

How-to

BY DAVE VALIULIS

Break Out of the Cell. Using tables to format text and graphics in FrameMaker

THE GRID OF A TABLE CAN FEEL LIKE A PRISON SOMETIMES—TOO CONFINING, dreary, and dull. Important information often just mopes inside the cells, with no hope of parole. But with a little guidance and a few tricks, you can quickly rehabilitate your text and graphics. In fact, not only can you create better-looking tables, you can also use their properties to format your pages in ways that you might have thought were far too cumbersome, or even impossible, in Adobe FrameMaker. So here are a few sure-fire ways to give your characters a chance at a new life.

A gap in the wall

Table titles are often overlooked as formatting devices. We've all been conditioned by too many dense textbooks into assuming that table titles must be boring and unattractive (*Table 2.5.3: The Economic Export History of Straw* comes to mind). But a little experimenting can achieve something fancier.

Have you ever wanted to place text right at the top of a table? You can't do this with body text, but you can with a table title—by specifying a negative gap for the title position. In fact, if you use a single-cell table, the formatting doesn't have to look like a table at all. See example 1 at the left.

The invisible borders

An easy way to align graphics or small amounts of text in different spots on your page is to place them in a table and then turn off borders so that the table becomes invisible. For example, you can use a borderless table to switch to a multicolumn layout in the middle of a single column. The steps are simple.

1. Insert a table, placing graphics or text in the appropriate cells.
2. In the Ruling section of the Table Designer, specify None for all ruling styles.
3. Adjust cell indents and margins to modify the positions of your elements on the page.

A luxurious cell

Though FrameMaker has no command for placing a box around a paragraph, a single-cell table works very nicely for this. The trick is to define ruling lines (in the Ruling

1

THE GANG

a Queen
washerwomen
the coachman

2

The hideout. A villa in Baveno, near the shores of Lake Maggiore.

3

INCOGNITO

> 1 Here, the title for a single-cell table has been formatted with a gap of -12 points in the Table Designer so that it sits directly on the upper rule. 2 A thicker rule on the right and bottom of the table simulates a drop shadow for boxed text. 3 A -6 point setting for the top Cell Margin and -13 for the bottom Cell Margin results in this unusual formatting (the text in the cell is 24 points). 4 A simple but colorful layout for text or graphics makes use of a table format with wide, colored ruling.

section of the Table Designer) only for the outside of the table and not for columns or rows. You can also simulate a drop shadow: select a thin line for both the top and left Outside Ruling settings, and a thicker one for the bottom and right (see example 2).

Similarly, you may want to highlight text with vertical lines on each side. Although FrameMaker has a clear way to place lines above or below text (the Frame Above or Frame Below settings in the Advanced paragraph properties), you'll find no similar property for right or left. Once again, tables come to the rescue. In the Table Designer, select a line style for the left and right Outside Ruling settings and None for the top and bottom.

A shady deal

Another single-cell table trick uses shading to create a few types of special display headings. For example, FrameMaker doesn't let you style reverse text (white on black). But use a one-cell table with dark shading and a white text format and presto!—reverse text. Here's how.

1. Create a paragraph format with white text (or text with a light color) using the Color pop-up menu in the Default Font section of the Paragraph Designer.
2. Create a one-cell table format using the Table Designer. In the Shading section for this format, specify the first cell to be filled with black (or a dark color).
3. Apply the paragraph format you created in step 1 to the cell, and then click Update All.
4. To place a reverse-type heading in your document, insert a table using this format, and then type in your heading text. Your readers will never suspect they're looking at a table, and your fellow FrameMakers will wonder how you did that!

Another shading trick lets you create a heading that prints over a thick line. This effect is achieved by shading the cell of a one-cell table format and then giving the top and bottom cell margins hefty negative values in the Basic section of the Table Designer (see example 3). The negative margins reduce the fill to a mere line, but the text in the cell (if you've made it large enough) prints over the colored line.

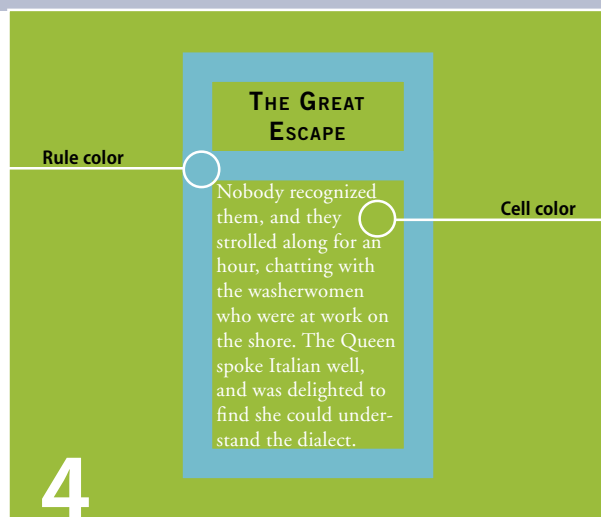
The hidden middle

Have you ever wanted to create side-by-side tables? Trying to insert two separate tables and keep them next to each other can be difficult, but it's easy to fake such an arrangement. All you do is create the table with an extra column in the middle that's unlined and unshaded.

Beyond the checkered background

Placing some text or graphics on a colored background in various parts of your document—as a regularly appearing sidebar style, for example—can be cumbersome if you're using anchored text frames or customized shading in table cells. In both cases, you can't create a single format; the styling must be entered manually each time you want to include another sidebar.

The solution, as you might have suspected, does indeed lie in tables—but instead of cell colors, you use



colored lines (ruling). Consider example 4. This table uses thick (10-point) blue ruling lines on the left, right, and between the two cells. The result is a customized layout for text or graphics, in which it looks as if one or more colored areas are placed on a colored background. Best of all, it can be made into a table format that you can use anywhere in your document. Here are the steps.

1. Create custom colors, if desired: Choose Definitions from the Color submenu of the View menu, specify CMYK percentages, and then give the colors descriptive names, such as Rule Color and Cell Color.
2. Define a special ruling style that uses these custom colors: Choose Custom Ruling & Shading from the Table menu, and then click Edit Ruling Style. Give the new style a descriptive name.
3. From the Color, Pen Pattern, and Width menus, select a color you defined in step 1, any tint you want, and the point size for the line width. Select Single for Number of Lines.
4. Insert a table with one column, two rows, no header, and no footer (or other formatting you might prefer for the sidebar).
5. Create a new table format: Click inside the table you just inserted, and then choose Table Designer from the Table menu. Choose New Format from the Commands pop-up menu, type in a new name, such as Sidebar, for the Table Tag, and click Create. In the Basic section of the Table Designer, choose No Title from the Title Position pop-up menu. In the Ruling section, select your custom ruling style; in the Shading section, select your custom colors (and any tinting you want) for the cells.

To place a sidebar anywhere in your document, insert a table and select your new sidebar table format. Type the title of the sidebar in the first row of the table, and enter the sidebar content in the second row.

As you can see, the Table Designer can give you a lot of options beyond a simple grid, allowing your text and graphics to enjoy a little more freedom. ♦

Dave Valiulis is a senior technical writer for Adobe's Interface Design group.