

New and improved Features in SharePoint Designer 2010

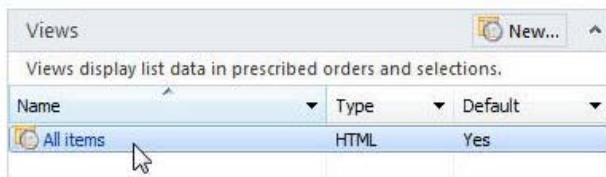
SharePoint Designer 2010 is THE tool for IW and for IT to build a complete, rich, reusable, process-centric application on the SharePoint platform that can also integrate external data.

That's a mouthful, and SharePoint Designer can be hard to wrap your arms around, so let's break it down into some key components and features that Greg talked about (By no means is this a complete list for SharePoint Designer 2010).

New Revamped User Interface



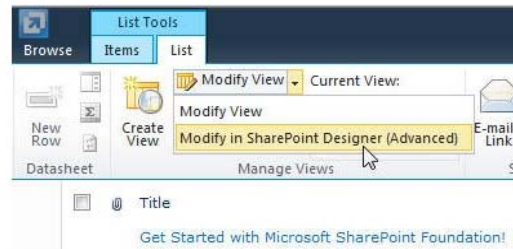
By itself, this would be a major improvement, but another major UI enhancement is an artifact-centric navigation UI. Each artifact has a home page that provides a high-level information summary and entry-point to related features. Sadly, you will not thereby improve your user-experience at an archeological dig site. By artifact is often meant a sub collection of features that are used in the process of creation of some well-defined output, such as workflows or views.



Rounding out the changes to the User Interface are some new and improved tools including: a much more robust Task workflow designer; a list schema editor, which makes it much faster than the browser to modify lists, columns, data types; and various Business Data Catalog (BDC) tools for creating external lists (that now behave suspiciously like native lists) connected to external data, such as Microsoft SQL Server databases and Web Services.

Note that these external lists are now bi-directional – you can not only view the data but update data in these external data sources via SharePoint lists and InfoPath forms.

Don't forget the additional entry points in the SharePoint browser that “tunnel” into SharePoint Designer itself that make it easier open SharePoint Designer and immediately to, say, modify a list or view.



And one more thing about the UI. It's a lot easier to create a custom action, add a ribbon command or button, or right-click command. For example, when you add a workflow to a site, you can integrate it better and more fully into the standard SharePoint UI.

Packaging repackaged

A unified packaging system makes it a lot simpler to export an application and import it elsewhere. In SharePoint Designer 2007, there was a packaging schism between .stp site templates and .wsp files. When should one choose one over the other, and why have to choose in the first place? In 2010, this schism was healed (without the laying on of hands) and .wsp is now the one way to go. This means, among other things, you can package up a workflow and use it on other sites. Woohoo!

IT has more control

SharePoint Designer 2007 was so powerful, it was a little too powerful, and in the wrong hands might cause undue stress in IT-land. Now several administration controls and commands help channel SharePoint Designer into the right hands and onto the right pages: On a per-site basis, you can:

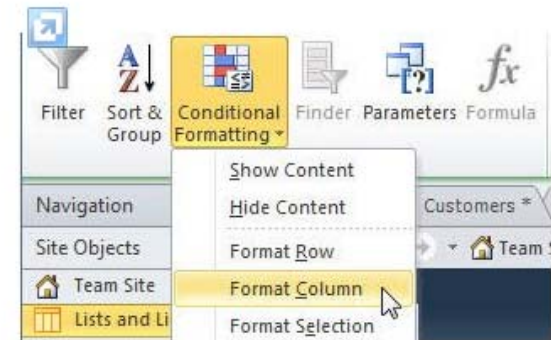
- Disable unghosting of web pages
- Turn off master page editing
- De-activate SharePoint Designer entirely (but only if it's absolutely necessary!)
- Lock the URL of a web site

Furthermore, a new permission group, called Designer, helps target those users who really need SharePoint Designer. Really.

Brighter Views

Three improvements to data views are worth mentioning:

- A new web part, called the XSLT Web Part replaces the old List View Web Part. The new XSLT Web Part can be customized in the browser and in SharePoint Designer, and combines the best of both the old List View Web Part and the Data View Web Part into a perfect oneness of being.
- Conditional formatting is a lot easier to do and the UI is similar to Excel's popular and highly touted feature.



- You can now do inline editing of an XSLT view. This is an edit-in-place feature that can be set in the browser per list view (it's turned off by default). Each row in a list acts like a mini form and displays appropriate controls for each column.

Workflows

The changes and improvements here are substantial. Greg provided a brief overview and they would require a book to do justice to but here's a list of some key changes:

- Workflows now can be defined as reusable templates.
- The Workflow editor is declarative, full screen, and uses lots of contextual ribbons – which means that the design is not driven by a series of endlessly overlapping dialog boxes.
- Site workflows do not require a "trigger" to get started.
- You can import and export to Visio 2010 using the new graphical design workflow. This integration round trips very well and makes it much easier to design and structure the workflow up front. You can even generate a picture of the workflow as part of the workflow to show the current state of the workflow. Got it?
- A new impersonation step allows a non-privileged user to temporarily be elevated so they can complete a task, which solves a big problem in building more elaborate and secure workflows.
- The Task designer can build a more complex approval process, and you can use very sophisticated workflow logic without resorting to code.

Totally Rad

A key artifact of SharePoint Designer is the ability to create robust mashups, often defined as a quick web solution that synthesizes different components, visualizations, and data into a useful or interesting application. Throughout the demo, Greg was building a typical classroom solution using various components of SharePoint. You can also think of SharePoint Designer as a Rapid Application Development (RAD) tool. There's a thin line between RAD and Mashups. Feel free to cross it at any time.

Imagine you want to create a quick solution for a college classroom, say computer science 101, where Teaching Assistants (TAs) are assigned students and want to track and grade homework assignments in a simple workflow. Students are maintained in a list and homework assignments are maintained in a library. Greg wove them together in a workflow by: (1) TAs assigning homework assignments, (2) students completing and submitting them, and (3) TAs assigning grades. Then Greg modified the student list to show only failing students with grades less than 60 by using conditional formatting.

It was simple to do and once you get the hang of it, there was a natural, iterative feel to it. You can easily envision this little mashup (two lists, some workflow logic, and a bit of visualization) evolving to a department-wide, and then perhaps university-wide solution, by adding more students and student data, linking all assigned TAs, and adding course and calendar data that could track all student homework assignments.

Even more new stuff

There's much more to the new SharePoint Designer 2010, but we hope this has given you a taster!

If you want to find out more please contact us on the following:

information@premiercs.co.uk

t: +44 (0)20 7729 1811

f: +44 (0)20 7729 9412

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SharePoint Designer 2010 New Features Guide



4 Ravey Street, London EC2A
4QP

t: +44 (0)20 7729 1811

f: +44 (0)20 7729 9412

e: information@premiercs.co.uk

w: www.premcs.co.uk

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