

Preparing and Planning a Web Site

Introduction

You might have heard the expression: A journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. While that makes perfect sense, there is one other thing that must be accomplished before taking that fateful step... proper planning.

Attempting to design a complex Web site without proper planning would be akin to taking a trip from New York to California without the benefit of any roadmaps. You might understand that you need to travel in a westerly direction; however, without proper planning, you would probably make a lot of wrong turns before arriving at your final destination. Planning therefore is a fundamental part of any journey, and it's a fundamental part of any Web design project.

Planning for a new Web site involves understanding in two key areas: knowledge of the applications you will be using (the logical side), and knowledge of what direction you want to take this new Web project (the creative side).

Dreamweaver will help any Web design project run more smoothly; whether you are building a Web site from scratch, collaborating with a Web-design team, or anywhere in between. So, before starting the planning process, you need knowledge of Dreamweaver and what's it's capable of doing.

Regardless of the scope of your project, take some time in advance to think through the architecture of your site (the layout structure of the pages as a whole, and the options for navigating the site), develop a look-and-feel (graphic design and interface), and gather the content (the information you want to include on the site pages). When this preliminary work is done, you can plunge into the development, staging, launching, and the very important maintenance of the site.

Creating a comprehensive plan of the project will simplify the process of creating a complex Web site, and like a road map, will help to keep you on track as you make that journey of a thousand miles.

What You'll Do

Begin with a Plan

Create a Visual Mind Map

Create Sample Page Sketches

Generate a Timeline

Assemble the Site

Create a Marketing Plan

Create a Storyboard

Create a Site Local Root Folder

Beginning with a Plan

Before you fire up the software and start cranking out Web pages, take a step back from the process, and ask yourself what you're aiming at by designing this Web site. You can get help in answering that question by asking yourself five more questions. Just turn to journalism 101, and ask yourself the 5 basic W questions: Who, What, When, Where, and the all-important, Why.

- ◆ **Who** is designing this site?
- ◆ **What** are the goals of the site?
- ◆ **When** will the site be completed?
- ◆ **Where** is my target audience?
- ◆ **Why** am I doing this?

Who is designing this site?

In this case the answer would be you. You're responsible for everything from the creation of the graphics, to the typing of the text; even to the compression of the video. Since you know Dreamweaver, the construction of the site... from the ground up, is all up to you. At least you think it is...

For example, you might know Dreamweaver from top to bottom, but do you also know some of the other applications you might need to use, such as: Photoshop, Illustrator, Flash, and Fireworks; just to name a few. If your knowledge of other essential applications is lacking, you might need to bring other experts into the mix. In addition, many Web designers can assemble Web pages with their eyes closed, but lack a fundamental understanding of how to load and manage the site out to the server. And what about marketing your site? Did you ever hear the expression, build it and they will come? Well, a lot of people built Web sites and nobody comes. Why? No one knew they

existed. The question: *Who is designing this site* helps you focus not only on the end game, but who is going to help you get there.

What are the goals of the site?

You would be surprised (or maybe you wouldn't) how many people want to build a Web site, but have no clear goals as to what they want the site to accomplish (just talk to some of my clients). A Web site is about communication, plain and simple. For example my goal for this book is to teach you how to use Dreamweaver in a logical and creative way, plain and simple. We could say that the goal of our fictional Web site is to obtain more business, that's what most business sites are designed to do. However, we also want an element of the site devoted to pure and free information; maybe an area devoted to tips and tricks on taking good photographs. A Web site can have more than one goal, but it's important to define them at the get go. If you don't have any clearly defined goals for your site, how are you going to be able to tell if you're successful? When my dad would take us on one of his famous across-the-country vacations, my sister and I would be in the back seat singing the mantra of all children everywhere: Are we there yet? Without a good, well-defined set of goals, how are you ever going to know if you've arrived? Later we'll talk about how you monitor those goals; for now just set them. If you don't know, or understand, the ultimate goals of your site, then stop right now, and don't move forward until you can define them.

When will the site be completed?

While this may seem trivial, I've known many a good Web designer who have gone out of business because they promised and never delivered. Since you'll be designing this site

on your own, this question becomes even more important because it gives you a date to strive. Believe me it's very easy to let other considerations interfere with the completion of the site. And here's another good reason... in the business world a make or break for many is the holiday shopping season. From the end of November to the end of December many retailers make most of their money.

You believe that you can sell a lot of your photographs during this time of the year, so you plan for the site to be up and running for the holidays. But what does that really mean? In truth it means having the site up and running by August, at the latest. This gives the site time to be indexed by all the search engines, and it gives you time to iron out any possible kinks in the operation of the site. The worst thing you want to happen is to get the site up by mid November, and then discover that your shopping cart module is full of problems. Set a reasonable, reachable date, and then work toward that goal. Reasonable and reachable is obtained based on your knowledge of the site, its complexity, how long it will take you to do things, and how much time in the day you have to devote to the project.

Where is my target audience?

How are you going to know what to put into your site unless you understand where your audience is coming from? By coming from, I don't mean their geographical location (although that can be important). When I design a Web site for a client, I want to get to know the people that will be visiting the site. In reality, that's not very practical. After all, you're not going to knock on the front door of each and every possible visitor, sit down with a cup of tea, and discuss his or her likes and dislikes.

What I'm looking for in the discovery phase is a general idea of who my visitors might be: What kind of people would buy my photos and videos? Once I've got a handle on the demographics of my audience, I can design the site around those parameters. For example, I would design a Web site for six-year olds much differently than a site for a major corporation such as: General Electric, or Williams-Sonoma. We'll talk more about how you'll accomplish this later in this chapter; however, it's important to understand your target audience.

Why am I doing this?

While this may seem close to the goals for the site, it's simply a motivating tool. For example, the goal of the site is to increase my business, but in the end my goal is to share my photographic work with the world. It might also be security. For example, you work for someone else as a photographer in his or her studio, and because business is not that great, you feel that you could be in the unemployment queue before long. Your objective for designing this Web site is a personal goal you've had for years: To start your own business and become a photographer in your own rights.

Designing a Web site is not just about making money. You would be surprised how simply asking yourself the question: *Why am I doing this*, will motivate you to not only to get the job completed on time, but to do the absolute best job possible. Hey, this could just be your dream come true.

Creating a Visual Mind Map

There are many ways to expand a simple idea into a complex design. My personal favorite way is through the creation of a mind map.

Mind maps have many applications in personal, family, education, and business. Ideas are inserted into the map around a center thought (the seed), without the organization that comes from hierarchy or sequential arrangements (grouping and organizing is reserved for later stages).

A Mind Map consists of four essential elements:

- ◆ The **idea** (seed) is placed in the center of a blank page.
- ◆ The main **themes** of the central idea radiate from the central image on connecting lines or branches.
- ◆ Each branch holds a **key word**, and secondary ideas radiate out from each branch.
- ◆ The branches form a **connected structure** back to the central idea.

I find the best time to create a mind map of a project is when I'm fully rested and calm with the world. Remember, a mind map is all about free association.

Getting back to the mind map of our fictional Web site... The name of your business is YouTechTube, a place to store and display home videos on technology. Start the process by getting away from any possible distractions; turn off the television, get away from cell phones. Music is totally optional, and might help to focus your mind by eliminating any distracting background noise. The supplies you need are some plain white paper, and few colored pencils, the answers to the 5 W questions, and an uncluttered mind.

Start by drawing a circle in the middle of the page, and write the title of your site in the circle. You draw a line out from the center circle, like the branch of a tree, and on the branch you write the word, Applications. Then, using smaller branches, you begin listing the applications you believe will be needed to accomplish your goal: Dreamweaver, Flash, Photoshop, Final Cut Pro, etc. As you write down Final Cut Pro, you realize that you don't have much experience with that application; however, it will be very important in the design and compression of your video files. A good friend of yours, Harold Driver, is an expert and so you make a smaller branch next to Final Cut Pro and write, Contact Harold.

The process of free association is that one thought will inevitably lead to another related thought. If at any time you seem at a standstill, simply reread the answers you gave to the 5 basic W questions, and it should give you the mental inspiration to continue.

Once the mind map is complete, you might want to clean it up by entering the information from the hand-drawn sketch into a word processor. Sometimes by retyping the details of the mind map, it helps to spot things you might have forgotten. If you prefer doing your mind maps on a computer, check out the following Web sites:

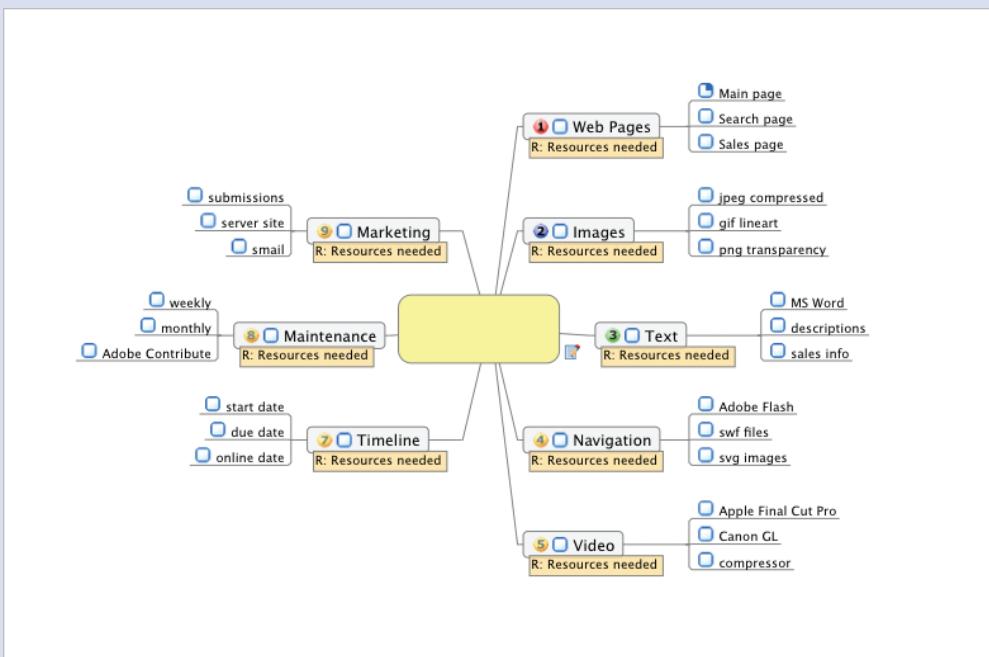
- ◆ **Mindmap.** <http://www.mindmap.com/EN/mindmaps/definition.html>
- ◆ **Inspiration.** <http://www.inspiration.com/>
- ◆ **MindGenius.** <http://www.mindgenius.com/>
- ◆ **Mind manager.** <http://www.mindjet.com/uk/>
- ◆ **Mind tools.** <http://www.mindtools.com/>

- ◆ **Open source Freemind.**
http://freemind.sourceforge.net/wiki/index.php/Main_Page

Remember that a mind map does not lock you in stone; it's simply ideas on how you are going to proceed with construction of your Web site.

The process of mind mapping a simple project can go very quickly. The more complex the project, the more involved the mind map. However it is time well spent. Most studies show that planning complex project will wind up saving you time... up to twenty percent.

Mind map



Creating Sample Page Sketches

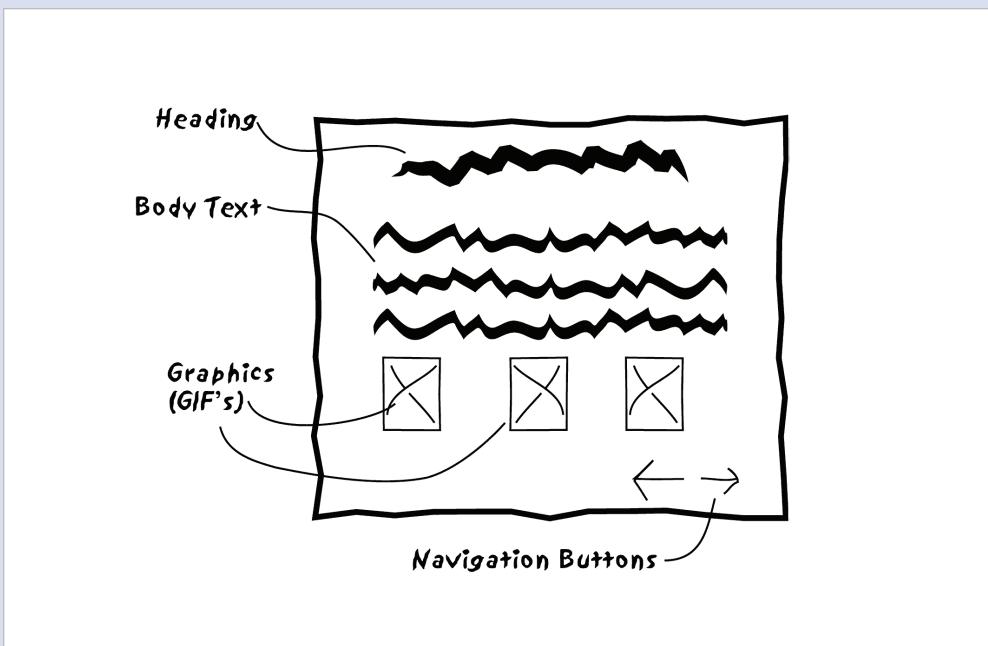
Once the mind map is complete, take some time to hand draw some sketches of what the pages of your Web site will look like. You can start out (like I do) by drawing rectangles on a piece of paper, and crudely outlining where you want to place elements on the page; like arranging the furniture in a room, place page elements where they will be most comfortable and accessible to your visitors.

You don't have to be pretty; just get a general idea of how the site will be visually laid

out. You might even add notations as to colors and text. Eventually you'll clean up these crude sketches by creating them on graph paper that matches the width to height ratio for each page, but more on that later.

The final step after the creation of the sketches is to give them the names you will use when you create them in Dreamweaver. Since these are file names, they should conform to standard file-naming conventions.

Sample Sketch



Generating a Timeline

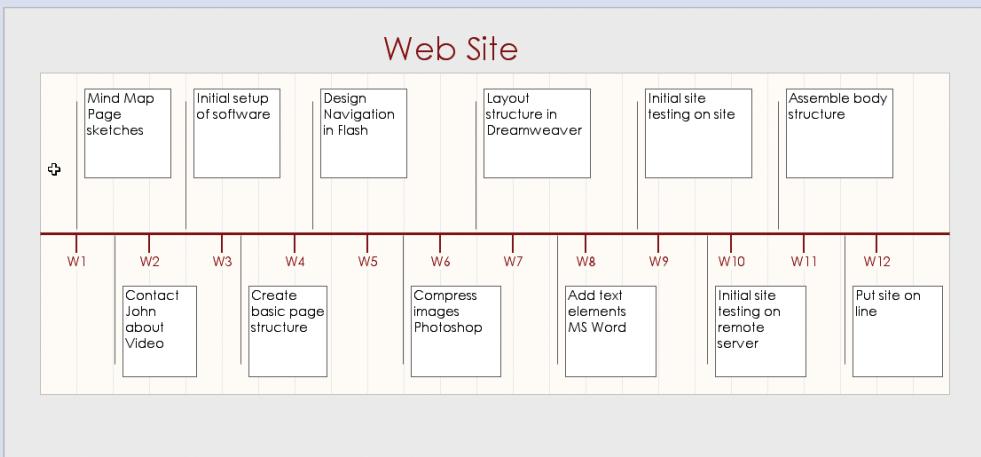
You've generated a comprehensive mind map, and you've got some page sketches... you're doing great. You now have the information you need to proceed to the next step, and that's the creation of a flow chart. While the mind map gives you all the details of how your Web site is to be constructed, it does not give you that information in chronological order.

The flow chart takes the information obtained from the mind map and places it into an ordered timeline. For example, what do you work on first, second, third? Do you call Harold and ask for his help today on Final Cut Pro, or can it wait a bit. The flow chart is like the construction of a house; you start with

the foundation, and move on. What do you think would happen if the drywall workers sealed up the walls to a new home before the electrician's had a chance to install the internal wiring?

In our case, you might design a really cool navigation system in Flash (took days of time); however, as you build the site, you realize that you left several pages out. Now, you've got to consume more time by going back and changing the Flash Navigation. The flow chart will help to reduce or eliminate such problems. It will also let you know where you stand in the construction of the site, and will help you complete your site successfully and on time.

Sample Timeline



Assembling the Site

The majority of what you've accomplished so far is without the use of your computer (Unless you're using your computer to generate the mind maps or flow charts). While the process may seem tedious, in reality it's quite straightforward. As a matter of fact, once you have experienced the benefits of proper site planning, you'll never design another project without having a plan.

The next part of this process involves the gathering together of the "stuff" you will need to complete the project. That will include applications, images, animations, text; all the things that make up a proper site. Believe it or not, in a typical Web project, Dreamweaver might be one of the last places you go; not the first. Think of it this way, Dreamweaver is a Web design layout application. In order to use it, you need things to "lay out."

Gathering Information About Your Visitors

I mentioned earlier that the statement: Build it and they will come, is not necessarily true, especially when it comes to Web design. You need information. If you haven't already done a demographic study (also called the discovery phase) based on your target audience, do

so now. If this seems a bit overwhelming, there are a lot of sites that specialize in giving you exactly this sort of information.

The following list is just a few of the existing discovery sites:

- ◆ <http://www.omniture.com/>
- ◆ <http://www.pewinternet.org/>
- ◆ <http://internet-statistics-guide.netfirms.com/>
- ◆ <http://www.w3.org/>

A demographic study will give you an idea of what kind of people will visit your site, who they are, and what kind of Web knowledge they have. This information is invaluable in creating the design of your site. For example, the portion of your site that deals with video, could be made much more efficient if you used the latest compression codec from Adobe Flash; however, your study shows that most of your potential visitors do not have the current version of the Flash player, so you decide to downsize the videos to match what your visitors have. A demographic study is all about giving your visitors an enjoyable experience. If they like it they'll be back.

Creating a Marketing Plan

While you haven't started the actually creation of the site, it's not too early to start your marketing plans. There are thousands of new Web sites going up on the Internet every week. How do you get known? Well, first off Web search engines will find you; they employ programs called Web robots that go to all the Web servers on the planet, and patiently index each site. That way they can offer their visitors the ability to access information from any site, anywhere on or off the planet. The more sites like yours they index, the more money they can charge their advertisers. That means they are aggressive and they will find you. That doesn't mean that you sit by and wait, submission of your site to search engines is one of the first steps in getting your name out there to the world.

If you have the bucks, there are companies out there that will help you with the submission process. For example, the following sites will get you going, but for a price:

- ◆ <http://www.wpromote.com/>
- ◆ <http://www.addpro.com/>
- ◆ <http://www.prioritysubmit.com/>

If you would rather take a crack at the process yourself, there are a lot of ways to shout "Here I Am" without spending any of your hard-earned cash.

Search engine submission, or registration refers to the act of getting your Web site listed with search engines. Unfortunately, getting listed does not mean that you will necessarily rank well for particular terms. It simply means that the search engine knows your pages

exist, and if your visitors type in the right search words, they will find you.

For example, Yahoo has two submission options: "Standard," which is free, and "Yahoo Express," which involves a submission fee. Anyone can use Standard submission to submit for free to a non-commercial category.

How do you submit? Type the following URL into your browser:

<http://search.yahoo.com/info/submit.html>

That will bring up a list of submission options. Select you option, fill out the form, and you're finished.

Most search engines give you the ability to submit your site for free, or for a price. In many cases the only difference is how long it takes for your site to appear.

You should always prepare before submitting. This preparation means that you have written a 25 word or less description of your entire Web site. That description should make use of the two or three key terms that you hope to be found for. In our fictitious site you would use words like Photography and Video.

You should consider researching what are the best terms for your site, rather than guessing at these. The site:

<http://searchenginewatch.com/>

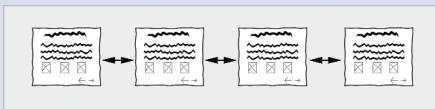
has a list of resources that will allow you to do such research. Avoid the use of marketing language in your description. You should use distinct keywords instead. So, your description might go something like: *video, technology, training, and social network, etc.*

Creating a Storyboard

Many Web professionals use a technique called **storyboarding**. Storyboarding gives you a visual look at the layout of the site, and what type of organization you need to use. This will also give you a first look at how you want to build your navigational system.

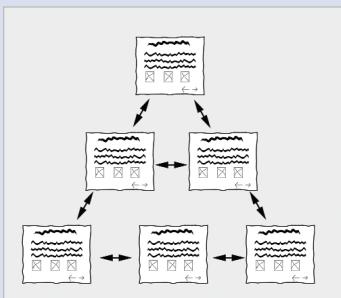
A Linear Storyboard

The linear method connects pages one to another in an almost book-like fashion. The visitor has two choices: to move forward, or to move back... one page at a time.



A Hierarchical Storyboard

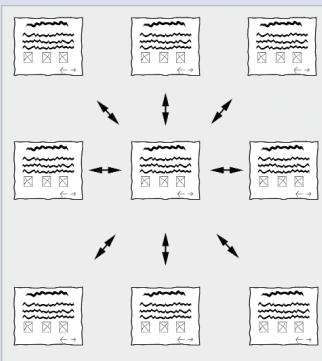
Hierarchical navigation models have a distinct top-down design. The idea is that there is an index or home page, and that pages branch to other main pages, on and on. It's resembles a business organizational chart, with the most important person at the top. This gives the visitor to your site a sense of direction, and is a popular Web organizational model.



A Wheel Storyboard

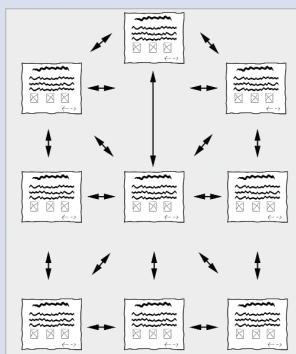
The wheel method is like spokes connected to a main hub. The main hub would have links to all the other pages within the site; however, it

does require the visitor to return to the hub before moving to another page.



The Complete Storyboard

The Complete method takes into account the dynamic nature of the Web and its ability to navigate anywhere at any time. Typically it involves a main or index page, connected with a sophisticated menu system that allows the visitor to access any portion of the Web with 2 to 3 clicks, and a single click will always take them back to the main page. This is the most widely used navigational method.



Once you've chosen and created a storyboard, you should have a thumbnail of each of the proposed pages within your Web site, and the file name for each page.

Creating a Site Local Root Folder



DW 2.4

The final act to perform is the creation of work folders. The work folders should contain all the elements of the Web site. You first start with a local root folder for the site. The **local root folder** contains all the elements of the Web site; every single piece of the site is included within this folder.

For example, your site local root folder is named, *youtechtube*, and there would be subfolders for the elements of the Web site, like: *Web Pages* and all the Web pages you designed in Dreamweaver would be placed within this subfolder. You use Photoshop and Fireworks to manage all of the site's images, and they are placed in the folder name, *Images*. Flash Objects, CSS, PDF documents; each kind of document is placed within its own personal folder. Later in this book you'll learn how to link this *site root folder* to Dreamweaver and create a working site.

Image the control you'll exert over the construction of a site when you create this type of organization. Even a modest Web site can have hundreds of parts. Let's say that you need to modify one of your PDF documents; however, you didn't create separate files, you put everything into one folder. Now, you have to scroll through over one hundred file names, looking for that one PDF file. Fortunately, you work smart, you simply open the PDF folder and, BANG, there it is, ready to be double-clicked. Work smart...

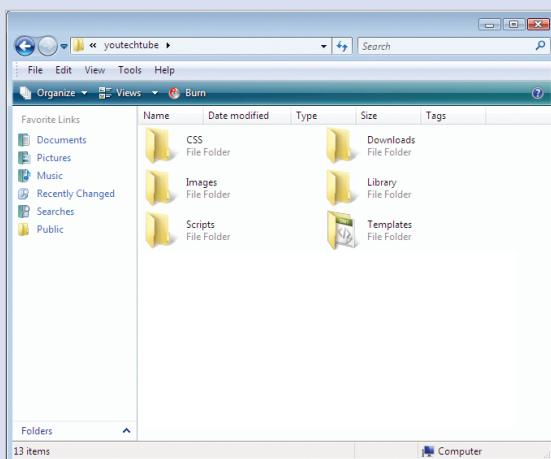
Creating a site root folder is not just a requirement of using Dreamweaver; in addition, it will help you in the creation, and of the moving of the site. If everything involving the construction of your Web site is contained within a single folder, it helps to keep you organized and in control... and being in control is an important part of being creative.

Although planning may seem like a lot of work, it really isn't. Especially when you add in the amount of time and frustration you'll save when the site is complete.

Have fun, and don't forget to enjoy the journey.

Create a Local Root Folder

- 1 Right click your mouse on the desktop, and then select **New Folder** from the popup menu (Macintosh) or right-click the desktop, point to **New**, and then click the **Folder** button from the popup menu.
- 2 Name the folder according to the site you're working (in this example, *youtechtube*).
- 3 Double click to open the folder, and then add additional subfolders to the local root folder.



All elements dealing with the construction of this Web site should be contained within this local root folder, and its corresponding sub-folders.