

Google Web Designer: The 100% Useful Guide

David Taylor

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As a thank you for purchasing Google Web Designer: The 100% Useful Guide, we'd like to give you a free gift. To go alongside this book, we've created a full colour printable guide to the Google Web Designer interface, which is an invaluable reference guide when starting out with the program.

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Introduction

A completely free HTML 5 / CSS authoring tool from no less than Google! It sounds too good to be true? Well, it's not and, as you spend time with Google Web Designer, you'll find it's already a very feature rich environment that can enable you to create adverts, page sections or even complete web pages and sites coded in HTML 5 for use on all current devices, including phones!

What's more, you don't need to be a coder or designer to get started with Web Designer. Suddenly some of that really cool, cross platform rich media content could be within the reach of individual developers, students, small companies, well everyone...

Until recently, if you wanted to create a rich multimedia element for your website, whether it was a video, and ad or a slideshow, the best option was Adobe Flash. Flash was used everywhere and required a good designer/coder combination to get the most from its advanced environment. It used its own bespoke programming language, which while not unlike various web languages did require you to be a Flash programmer. In other words, it meant a specialist and one that often did cross over with other web skills. There were also other 3rd party applications to produce Flash files, but even these required new knowledge.

Then there was the fact that Flash required a browser plugin to work, so although the player was almost ubiquitous on the desktop, it meant websites did not work well on some phones.

Then the iPhone arrived and declared Flash to be obsolete. Apple declared

HTML 5 the rich media delivery platform for the future, and refused to support it on their phenomenally successful mobile devices. Adobe fought this for a time, and then accepted it and started working on a series of WYSIWYG design environments to deliver the sort of functionality Flash had but in HTML 5.

HTML 5 is not Flash and there are still some specific areas where Flash might be more appropriate, but as it develops HTML 5 is proving its chops, and certainly for the majority of smaller users, it is capable of producing the sort of rich content that they want, safe in the knowledge it will work on almost all browsers on almost all devices.

The problem had been that it still meant you either hiring an agency or buying Adobe software, which is outside the reach of many. Google Web Designer is a game changer: download it today for free, and you can easily create touch ready ads with embedded Google map data and YouTube videos, or a animated logo for your company's website, knowing it will work on people's iPhones or Android devices.

If you're an amateur web designer, a student, a tech loving geek, or even someone who wants to launch a new business website, Google Web Designer should have you very excited. If you're an existing professional web designer even, you'll be able to see how Web Designer can do some of your existing workload much more time effectively, especially if you are delivering ads for platforms like DoubleClick.

Ready to get started? Of course you are...

About the Author

David Taylor is a technology journalist with 20 years' experience. He worked for a time as the editor of .net Magazine, the UK's leading internet magazine as well as on several PC magazines, including PC Answers and PC Plus.

He went on to be Group Publisher at Future Publishing, where he published the portfolio of PC titles including Linux Format, .net, Internet Works and Internet Advisor.

He has launched over a dozen technology magazines including the Official Windows Magazine and the award-winning Digital Camera Magazine.

David also worked as Publishing Director at Highbury Entertainment, responsible for all the technology and gaming titles there.

For the past seven years he has run his own publishing company, specialising in digital publications, and is responsible for the publishing side of several websites as well as being a consultant on digital marketing for other firms.

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Also in this Series



Google Onsite SEO: The 100% Useful Guide

David Taylor

The first volume in our SEO series, this 100% Useful Guide starts with the basic question: Do you want your website to perform better on Google? As you're reading this guide, the answer is "Yes". If you haven't sorted your "on site" SEO yet, then this book is for you.

Google Onsite SEO: The 100% Useful Guide is a completely practical introduction to search engine optimisation, the key to improving your site's rankings on Google's search pages.

Written by David Taylor, a technology journalist of over 20 years with experience launching and optimised dozens of websites, the book is broken down into 9 easy to follow chapters, each with checklists to help you create action points for your site.

Aimed at anyone from the first time site owner up, this book covers an introduction to search engine optimisation, keyword research, site structure, keywords in URLs, keywords in text and other on-page elements, non-text (META) keyword use, linking, design for SEO, the perfect Title tag and much more.

The Guide is written in plain English, with no buzzwords or incomprehensible lingo. Our 100% Useful Guides are written to cut out the mystery of a subject and ensure anyone can get to grips with it. This Guide is a must-have for anyone who is in control of a site and needs to know what can be done to improve its traffic.

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Chapter 1: The Basics

In this chapter we'll take a look at what Google Web Designer is capable of, and what it is not currently designed to do, as well as an introduction to the interface and what you'll see the first time you start the program up.

What Will You Learn?

1. What Google Web Designer is.
2. What Google Web Designer isn't.
3. How to download and install Google Web Designer (GWD).
4. How to create your first project in GWD.

What Google Web Designer Is

Google Web Designer (GWD) is a free piece of desktop software (Windows and Mac) from Google. It is a web design WYSIWYG environment that generates HTML 5 and CSS code. In short, it allows you to create some very sophisticated web pages, banners or page snippets in a cross-browser format that will work everywhere. It even gives you drag and drop elements for things like swipable elements and allows you to make calls to the code based upon events such as a phone screen rotating.

Currently version 1, the software is still classed as beta, and that will become evident to you as you make more use

of it. While it will make certain things easier to produce than ever before, and indeed enable novices to add elements to their web pages that they likely would never have the ability to do otherwise, there are also some functionality areas that are either sparse on the ground, or clearly missing.

As you'd expect from Google though, even though this is version 1, and even though version 1 is classed as beta, GWD can produce usable assets of a quality you would previously have considered beyond you without expensive software and/or extensive training.

What Google Web Designer Isn't

GWD isn't Dreamweaver. GWD can create some simple web pages that can be built into a simple website, and you can incorporate some advanced animations and elements on these pages. For a home site, or a small business, some of what you can already

create in version 1 is beyond the quality of what you'd be able to achieve otherwise.

However, sophisticated web design is not really possible, nor is database connectivity for dynamic content

beyond the components, so these are flat pages rather than ones for a CMS.

That said, the advertising design functionality is very well constructed and does offer a lot more, and we'll look at how some of this can be implemented on normal web pages later. The ads section also has great integration with DoubleClick (not a surprise, as that's a Google platform) and some other advertising platforms to allow you to track events such as user swipes, etc without having to code in all the tracking manually. It even packages it up in an easily published manner for uploading to the platform. In this sense, you can see the origins of GWD as an ad creation tool for making ad design more accessible so that you can make more use of the Google platform.

I've also seen articles on web sites saying that GWD creates responsive webpages, that is ones whose design fluidly adjusts according to the screen size so that you get the same code delivering a different and more user friendly view on say a phone to on a desktop. In version 1, GWD does not do

this: to talk technical terms, and again you'll see the ad format heritage, GWD likes to work in CSS absolute positioning. On the forums, the Google team says that they are actively looking at how to bring responsive design into the interface. Currently the only way to do it would be to edit the source code yourself, which GWD does allow, but it would be such a big job that it seems unlikely you would be starting in GWD.

This does not mean that there aren't workarounds for creating a less constrained or rigid design, and we'll dig into some of these GWD tricks later on.

Lastly, despite its name Google Web Designer can't make you a good designer if you're not. GWD handles the coding elements and offers design tools, but it won't make you artistic, so be careful to either partner with a designer if you need good creative or code elements that aren't design focussed to fit in with any existing site design you may have - you'll see how this can be done as we work on some examples.

How to download and install GWD

It doesn't get too much easier to install a program: simply go to <http://www.google.com/webdesigner/> and you can download the program for free. You'll see a pop up which ask you to confirm you accept the Google Terms of Service and when you click on OK, the download will start.

If you haven't already done this by the time you're reading this (really?) then do make sure you meet the system requirements. Currently GWD is Windows and Mac only (no Linux or Android(!)) and the exact requirements and recommendations are:

	Minimum	Recommended
Operating system	Windows® 7 / Windows 8 Mac® OS X 10.7.x or later	Windows® 7 / Windows 8 Mac® OS X 10.7.x or later
Processor	Intel Pentium® 4 or AMD Athlon 64 processor	Intel Pentium® 4 or AMD Athlon 64 processor

Memory	2 GB RAM	4 GB RAM
Screen resolution	1280 x 1024	1920 x 1080
Application window size	1024 x 768 minimum	1024 x 768 or larger
Internet connection	Required for initial use after download, for updates, and for help access.	Required for initial use after download, for updates, and for help access.

Once installed the program is available on your desktop in the usual way, e.g from the Start menu.

N.B. This book is written using the Windows version, so makes reference to the likes of right clicks, etc for context sensitive menus.

How To Create Your First Option

When you open GWD you will be shown the create New File dialog. If not, You can access it from the File > New menu. This dialog shows a series of options for the project you create, and again, you'll see a lot of focus on the original concept of a tool for Google Ads. In fact the section is for Google Ads, offering Banner, Expandable and Interstitial.

Now, just because the section is called Google Ads, don't be put off if you don't want to create one of these: the first option on the right is Environment, and in that drop down you can select DoubleClick and AdMob (two of Google's ad platform companies) but also Generic. So if you're not using a Google platform you can simply select Generic. The difference in these environments is that GWD can insert the appropriate tracking code for various events automatically for you and package up the files in the correct format for uploading to these platforms. In Generic, you still get all of the GWD functionality, but you'd need to add additional code (GWD also

features a code view, on which more later) if you want to add some tracking.

Depending on which option you choose on the left from Google Ads or Blank file will determine what options are shown for you in the right. For example, Expandable will offer you not just the original dimensions, but also the dimensions for the expanded version. As well as the predefined options for dimensions, you can select custom and manually enter pixel dimensions for the stage (the canvas area).

The Name you enter is the filename that the html will be stored as, and the location is the place on your drive where the html and associated files (eg images) will be stored.

Lastly, notice Animation Mode as an option. You can select Quick, which is a very basic animation mode for beginners, not dissimilar to the type of timeline you would see in the basic video packages. Advanced is a more advanced timeline with frames and keyframing, and is the much more powerful (not that complicated to understand) and will look fairly familiar

to anyone who has used a multimedia program of some sort (cough, Flash, cough).

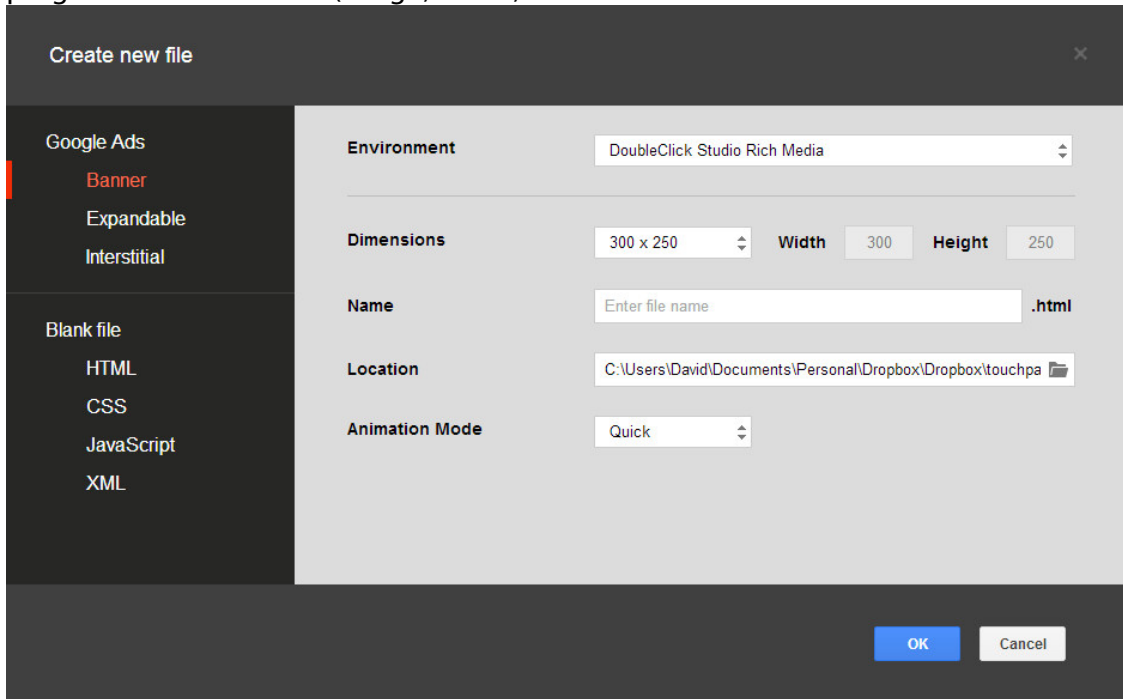


Fig 1.1: The New dialog allows you to set the stage size, environment and various other elements. Bear in mind you cannot switch back from Advanced to Quick Animation mode, and also remember that in this version of GWD, the components that are available to create ads in the GWD interface are not available in the blank HTML file.

Recap - What Did You Learn?

1. That GWD can create powerful HTML 5 ads and pages.
2. That GWD is a first version software, and has some quirks.
3. That GWD creates good code, but good design is up to you.
4. How to download, install and start a new project in GWD.

[Multiple Chapters removed from excerpt. In order to give you a flavour of the book, we included the entire first chapter and then we are including a very short excerpt from one of the later chapters so you can see how the book quickly builds to give you complete mastery of the Google Web Designer Tools.]

Chapter 4: Simple Animation

GWD offers two animation modes, and while the Quick one is OK for simply moving elements around the stage, we'll dispense with it quickly. Bluntly speaking, the Advanced Mode is not really that difficult to understand and offers you so much more control, I wouldn't suggest spending any real time in Quick Mode.

What Will You Learn?

1. How to move elements in Quick Mode.
2. How to view animations and projects within GWD, and preview them.
3. How to swap to Advanced Mode.
4. How to group objects.
5. How to animate object and object groups.
6. How to use easing.
7. How to rotate an object.

Quick Mode

[Excluded from this excerpt]

100% Useful Tip: You'll see that there is an arrow icon that loops back next to the Play button. This is a loop button, so the animation will play over and over. This only applies within GWD to allow you to rewatch the animation. The code that is generated for the browser will not loop just because you checked this icon.

Preview

Make sure you have Chrome installed. The Preview button just above the Play button will allow you to see a temporary version of your HTML in Chrome. This doesn't mean that your final HTML will only work in Chrome.

When you come to Publish, you have the choice to add in HTML code automatically to make it all work in all browsers. For the preview though, it will be shown in Chrome.

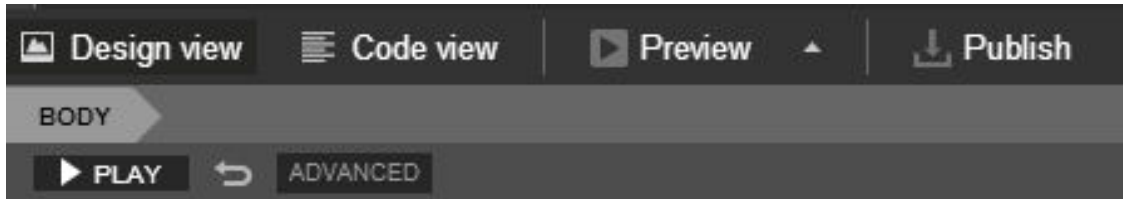


Fig 4.1: The Play button can loop the animation for you to watch, and you can Preview the code in Chrome.

Advanced Mode

Click the Advanced button on the toolbar and you will swap to Advanced Mode. Once you have swapped to Advanced Mode in a project, you cannot swap back and you will lose your Undo history. The two modes are completely discreet.

Instead, start a new blank HTML file in Advanced Mode. Flash users and video

editors will start to feel more at home, as GWD will now display a full timeline next to the stage, entitled "Master Layer". Advanced Mode give you more control over individual elements doing different things at different speeds, and works on the concepts of "keyframes".

Keyframe: A keyframe is a part of an animation where you set how you want things to look at that time code within the animation. So for example at 0 seconds, you might want a circle to be on the left of the stage, so you set a keyframe there and the circle on the left, and then at 1:45 seconds you want that circle to be on the right of the stage, so you set a keyframe at 1:45 and move the circle to the right. As a designer, all you need to do is worry about where elements are at each keyframe that you set, and different objects can have their own keyframes so can move and change at different speeds. There's no need to worry about actually making the elements animate between the keyframes. GWD will do that for you, a process known as tweening.

Within your new document, draw a small white circle with a reasonable black border halfway up on the left. This is going to be a snowball. Now in the timeline, you'll see a new object under Master layer called <canvas>. On the right, in the Properties, change the ID to "Snowball". You should now see the canvas has the word "Snowball" next to it.

In the first rectangle next to Snowball in the timeline, under 00:00:00, right

click and choose "Insert keyframe". Now insert another keyframe at 00:02:00, 2 seconds.

Choose the Selection Tool, and ensure Transform control it unchecked. with the second keyframe active (showing blue in the timeline), drag the circle to the right. Press Play, and you'll see the circle travel to the right (Snowman 1.html in Chapter 4 files).

Now, we want a head and a body for our snowman. But, we want to have some eyes and a nose in our head, and

we' want those to animate together, so we need grouping.

Grouping (Nesting or Parent/Child)

Go to the Tag Tool, which handily looks like a luggage tag. We're going to look at this in more detail next chapter, but for now the default is what we need as it will create a <div> tag. Draw out a rectangle on the stage in the middle, big enough to contain your snowman's head.

Now, name the ID for this Div as Head, and use the Selection Tool. Double click on the new div on the stage. This will allow you to move "within" it and create elements that are contained inside the div. You cannot double click on the element in the timeline to go into the child, although once you are in there, you will see a nested arrow representation at the top of the timeline (which will look familiar to those who use Chrome's Inspect Element function). You can use this to go back up to the parent layer.

Once inside the Head div, draw out a circle with black outline for the head, then two eyes and a nose. They don't need to be perfect, but you can use the Align and Space Evenly options in the Selection Tool toolbar to align the eyes and place the nose in the middle. Shift click to select the two eyes and then choose Align Top, then Shift click to select the nose and choose Space Evenly horizontally. Then position all of them roughly in the middle of the "Head".

At top of the timeline, you should see Body>Div. Click on Body and you will exit the div container and go back to the main stage. You can now draw out a new bigger circle for the body and name it "Body". Position them and you should have a snowman in the middle and the snowball to the left.

100% Useful Tip: The timeline also shows you which elements appear above and below others on the canvas, which we played with in the Selection Tool. As well as "Bring Forward"/"Send Backward", you can move layers up and down the Advanced Timeline to select where they appear in the Z-Axis of the Stage.

[End of excerpt]



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