



May 14, 2001

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Adobe GoLive 4.0: Professional Web Authoring With Flair

By Sean Wagstaff

Rating:

Platform: Macintosh, Windows 95/98, NT 4.0

Verdict: Users of GoLive CyberStudio 3.0 won't notice much of a change, which is good and bad.

List Price: \$299; \$99 upgrade

Contact: Adobe Systems, 408-536-6000, 800-685-3612

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Although Adobe has been in the Web publishing business for several years, its low-end PageMill software was eclipsed long ago by more sophisticated programs. With Adobe's recent acquisition of GoLive CyberStudio 3.0 and the subsequent renaming, updating, and repackaging of the product as GoLive 4.0, Adobe can once again compete in the professional Web authoring market. And by the time you read this, the company should have released the first Windows version of the previously Mac-only program.



Despite the move to a new parent company, GoLive 4.0 is a fairly minor upgrade. It offers new JavaScript features, support for Active Server Pages (ASP) code, and a handful of interface improvements, as well



as an impressive QuickTime editing module. But in general, this version looks and acts about the same as CyberStudio 3.0 not a bad thing, except for the persistence of program-crashing bugs that manifested at random intervals until I turned off Navigation Services in the preferences.

GoLive offers a great deal of design flexibility and control. As with NetObjects Fusion, you can lay out pages on a grid (which is structurally dependent on complex nested HTML tables), but you can also turn to simpler user-defined tables of columns and rows. You place objects such as images or form elements on pages by dragging icons from a palette. You set parameters, including links and client-side image maps, in context-sensitive Inspector palettes. It's easy to switch between the layout mode, which is basically WYSIWYG, and a syntax-checking source-code view. Of all of the Web design applications, GoLive has the cleanest, most designer-friendly interface.

Dynamic HTML (DHTML) and the related cascading style sheets (CSS) are temptingly easy to create. Unfortunately, DHTML and CSS are handled differently by current versions of Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer and aren't supported at all by many older Web browsers. GoLive warns you when you use DHTML tags that are browser-specific, but it doesn't come close to Macromedia Dreamweaver in terms of smoothing the road to cross-browser compatibility. Nor does GoLive help you create scripts that redirect older browsers to alternative versions of your site.

With a much improved table editor you can make changes to

discontinuous selections of cells. However, there are still a few glitches; for instance, colored table cells created in the editor didn't work in Netscape Navigator 4.0 because the cells lacked the required `<td style="background-color: #cccccc;">` tag.

Although GoLive's interface is good, it has a long way to go before it's consistent with other Adobe software. For example, shift-dragging doesn't constrain the axis of movement of objects on grids, and you can't zoom in on details. And although GoLive supports DHTML layers, the layer interface is markedly different from those in Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator. Aside from that inconsistency, the interface would benefit from many small tweaks; editing image maps in a tight space, for example, is difficult.

GoLive offers some unique time-saving design features. It automatically generates low-resolution black-and-white images that load before a high-resolution color image. The program makes fast work of creating JavaScript rollovers. On the other hand, it lacks sitewide templates, a pasteboard for frequently used objects, or a place to store favorite colors. It can't import and convert Photoshop and Illustrator files and layers directly, nor can it create bitmapped display text. And GoLive, like most other HTML editors, doesn't incorporate the powerful Microsoft FrontPage server extensions, which would make it easy to add features such as bulletin boards and internal search engines without programming.

The new QuickTime editor is unlike anything in other Web-design programs, and it provides excellent support for the layers, audio tracks, text, and sprites

in QuickTime 3. Control of the playback and event-based linking of QuickTime tracks is good: you can make music and sprites start and stop and jump to other URLs. On the other hand, Macromedia Shockwave and Flash files get short shrift, although you can set up links from events triggered in those plug-in formats. I'd like to see GoLive incorporate more controls for popular plug-ins.

The current crop of WYSIWYG Web design applications share a major blind spot: they can't quickly and easily build interactions with a variety of databases. GoLive views and edits ASP, XML, and WebObjects code, and you can edit without fear of altering special tags, but this is a long way from being a fast front-end builder for database servers. I'll jump for joy when a Web design tool makes it easy to tap into databases and when it can do a credible job of converting existing database forms into Web-ready HTML.

While print publishing tools have had many years to mature, Web design software has been in a mad rush to meet the exploding demands of the publishing community while staying current with browser capabilities. GoLive keeps up with the pack. My wish list for the next revision is lengthy, but even now design-minded Web publishers should consider GoLive.

Sean Wagstaff, the author of *Animation on the Web* (Peachpit Press), is a freelance digital artist and Web animator.

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