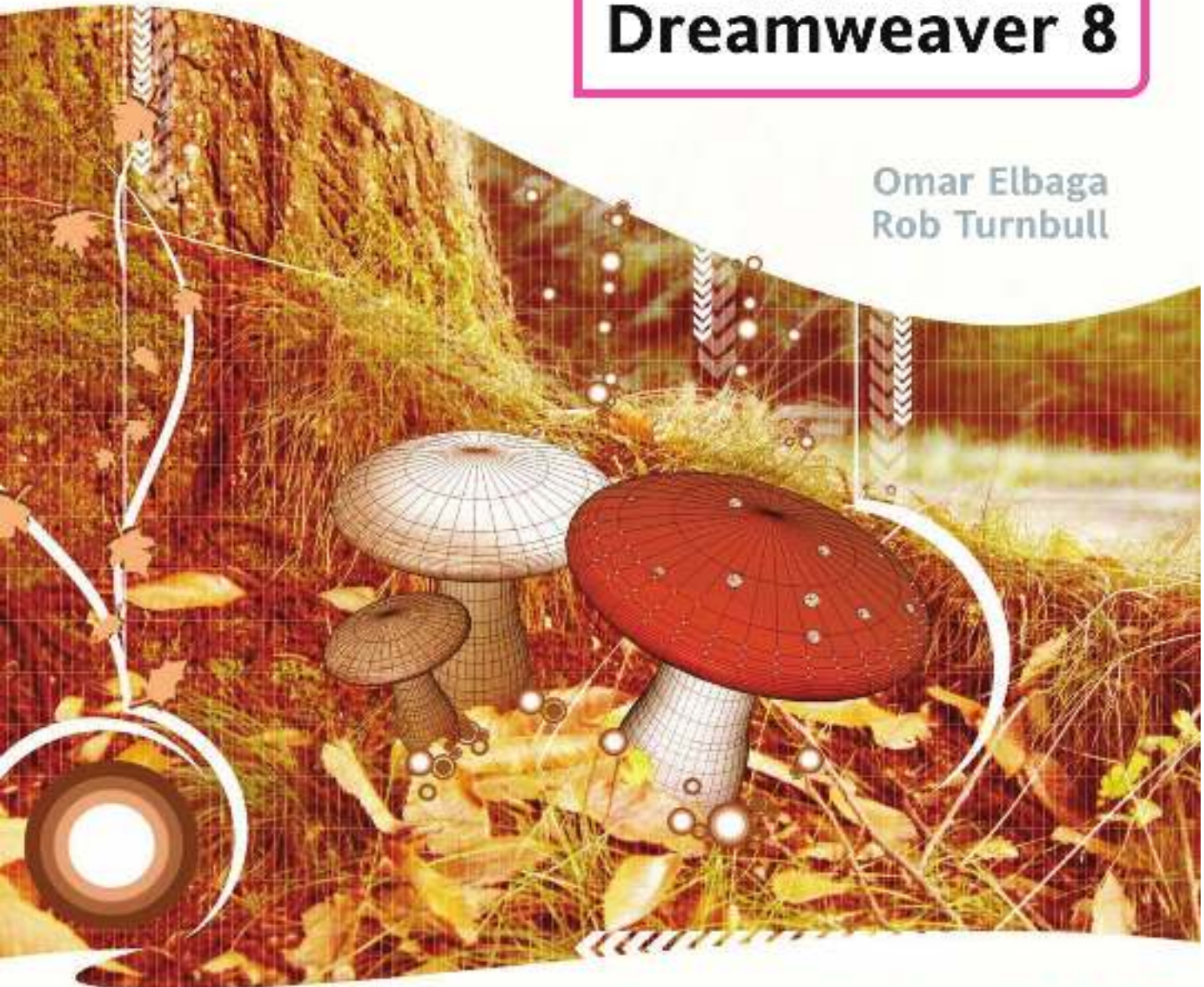


Foundation

ASP for Dreamweaver 8

Omar Elbaga
Rob Turnbull



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Foundation ASP for Dreamweaver 8

Omar Elbaga and Rob Turnbull



Foundation ASP for Dreamweaver 8

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I would like to dedicate this book to my mom; dad; brothers and sister, Tamer, Hesham, Soliman, and Yasmine; my fiancée, Mona; my entire family; and all my faithful readers.

—Omar Elbaga

This book is dedicated to my family and friends who always support me. Special thanks go to baby Theo who always puts an even bigger than usual smile on my face.

—Rob Turnbull

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Omar Elbaga has been passionately involved in web development for over six years, over which time he has completed several projects for small businesses and nonprofit organizations, including personal sites. He has previously coauthored two books on Dreamweaver web development, and maintains his own Dreamweaver tutorial/resource site, now known as dmxfire.com. Because he did not start out as a programmer himself, he has a knack for teaching dynamic web development to those who do not have programming backgrounds.

He is also a postsecondary language arts instructor, artist, independent filmmaker, and graduate student at New Jersey City University, currently finalizing his master thesis as a reading specialist. You can find some of his work in these areas and more information at <http://elbaga.net>.



Rob Turnbull is the senior developer for Lighthouse – design for business limited, an established new media design and marketing company based in Shrewsbury, UK. Clients across Europe, from small businesses to blue chip companies, provide an increasing workload, which includes the development of databases, websites, multimedia presentations, interactive CD-ROMs, promotional videos, and 3D artwork (animations and stills).

His personal website, <http://robgt.com>, is primarily focused on offering help and guidance to fellow Dreamweaver users, including tutorials and links to helpful resources and some useful extensions. You'll also find links to relevant books on web development and design, including his three previous books about Dreamweaver.

ABOUT THE TECHNICAL REVIEWER

Jason Nadon has been in the information technology field for the past nine years, and building web applications and solutions with Macromedia tools for the past six. He holds several industry certifications and is currently employed by Thomson Creative Solutions as a web services administrator.

Jason also manages the Ann Arbor Area Macromedia User Group and enjoys being an active member of the Macromedia developer community.

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—Omar Elbaga

INTRODUCTION

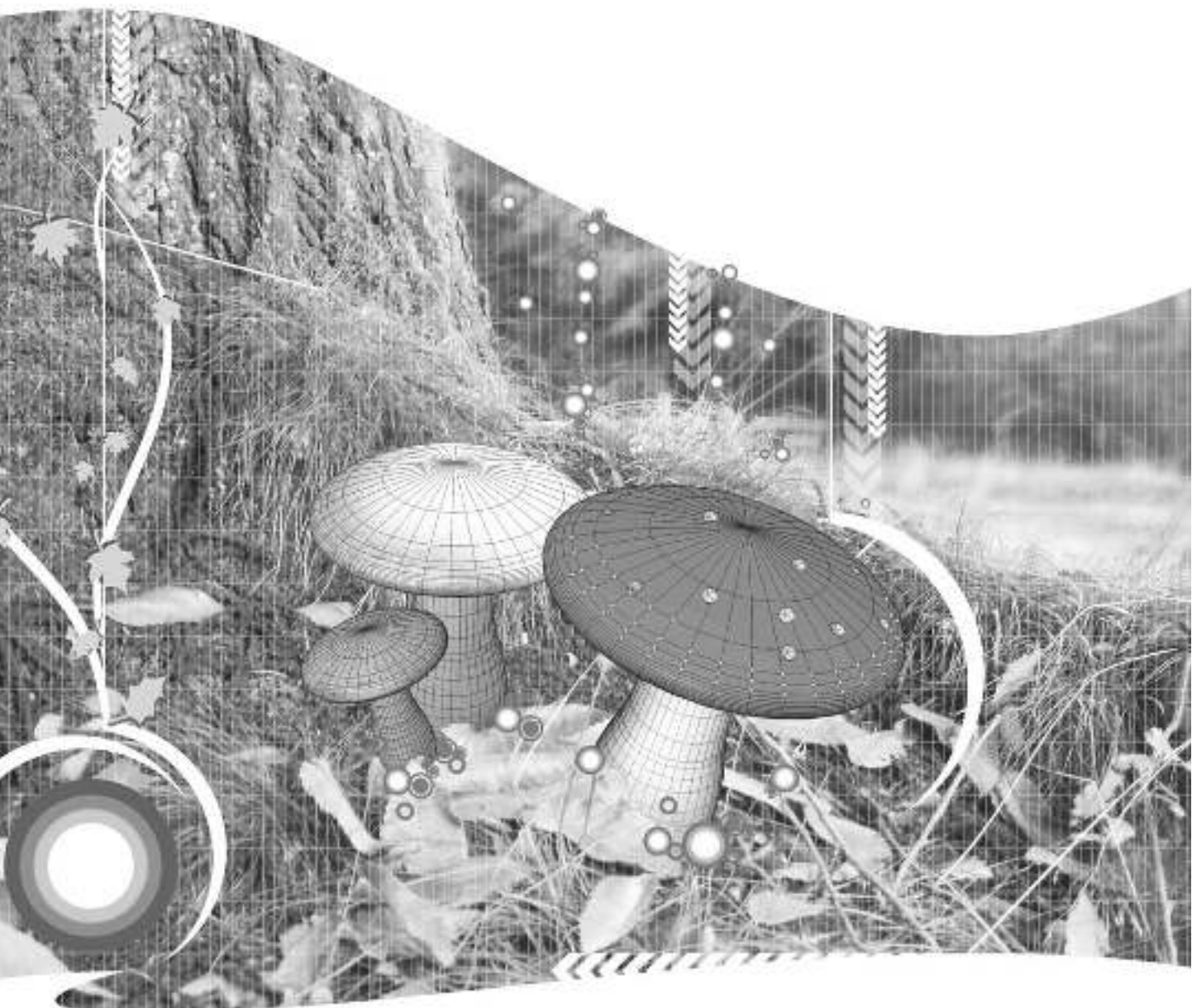
We're glad you picked up this book to begin learning about building dynamic websites using Dreamweaver 8 with ASP technology. This book is geared for both beginners who know little about dynamic and database-driven websites, and intermediate users who want to begin building more powerful web applications—such as blogs and photo albums—along with working administration systems to effectively manage those data-driven applications.

To complete all of the activities in this book, you will only need Dreamweaver 8, a server running Microsoft's classic ASP (Active Server Pages), and Windows 2000 or above. If you do not use the Windows platform, you can run the code remotely, such as on your web host's server—just make sure your web host allows ASP scripts to run on its server.

You should also have either Microsoft Access 97 or higher, or SQL Server 2000 or higher, to build the databases that you will connect your pages to. You can download a 180-day trial of the new SQL Server 2005 at www.microsoft.com/sql. Alternatively, you can make use of the new (and free) Express edition of SQL Server 2005, which is available from the same location. You can also download a 30-day trial of Dreamweaver 8 at www.macromedia.com.

It is possible that throughout your reading of this book, you will have some questions or comments, so feel free to drop the authors a note. Omar Elbaga can be contacted directly through the feedback/contact section of his website, <http://elbaga.net>, and Rob Turnbull can be contacted through the contact form on his website, <http://robgt.com>.

We have written this book for you, and we are here for you. Please give us time to respond due to the large amount of responses we have to deal with. We look forward to helping you learn more about building dynamic websites using Dreamweaver 8 with ASP!





Chapter 1

DREAMWEAVER AND DYNAMIC SITES

In this chapter, you'll learn about a number of important concepts, including what a dynamic website is and how it's different from a static site, what awesome dynamic features Dreamweaver offers you as a progressing web developer, and how ASP (Active Server Pages) fits into the mix. You'll also discover which ASP features are supported by Dreamweaver, where ASP features are located in Dreamweaver, and how Dreamweaver automates ASP code to create dynamic sites.

The first thing going through your mind is probably "What in the world is a dynamic website?" Well, I want you to figure this out with me. Take two minutes and jot down some things you know about the word "dynamic." What do you think a dynamic site is? And what do you think it can do? Do that, and then come back and continue reading. Remember, you're thinking of the word "dynamic" in the context of computers and web development.

All right, you're back! That was fast! What did you write down?

If you said something like "strong," you're right. If you said something like "powerful," you're also right; however, these meanings are a little different from what the word "dynamic" means in the context we're talking about. If you said anything like "changing" or "moving," you're right on target—that's exactly what it means!

You can also look it up in the dictionary—if you have access to the Internet, do a quick search at www.dictionay.com or <http://m-w.com> (Merriam-Webster Online).

According to the American Heritage Dictionary, dynamic means “characterized by continuous change, activity, or progress.” That’s it! It’s all about change. See Figure 1-1 for further clarification on the definition.

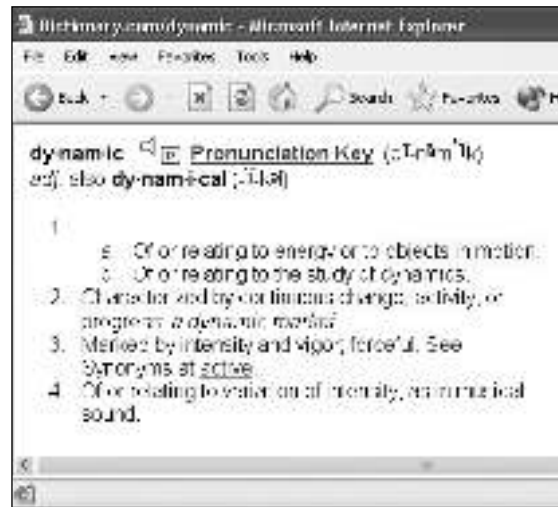


Figure 1-1. Here is a screenshot of the definition of the word “Dynamic” at Dictionary.com. “Dynamic” means “changing.”

So sit back, relax, and let’s have some dynamic fun!

The first thing I want you to ask yourself is “What do I personally do with web development now?” and “What more do I want to be able to do?” If you said to yourself that you’re writing back-end database models for Amazon.com, you might want to stop right here!

If you said something like one of the following, though, this book will definitely help you take your web development skills to the next level:

- I am designing websites for myself and family.
- I am working for a company whose managers want me to upgrade the site so that they can begin adding content to the site on their own.
- I want to start doing more dynamic things to my site, such as allowing web surfers to register and log in.
- I want to start collecting information from my site visitors.
- I want to start protecting site content from particular web surfers.

Data exchange

As a web developer, you need to make your website interesting and interactive. Thus, you need to tailor your website according to the web surfer. Shoving the same static data at all of your users is bound to leave someone (or many people) behind. The greatest problem with a static website is the

simple fact that it doesn't change. Imagine Amazon.com without the personal wish list, or without the capability of tracking your recent purchases, or without the feature that says "Customers interested in this title may also be interested in . . ." Dynamic websites can spontaneously reconstruct themselves according to an individual web surfer's needs. These sites change depending on how each user interacts with them. This is what data exchange is all about, and data exchange is what enables Dreamweaver 8 with ASP to save your website from static doom!

You want to exchange data between yourself and the web surfer; technically, the web surfer's computer will be doing the exchanging. Basic HTML can't handle this kind of data exchange, which is why we now use web programming technologies to do this for us—in our case, the particular technology is ASP. The web programming aspect takes care of all the dynamic stuff and then tells HTML what to print out. So instead of having to tell HTML what to do every time you want to change your data (by recreating HTML web pages), you set up an interactive system in which ASP tells HTML what to do. You're saying, "HTML, we've already designed you. From now on, let ASP deal with you for major changes in terms of data."

Let me show you a quick example. If you've already set up your environment, you should be up and running to view ASP pages on your local server. (You'll learn all about setting up the Dreamweaver environment in Chapter 2.)

1. Load Dreamweaver.
2. Choose File ► New, and select the General tab. Select Basic Page from the Category menu (on the left) and HTML from the Basic page menu (on the right), and click the Create button at the lower right of the window (see Figure 1-2).

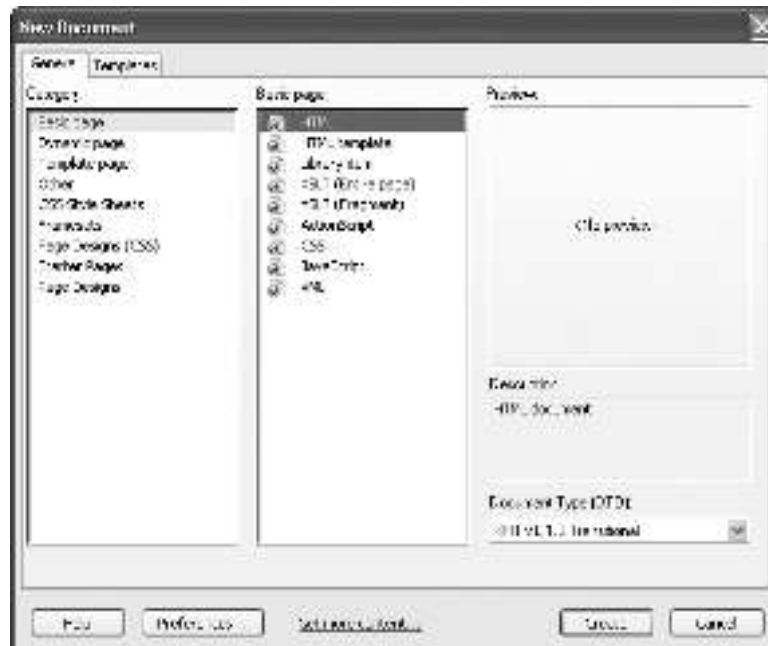


Figure 1-2. View of Dreamweaver's options for creating a new document

3. On your new “basic” page, type in the following message in design view:

Hi, I don't know who you are because I'm just a plain 'ol' HTML web page.

You might want to change the title of your document. I changed the title of my document to Plain 'ol HTML. View the page in your web browser by selecting File ► Save As, naming the file, and finally loading it into your browser. You can also press F12 to have Dreamweaver automatically load the page into your browser (see Figure 1-3).



Figure 1-3. View of static HTML page in the web browser

4. Next, within Dreamweaver, select File ► New. Select the General tab, highlight Dynamic page from the left-hand Category list and ASP VBScript from the right-hand Dynamic page list, and click the Create button at the lower right of the window (see Figure 1-4).

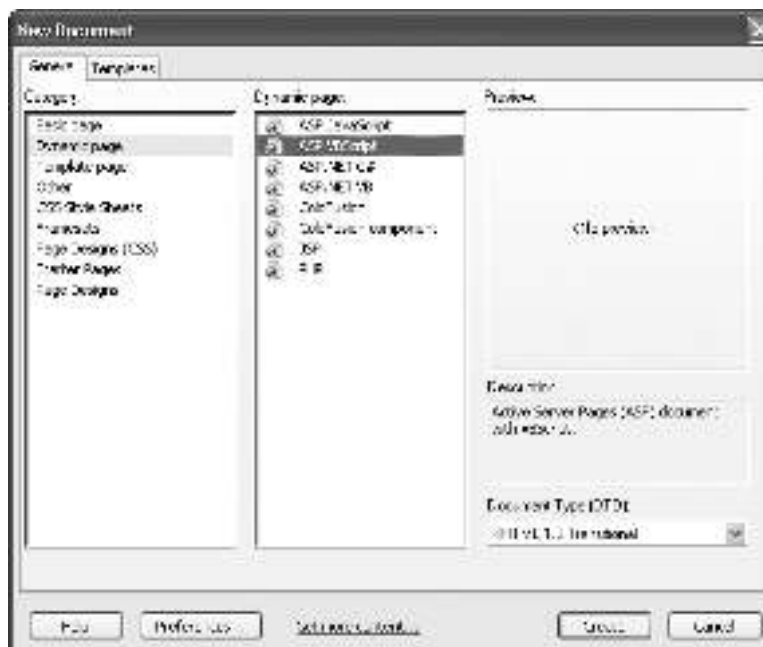


Figure 1-4. View of Dreamweaver's New Document options, in which Dynamic page and ASP VBScript are selected

Your cursor will now be within the design body of the document. From the standard toolbar, select Insert ► ASP Objects ► Output. Dreamweaver will now create the following ASP brackets for you: `<%= %>`. (We'll go into more detail about these brackets in Chapter 3.)

5. Within the brackets, type the following code:

```
Request.ServerVariables("REMOTE_ADDR")
```

In Code view, your final code should look like the following:

```
<%= Request.ServerVariables("REMOTE_ADDR") %>
```

In Design view, you'll see an ASP textual placeholder that represents the dynamic code. Highlighting the dynamic text in Design view will automatically highlight the same code from within Code view. Switch to Design view, take the focus off the dynamic text by moving your cursor to the right of the text, and hit Enter. Now type the following message:

I know who you are now. Your IP address is listed. Don't try anything funny!

6. Save your page as `dynamic_asp.asp` and view it in your web browser (see Figure 1-5).



Figure 1-5. View of the `dynamic_asp.asp` page in the web browser

See the difference? With HTML, you're unable to recognize the web surfer; you can only share *your* information with him or her. But with ASP, you can collect information from the user. In this vein, you can also have the web surfer provide you with specific information, which can be accomplished through forms. We'll go into further detail about this in the chapters to come, but most importantly, we want to drive the following point home:

ASP gives you the ability to interact with your web surfers by allowing you to exchange data with them. What's more, once you have that data from the user, you can update data on your web pages accordingly.

With a static HTML website, your data is merely sent to the web surfer's web browser, unchanged and unprocessed, by a dynamic web programming language such as ASP (see Figure 1-6).

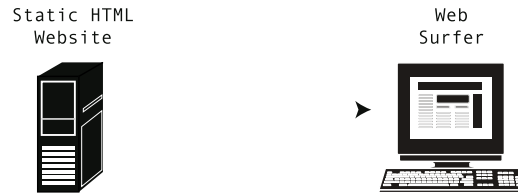


Figure 1-6. Illustration of data flow from a static site

With a dynamic ASP website, data can be sent back and forth between the website and the web surfer's web browser (see Figure 1-7). As a web developer, you can do a variety of things with the data, such as collecting it for statistical purposes or processing it with a dynamic web programming language such as ASP. In the latter case, ASP processes the data on the server and then recreates the HTML page, sending the data back to the web surfer's browser with new data.

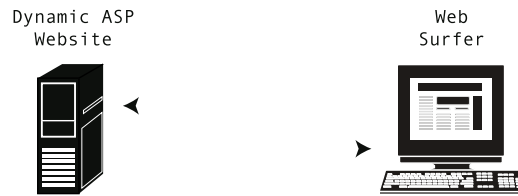


Figure 1-7. Illustration of how data is exchanged between a dynamic site and the web surfer

Data that you provide, and data you collect from the web surfer's computer, can be stored in a database. The ASP page can then connect and interact with the database while interacting with the web user. The flow of the interaction is all up to you (see Figure 1-8). For example, you can send data that you specify (such as contact info or "about" info) from a database to the web surfer's browser without allowing the user to alter the data, or you can actually allow the surfer direct access to the database so they can add, edit, and delete data.

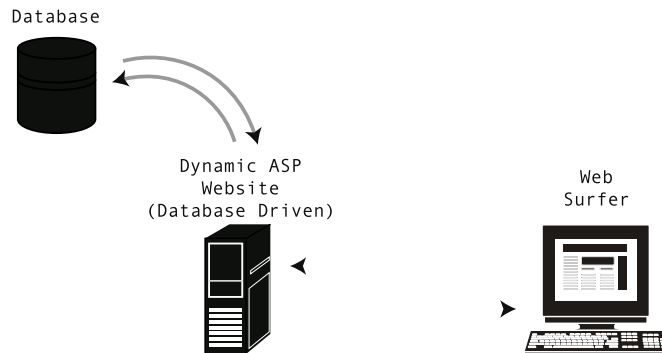


Figure 1-8. Illustration of database-driven data exchange between a dynamic site and the web surfer

Dynamic takes over static

What do I mean by dynamic “taking over” static? I mean that we’re now in a new era of web development and we need to pick up the pace and get with the times. Web development has been zooming right by us, and you’re just sitting around doing nothing! Well, not you, since you picked up this book.

Web development has progressed from displaying simple pictures to streaming live video footage. Even more drastically, it has gone from displaying basic text to regenerating huge reports on the fly, in seconds, at the touch of a web button. It has gone from static text to dynamic text—for example, you were once able to write up your own resume, create a website with basic HTML pages, and upload it to the Web. Now, websites are able to generate your resume and a thousand others on the fly, at the same time, based on the simple submission of a couple of online forms! If you don’t believe me, go visit Yahoo’s Hotjobs (<http://hotjobs.yahoo.com>) or www.monster.com.

Dreamweaver server models

How exactly does Dreamweaver make your sites dynamic? In the past, you could create HTML pages through Dreamweaver’s powerful visual layout system, but you would then have to edit the content of the actual HTML page and hand-code the HTML tags over again to make the pages more dynamic. Now, Dreamweaver integrates what Macromedia calls server models. You, as a web developer creating websites with Dreamweaver, get to choose whichever server model you want to create dynamic websites with, almost seamlessly. And the best part about it is that Dreamweaver generates the web programming code for you through its robust internal storage of stock code. It does so based on the server model you select.

The ASP VBScript server model

When developing web applications in Dreamweaver, it’s a good idea to choose a server model that you’re familiar with, or at least one that you want to become more familiar with. When you use server models, Dreamweaver will generate full-blown programming code—but you’ll want to be able to know what Dreamweaver is doing, and you’ll also want the ability to tweak code to attain more desirable results. As such, this book will familiarize you with ASP as a language before teaching you how to develop using Dreamweaver’s drag-and-drop ASP server behaviors.

We’ll show you how to set up your environment in the next chapter—but for now, fire up Dreamweaver. Let’s take a look at the server models that Dreamweaver supports.

1. From the toolbar at the top, select Site ► New Site.
2. Select the Advanced tab, and then highlight Testing Server in the Category list.

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