Creating Web Pages with Nvu

In this tutorial, Daniel Bartholomew uses Nvu to create a small Web site for viewing family pictures. The Nvu Web site editor provides what you see is what you get (WYSIWYG) editing in Linux.

DANIEL BARTHOLOMEW

In the early days of the World Wide Web, Web pages were created by hand. Although this approach still may appeal to some, I think most of us would prefer to see our Web page as we create it.

In fact, several programs, most of them quite expensive, exist that help you create nice-looking Web sites graphically. Back in Netscape's heyday, a free Web site editor was built into the old Mozilla browser suite, but it was abandoned when the Mozilla development stopped. Now, thanks to some enterprising programmers who resurrected the old Mozilla code, we have Nvu.

Nvu is short for new view. Think of Nvu as a word processor for Web pages. It helps you—quickly, easily and graphically—create attractive Web pages and entire Web sites.

The easiest way to get Nvu is through your distribution's package manager. For example, on my home computer, which runs Ubuntu, I simply launched the Synaptic package manager, searched for nvu, selected it, and then pressed the Apply button. After the install, I found it sitting in the Applications→Programming menu.

If you can't find Nvu in your distribution's package manager, go to http://www.nvu.com and click on the Downloads link to find several packages that are suitable for many different distributions.

When you first launch Nvu, you are presented with what essentially amounts to a blank canvas.

This blank sheet can be daunting, but creating Web pages with Nvu is surprisingly easy. To demonstrate a little of what it can do, let's create a simple Web site.

I recently took my family to the beach, and the grandparents have been pestering me for the photos, so that seems like a natural place to start.

When it comes to creating a Web page, the sky is the limit. Because this is a small site, I'm going to try to keep things simple. The first thing I want to do is set up a couple of tables, one inside the other, to hold my pictures and text. Think of tables as little boxes that you can put stuff into.

There is a fancier way of laying out a Web site, called Cascading Style Sheets, and Nvu supports it, but for simple sites it seems like overkill. Tables have been used for years for basic Web page layout tasks, and they are quick and easy to set up—exactly what I need.

To create a table in Nvu, click on the Table menu and choose Insert→Table. A dialog box pops up with a 6x6 grid on it. To create a table, simply move the mouse around the grid, and click when you have the appropriate number of rows and columns highlighted.

The first table I want to create is simple—two rows with a single column. I highlight them, as shown in Figure 3, and click OK with my mouse. Presto—I have a table.
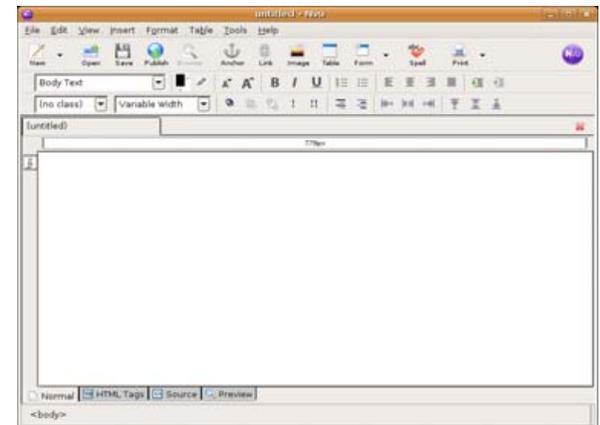

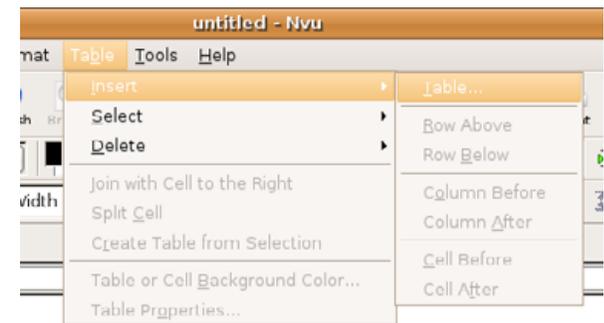**Figure 1. Nvu Ready for Action**

Figure 2. Creating a Table

Before moving on to the second table, I want to make sure to hide the borders of this table. Because I'm using the table for layout, I do not want the table border to be seen. To change the visibility of the border, I click inside one of the cells, and then click on the Table button in the toolbar. The Table Properties window opens, and under the Table tab, I set the border to 0. As the rest of the settings are fine, I click the OK button. The border
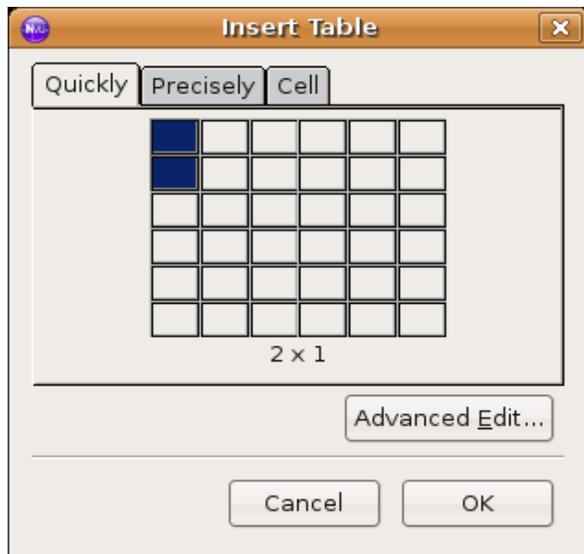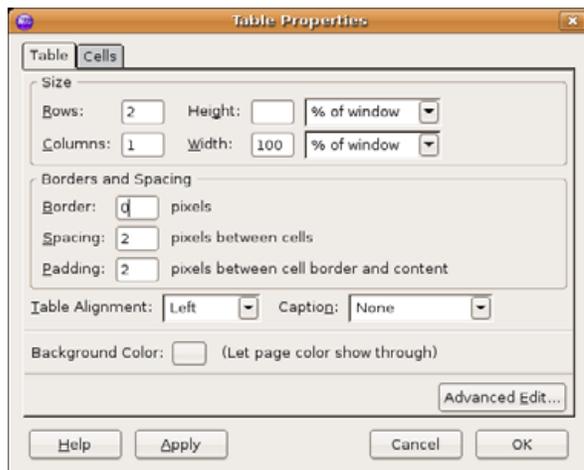
Figure 3. Defining My Table Dimensions

Figure 4. Setting Other Table Options

can be set to any number you want, from zero up.

After setting the border to zero, you will notice that the table is represented by colored lines instead of black lines. Don't worry; they won't show when you view the page in your Web browser.

Now, on to the second table. I want this table to be nested or placed inside of the other table, inside the bottom cell to be exact. To do this, I simply click inside the bottom cell, and then go to the Table menu and choose Insert→Table as I did when creating the first table.

I have six pictures that I want on this page, with some text about each picture, so for this table, I want six rows and two columns. I highlight the appropriate boxes until it says 6x2 and then click OK. I then select my new table and set the border to zero as I did with the first table.

If you've been following along, your Web page should now look similar to the one shown in Figure 5.

Before moving on, I want to save my Web page. I want to do this for two reasons. First, saving often is a good thing to do. Second, Nvu likes to know where the things are in relation to each other; otherwise, it has to guess, and it can make mistakes. Until we save the file, the changes I have made do not really exist.

When I was getting ready to create my Web page, one of the first things I did was create a folder to hold all of the files. Unlike a word-processing document, items on a Web page are not necessarily in the same file. The text and layout portion of the Web page are in the HTML file, and the images, movies and sounds are in separate files. For a large Web page, this can mean hundreds of files. I don't plan to have quite that many, but to keep things neat and tidy, I always create a folder to put everything in.
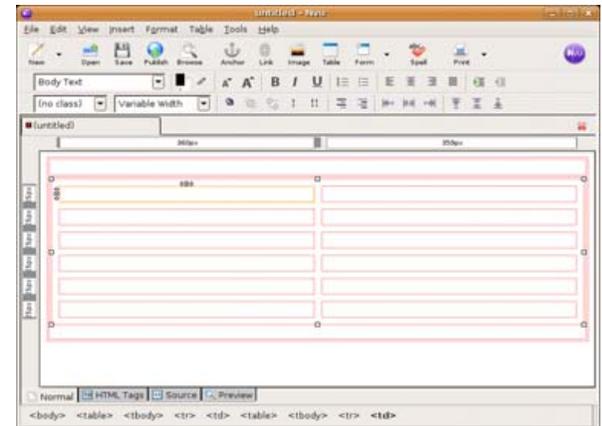

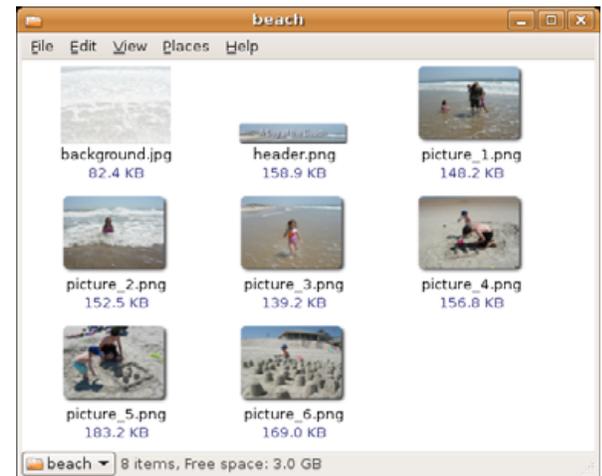Figure 5. My Finished Tables, One inside the Other

Figure 6. Images for My Web Page

Because my Web page is about a trip to the beach, I called the folder beach. I put the selected beach photos in the folder I had prepared, along with a title picture and a picture I prepared to use

as the background. Having title and background pictures is not necessary, but they can make things look nice. All of the pictures were prepared using The GIMP image editor included with most Linux distributions.

One thing to be aware of when preparing images for the Web is that, straight from your digital camera, most pictures are far too large to present comfortably at full size on a Web page. For my images, I opened them in GIMP, went to the Image menu and chose the Scale Image... option. I then resized them to a comfortable 320x240 pixel size. I also made other modifica-tions to make them look nice. When preparing your images, experiment on a copy of your images until you get results you like. I prefer to save my images in the PNG format.

Back to the task at hand—to save my Web page, I click on the Save icon. The first thing that happens is a window pops up asking for the Page Title. This is a necessary part of every Web page. I just put in "A Day at the Beach", and then click OK.

Now that I've gotten the title dialog out of the way, a normal save dialog appears. I navigate to the beach folder, put in a file name of index.html and click the Save button. The reason I name this file index.html is because that is what most Web servers expect the first file of a Web site to be named.

Figure 7. Setting the Title of My Web Page

Now that I have saved my page, it is time to add my title picture. To do this, I first select the cell where I want it to appear (the big one on top) by clicking inside the table cell, and then I click the Image button.
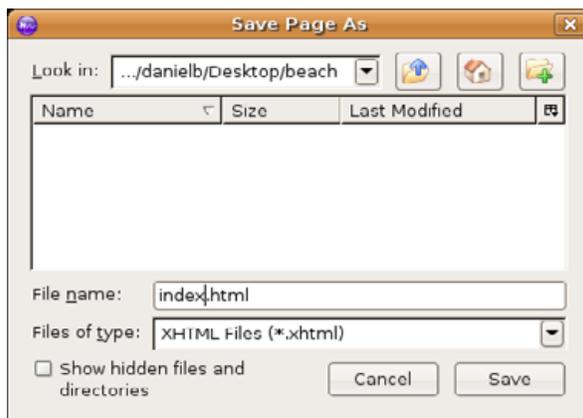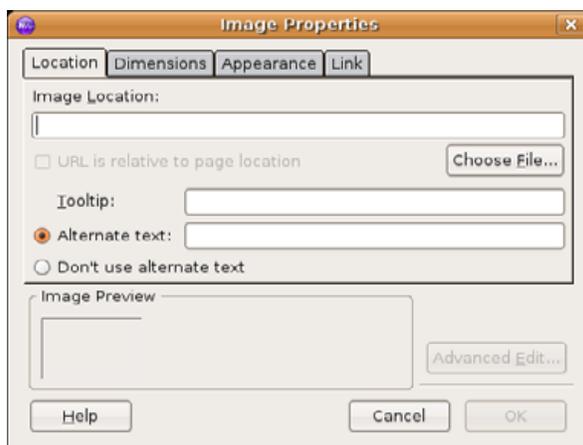

Figure 8. Saving My Web Page

Figure 9. Getting Ready to Insert an Image

Next, I click on the Choose File... button and see the Select Image File dialog, shown in Figure 10. Don't worry about the index.html file not showing up; this dialog shows only image files by default. From here, I select my header.png image and click the Open button.

After selecting the image file, I am redirected back to the Image Properties window. I enter some alternate text for the image and then click the OK button. Alternate text is displayed while the image is loading or if images are turned off. It also is used by screen readers and other tools for people with disabilities, so it is always a good idea to put it in and make it descriptive.

Now that I have my title graphic in place, I can put in all of my other pictures. The process is the same as for the title graphic. I first select the cell where I want the picture to be and then click on the image button and so on.

You may notice after putting the first picture in the nested table that the column it is in expands to fill the screen. The other column is still there,
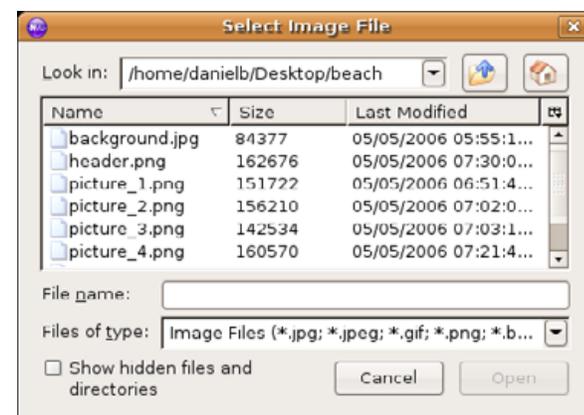

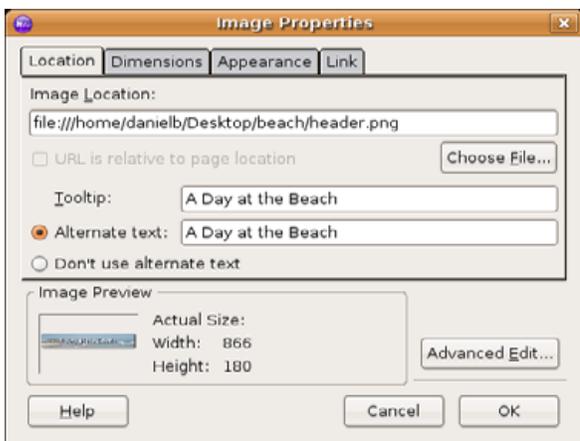**Figure 10. Choosing an Image**

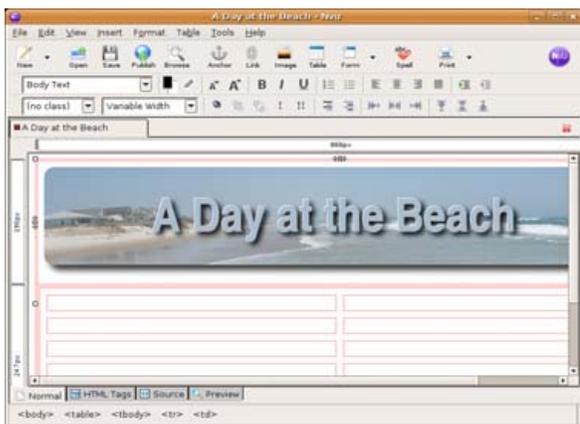Figure 11. Setting Image Properties

Figure 12. The Image Is Now Inserted

but it has been pushed to the side. Simply scroll sideways until you find it, select the cell for the second picture, and insert it as before. After you have pictures or other content in both columns, the cells will even out.

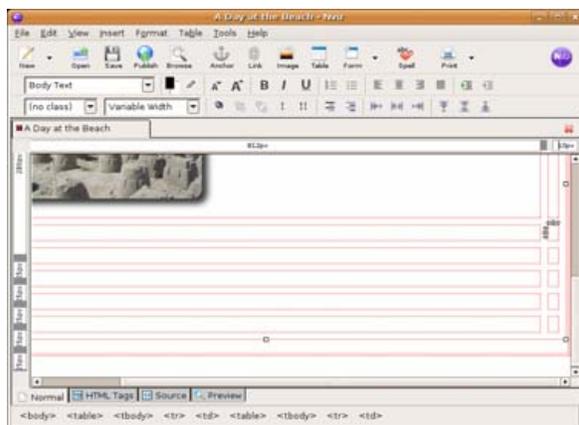After placing all of my pictures, I noticed they

Figure 13. Selecting the Correct Cell to Insert the Third Image

were not centered in their cells, so I centered them by first selecting the picture by clicking on it and then clicking the Align Center icon (Figure 14). It works like the equivalent icon in OpenOffice.org and other word processors. In fact, the other icons in the toolbar that you may recognize work similarly to what you would expect from working in a word processor.

I now have placed most of my pictures—all except the background picture. To place this one, I choose Page Colors and Background... from the Format menu. From the Page Colors and Background window, I can set the background color of the page, link colors and more. I'm interested only in the background image at this point, so I click the Choose File... button, select the file, click on the Open button and then the OK button.

Now things are starting to look the way I want them. I put in my text, save the file, and I am basically done. Figure 17 shows what the site looks like in Firefox.
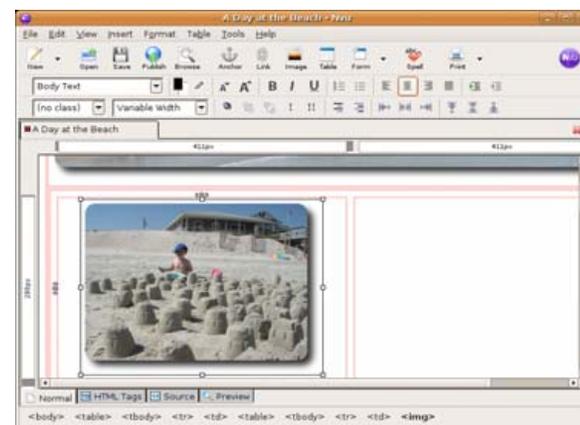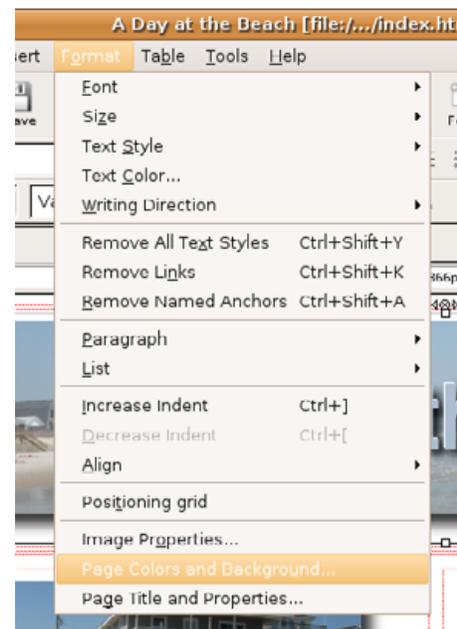

Figure 14. Centering the Image in the Cell

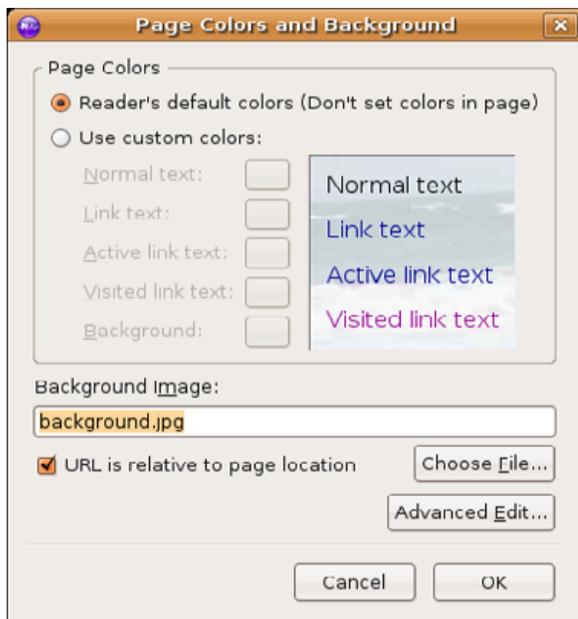

Figure 15. Setting the background image is done here.

Figure 16. The Page Colors and Background Dialog

All that is left for me to do is add some links and then put it on the Internet.

Links are those (usually) blue underlined words that take you from place to place on the Internet. Nvu makes adding links easy. Simply highlight the text you want to turn into a link, and then click the Link button. If you are linking to another HTML or other file in the page folder, simply enter its name and click on the OK button. If you are linking to another Web site, enter in the URL (don't forget the http:// part). And, if you are put-ting in an e-mail address, make sure you check the indicated check box.

The final step in creating a Web page is to publish it. To publish a site from Nvu, click the Publish button. It then prompts you for the set-

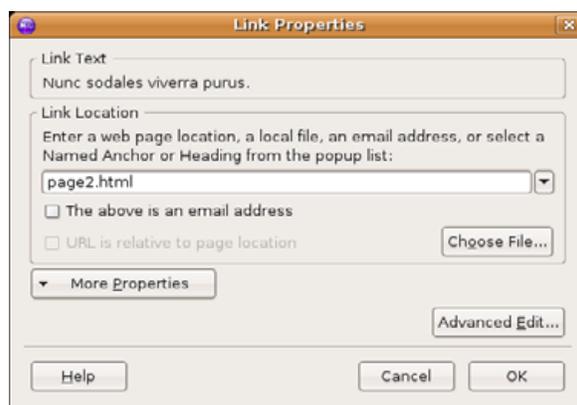**Figure 17. The Newly Created Web Page**

Figure 18. Adding a Link to a Second Page

tings it needs to copy your files to the server. Filling in this information can be the most difficult step. Most ISPs provide customers with space on their server to put up Web pages. Contact your ISP for help in filling in this information.
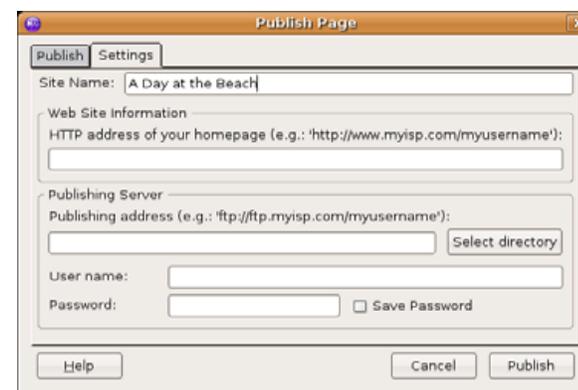
That's it for now. If you've been following

Figure 19. Publishing My Web Page

along, congratulations! You've just created your own Web page! Now play around, add to it and create your own Web site.■

Daniel Bartholomew has been using computers since the early 1980s when his parents purchased an Apple IIe. After stints on Mac and Windows machines, he discovered Linux in 1996 and has been using various distributions ever since. He lives with his wife and children in North Carolina.

RESOURCES

A lot of resources are available on-line to help you learn more about Nvu. Here are some of my favorites:

WebBriefcase: http://www.webbriefcase.com.au/categories/how-tos/nvu

Designing & Publishing a Site with Nvu, by Christopher Heng: http://www.thesitewizard.com/gettingstarted/nvu1.shtml

Introduction to Nvu: http://learn.dccc.edu/~lori/nvu

forum.nvudev.org: http://forum.nvudev.org