

Chapter 1

Touring Family Web Sites

In This Chapter

- ▶ Appreciating the range of sites you can create
 - ▶ Comparing different types of Web sites
 - ▶ Getting ideas from great examples
 - ▶ Choosing the best tools for the job
-

As photo albums turn digital and e-mail addresses become commonplace, modern families are building their own Web sites, contributing to an increasingly popular part of the Internet where you can find everything from elaborate wedding invitations to vacation pictures to the first photo of a newborn.

You don't need advanced computer skills anymore to create a family Web site. Today, sharing photos online is as easy as pressing the Enter key to upload images to a photo site. And you can create a wedding or baby site by simply filling out a form. Even if you want to create a customized Web site, the software programs and resources available now make it easier than ever to personalize the way you share family stories and memories over the Internet.

In this chapter, I introduce you to the many ways you can build a Web site so you can better appreciate your options and decide which method is best for you. Then I take you on a tour of family Web sites so you can see what's possible. Finally I compare the most popular Web design and image editing programs so you can find the best tools for your project.

Connecting Families Over the Web

My goal in this book is not just to help families create Web sites but to help people around the world get closer by sharing their stories and photos with loved ones over the Internet. Here are a few ways people like you are using the Internet to keep in touch:

- ✓ **Baby sites:** Many parents are using Web sites and blogs (online journals) to chronicle every milestone of their child's life, from the first tooth to the first day of school. Chapter 11 features templates and tips for creating a baby Web site, and Chapter 15 covers blogs, which are becoming increasingly popular on the Web.
- ✓ **Sites for younger kids:** Better than a bumper sticker, Web sites are a great way to showcase your favorite student's work, clubs, after-school activities, hobbies, and more. Chapter 14 features templates and instructions for creating a sports or hobby Web site.
- ✓ **Sites for older kids:** Tech-savvy high-school kids are showing off with graduation sites, prom sites, and team sites. Creating a Web site is like having your own yearbook, only better. If you want to create your own completely customized site, see the introduction to FrontPage 2003 in Chapter 8.
- ✓ **Travel sites:** The days of vacation slide shows in the living room are fading fast. Today, families are creating vacation sites with online photo albums to share snapshots from their latest adventures. Chapter 13 provides examples and templates.
- ✓ **Wedding sites:** Before they say 'I do,' more and more couples are building wedding Web sites that feature invitations, directions, guest registries, and more. Chapter 12 provides templates and instructions for creating a wedding site.

If you're anxious to put up a Web site right away, skip ahead to one of the chapters listed in the preceding list. You find everything you need to get a site up quickly. If you have a little more time to think about your project or you want to create a more general family site, continue reading this chapter to discover more about the range of options for creating a Web site.

Comparing Web Site Options

If you've never created a Web site before, you may not realize how many ways you can publish photos and other information on the Web, or how many software programs and service providers there are to choose from. You've probably seen Web sites in many styles, but you may not know that some of the differences in how those sites look depends on the type of technology used to create them.

Choosing how to create a Web site is an important first step. You can start simply, with an online photo album site or with an online service that does nearly everything for you. Or you can create a site based on templates, like the ones featured on the CD for Chapters 11 through 14, or you can create a completely customized Web site. This section provides a brief review of your options.

Photo album and printing services

If you're looking for an easy way to share photos online, but you still think it's nice to have a physical, tangible photo printed on paper, you may be happy to discover the services listed in this sidebar, which provide both free online photo album services and an easy way for you — or anyone else with access to your photo album — to order prints.

To create a photo album, you just upload your images; they become instantly available on the Web to anyone with your user ID and password. (Passwords are required to ensure privacy so you can restrict who views your personal images.) You don't even have to optimize your images (*optimizing* involves reducing the file size of images so they download faster), so you won't need an image program such as Photoshop. Indeed, sites such as Ofoto and Shutterfly encourage you to upload high-resolution images because the better the resolution, the better the print quality.

The following sites offer online photo album and printing services:

- ✓ **Ofoto** (www.ofoto.com): Kodak's online photo site makes it easy to upload images for free and share your photo album with
- friends and family. Like other photo sites, Ofoto makes money by charging for prints. At 29 cents per print, Ofoto is not the cheapest, but they boast that the archival quality of their pictures means they'll last as long as conventional film prints. The site offers basic image editing and cropping tools and enables you or anyone with access to your site to create and order printed calendars and photo books from your pictures.
- ✓ **Shutterfly** (www.shutterfly.com): Shutterfly offers simple editing tools, enables you to post and share photos for free, and sells printing services. Shutterfly has an intuitive interface, and their specialized printing options enable you to turn your pictures into greeting cards, bound photo albums, personalized calendars, coffee mugs, T-shirts, or tote bags. Prints at Shutterfly cost 29 cents each.
- ✓ **Yahoo Photos** (photos.yahoo.com) offers online photo album services similar to Ofoto and Shutterfly, but their digital prints are priced at only 19 cents each.

Different types of sites

Here's a brief list of some of the different kinds of Web sites you can create and the technical options that go with them:

- ✓ **Online photo album sites:** Even if you plan to create a more complex Web site later, you may want to set up an online photo album site because it's one of the fastest and easiest ways to put photos online. Best of all, these photo sites are free, and they don't bombard your pages with lots of advertising like the free Web site services at Geocities or Tripod. Photo album sites make their money by charging for prints, which they are happy to send to you or your loved ones for about 20 or 30 cents each. The most popular free online photo album sites, including Ofoto.com, shown in Figure 1-1, are featured in the "Photo album and printing services" sidebar.

Figure 1-1:
Online photo
album sites
let you
upload and
showcase
photos
for free.



✔ **Free online services:** If price is your biggest concern and you want to create a Web site, you may be pleased to find that several companies will let you publish your site for free. The catch is that these companies then sell advertising on your pages, and you have no control over what ads will run next to your words and pictures. Yahoo! features a free Web site creation tool at Geocities.com, and you'll find similar solutions at Angel fire.com and Tripod.com. All three enable you to create template-based sites or to upload your own pages to their system (although they offer limited space and visits to your site). You find more about these and other Web server options in Chapter 4.

✔ **Specialty Web-based solutions:** The easiest way to create a professional-looking Web site for your family is to use an online service, such as family.myevent.com, as shown in Figure 1-2. You'll find similar services at www.eweddings.com and www.babyjellybeans.com, but I chose to feature family.myevent.com because I think it's one of the best in terms of price and ease of use and because you can create a variety of Web sites in one place (for weddings, babies, bar mitzvahs, or any other event). The family.myevent.com site offers a complete package of features, including planning tools, maps, and hotel reservation systems. Simply choose the template you want for your design, fill in a few forms, and upload your photos. You can create and publish a complete Web site in a matter of minutes.

Figure 1-2:

An online service like this one makes it easy to create a family-oriented Web site without special software or technical expertise.



✓ **Blogging software:** Millions of people now have blogs, or online journals, on the Internet. Their popularity has spawned a variety of software programs designed to facilitate easy updates, such as Blogging.com, as shown in Figure 1-3. A blog may be your best option if you want to make frequent updates to your Web site. One of the more famous family blogs is The Trixie Update, which Trixie's stay-at-home dad updates many times a day to keep her mom informed while she's at work. That site and many other blogging sites are featured in Chapter 15.

✓ **Predesigned templates:** I included with this book a collection of templates to make it easy for you to create a variety of common Web sites, such as a wedding site and a baby site. To use these templates, you need a Web design program, such as Microsoft FrontPage 2003, and an image program, such as Adobe Photoshop Elements 3. Although you have to know the basics of these programs to create a template-based site, the process is still much easier than creating a site from scratch. You also have more design control than you do if you use templates at an online service such as Tripod, where you can change only the content. When you edit templates in a program such as FrontPage 2003, you have the option of altering the design as much or as little as you choose. Many Web design programs include templates you can use, and you can buy or download free templates from a variety of Web sites. To use the templates included on the CD, check out Chapters 11 through 14.

Figure 1-3:

Blogging has become a popular way to create a Web site, especially if you want to make regular updates or create an online journal.



✓ **Fully customized sites:** If you use a program such as Macromedia Dreamweaver MX 2004 (which is what I used to create my own Web site, featured in Figure 1-4) or Microsoft FrontPage 2003 (featured in this book), you can create a fully customized Web site. You'll need more technical expertise to create a customized Web site than you need to use one of the template options, but you'll have the greatest design control over your pages. Even if you start by using a template to create your site, you can always go back later and further customize your pages in one of these programs. However, just mastering the technical features of a Web design program doesn't make you a great designer. Templates can help you avoid common design mistakes and create a professional-looking site, even if you can't draw a stick figure. (To find out more about design, check out the design tips in Chapter 17.)

✓ **Database-driven sites:** The most sophisticated Web sites on the Internet, such as the online store at Amazon.com or the news site at CNN.com, were created by using complex programming and databases. Combining a database that records information about users with the ability to generate pages automatically is what enables Amazon to greet you by name when you return to their site, track your orders as you buy books, and even make recommendations based on your previous purchases. I definitely don't suggest that you begin with a custom database. You don't need anything this sophisticated anyway, unless you want to sell lots of products or publish dozens of articles and photos to your site every day.



Figure 1-4:
I created my
own Web
site with the
Web design
program
Dream-
weaver.

Recommendations

The type of Web site you create depends on your budget, your expertise, and your time. If cost is your biggest concern and you don't mind sharing your pages with advertisers, try Angelfire.com or Geocities.com, but be aware that you'll have limited design options and no control over the ads that appear on your pages.

If your goal is to get a feature-rich site online as quickly and easily as possible, I recommend family.myevent.com. For a nominal fee, you can choose from a variety of high-quality site designs, add sophisticated features such as an online calendar, and use their simple system to publish your site in a matter of minutes or hours, even if you have no technical expertise. You do the development online, filling out a series of forms with the text you want on your site and then uploading your photos through a system that's similar to attaching a photo to an e-mail message.

If you use a service like family.myevent.com, you don't need any software, unless you want to edit your images before you post them to your site. (You find instructions for resizing, cropping, and editing images in Chapter 6.)

Protecting your privacy

Many parents wonder whether it is safe to put their children's photos on the Web; others simply don't want to share their stories with the world for fear that they may attract unwanted attention. Although there have been some highly publicized cases of children running into trouble because of someone they met online, such incidents are rare. I consider a child's photo appearing on a Web page to be roughly equivalent to his or her image appearing in a school yearbook or in a sports team photo in a local newspaper.

Millions of families have created Web sites and enjoy sharing their photos and stories. Rather than expressing concern about making their

stories and photos public on the Web, many families report that they have made new friends and reconnected with old ones thanks to their Web sites.

Here are some other things you can do to protect your personal information:

- ✓ Don't include your home address or phone number on your Web site.
- ✓ Don't include your work address or phone number.
- ✓ Be careful when writing about the times when you won't be at home, such as the dates you'll be on vacation.

If you want more control over your site and no ads, a Web site built with the templates included in this book and hosted on a commercial service provider is a great option. With just a little knowledge of a program such as FrontPage 2003 (covered in Chapters 8 and 9), you can customize predesigned Web page templates. The beauty of creating your own site design with a program like FrontPage is that you can add as much text and as many images as you want, and you can change the design as much or as little as your talent and time allow.

When you use a program such as FrontPage (whether you use templates or not), you create and edit your Web pages on your own computer and then transfer them to the server when you're ready to publish your site to the Web. The transfer process is easy and the benefit of building the site on your computer first is that you can test your work and experiment with different options before you publish your site on the server and make it available on the Internet.

No matter what option you choose, you can register your own domain name and point it to your Web site. This means you can direct people to your own special Web address, such as `www.the-smith-family.com`, whether you host your site at `AngelFire.com`, at `family.myevent.com`, or on your own server. You find out how to register a domain name in Chapter 3 and how to choose the best service provider in Chapter 4.

Best Practices and Models

A great Web site combines beautiful images and well-written text in a design that makes it easy to find your way to the most important information. But if you're staring at a blank computer screen, creating a Web site can seem daunting. To help inspire you, this section presents a few well-designed or innovative Web sites. So sit back, relax, and get your browser ready to go for a ride — after reading the descriptions of these sites, you may want to see them for yourself.

Wedding sites that inspire

When Jonathon and Joanne decided to get married on a Caribbean island, they knew that creating a Web site would make it easier to coordinate the travel arrangements and accommodations for their guests. On the site, shown in Figure 1-5, they posted helpful information, such as the “Things to Bring” section, which includes passports, suntan lotion, and snorkel gear. If you visit the site at wedding.studio2f.com, you'll find many wonderful stories about how they met, as well as regular updates for friends and family who couldn't travel to attend the wedding.

Figure 1-5:

This site combines a simple, elegant design with valuable information, such as all the special things guests should pack for a wedding on a tropical island.



Jonathon and Joanne's Web site was created using blogging software, which makes it easy to add updates (even from a tropical island). You find more information about blogs in Chapter 15. In Chapter 12, you find instructions for creating a customized wedding site using the templates provided on the CD.

Studying other people's wedding sites is a great way to see what you can do with your own site. You'll find many more wedding sites online at

www.topweddingsites.com/

Baby sites to make you smile

The MoriCentral.com Web site, shown in Figure 1-6, features photos and stories from everyone in the Mori family, but there's no question that the children are the stars of the show. In addition to a photo gallery and guest book, the Moris have included a section called Jared's Anecdotes filled with fun stories about their son. Visit the site to see a great example of a clean, simple design, with lots of great photos and clever stories about the kids.

Figure 1-6: This site is a showcase of photos and stories about baby Kegan and her brother Jared.



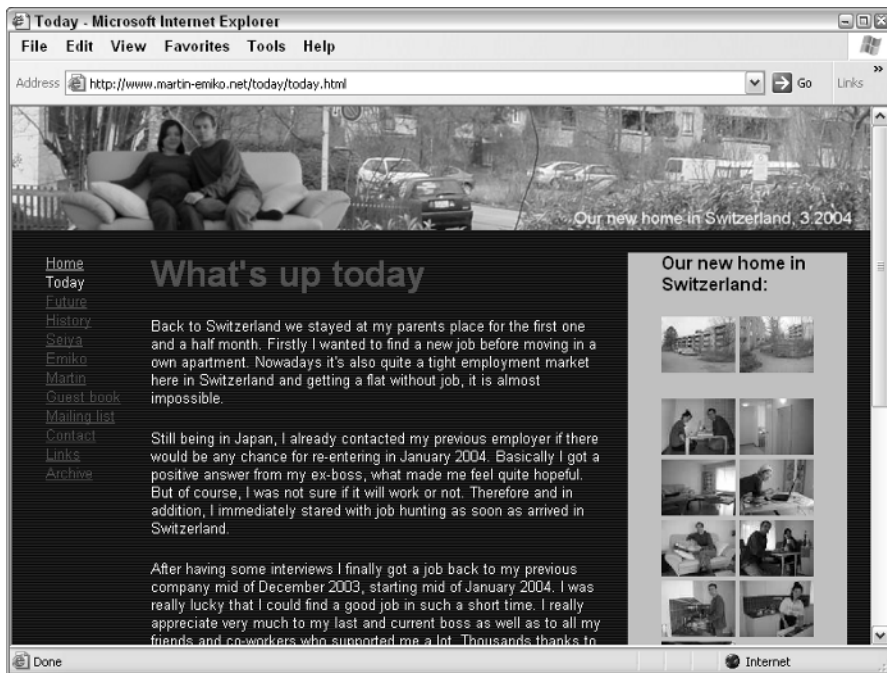
Family sites for everyone

Martin and Emiko created a Web site (www.martin-emiko.net) to help keep their distant families informed about their lives and growing family. He's from Switzerland and she's from Japan, so they are always far away from someone in the family. In addition to a great collection of stories and photos, the use of a long image across the top of each page, shown in Figure 1-7, is a simple but dramatic design trick and an ideal way to showcase the many landscapes they've photographed in their travels.

Here are a few other family Web sites you may want to visit for ideas:

- ✓ The Demar Family Web site at members.cox.net/botiff features an animation on the front page that includes a recording of the voices of some family members. The combination of the mother's voice welcoming you to the site and the kids making snide comments in the background as she talks provides a humorous introduction that draws you into the site and gives you a good idea about what to expect when you get there.

Figure 1-7: Martin and Emiko's web site helps them stay in touch with distant family and friends.

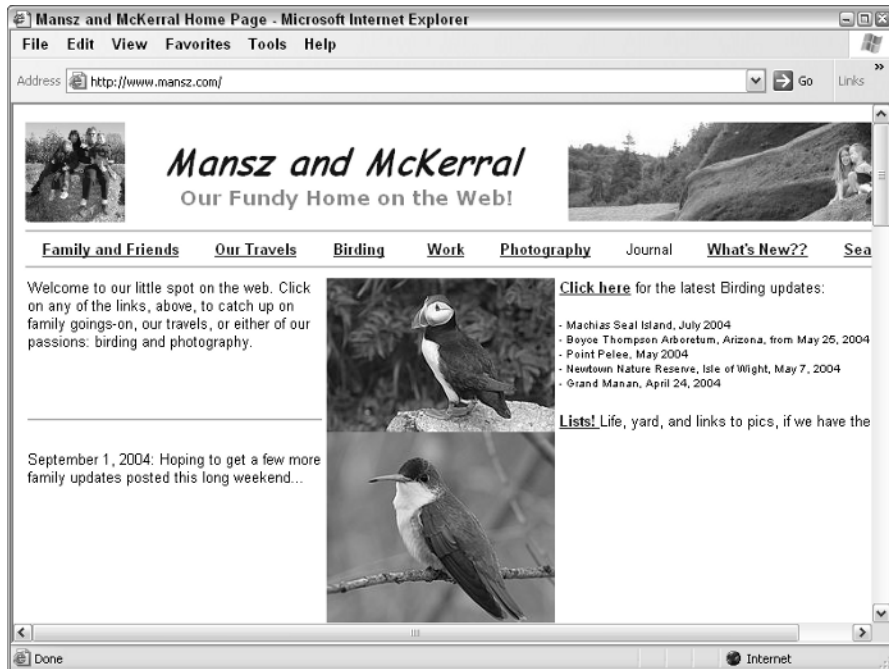


- ✓ The Miller Family Web site at www.millfam.org boasts several sophisticated features, put together by using a combination of services. Check out the bulletin board for neighborhood and family events, and visit their content-managed site, as they call it, to see a family blog linked to a custom family Web site. (You find out more about blogs in Chapter 15 and more about calendars in Appendix A).
- ✓ The Bratz family Web site, at webpages.charter.net/bratz/, features a fall sports schedule with a full calendar of games and other sporting events of interest to family and friends.
- ✓ Vicki and Tony's Web site at www.geocities.com/vickips/ is an example of how much you can do with a good sense of humor, even on a free Web site like Geocities.

Travel sites around the world

The Mansz and McKerral family Web site at www.mansz.com, shown in Figure 1-8, is more than just a place to share photos of friends and family. They've created a site that's a showcase of bird photos from their travels and a great resource for other birders. Whatever your hobby or passion, a family Web site can provide a great place to share your expertise and even make new friends.

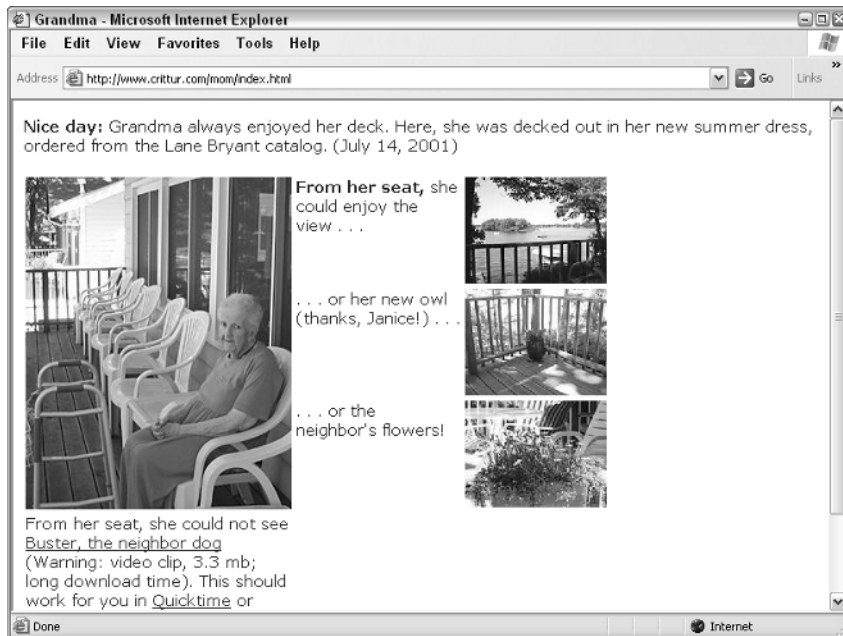
Figure 1-8:
This site features photos from bird-watching trips and great tips about birding.



Tribute sites to make you proud

Creating a Web site for friends or family members is a beautiful way to preserve their memory and pay tribute to their life. Figure 1-9 features a simple Web page that my Uncle Tom created for my grandmother, Carol McCain. We all have fond memories of grandma's house on the lake, where I learned to water ski and enjoyed sitting on the long deck staring out at the water and waiting for a chance to wave at the Dixie boat.

Figure 1-9:
Even a simple Web page, like the one shown here of my grandmother, provides a loving way to pay tribute and remember someone you love.



Choosing Tools

All Web pages are simply text pages that can be opened in any editor capable of reading text, such as Microsoft Word or even Notepad. I've chosen to use FrontPage 2003 and Photoshop Elements 3 in this book because they're relatively easy to use and reasonably priced, yet powerful enough to create complex Web sites. I recommend that you start with these programs if you're new to Web design. You can always move on to more advanced programs if you decide you want more features and options.

A note of caution, however. It's easy to get dazzled by all the effects, filters and tools. Don't fall into the trap of using filters and other fancy features just because you can. ("Look Ma, I made my photo look like a watercolor! Now it looks like a Japanese print! Wait, let me try Fresco.") Keep in mind that the most important thing is to make your photos and Web pages look good and download quickly on the Internet.

My goal in this section is to help you understand the strengths and weaknesses of the most popular Web design programs so you can find the program that's best for you now and in the future.

Comparing image editing programs

You'll find many choices in the world of image editing programs, from high-end programs such as Adobe Photoshop (which retails for about \$650) to simple programs that you can download for free over the Internet. Here's a quick comparison of some of the most popular image editing programs.

- ✔ **Adobe Photoshop CL:** By far the most popular image editing program in the history of computer design, Photoshop CL is a powerful program that lets you create, edit, and manipulate images. This is a professional tool, with a professional price tag (about \$650), so unless you have a huge budget or you're a serious photographer or designer, it's probably not the right choice for you.
- ✔ **Adobe Photoshop Elements 3:** Shown in Figure 1-10, Photoshop Elements 3, which now comes bundled with the creation tools from Photoshop Album, features many of the same powerful tools as Photoshop CL but is easier to use and costs about \$100. Elements provides more than enough power for almost anything you'd need to do on a family Web site. That's why I've chosen Photoshop Elements 3 as the image editing tool for this book. You find instructions for how to use Elements in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.



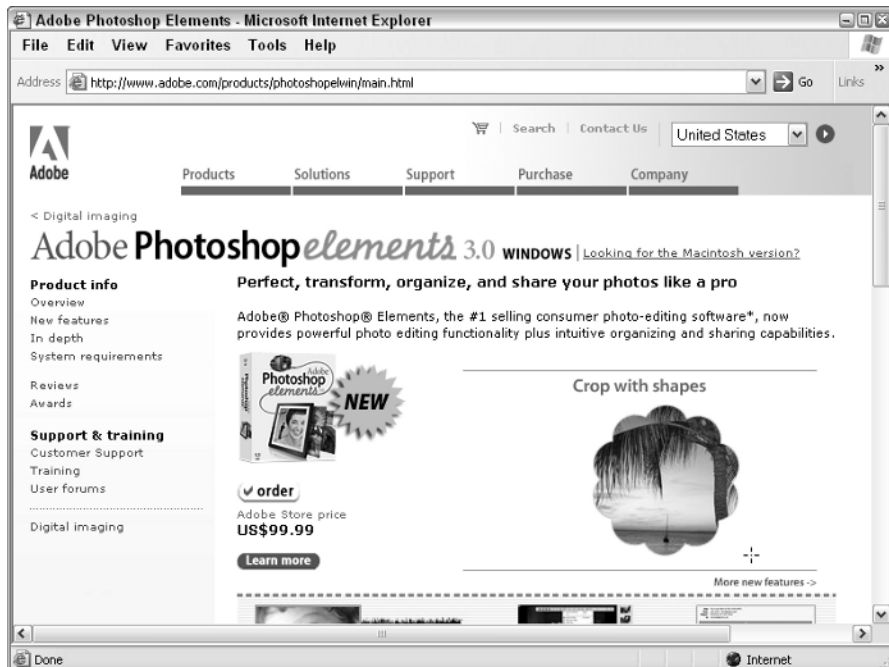
The difference between the two versions of Photoshop boils down to this: The expensive version is used by people like magazine editors and high-fashion photographers to do painstaking, exacting work on their photos, to make a flawless image suitable for viewing by millions and optimized for print. Given enough time, you can use Photoshop to make a mule look like a supermodel. For the rest of us, who just want to edit photos, or maybe make it look like Uncle Ernie's basset hound was driving the lawnmower, Photoshop Elements 3 should be all you'll ever need.

- ✔ **Macromedia Fireworks MX 2004:** This image design program has many special features that make it easy to create images that download quickly and look good on the Web. A few years ago, Fireworks was the

best image program for the Web, but that's no longer true due to enhancements to Photoshop Elements and other programs in this list. Today, the main reason for choosing Fireworks is if you use Dreamweaver as your Web design program, because the two programs are fully integrated.

- ✓ **Corel Draw Graphics Suite 12:** Although not as popular as Adobe Photoshop, CorelDraw is a professional-grade image program that is rich in features. This suite of programs costs less than Adobe Photoshop but more than Elements.
- ✓ **Ulead PhotoImpact XL:** This image editing program often comes bundled with the software for digital cameras and scanners. It's easy to use and has a wide range of features, including several automated correction features. The ExpressFix Photo Wizard, for example, helps correct for common photography mistakes such as red eye and lens distortion. You'll also get everything you need to edit and convert images for the Web — and at a lower price than Adobe's or Corel's products.
- ✓ **Apple iPhoto:** Often bundled with Apple computers as part of the iLife suite, iPhoto is an excellent image editor and by far the best choice for Mac users. (You can't get this program for a PC.) If you have iPhoto, you have everything you need to create images for the Web.

Figure 1-10: Elements is a "light" version of Photoshop, ideal for anyone new to working with an image editor.



Comparing Web design programs

In the early days of the Web, people were using lots of different visual HTML editors. Today, only a few major ones are left: Microsoft FrontPage, Adobe GoLive, and Macromedia Dreamweaver:

- ✓ **Microsoft FrontPage 2003:** I chose to use FrontPage 2003 in this book because it is less expensive than its competitors and relatively easy to use. It's also the most popular Web design program among consumers (although Dreamweaver wins among professional designers). If you work with other Microsoft Office programs, you should feel comfortable with FrontPage because it's similar to Microsoft Word and is integrated into Microsoft Office. You find a basic guide to FrontPage in Chapter 8 and a special guide to working with templates in FrontPage in Chapter 9. For more about FrontPage, visit www.frontpage.com, as shown in Figure 1-11.
- ✓ **Macromedia Dreamweaver MX 2004:** By far the most popular choice among professional Web designers, Dreamweaver has received great reviews and attracted considerable attention because it offers high-end Web design features and lots of control for programmers who like to work in the code behind their Web pages. Dreamweaver features many customizable palettes and floating dialog boxes, which makes it look more like an image editor than a word processor. If you're serious about Web design, this is the tool to use. If you're still new to the Web, you'll save money and probably have an easier time with a program such as FrontPage. For more about Dreamweaver, visit www.dreamweaver.com, shown in Figure 1-12, or buy my book, *Dreamweaver MX 2004 For Dummies* (published by Wiley).



If you want to use the templates provided on the CD, but prefer to use Dreamweaver to do your Web design, visit www.digitalfamily.com. You'll find a special bonus for readers of this book — instructions for using Dreamweaver to create the template sites featured in Chapters 11 through 14.

- ✓ **Macromedia Contribute 3.0:** This program is reasonably priced and easy to use, but it's not a stand-alone program. Instead, it works with Dreamweaver. Contribute can be used to edit a Web site created in Dreamweaver, which makes it easy for anyone to update pages, but you'll need a pro to create the site in Dreamweaver first. Contribute is an ideal choice if you're hiring a Web designer to create your site or if one member of the family is an experienced designer who wants to use Dreamweaver.
- ✓ **Adobe GoLive CS:** Similar in features to Dreamweaver MX 2004, GoLive CS is used by many professional Web designers, especially those who are loyal to Adobe and are already using Photoshop CS. GoLive CS is a professional design tool and not generally recommended for beginners or hobbyists.

Figure 1-11:
FrontPage
was
designed to
look and
work much
like Word.



Figure 1-12:
Dream-
weaver is
the most
popular
choice
among
profes-
sional Web
designers.



No matter what software programs you choose for image editing and Web design, the basic concepts are the same. If you're new to Web design, I recommend that you start with FrontPage 2003 and Elements. However, don't forget that you can use whatever image or Web design program you prefer with this book, and you can always move on to more advanced programs later if you decide you want more features and options.