site, this may not be a serious limitation.

Freeway eliminates the pain. Open a new Freeway site from a collection of templates or as a blank page and lay out your pages as in a page layout program. Freeway creates the code for you. Drag an HTML text box and start typing. Link text boxes and the text flows between them. Drag a graphic box and type in it using any typeface and style. The text is converted to a graphic so it displays as intended. Import graphics directly from an iPhoto library or drag them from the Finder. Scale, crop and rotate images. Add drop shadows and borders. Open and edit images directly from within Freeway using your favorite image editor.

Managing a site is easy. All master and site pages appear in a sidebar. Click a page to open it in the editing window. Master pages let you create layouts with common elements on which you can base web pages. To link pages select the text or graphic to be linked and drag the linked page from the sidebar to the link box. External links are handled by clicking the link box and entering a URL or email address.

Softpress continues to enhance the program. The latest update (5.1.1) adds RSS feed generation (see May 08 newsletter), personalized Blogger templates, Google and script.aculo.us Actions. Softpress has a lively user forum for tips, tricks and user-contributed Actions (javascripts). It comes with a 500 page PDF reference guide. You can order a printed copy.

I've used Adobe GoLive for years and still use it for our MUG since we have several people modifying the site. For my personal sites I'm switching to Freeway. It's much easier to use, yet seems to have the power of GoLive. To show how easy it is to use Freeway I created, in about 45 minutes, the complete SBAMUG home page.

Freeway comes in two flavors, Express ($79) and Pro ($249). Senior, education and user group discounts are available. The Express and Pro versions are compared on the softpress.com website, but I expect many of our members will find that Freeway Express meets their needs. If not, you can always upgrade. Demo versions are also available.