

# Web Design Revolution - Evolution - Rebellion

By JEFF ROUYER

In 1989, Tim Berners-Lee, planted a seed that revolutionized the way humans communicated with each other through a web of networked machines. Like a living thing, the web has since evolved and mutated with ideas and technology that took root and grew rapidly, such as HTML, as well as leaving other ideas to their quick death.

For me, I viewed much of the web as an endless series of static pages that flashed before my eyes, but what made the web really come alive was my introduction to Dynamic HTML in 1997. With DHTML, I saw through the static world of web page construction into a new world filled with art and interactivity that previously roamed the planet in the form of multimedia applications and games.

For the first time, I was able to design a web page the way I envisioned it, with total freedom of image placement, text control, animation and heightened levels of interactivity. Ha, ha. How naive of me to think of this new evolution of web design as a place free of tyranny...

From its origin, the web has been envisioned as a place where information can be shared freely with few barriers to both humans and machines and with an overwhelming desire to keep its control out of the proprietary grips of competing corporations. Paradoxically, these same competing corporations have provided innovations to display web pages as well as exert their control on how that information will be formatted.

Web developers know this unusual circumstance as the "Browser Wars."

Web developers caught between the crossfire during this war were forced to pick sides or remain neutral. Neutrality largely meant building web pages that worked in both Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Explorer browsers. Neutrality meant dealing with each browser's proprietary HTML extensions for document display and having to code HTML, Style Sheets and Scripting to cope and work around several layers of browser incompatibilities. In short, neutrality meant one big headache that stroked the death bell for promising technologies like Dynamic HTML.

At the onset of the browser wars, web developers seemed to be a passive group that only voiced their concerns and frustrations in hotly de-

*What made the web really come alive was my introduction to Dynamic HTML.*

bated newsgroups and email lists, but that lacked any cohesive body sharing a single voice. Yes, there has been the W3 standards body in place to present and test new ideas for evolving web browsing, but implementing these accepted standards was still largely the prerogative of the browser manufacturers.

Web developers soon found themselves in the dilemma of ignoring the full multimedia potential that modern web browsers offered for sake of compatibility. On the flip side, browser manufacturers weren't getting a strong following for proprietary

technologies introduced in their latest browsers. Here we have the ingredients for a bad tasting stew containing frustrated web developers, over-engineered browsers and ground-breaking standardized web technologies such as Style Sheets, JavaScript and the Document Object Model. Something had to give.

What was that? It sounded like thousands of web developers screaming.

Yes, finally frustration changed into action, and action resulted in web developer groups, associations and guilds poised to fight the good fight. Not just with words either, but with tools for proof of concept that conforming to standards-based technologies can work and benefit web developers, corporations, individuals, browsers makers and ultimately all web visitors. Great tools such as the Opera browser and recently the open source Mozilla browser boasted unequal levels of compatibility and standards support.

Again, the state of web development finds itself back in the spirit of providing efficient communication between human and machine with as few barriers as possible including a handy set of standards to follow. Now there is a bright future for web developers with the aid of groups like the Web Standards Project and Mozilla.org pushing for a

day when it is good to be a web developer in the neutral zone.

The following list includes resources for revolutionary web technology trends that will probably soon become mainstream. As a web developer, getting on the learning curve for these technologies now is key.

- <http://www.mozilla.org>: The open Source browser freely available to the web with the primary goal of becoming fully standards compliant. This browser will soon set the watermark for past and future standards support for HTML, Style Sheets, Scripting, and XML related technologies. With a successful implementation of these technologies, you will see new innovations in web site development that will fully exploit the multimedia abilities of modern web browsers and increased efficiency of information exchange. These technologies will also be the groundwork for the building of standards-based web applications.
- <http://www.opera.com>: With a firm commitment to keeping a browser to a small size and

*There is a bright future for web developers with the aid of groups like the Web Standards Project and Mozilla.org pushing for a day when it is good to be a web developer in the neutral zone.*

based on strong standards support, the Opera browser has been an excellent proof of the concept that standards-based browsers and web development can benefit us all. Now instead of some new proprietary browser technology occupying the marketing of a browser you see the touting of its ability to support standards.

- <http://www.projectcool.com/>: Project Cool is a fan-

tastic place to learn about forth-coming web related technologies that will soon become the daily practice for all web developers. You will find information and resources pointing your towards cross-browser Dynamic HTML development, Style Sheets and XML. Keeping abreast of these technologies is crucial to any web developer who wants to show off adaptability and innovation.

- <http://www.webstandards.org>: A unified body of organized web developers can make a difference as evidenced by this organization. If you have ever been frustrated by browser incompatibilities and the flat-out refusal of browser manufacturers to make a product that works, then please channel that energy into signing up for this association and add your voice and help prevent the past from repeating.