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Web Standards & Best Practices :: DROP-DOWN MENUS (GRAPHIC ITEMS)

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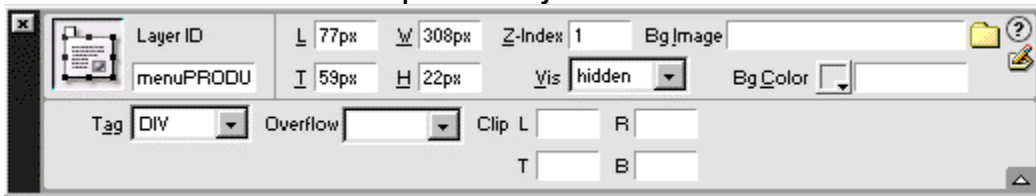
THE PRINCIPLE :: LAYERS :: An Overview

In the situation when the drop-down menus are constituted by graphic items (all the buttons in the menus are graphic objects, not tabels' cells containing hypertext) the drop-down menus are, actually contained in **layers** being displayed according to user's actions: on Mouse Over, on Click, on Double Click etcaetera.

A **layer** is a container for HTML content, delineated by the <div> or Tag, that you can position (the position being measurable/controllable/editable in pixels) anywhere on the page.

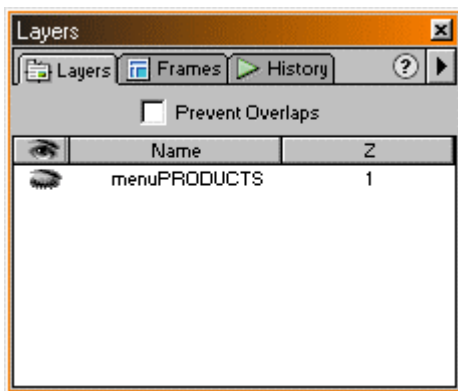
So, a layer can contain tables, hypertext, static images, flash, shockwave, video, - anything that could be a content of a webpage and is 'manageable' by html.

:: The POSITIONING PROPERTIES panel of a layer in Dreamweaver:



The POSITIONING PROPERTIES panel of a layer gives us all the information regarding the dimensions (W and H), the position (X and Y coordinates, - Left and Top, respectively), the order (the z-index), the visibility, the visible area, if the case (Clip), the background (hexametric code or graphic), and the type of html tag inserting the layer in a html layout of a page.

:: The LAYERS INSPECTOR:



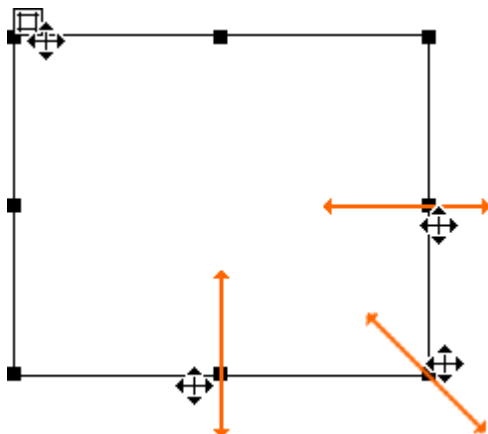
Inserting LAYERS using the Objects Palette:



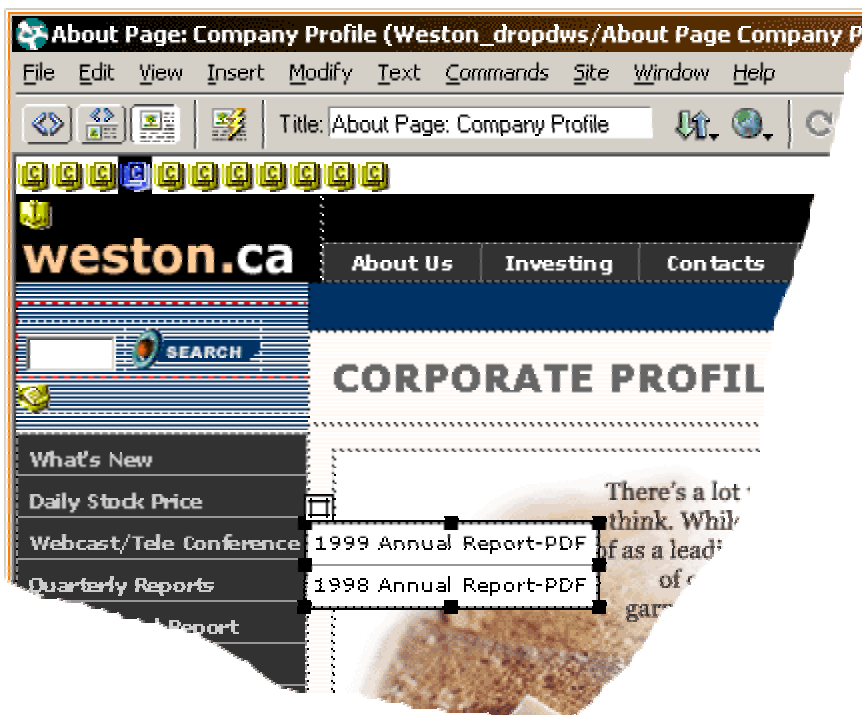
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We can, manually, insert and resize a layer by using the Object Palette and the mouse pointer, which turns, on top of the layer's corner, into a 'resizer':

:: Resizing LAYERS:



THE DROP-DOWN MENU: basically, the drop-down menu is an html object (structured, usually, as a table) created in and coming from Adobe Image Ready or Macromedia Fireworks or built, graphically, in Photoshop and web-edited in Dreamweaver or any other editor, contained in a layer:



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Hence, assigning behavior(s) to a drop-down menu will, actually, mean working on two levels:

- 1) assigning behaviors to the buttons in the main navigation bar able to trigger drop-down menus and
- 2) assigning behaviors to the buttons in the drop-down menu(s).

In order to make a drop-down menu (layer) able to "appear and dissapear" as a response to an action of an user, we will consider two different phases of the object / layer : the visible one and the invisible one; between these two phases we will ANIMATE the layer, so the animation will be the 'motion' between the invisible and the visible phase of the layer, being triggered by rollover, click etcaetera. In this scope we will use a Dreamweaver's feature, THE TIMELINE.

ANIMATING VISIBILITY :: The Timeline

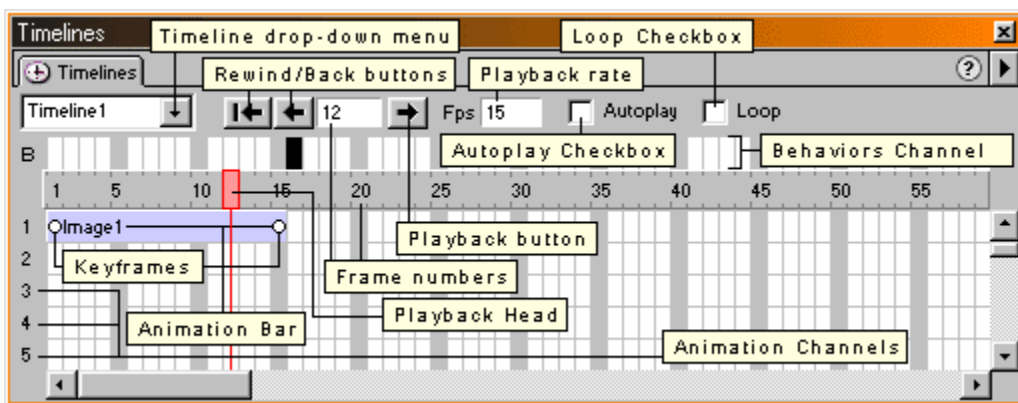
What's a Timeline :: a way to add animation to a web page using Dynamic HTML.
 What a Timeline Can Do:

- » Can incorporate three types of objects: LAYERS, IMAGES, BEHAVIORS

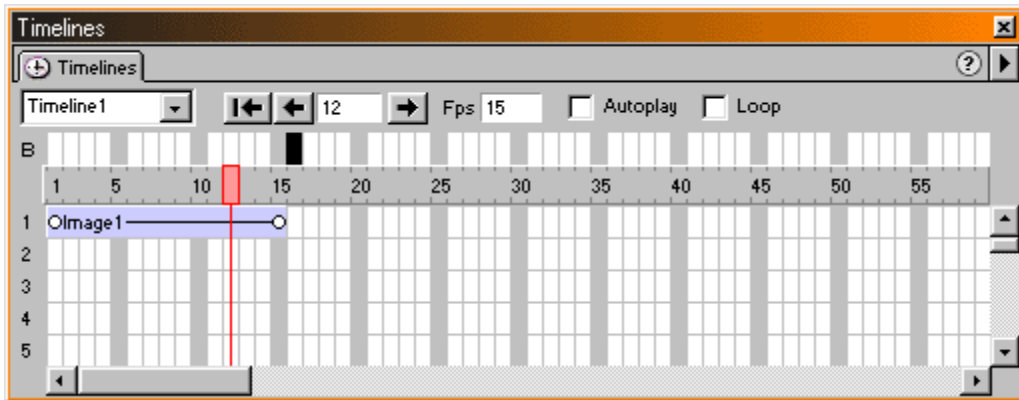
⇒ **LAYERS ::**

- ⇒ Moving the layer's x and y coordinates (position on the page or within the parent layer)
- ⇒ Changing layer visibility :: VISIBLE, HIDDEN, DEFAULT.
- ⇒ Changing the stacking order, or Z-index
- ⇒ Adjusting layer dimensions

:: **The Timelines Inspector (Window ⇒ Timelines :: Shift + F9) :**



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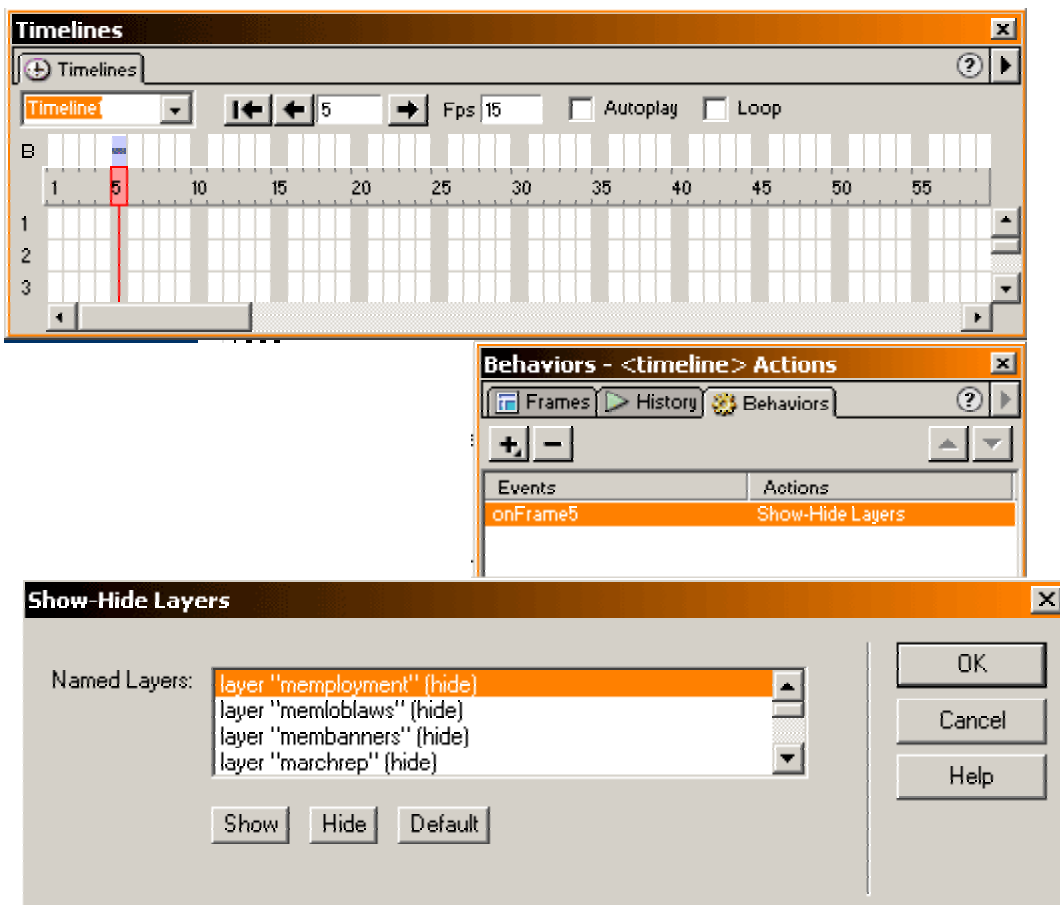


ADDING BEHAVIORS TO TIMELINE / ANIMATING BEHAVIORS ON TIMELINE

In our case, it's not necessary to add the layer itself to the timeline, but the "visual behavior" of the layer; we will build a timeline having added to it a "Show/Hide Layers" behavior: the behavior that will hide the layer(s).

The very top 'layer' (channel, in fact) of the timeline is the BEHAVIOR channel; by clicking / selecting on a frame / keyframe and choosing a behavior by clicking the "+" button in the BEHAVIORS panel, we can asset that behavior to the selected frame of the timeline, which means, the behavior will occur only only if the timeline runs and only when the timeline's running reaches the specified frame. (e.a. : on frame 5, the behavior added to the timeline hide all the drop-down menus layers in the page).

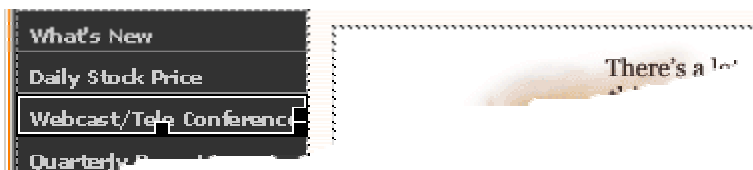
The next step, - the assessment to one or more elements (buttons) of an action able to start the timeline and, respectively, to trigger the Show/Hide layers behavior:

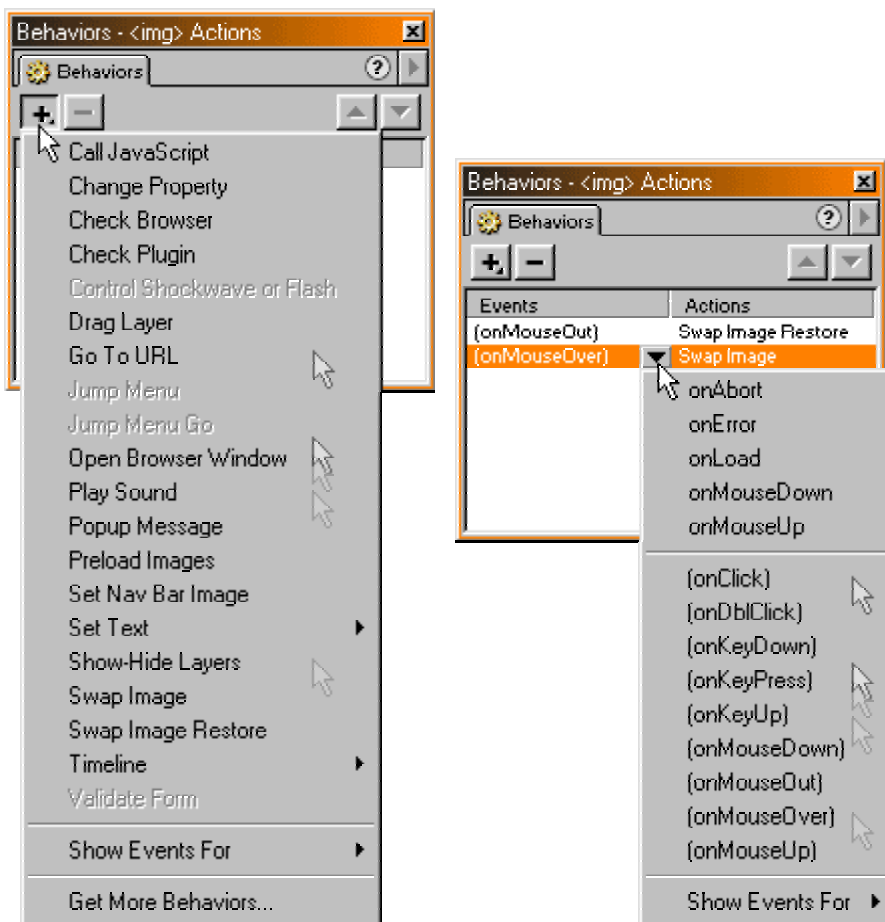


THE PROCESS STEPS ::

The main navigation bar's buttons :: adding behaviors

In Dreamweaver, adding behaviors to an element means, 1) selecting the element (in our case, the button from the navigation bar) ; 2) clicking the "+" button in the BEHAVIORS panel, in order to add an action; 3) choosing the event desired to trigger the action :





This is a 'logic scheme' of the main navigation bar button's behaviors, in order to be able to trigger a drop-down menu:

:: graphic drop-down menus ::

timeline:: [Shift + F9] > in the 5th frame assign [+] "Show / Hide Layers" :: hide all the dropdown menus layers

navbar_item	
onMouseOver	Swap Image
onMouseOut	Swap Image Restore
onMouseOver	Show Layer (the afferent dropdown menu layer) + Hide Layers (all the rest of the dropdown menus)
onMouseOut	Play Timeline
onMouseOver	Go To Timeline Frame :: DEFAULT :: Timeline 1, frame no. 1
onMouseOver	Stop Timeline

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The main navigation bar's buttons :: adding behaviors

This graphic drop-down menus solution was thought to work in the same way in IE and Netscape; because we can assign actions/behaviors to layers only in IE, we can't afford to assign in this case layer actions/behaviors to the layer itself, but to the elements being contained into the layer, - the buttons of the drop-down menus. We will consider two types of situations: 1) when the web page needs only one level of drop-down menus; 2) when the web page needs two or more levels of drop-down menus (there are buttons contained in the drop-down menu able, themselves, to trigger a 2nd-level drop-down menu, - just similar to Windows Operation System's interface).

1) one level:

dropdown_menu_item	
onMouseOver	Swap Image
onMouseOut	Swap Image Restore
onMouseOver	Show Layer (the afferent dropdown menu layer :: the layer where the item belongs) + Hide Layers (all the rest of the dropdown menus)
onMouseOut	Play Timeline
onMouseOver	Go To Timeline Frame :: DEFAULT :: Timeline 1, frame no. 1
onMouseOver	Stop Timeline

2) two levels:

(in the two levels situation, the first level menu item will have the behaviors described below and the second level menu item will have the behaviors described above, - will have the same behavior as the "one-level first level menu item"):

dropdown_menu_item	
onMouseOver	Swap Image
onMouseOut	Swap Image Restore
onMouseOver	Show Layer (the afferent dropdown menu layer :: the layer where the item belongs + the layer containing the 2nd-level drop_down menu triggered by the item) + Hide Layers (all the rest of the dropdown menus)
onMouseOut	Play Timeline
onMouseOver	Go To Timeline Frame :: DEFAULT :: Timeline 1, frame no. 1
onMouseOver	Stop Timeline