The W3C

& the web design ecosystem

Who the hell am I?

- I work for Opera
- Open standards advocate and education agitator
  - dev.opera.com editor
  - W3C web education community group chair
- HTML5/CSS3 wrangler
- Heavy metal drummer

What are open web standards?

What are standards?

Thursday, 12 January 2012

Standards make life easier

▸ We don't have to worry about compatibility all the time

▸ Products are cheaper

▸ Solutions can be reached more quickly

▸ Imagine if we didn't have standards?

Australian trains...

"When railway construction began in Australia in the 1850s, the engineers favoured the gauge system they were most familiar with: the emerging standard gauge (rails 1,425 millimetres apart) from England and Europe or the broad gauge (rails 1,590 millimetres apart) from Ireland."

-- *australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/railways-in-australia*

Australian trains...

When train lines were expanded to travel between states, the lines, equipment and operating practices were incompatible. Passengers and freight would often have to be transferred from one train to another at state borders.

-- *australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/railways-in-australia*
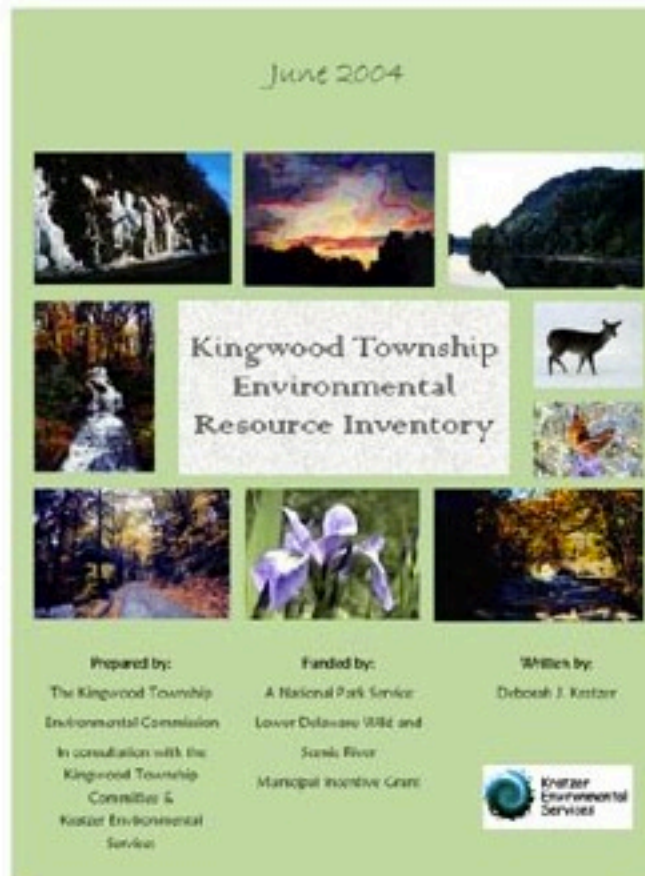
Now let's apply this to web standards

▸ Before web standards were embraced, life was grim

▸ Let's rewind to the late 90s

June 2004

Kingwood Township Environmental Resource Inventory

Prepared by:
The Kingwood Township
Environmental Commission
In consultation with the
Kingwood Township
Committee &
Kratzer Environmental
Services

Funded by:
A National Park Service
Lower Delaware Wild and
Scenic River
Municipal Incentive Grant

Written by:
Deborah J. Kratzer

Kratzer Environmental Services

Kingwood Township Environmental Resource Inventory

May 10, 2004 Summary

Prepared by Deborah J. Kratzer, Kratzer Environmental Services
for the Kingwood Township Committee & Environmental Commission

Heather's
Buffy the Vampire Slayer
Encounter

[Enter] [Contact Webmistress] [singsinthecar]

This site is best viewed with IE 3.0 or later, or Netscape 4.5 or later.

Bad, bad times

▸ Features were implemented incompatibly, to try to monopolise the web (IE succeeded)

▸ You either had to write two different web sites, or just support IE or Netscape

▸ Life was hell for developers, and users suffered

This had to change

▸ **The W3C was formed to create and impose standards, but they needed help**

▸ **Pressure groups were formed to lobby browser vendors into aligning with the standards, most notably WaSP**

Open standards...

▸ **Anyone can suggest a standard**

▸ **Anyone can contribute to a standard**

▸ **Open standards are free for anyone to use**

▸ **They are created collaboratively**

▸ **They are not owned by any one company**

...versus proprietary tech

▶ **Controlled by single companies**

▶ **Often rely on costly software**

▶ **What happens if that company goes bankrupt, or insane? ;-)**

What is the W3C?

The World Wide Web Consortium

▸ **Created in 1994 by Tim Berners-Lee**

▸ **"Hosted" by three universities: MIT (US), ERCIM (France) and Keio (Japan)**

▸ **Mission: "To lead the World Wide Web to its full potential by developing protocols and guidelines that ensure the long-term growth of the Web."**

▸ **64 FTEs, and 334 member organizations**

Basically...

▸ **They are the keepers of (most of) the technology standards that we use to create the Web**

▸ **Although there are others:**

  ▸ **ECMA (European Computer Manufacturers Association)**

  ▸ **IETF (Internet Engineering task force)**

  ▸ **Khronos**

  ▸ **WAC**

Creating a standard #1

▸ First, someone has a "good" idea

▸ The idea gets support from others

▸ It gets a test implementation (this should probably come later)

▸ The creator approaches the W3C to see if they want it

Creating a standard #2

▸ **If the W3C approves, a working group (WG) is formed to work on the technology**

▸ **The WG creates an editor's draft for people to check out**

Creating a standard #3

▸ **First public working draft**

▸ **Collect feedback and refine spec**

▸ **This is the first IP exclusion opportunity — contributors will check whether the spec relys on technology that they have a patent on. Then they can:**

   ▸ **Grant a royalty-free license**

   ▸ **Declare a patent exclusion**

Creating a standard #4

▸ **Working draft**

▸ **Potentially several iterations**

▸ **First public chance to comment**

▸ **Lots of feedback and refinement**

▸ **Implementers will typically create prototype/test implementations at this point too**

▸ **Useful for developers to test the tech**

Creating a standard #5

▸ **Last call working draft**

▸ **The point where the WG thinks the spec is finished**

▸ **Usually at this point they are inundated with feedback ;-)**

▸ **Also the second IP exclusion opportunity (60 days)**

Creating a standard #6

▸ **Candidate recommendation**

▸ **It should be pretty stable by now, and implementable by browsers**

▸ **Although usually at this point:**

　▸ **Developers come back with loads more critical feedback (due to more implementation)**

　▸ **W3C realises it hasn't got enough tests**

▸ **So it often goes back to last call**

Creating a standard #7

▸ **Proposed recommendation**

▸ **The tests are finally in, and each one is passed by two or more browser implementations**

▸ **Final sanity check stage**

Creating a standard #8

▸ **W3C recommendation!**

▸ **Finished, done!**

Conflicting drafts?

▸ **These sometimes appear**

▸ **Eg for Web Audio, we have:**

  ▸ **The Web Audio API from Google**

  ▸ **The Audio Data API from Mozilla**

▸ **The WG needs to work out how to go forward**

How can you get involved?

▸ **Anyone can give feedback on a new spec**

▸ **Join the mailing lists, read the drafts**

▸ **The drafts often contain instructions on how to feedback**

How does the W3C relate to the community?

Some would say badly!

▸ They've been accused in the past of not representing the needs or wishes of real web designers

▸ And being stuffy and academic and hard to communicate with

▸ And being far too slow

XHTML2

▸ **XHTML1 was a good move**

▸ **But XHTML2 went in a direction that was incompatible with existing work**

▸ **It took a renegade spec group — the WHATWG — to set them straight**

▸ **Their work was eventually brought back into the W3C, and became HTML5**

Hard to communicate?

▸ It is hard to get feedback listened to, some say

▸ For example Ian Hickson, editor of HTML5, is viewed as a "benevolent dictator"

▸ Hard to argue against

▸ But tends to relent if given compelling enough evidence. Sometimes!

And they work at glacial speed

▸ **CSS 2.1 took 10 years to "finish"**

▸ **Browser vendors started to take things in their own hands somewhat**

▸ **Improvements being made — e.g. modular nature of CSS3 makes things manageable and seem faster**

The W3C exists to innovate

▸ **But it is really the browsers that innovate**

▸ **A spec being "finished" or not doesn't really matter**

▸ **The best spec is useless if it doesn't get widespread implementation**

▸ **The best implementation is useless if designers and developers don't build things with it**

Overall...

▸ **Things are getting better, and the W3C are spending a lot of time trying to streamline things, design things better, be more communicative, and produce better educational resources**

▸ **It's not perfect, but it's what we've got**

▸ **And it's better than the alternatives**

Thanks!

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http://dev.opera.com

http://www.w3.org/community/webed/

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beavis and butthead - ?