

Chapter 1: Why Build a Web Site?

In This Chapter

- ✓ Exploring the reasons that Web sites get built
- ✓ Finding your place on the Web
- ✓ Understanding what drives people to the Web
- ✓ Investigating common types of Web sites
- ✓ Getting ready to build a Web site

So you want to build a Web site? Well, congratulations! If you're reading this book, then you've probably already purchased a copy of Macromedia Studio MX 2004, and you're ready to dive right in. Macromedia Studio is a fantastic tool that enables you to create a wide array of content and graphics to deploy on a Web site that is dynamic and easy to maintain.

But software isn't all you need in order to create a wonderful Web site. It also takes creativity, a good eye, a well-thought-out plan, and some serious soul searching about why you want to undertake this endeavor in the first place. This chapter offers some insight into how sites get built, why they are created, and who they are aimed at. So grab your pen and paper and get ready to jot down your own ideas about the great site that you want to build.

Understanding Why People Build Web Sites

In the early days of the Internet, all Web sites generally looked the same and served similar functions. Back then, an average Web site could be described as a big online book with linked pages. In short, in its infancy, the Internet was not all that interesting graphically and was severely lacking in interactive sophistication.

All that has changed. Today's Internet is a dynamic amalgam of text, graphics, interactive tools, commerce, and communication. If you are part of a business, an association, the government, or an academic institution, chances are a Web site supports some or all of the mission of the group. But not every venture requires a Web site, which naturally leads to the question, "Why build a Web site?" Most organizations and individuals establish a presence on the Internet for one or more of the following reasons:

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- ◆ To sell a product or service directly online, as shown in Figure 1-1
- ◆ To provide information or tools
- ◆ To provide an extension of — or support for — products and services
- ◆ To find other organizations or people to work in a particular area of interest
- ◆ To introduce and promote an organization and its mission
- ◆ To remain competitive with other organizations that are already on the Internet
- ◆ To promote community development by bringing groups of people together around ideas, people, or causes, either online or in person
- ◆ To share artwork, writing, or photographs

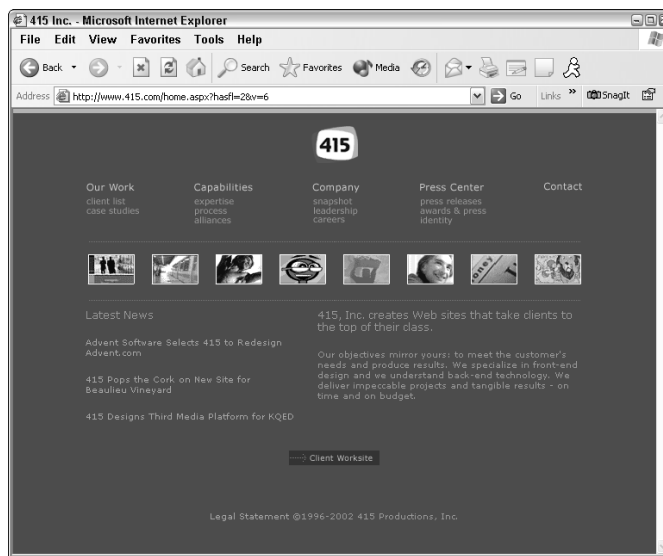


Figure 1-1:
A common
product and
service style
Web site.

Finding Your Place on the Web

Before you begin to think about the kind of site you're going to build (either for yourself or for your organization), you should consider each of the following questions carefully. Doing so can help you target your site to an appropriate audience and prepare yourself for the work ahead.



◆ **Consider your content:**

- What is the content going to be on your site? Is it unique?
- How often will you be updating this content?
- Are there any other sites that already do what you want to do? If so, how will you differentiate your site?

Consider the early explosion of sites during the dot-com boom. At one point, more than five pet sites were all trying to hawk their wares to users. Only one survived, and that was because it was a traditional retailer first. Market saturation is a sure way to spell doom for your venture, so be sure to check out the competition first!

◆ **Select a format and interface:**

- In what formats will your content be delivered? Will you just use text and graphics, or will you also need animation and/or forms that respond to user input?
- What are the technical requirements needed to view your content? Will users need a video or audio player or plug-in? For example, to view a Flash animation, users need the Macromedia Flash Player plug-in.

◆ **Know your audience:**

- What audience or audiences are you trying to reach with this content?
- Do they need or want it?
- Is there any other place they can get this content already?
- What are the demographics and technical capabilities of this audience?
- If your site has more than one audience, are there differences between them and do they need the content delivered differently? If so, you will want to take advantage of ColdFusion's dynamic scripting language to deliver different content to different audiences.

◆ **Manage your workload:**

- How much time and effort are you willing to give in order to support this site?
- Are other people working on the site with you?
- Who's going to create the graphical design for the site? Of course, if it's you, you've got powerful tools at your disposal with Macromedia Studio MX 2004.
- Are there any deadlines you need to keep in mind when developing your site?

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These questions have no right or wrong answers. Instead, they're designed to help you formulate an idea of where you're going when you're building a site. Frankly, if you're building a personal site, then these questions are moot to some degree because you can build whatever you want and it may not matter whether someone else can read it or see it. Of course, if you're thinking about selling your new products on the Web, then these questions can be critical to your overall business success, not just your Web site's success. For example, if you find that a number of other sites have similar products or a similar focus to what you had in mind for your site, you may consider not building a site at all or changing the focus of the products you are selling.

What Drives People to the Web

What kinds of services, you may be wondering, are people looking for on the Internet? Six years ago, the Internet was largely a research medium, meaning that people would hit the Internet to try to find information about something fairly academic or obscure. This is not surprising, given that universities were the first groups to start putting their content online.

Today, the number of reasons people head to the Internet has grown dramatically, and includes the following:

- ◆ To research, compare, and purchase products
- ◆ To find and interact with other people (business colleagues, friends, romantic interests)
- ◆ To get daily news and information delivered in real time
- ◆ To search for and find information about any topic or organization of interest
- ◆ To deliver and promote their own messages and products to others on the Web
- ◆ To watch or listen to events, online and otherwise, delivered in a variety of audio and video formats
- ◆ To educate themselves via online classes and enrollment in universities
- ◆ To play games and entertain themselves
- ◆ To complete all sorts of personal and professional tasks that can now be done securely online, such as online banking, personal finance, investing, tax submission, travel, donating, and procurement

These items run the gamut of professional and personal, and they cross demographic lines. What is common among most online users, though, is that they begin their online usage with a focused purpose, and that focus then bleeds over into surfing for things that interest them throughout the Web.

Choosing the Right Type of Web Site

For all its diversity in content, the Internet really doesn't have that many different types of Web sites. Why do so many Web sites look alike? The main reason is that people want their sites to be easy to use, free (or close to it), and similar to other sites they've seen or experienced. This has resulted in the emergence of some standard types of Web sites. A number of components for these sites can be found in ColdFusion. Where applicable, we've noted it in the following list. The most common types of sites include:

- ◆ **The Product Site:** The most common type of site. Generally, the site offers some basic information about a company, its products, staff members, perhaps a product demo, and a way to contact the organization to get more information. Examples of this kind of site would be www.symantec.com, www.amf.com, and www.nadelectronics.com.
- ◆ **The Commerce Site:** A storefront on the Internet. Whether it's a single company that carries just their own specialized products or a retailer that sells a wide array of products, these sites are geared towards purchasing products and offering accessories to complement those products. An example of this kind of site would be www.macys.com. ColdFusion offers tools that can help you to add a shopping cart, a search function, and more to your site easily.
- ◆ **The Portal Site:** A site that aggregates content from a wide variety of sources. Portal sites tend to be rich in content and links but short on graphics. The idea is to provide users with a launching pad to other destinations on the Internet, though in recent years, many of these portals are adding features to try to keep their users on their own site. An example of this kind of site is www.yahoo.com. ColdFusion includes robust search capabilities that enable you to have more content-rich sites that are easily indexed and searched.
- ◆ **The News Site:** A site that, in general, mirrors an offline counterpart, such as ABC News. These sites provide a lot of the same information as their offline counterparts through the use of text, video, audio, and graphics, and also provide services geared towards the online audience, such as chat sessions, newsletters, and personalized content. An example of this kind of site would be www.cnn.com. ColdFusion includes tools for adding chat to your site as well.
- ◆ **The Application Site:** A type of site that offers perhaps the greatest diversity of all the sites. Application sites are geared towards a specific purpose, such as banking, investing, automobile purchasing, travel planning, photo galleries, event planning, or online greetings. Some of the commonalities among these sites include user accounts, password protection, and the widespread use of e-mail campaigns to try to keep users coming back. Examples of this kind of site include www.egreetings.com, www.imotors.com, and www.bankofamerica.com.

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- ◆ **The Personal Site:** Personal sites also offer a great deal of variety in their design and function. Personal sites usually include some of the designer's work, opinions, and rants; links to other sites; and pictures. Examples of this kind of site would be www.loungeboy.com and www.katswindow.net.

Macromedia Studio MX 2004: Your Ally in Development

After you've answered a number of the questions in the "Finding Your Place on the Web" section, you may be wondering how you're going to build your grand Web site. Well, don't fret. With Macromedia Studio, you have the most complete, user-friendly, and popular development suite on the market. Even though professionals use these products all the time, the programs in the Macromedia Studio suite are truly designed for the first-time Web developer. With an array of tutorials, wizards, and interfaces that keep you as distant from the code as you want to be, Macromedia Studio makes the Herculean task of building powerful Web applications seem like just another project.

The goal with Macromedia Studio is to help you, the developer, build compelling and powerful Web sites in the shortest amount of time, while simultaneously helping you alleviate cost and resource issues common to Web development. Macromedia Studio includes several tools to help make this happen:

- ◆ **Dreamweaver MX 2004:** The premier tool for easily building Web pages. In recent versions, it has been combined with ColdFusion to make developing dynamic Web applications much easier.
- ◆ **Fireworks MX 2004:** A leading tool for the graphical development of a site. Fireworks helps you design the look and feel of your site, as well as prepare the graphics for inclusion in an HTML or CFML file.
- ◆ **Macromedia Flash MX 2004:** The world's most popular tool for adding animation and sound to Web sites. Macromedia Flash will truly change the way any site works.
- ◆ **FreeHand MX:** The Web developer's best friend for creating illustrations for Fireworks and Macromedia Flash.
- ◆ **ColdFusion MX 6.1 Developer Edition:** Give yourself the powerful tools to add databases, e-mail servers, and other dynamic elements to your site. ColdFusion allows you to take control of one of the most powerful — but also easy to learn — scripting languages for the development of compelling Web applications.

- ◆ **Contribute 2:** Collaborate with others and take all the development hassle out of building (and maintaining) Web sites with Contribute. Using this tool in combination with Dreamweaver will help you design Web sites in such a way that just about anyone in your organization who can use a word processing program will be able to add and modify content on the site.

Before You Start: Things to Know

Hopefully, all this information hasn't scared you into dropping this book and deciding to open a lemonade stand instead. This last section is just a quick check of some things you should be aware of before you jump into this venture called Web development:

- ◆ **Plan ahead.** Building a Web site always takes longer than you think, so give yourself more time than you originally planned for!
- ◆ **Get organized.** Remember to categorize your content and use those categories as the initial architecture for your site when you're doing the user interface design.
- ◆ **Always do the user interface design before the graphics design.** The user interface design specifies how your site will work, while the graphical design is the look and feel. If you do the graphics before the architecture is done, you'll likely end up redoing a lot of your design after you've figured out how your site is going to work.
- ◆ **Not all browsers are the same.** Internet Explorer and Netscape Navigator are the two most common browsers, and in recent versions, they've adopted the same standards. But there are still quirky differences between the two browsers, and you have to check your work on both browsers.
- ◆ **Not all platforms are the same.** If only they were! Explorer and Navigator work slightly differently on the Mac, in Windows, and in Unix. If you're developing on the PC, find a friend or a graphic designer with a Mac and check your work on her system as well. Dreamweaver also includes some tools to help you verify whether your site will work the way you hope it does on a variety of platforms.
- ◆ **Learn from sites you like.** If you like the way a page looks — but can't imagine how such a design could have been translated to the Web — you can view the source code in your browser to see how the page was constructed. Seeing how other people have coded their pages can spur you on to create your own unique designs.

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- ◆ **Lots of stuff can be had for free.** The Web is filled with geeks like us who have made all sorts of crazy applications, like chat engines, bulletin boards, and even wholesale applications. A lot of them can be had for free or something close to it. This is where sites like www.google.com and www.download.com can be your friends.
- ◆ **Old content equals a dead site.** You have to be prepared to update your site on a semi-regular basis. When content is stale, people will notice, and they will stop coming.
- ◆ **If you build it, tell someone.** It's one thing to build a site. Site-search spiders will eventually find you, but if you really want to be seen, then you really need to promote yourself. When you're done building, remember, it's time to start promoting.
- ◆ **Don't be afraid to ask.** Building sites can be fun, but it can be especially frustrating if you can't figure out how to do something. Well, here's a secret: Developers like to talk about what they do. So if you're stuck, try finding a user group or searching the Web for an answer to your question. Someone may have come across the problem before, and if they haven't, then there are plenty of resources for the asking. Macromedia is also very good about supporting these kinds of groups, so you can always check out its Web site at www.macromedia.com for listings of developer resources.