

PC Magazine Review of Contribute CS3

Adobe Contribute CS3

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BOTTOM LINE:

Ideal for corporate and small-business users who want to keep their Web site content fresh without any fuss.

PROS:

Easiest, most straightforward tool for direct online editing of remote Web pages and blogs; no HTML knowledge required; administrators can limit the kinds of editing available to individual users.

CONS:

No direct access to HTML code, even for experts.

COMPANY:

Adobe Systems

SPEC DATA

Price: \$149.00 Direct

Type: Enterprise

Free: No

OS Compatibility: Windows Vista, Windows XP, Mac OS

Tech Support: Online forum

EDITOR RATING: ●●●●○

By [Edward Mendelson](#)

Everyone who maintains a Web site dreams about finding software that makes it as easy to edit his or her site as it is to maintain a blog. Adobe Contribute CS3 comes closer than anything else I've seen to making that dream real. Thanks to this clever app, anyone to whom a Webmaster grants access can add or modify Web-page content without the risk of damaging the overall layout, and without going through the usual site-editing steps of downloading, editing, saving, and uploading again. And not only does Contribute CS3 make site editing work like traditional blog editing; it also includes features for editing blogs. Adobe bought Contribute from Macromedia along with Dreamweaver, and it's now a mature product that Adobe supplies either as a standalone or as part of the Adobe Creative Suite 3 Web standard and Web Premium editions.

Contribute CS3 is simpler than traditional Web editors such as Dreamweaver CS3 or Microsoft Expression Web, but that's because it's not a tool for creating a site from scratch; it's designed mainly for nonexperts who need to add content to existing pages that someone else has designed, or who need to create new pages with new content based on templates that someone else has designed. Contribute is also far less elaborate than enterprise-scale content management systems such as Vignette, although large businesses can extend it with Adobe's Contribute Publishing Server, which tracks and manages assets uploaded with Contribute. Unlike cookie-cutter services

such as Microsoft Office Live or Yahoo's GeoCities Live, Contribute can manage content on any Web site, no matter how simple or elaborate.

When setting up Contribute CS3 to edit a Web site, you need to know the same technical details that you need when setting up an FTP or other connection to your Web server—the upload address (which may be different from the address used by site visitors), username, password, access method (secure or ordinary FTP or Web/DAV), and the folder that contains site files.

Road-Testing Contribute

It took me only a few seconds to set up a connection, and the site's home page then appeared in Contribute's browser-style main window. I simply clicked on Edit Page on the toolbar and the browser became a WYSIWYG editing window, complete with a simple formatting toolbar and buttons for inserting links, images, and tables—and I could drag document, images, PDFs, or Flash files directly from Windows Explorer into the editing window. It felt slightly slower than editing a page on my local machine with a traditional editor such as Dreamweaver, but no traditional editor matched the ease with which I could post the edited page to my site simply by clicking the Publish button.

It feels as if you're editing the remote page, but you're actually editing a copy, which you can save as a draft, forward to colleagues for review, or save as a replacement for the original page. By default, Contribute saves backup copies of edited pages in case you or the Webmaster decides to revert to one of your earlier edits. Other toolbar buttons let you add pages to an existing site, using supplied templates or any custom template created in Dreamweaver, and a similar interface lets you edit any standard blog by adding, deleting, or modifying entries. The whole procedure felt effortless, and I admired the way a first-time user is guided by prompts and explanatory dialogs that don't hog the screen and get in the way of an experienced user.

Site administrators will be relieved to find that they can limit editing privileges for individual users, so that some can edit only files in specific folders, or can only edit text but not upload images or documents. In fact, any Web page based on Dreamweaver or Contribute's template-based pages will automatically prevent Contribute users from editing any part of the page that was created by a template, guaranteeing that ham-fisted users can't damage the site's overall design. Expert users will easily figure out that they can use any traditional Web editing program to insert the tags that tell Contribute where editing is and isn't allowable, but Dreamweaver inserts those tags automatically when you use a template.

Sooner or later someone will probably write a freeware rival to Adobe Contribute C3, but, meanwhile, the price is reasonable, and what you get is the simplest and most elegant tool ever invented for editing an existing Web site. Keep in mind that Contribute can't *create* a new Web site—for that you'll need Dreamweaver or some other traditional editor. But with a copy of Contribute on your laptop, you'll be able to make quick changes to your site from anywhere.