



A Frame Job?

Choosing between frames and free-form layout

By *Tamis Nordling*

I know someone who doesn't like making decisions. It's not that she fears making the wrong choice. She just loves those last few moments before the decision, when she still has the potential to choose anything. But once she decides, a door shuts. She can't go back.

If she were a designer, she'd really like PageMaker's new Frames feature. It gives you a new option for laying out your pages, but you never have to choose between it and PageMaker's other, free-form layout method—you can use both in the same publication or the same page. What follows is a brief explanation of what frames are and how they differ from free-form layout.

Frame basics

A frame is a "container" for text or a graphic. In PageMaker 6.5, you can create frames that are rectangles, ovals, regular polygons, or irregular polygons using any of the frame tools on the tools palette (they're the objects with the crosses through them). You can also draw an object with one of PageMaker's regular drawing tools, then convert that object to a frame by selecting "Change to Frame" from the Frame submenu of the Element menu.

To place text or a graphic into the frame, select both the frame and the element you want it to contain, and select "Attach to Frame" from the Frame submenu of the Element menu. You can also use the text tool to click inside an empty frame and start typing. In addition, you can import text or a graphic directly into a frame by selecting the frame and choosing "Place..." from the File menu. In the "Place document" dialog box, select what you want to import and click the "Place within frame" option.

Frames can contain a block of text or a graphic, not both.

Text frames, like free-form text blocks, can be threaded together so text can flow among them. To thread frames, select the pointer tool. Next, select a frame that contains text or will contain text, and click on its bottom windowshade handle—PageMaker will display a threading icon. Click on the next frame. To break the threads for a frame, select it and choose "Break Threads" from the Frame submenu of the Element menu.

Frames vs. free-form layout

Both free-form layout and frames offer distinct advantages, and each is particularly useful in certain situations. You can use both in the same publication or the same page, although a single story can't be threaded between a free-form text block and a text frame. Here's a quick rundown on the merits of using frames.

- Frames let you design a publication before text and graphics are ready for positioning, which makes frames particularly useful for highly structured or layout-intensive documents like catalogs or magazines.
- With frames, you can create text columns shaped like rectangles, ovals, regular polygons, or irregular polygons.
- You can add a line or fill to a frame. (You can also assign a fill and line of "None" if you don't want the frame to be visible.)
- You can specify an inset value (how far from the frame border the text begins)—which is like being able to set margins for a particular text element on your page.
- You can set the alignment of text or graphics within a frame, which is particularly useful for vertically centering text and other elements within a specific area.
- With frames, you can easily traverse to the next or previous text object in the threaded story by selecting a text frame, and then selecting the "Next Frame" or "Previous Frame" command from the Frame submenu of the Element menu.

Free-form layout is your other choice for positioning and sizing text and graphics. Here are some of its advantages.

- Free-form layout can be extremely quick. Text blocks, for instance, can be created in one step by dragging the text tool.
- Text blocks can be created and threaded automatically throughout a publication by flowing text into columns using the Autoflow feature (located on the Layout menu). For this reason, free-form text layout is especially well suited for long-document work, such as books and technical manuals.

Decisions, decisions . . .

Being able to use frames, free-form layout, or both at once in PageMaker 6.5 gives you a lot of design control and flexibility no matter what kind of document you're creating. Of course, you *will* have to choose what method to use for each graphic or story. But that's a pretty good set of options to choose from, even if you don't like making decisions. ♦

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