Creating an Animated Navigation Bar in InDesign*
*for SWF or FLA export only

Here's a digital dilemma: You want to provide navigation controls for readers, but you don't want to take up screen real estate or cover up other details. Here's a nice solution: create an animated navigation bar which shows up only when needed, then moves out of the way. *NOTE: This only works if you're exporting to Flash or SWF. Sadly, interactive PDFs don't support clickable animated content.*

While buttons are really handy, they can't be animated. However, they can be grouped with other objects that *can* be animated; the buttons will retain their button capabilities even when grouped.

BUTTONS

Any object can become a button in InDesign. But if you don't feel like creating a button from scratch, the Creative Suite provides a great starter kit.

Photoshop Graphic Styles

While Photoshop doesn't provide discrete objects, it does include a nice selection of Graphic Styles (**Window** > **Graphic Styles**) to apply to layers. Just create an empty floating layer, fill an area, and apply one of the styles.

Photoshop Graphic Styles can turn any floating layer into button artwork.
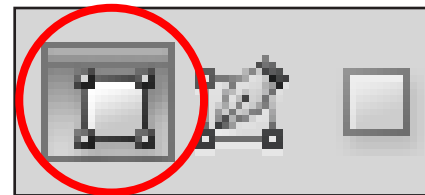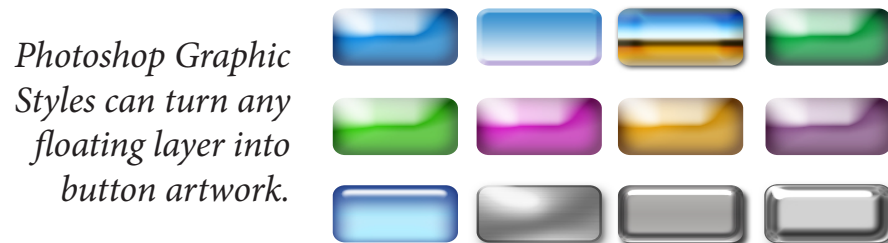
Choose the Shape Layer mode to create vector shapes with the Pen tool or with any of the Shape tools.

TIP: to ensure crisp edges, use a vector shape layer as the basis for the button, then save the file as a Photoshop PDF. While InDesign will render vector edges in a placed PSD as pixels, it will retain the vector edges in a placed PDF. This creates a special kind of PDF — it can be round-tripped back into Photoshop for editing.

InDesign Buttons

To view InDesign's buttons, open the Button panel (**Window > Interactive > Buttons**), then choose **Sample Buttons** from the panel menu. It's just a standard InDesign Library; to use a button, just drag it onto the page. Each button has an action already assigned, so you'll probably want to change that. Select the button in the page, and modify its settings in the Buttons panel. Remember that a button has multiple trigger events, and each event can trigger multiple actions.
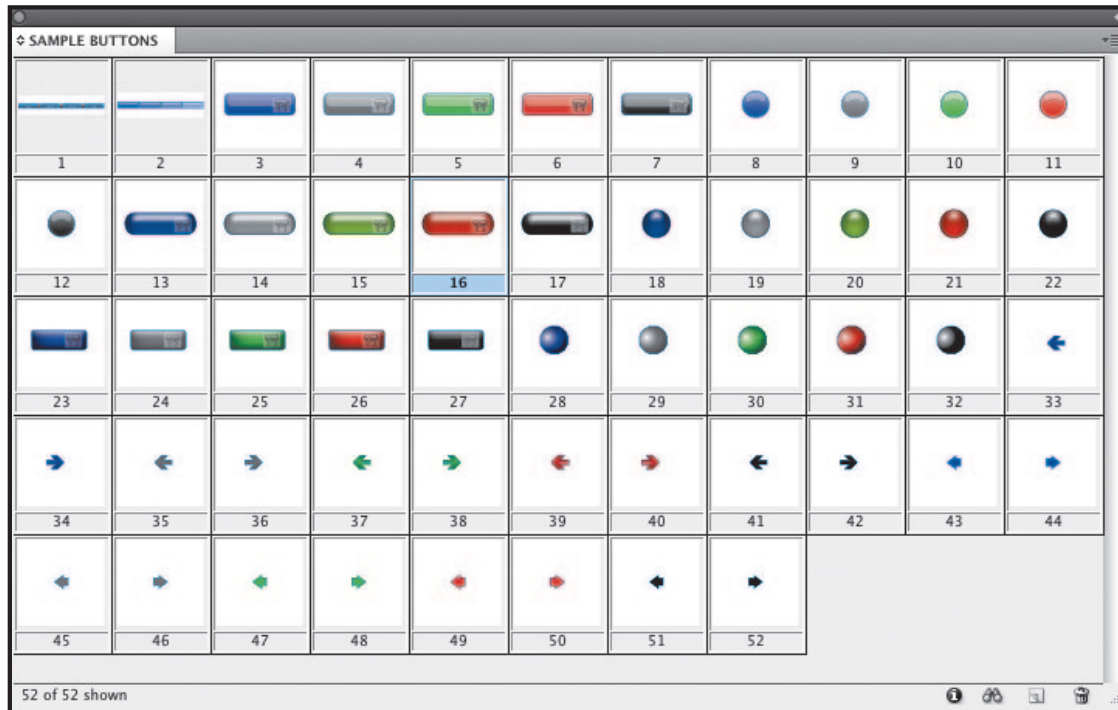

InDesign's sample button library includes 50 buttons and 2 navigation bars.

The first two entries in the Sample Buttons library are actually groups of buttons. Remember that you can double-click an object in a group to modify the object, without dismantling the group.
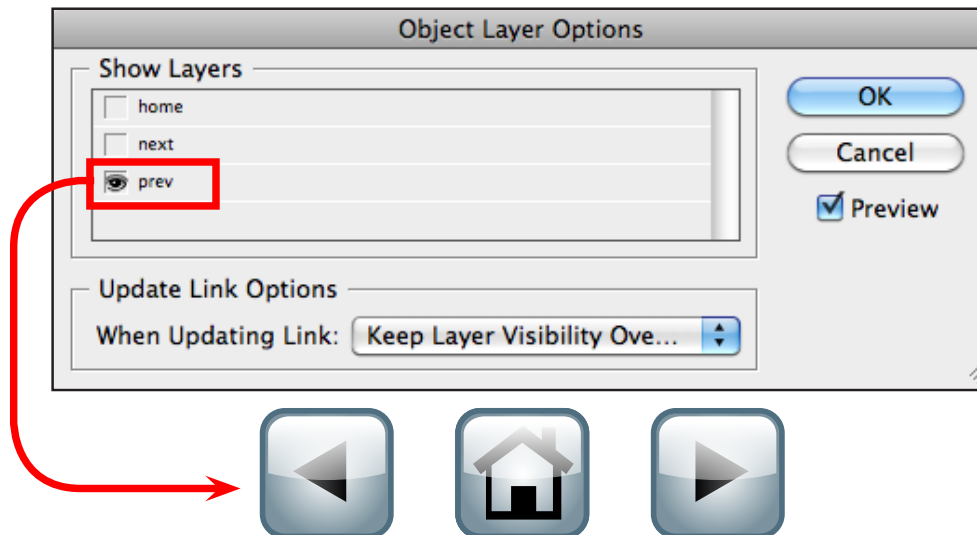
Illustrator Buttons

You'll find pre-fab buttons in Adobe Illustrator's Symbols libraries: In the Symbols panel (**Window** > **Symbols**), choose **Open Symbol Library** > **Web Buttons and Bars**.
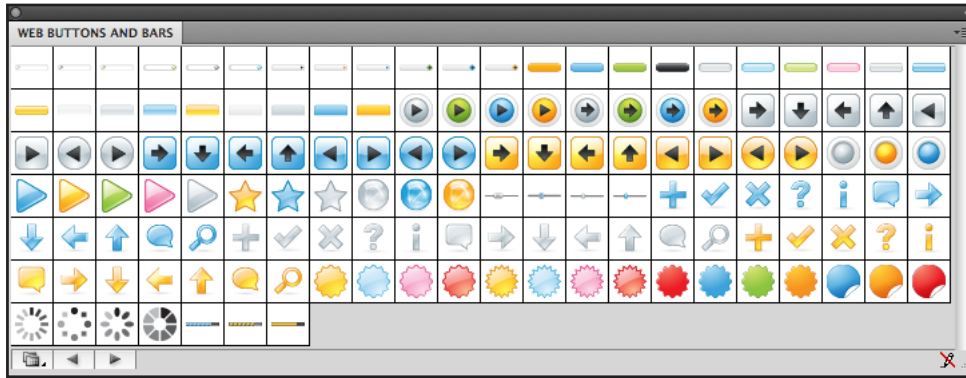
*The **Web Buttons and Bars** symbol library in Adobe Illustrator includes 139 pre-built pieces of artwork.*

To use one of the buttons, just drag it out of the Symbol library onto the Illustrator document. You can easily change the original colors with **Edit** > **Edit Colors** > **Recolor Artwork**, or edit individual components by double-clicking on the placed symbol, then selecting and modifying components. You could just create each button in a separate document, but I like to economize: I combine all my buttons in a single Illustrator file, stacked up in layers. I select everything, then choose **Object** > **Artboards** > **Fit to Artwork Bounds**. Then I can use InDesign's Object Layer Options to display what I need.

Stack up the button states in Illustrator layers, then use InDesign Object Layer Options to reveal them.

ACTIVATING THE BUTTONS

Once you've created the buttons, give them something to do. Select a button, and open the Buttons panel. Name the button, choose an event trigger (On Release is the most common), and assign an Action by clicking the plus sign icon. Since animation works only in SWF export, avoid the "PDF Only" section of the Actions pull-down menu.
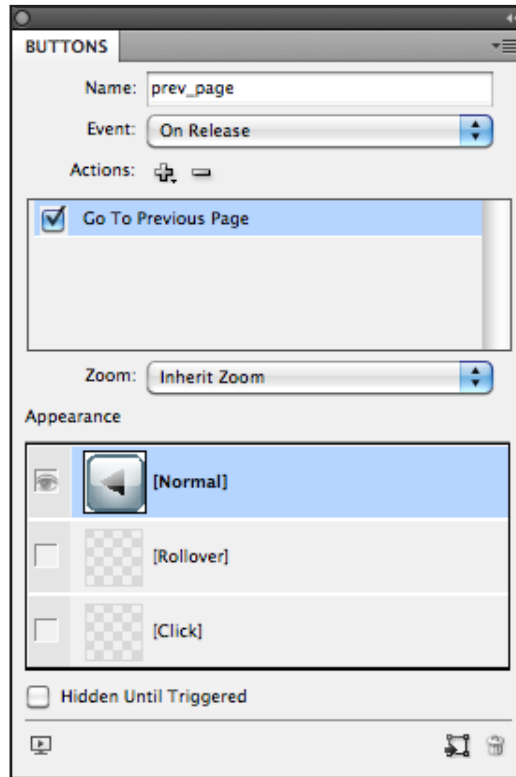

Choose the event trigger, and attach an action. Remember that you can apply effects (or even import a different graphic) to each button state appearance. Don't get carried away.

If you want to get fancy, you can select the Rollover and Click button states in the Buttons panel and change the attributes of each: Change the applied Effects —even change the graphic.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Now to build a "carrier" that will allow the buttons to slide in when needed, and disappear afterward. Any object will do; I used Pathfinder to combine two rectangles with rounded corners, and filled the result with [Paper]. I changed the opacity to 70% and added a drop shadow just for grins.
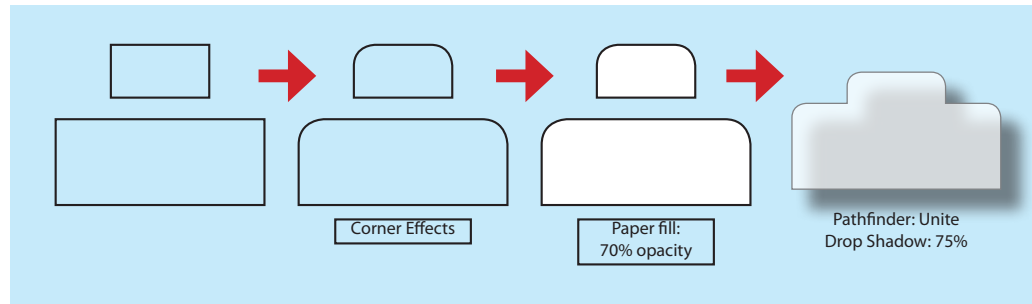
Once the carrier is created, it's time to position the buttons. Add some text or a symbol to identify the navigation kit; I just used "NAV" with a white fill and black stroke, then converted it to outlines. Once everything is in position, group all the objects together.
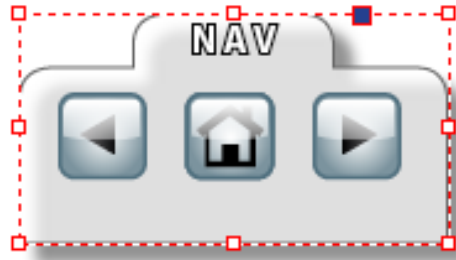

Position the navigation bar at its starting point. Mine floats up from the bottom, but put your wherever you like. You can even hide the navigation bar under other objects (even animated objects).
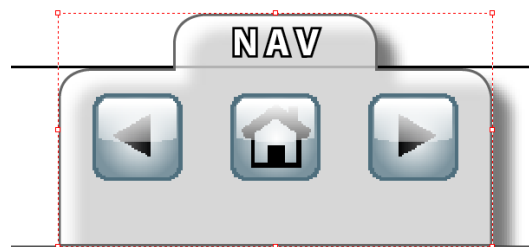
ANIMATING THE NAVIGATION BAR

Once you've positioned the navigation bar in its hiding place, it's time to set it in motion. If you just want to move it in a general direction, the canned Animation options, such as Fly in from Bottom, are fine. But if you want to move it an exact distance, you may find it easier to draw a line of the proper length, and then convert that line to an animation path.
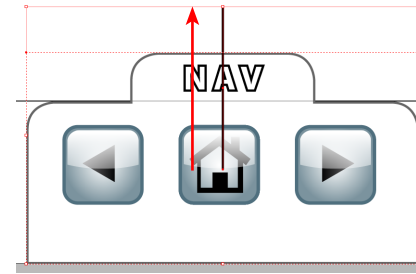
In my example, I carefully positioned the navigation bar partially off the page, and I wanted it to move up exactly one inch. I've found it a bit tricky to do that with the canned animations, so I just made my own motion path: Any path can become a motion path. Since I wanted the bar to move up one inch,
I drew a vertical line from bottom to top, exactly 72 pixels long.

If the distance your navigation bar needs to travel isn't crucial, you needn't be so exact. If you do draw your own path, select both the path and the navigation bar, and click the **Convert to Motion Path** icon ( ).

By default, animations are set up to play on page load, but I wanted the navigation bar to appear only when necessary. In the Events section of the Animation panel, choose "**On Roll Over (Self)**," and *uncheck* the "On Page Load" option (it does not uncheck itself when you choose another event). Click the triangle by **Properties** and choose "**From Current Appearance**" for the Animate option (meaning "start where you are, and follow the motion path.") When the user rolls over the little tab of the nav bar that's peeking into the page, that sets the nav bar in motion.

Preview the animation, and tweak as necessary. If you want the navigation bar to appear on all pages (and why wouldn't you?), place it on the Master page.

Oh, and one more thing... (next page)
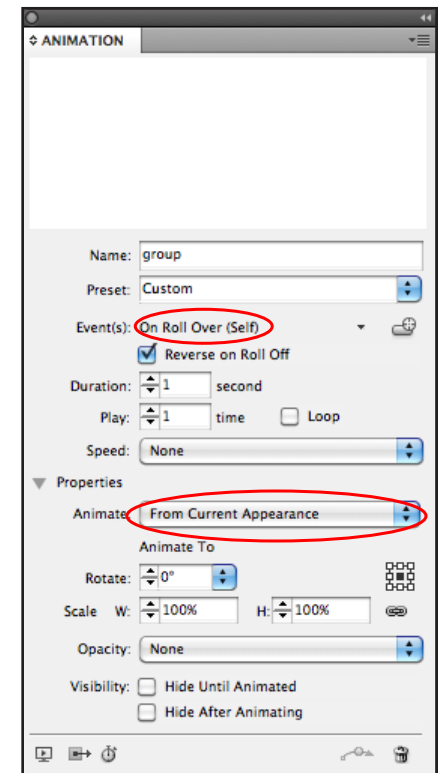
GET A LITTLE CRAZY: NAV BAR PRANK

Remember the part about "any path can be a motion path"? Here's a chance to, well, annoy someone. Promise me that you won't use this for evil.

It's simple, really: Just create a motion path that pulls the nav bar away from the user when they roll over, accomplishing an unintended roll-off. They'll never catch it!

Just don't tell them I showed you how to do this…