

Xara Web Designer

The goal of Web Designer is to present a simple, un-cluttered, easy-to-learn tool for creating beautiful websites.

USPs

Lots of manufacturers make claims such as 'easy to use, WYSIWYG web editor' (even if very few of them are true). So here's a list of the things that make Xara Web Designer stand-out from the crowd (at last count from more than 160 different web authoring products).

This is what makes Xara Web Designer special:

- One integrated tool for creating graphical websites. With tools for creating resolution independent vector graphics, photo editing and advanced text layout.
- Drag and drop anything anywhere. Complete freeform, WYSIWYG web page layout with pixel accurate positioning.
- Fast. Xara owners know this - the fastest graphic and photo rendering engine in the world.
- "Liquid Text" flow around objects. The ability to create curved edges or for text to be automatically repelled around irregular shapes, and alpha-channel images (it will flow around the opaque parts of transparent images).
- Automatic stretchy objects such as graphic buttons and text panels.
- Site-wide, one-click, theme re-colouring. Smart shade re-coloring as well.
- Automatic color matching of imported objects (e.g. buttons, headings, text panels)
- Full support for transparency even graduated transparency (on graphics, photos & text)
- Full (and automatic) alpha channel support for things like soft shadows, anti-aliasing, semi-transparent objects, rotated text.
- Flash creation + Flash templates for easy Flash creation
- Automatic creation of and optimization of web graphics from vectors, photos and more. e.g. it knows that rotated text is not possible in HTML so converts to an anti-aliased graphic of the correct type.
- All photos are automatically re-sampled to the correct web resolution and image type (E.G automatic photo optimization. Drop a 12 Megapixel image on your document, make it any size, and WD produces a image of the right resolution.
- Easy mouse-over and pop-up effects (photos, graphics and layers with text, graphics etc)
- Easy photo thumbnails with automatic pop-up (with animated pop-up effects)
- Easy embedding of tens of thousands of external third-party web page widgets and add-ons with completely free page placement (drag the object anywhere you want on the page, even place on pop-up layers) e.g. Google Maps, YouTube, RSS, Flash, news feeds, and a whole lot more.
- Embedding of free-form placement of resizable Flash files.
- Huge range of import types, vector, image and text (e.g. PDF, RTF, RAW, EPS, PSD, TIFF, plus the usual, JPEG, PNG, GIF)
- Ultra-fast photo tool, one click crop, brightness, contrast, color, blur, sharpen, temperature control, all completely non-destructive, lossless.
- Cross browser, cross platform compatible (IE 5.5+, Firefox, Safari, Chrome, Opera), XHTML, CSS, W3C standards based
- All this and not a single line of HTML / Javascript required

Xara Xtreme vs. Xara Web Designer

Xara Xtreme is a much more powerful graphics tool (and more expensive) and has a lot more general features. Web Designer is based on Xara Xtreme, but many tools and features that are not directly related to creating websites have been removed. (e.g. blend, mould, Extrude, etc). On the other hand those features related to creating websites have been improved and simplified. e.g. where you had to use hidden methods such as Names for placeholders, embedding Flash, forcing image type etc are all now directly controlled via new dialogs.

Removed features

- Many tools not directly related to website creation have been removed e.g. blend, mould, freehand, Live

Effects, 3D extrude, etc

- Most remaining tools have been simplified. e.g. fewer range of fill and transparency types. No profiles control. Mix only transparency. Selector Infobar simplified. Text Infobar simplified.
- Convert to Editable shapes removed (this is automatic when saving website. You can use Add Shapes if you really want to, which does pretty much the same thing on a single shape.)
- Clipview
- Option dialog very considerably simplified
- Name, Font, Color galleries removed
- No Panorama Maker (but stub left in Photo Tool)
- Levels tool removed.
- All clipart removed and entirely new set of web template and web graphics under newly named Designs Gallery (not yet finished)

The list of changes and improvements is not small:

Additions, new features and improvements:

General

- Copy / Paste retains layers
- Direct resize of pages vertically by dragging on bottom edge
- Click on color line shows menu - does not set set fill color (Shift click sets outline color still)
- Fill tool push when you drag anywhere on photo. Easier to move photos inside their frame
- Repeating objects across pages and new menu options to make an objects repeat across all pages. Smart positioning of items like repeating footers so they are positioned at the correct place irrespective of page size.
- Multi-stage transparency. Works like multi-stage graduated color fill.
- Improved colour matching on inserting clipart objects (by import and paste)
- Much improved Adobe EPS import. Now imports most if not all iStock vector files and VectorMagic traces
- Improved PDF import
- .web is native file type not .xar (but it is .xar compatible and will load any .xar file (and Xtreme can open .web files)
- Name Gallery removed, replaced by new simplified Name Dialog. Much easier to add, remove names to objects. This is used for adding Anchor points, amongst other things

Text related

- Multi-language Spell Checker, with check-as-you-type.
- Link Underline made more intelligent
- Improved Link color control (global site-wide and ability to override on a per link basis)
- Web Safe font section of the font menu
- Font embedding & subsetting. You can use any font and send someone your .web file and they will be able to read it will all the correct fonts
- Text syncing of Soft Groups (all identical text strings in a soft group get updated when one is changed. This is how multi-layer button editing is done. Also useful in Flash templates)
- Instant, live, font size preview when selecting fonts and also now font size
- Improved button and heading stretching
- 'Windows Compatible Font rendering' mode to adjust font metrics to emulate the *incorrect* Windows font rendering used by Windows browsers
- Improved vertical positioning of text, for more accurate WYSIWYG text placement
- Better more reliable replacing, or pasting, of selected regions. Takes on style of paste point
- Better replacement of selected text line (e.g. triple click line and type, now does not replace CR)
- Double-click on text takes you into the Text Tool.
- All fonts on screen are now rounded to whole pixels to match the behaviour of web browsers.

Update: Selecting small text sizes with the Selector Tool has been improved.

Update: It's now easy to put rotated text back exactly upright, from any angle, by holding Ctrl while rotating.

Photo Tool

- Drag n drop a photo will now replace all copies of that photo (on that page). Use Ctrl to replace only the one instance. Great for pop-ups and templates.
- Photo color temperature (warm / cool) control added

- Direct crop (just drag on Photo into Photo tool, no need to go into crop mode).
- Easy crop adjust - the crop handles are shown always in Photo tool so you can just drag sides of any photo, at any time. No need to go into Crop mode.
- Next & Previous added for use in Photo mode.
- Zoom to 1:1 on selected photo
- Constrained rotate (with Ctrl) will now always include an upright, so it's easy to rotate photos to be axis aligned
- Dragging anywhere on photo in Fill Tool now re-positions, (it used to create a new fill). Shift drag will create a new fill
- Large imported photos are resized to 500 pixels. You can of course resize to any value still.

Object selection

- New cross-layer grouping system called Soft Groups.
- Ctrl+Alt+G to create SoftGroup, Ctrl+Alt+U to un-SoftGroup. When you select any member of a SoftGroup, all other parts are selected and transformed the same way, even if on hidden layers.
- If 2 or more members of a SoftGroup have identical text, they will be synchronised when the text of any of them is edited.
 - Double click to select Navbars, or any Repeating objects with the same name
 - Double click in Selector tool on objects selects and appropriate tool e.g. Shape Editor, Rectangle, Ellipse, Photo Tool, Text Tool.
 - You can't stretch / skew objects with side handles in the Selector (only rectangles). (To prevent accidental aspect ratio corruption, one of the most common problems for beginner users)
 - Stretching rounded corner rectangles in the Select Tool maintains the aspect ratio of the corners, (but only if singly selected)
 - Ctrl+Click (select inside) on a text object inside a Group now select the whole text line and not the single character.
 - Ctrl constrained rotate will now align rotated rectangles to be axis aligned (i.e. it's easy to make rectangles (and photos) be exactly upright)

Flash related

- You can add a link to the whole animation now (useful for banners)
- Hi-res photos are automatically resampled down to maximum size used in the animation (at 100%), no need to manually optimize any more.
- In Flash animations, you can make a click re-direct to another part of the animation
- Bitmap blur/sharpen supported natively as a Flash transform (i.e you can tween photo blur values. Flash blur is not quite the same as Xara blur. Flash blurs edges of photos. We do not)
- You can now also tween saturation and color temperature
- Direct page (Flash Animation) resize (vertically only so far)
- Ability to control JPEG compression for all photos in a Flash file
- Improved tweening error messages
- You can now jump to frames on a mouseover (as well as clicks) so you can control animation on mouseover.
- Flash movies now restart on pop-ups or mouseover pop-ups each time the pop-up appears (rather than carry on from where it last was)
- Embedded PNGs are converted to transparent JPEGs when they have to be re-sampled (i.e. they are higher than 96dpi). Flash supports a proprietary type of JPEG that can include alpha channel, and hi-res PNGs are automatically converted to this format to save file space. If you want a PNG to remain as a PNG in the Flash file, add it to the animation at 96dpi.
- When selecting a Flash file on the Placeholder tab, the Flash file is copied into a support folder alongside the saved .web file. This folder is called 'filename_web_files' where filename is the name of the web file. The placeholder then references this copied file and not the original. This means when copying a .web file, you should also copy the associated _files folder to keep the associated Flash files.

Multi-page documents

- Pages can now be different sizes (new document option to choose same or different page sizes)
- Pages can have different layers
- Importing page templates from Clipart/Designs gallery adds them as a new page
- Each page can have its own name (used in HTML export), and links to pages can be made to named pages via drop-down lists of pages

Website related

- Single click website preview
- Improved Placeholders and ability to embed HTML snippets on placeholders (this gives easy way of embedding YouTube and a host of other widgets, media players and all sorts of interactive gadgets)
- New Web UI for lots of web related features (links, placeholders, image type and quality, improved mouse-over)
- Website-wide title, keywords, description and tracker (web analytics) code, *and* also on a per-page basis
- Ability to set filenames of final HTML on a per-page basis
- Improved style or Theme-based color matching when importing and pasting
- Single click export of PNGs and JPEG (export dialog stage is now optional)
- New Web Properties dialog.
- New website related set of buttons and a new 'website' bar for single click access to Preview, Export website, Web Properties, Links dialog, FTP Publish.
- FTP Publish capability (one-click publishing to your web host)
- Mouse-over now works for any overlapping object (more than 50% overlapping) on the MouseOver layer and is no longer cropped. (means that irregular shaped rollover buttons are easier)
- Double click on Navbars selects all the buttons in a bar (and on all layers) for bars that have been SoftGrouped.
- Force objects to be PNG or JPG using new Image dialog
- Ability to change JPEG compression on a per image basis
- Improved HTML source code formatting and readability
- Improved smart elimination of replicated graphics. (If you have the same image multiple times on the same or different pages and the program automatically removes the duplicates and references the same master image on the server which is cached by the browser. Makes a huge difference to the download size and speed of the website. e.g. for headings, background, logos, buttons, NavBars that are repeated throughout a website. How smart is that!)
- Easier Alt and Title tags and ability to add 'tooltip' pop-up messages to images
- Ability to link to Next & Previous pages, so it's easy to create navigation systems with Next & Previous links without having to manually set up each link.
- Ability to link to MailTo; links without the email address appearing in the HTML (uses simple email address encoding) to avoid SPAMbot trawling. Just add an email address into the Link field and this is done automatically.

Pop-ups

- Easier mouse-over effects for buttons and easier pop-up layer control
- You can make popups appear by applying the Mouseover property to any text selection, not just graphic objects
- You make pop-up layers appear on-click as well as on mouse-over
- New photo thumbnail with automatic pop-up feature (no layers required), with deferred loading (great for hi-res images), with animated effects.

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