CSS. Basic concepts. Syntax of CSS

In the past, much of the visual formatting of Web pages was supplied by markup elements, squarely mixing the concepts of logical and physical markup into the mess that is classic HTML. Strict variants of (X)HTML deprecated the elements and attributes that focused on presentation, providing a clear distinction between the structure provided by markup and the look dictated by a style sheet written in Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) syntax. The distinct division of duties between markup and style can provide numerous production, maintenance, and even performance benefits, making it a far superior presentation solution to markup alone.

Presentational HTML Traditionally, for right or wrong, markup has been used for formatting. For example, many HTML elements support the align attribute, which provides simple support for text alignment. Combine these aspects of markup with the assumption of visual rendering, such as the belief that h1 elements always should make text big, and it would actually seem clear to some that HTML is meant for formatting, as demonstrated here:

<h1 align=”center”>Big Centered Text!</h1>

Now an argument can be made about the semantic value of the h1 specifying a headline, but for those solely coming at HTML from a point of view of knowing what a tag does, the idea that an

tag makes something big wins out. Yet, beyond such misunderstandings based upon observation rather than the intent of the specification, there are elements that are strictly presentational, like font, which is part of HTML 3.2, 4.01 transitional, and XHTML 1.0 transitional specifications:

<font size="7" color="red">I am big and red!</font>

Further, when looking at browser-specific elements, plenty of presentational markup can be found. For example, the following markup

<blink>Proprietary HTML Tag Sale: 50% Off for Firefox Users!</blink>

creates blinking text in Firefox, while this markup

<marquee>Sale! Sale! Sale! All Presentation Tags Must Go!!!</marquee>

animates text in nearly any browser. History has already been written. Like it or not, markup has been used to visually present Web pages for well over a decade. The problem with using HTML for formatting is that it just isn’t really very good at it, nor was it generally designed for it. For example, just to make some centered red text with a yellow background, you’d likely resort to using markup like so: