

SiteGrinder2

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The idea behind *SiteGrinder2* is that you can quickly and easily create a website without any HTML or CSS knowledge, working from inside either *Photoshop* or *Photoshop Elements*. Of course, having a website and the ability to upload to it is also useful. “This I gotta see,” I told Dick Reaser (TCS Product Review Chair).

Installation

SiteGrinder2 is available for download from Medialab for either Windows or MacOS X. Once downloaded, I double-clicked to begin the install process. It told me to quit *Photoshop* and relaunch the installer. *Photoshop* was not running, but it had been and InDesign was, so I quit it and tried again. Same message: “quit *Photoshop* and relaunch.” I left it alone to sulk, and then tried it a day or so later. Because I hadn’t previously opened any Adobe product (except *Reader*) the installation proceeded without hesitation or problem.

During the review process the same thing happened. During the build, *SiteGrinder2* informed me a more recent version was available and invited me to download it. I did, but when I tried to launch it I got the same “quit *Photoshop* and relaunch.” After a reboot, no problem. Apparently Adobe products leave a “trail” behind that *SiteGrinder2* reads.

Working with the plug-in

You begin by opening *Photoshop* and creating a layered image. Add graphics, add text, make it look the way you always wanted. Once everything looks the way you want it, Save your creation (as a PSD *Photoshop* file). Then choose **File > Automate > SiteGrinder2**.

When the interface opens you can just click **Build**. If you hold off for a minute, though, it can be quite useful. This dialog box gives you a lot



of insight to how (or whether) the webpage is going to appear. Depending on what it says, you may decide to go back and work on it a little longer. When you are ready, click the **Build** button at the bottom, your browser opens, and after a moment there’s your webpage.

Of course, there are some niceties to observe. *SiteGrinder2* expects each element to be on a separate layer (think wedding cake), each of which is stacked above and below other elements/layers. Elements on lower layers may be hidden by elements on layers above. *SiteGrinder2* generates the webpage according to how these layers are named. This is called “hinting.” In an image with multiple layers, each layer is named according to its contents. For *SiteGrinder2*’s purposes, that layer name is followed with a hyphen and then the appropriate hint.

For instance, text layers are saved as CSS styled text – **if** that Text layer’s name ends with a “-text” hint. This also makes the text selectable in the browser. Text layers lacking that “-text” end to their name are saved as images and can’t be selected.

This can be useful, particularly when it comes to e-mail addresses. In fact, this is how TCS’s own website is set up: all e-mail addresses are graphics, not text. People need to know how to contact our Board members, but live e-mail addresses would allow bots to “harvest” them for spam.



Scrolling text is created simply by making a text box smaller than the text it contains and adding the “-scroll” hint. During the build, *SiteGrinder2* creates the scroll bar automatically.

Creating buttons with rollovers and popups follows a similar process. Want a button to change color if the cursor hovers over it? That takes two layers with the same name, but one ends in “-button” and the other in “-rollover.” Save and build, and it’s done. If you’re using text as a link, define the global rollover color in the *SiteGrinder* interface.

This is so easy it’s almost scary.

It gets a little more complex when you want to use the same layout for different pages. This process uses *Photoshop*’s Layer Comps feature. Hiding unwanted layers, a Layer Comp is generated showing only the layers visible at that time, which creates a specific page. As with the layer names themselves, the “-page” hint is appended to the Layer Comp name.

This time when *SiteGrinder2* opens, it reads the Layer Comps and their hints. *SiteGrinder2* then proceeds to check that all the page elements that are supposed to link up actually do. Essentially, that each “-button” or other named element actually has something to do. Once the Summary give you the “all clear,” clicking **Build** directs *SiteGrinder2* to create the site. It opens in your browser and you can navigate through it to check how it works.

There’s more than the Summary in that dialog box (previous page). Along the top are multiple tabs. “Photoshop Files” tells you which .psd file(s) is being used. “Pages” and “Buttons” list those elements, making it easy to see if you’re generating what you think you are. “Text Buttons” and “Decoration” have options for borders and colors and, in the case of Text Buttons, rollover options.

SiteGrinder2 also opens a “build summary” that tells you how the site is created, how long it takes to load, which files take up how much space, where the files are actually saved, etc. Under “errors and warnings” anything *SiteGrinder2* doesn’t think quite kosher is detailed. “Wide pages” was in this list for my site because my pages are set to wider than 750px.

Navigational bars are also automatically generated, again with just a layer and hints. Create a layer with the desired elements and append “-menu” to the layer name. Of course, it helps to make sure the menu item names match the page names they’re supposed to link to.

If you happen to be an artist or photographer, anyone with something to display, the Pro version of *SiteGrinder2* has something very special to offer. Galleries! A single *Photoshop* layer can generate thumbnails, each linking to its full-size image. A-u-t-o-matically. Yeah!

I’m still working my way though this, and until it’s “ready for prime time” and replaces the existing site, these pages are at www.kamper.com/test. Drop in from time to time to see the progress. It really is simple and easy to create web pages, from simple to complex layouts. To help you there are examples, videos, the PDF *Zero to Hero* guide, etc. What is difficult is deciding exactly what we want on our web pages. Content, you see.

If you’re comfortable working with layers in either *Photoshop* or *Photoshop Elements* and want a website with no knowledge of anything else, this plugin is the way to go!

About: *SiteGrinder2*

Manufacturer: MediaLab
<http://www.medialab.com/sitegrinder/>

Price: Basic: \$129; Professional: \$349

Requires: *Photoshop 6* or later (including *Photoshop CS3*) under Windows or Mac OS X. *SiteGrinder2* also runs in *Photoshop Elements 3* and later on both Windows and Mac. Any machine that runs the appropriate version of *Photoshop* should be able to run *SiteGrinder2*. Obviously the more RAM and the faster the processor the better.

Note: *SiteGrinder2* works best with *Photoshop CS* or later mostly because of the “layer comps” feature and the ability to nest layer sets inside other layer sets.