

## Cascading Style Sheets

The saga of CSS starts in 1994. Håkon Wium Lie works at CERN – the cradle of the Web – and the Web is starting to be used as a platform for electronic publishing. One crucial part of a publishing platform is missing, however: There is no way to style documents. For example, there is no way to describe a newspaper-like layout in a Web page. Having worked on personalized newspaper presentations at the MIT Media Laboratory, Håkon saw the need for a style sheet language for the Web.

Style sheets in browsers were not an entirely new idea. The separation of document structure from the document's layout had been a goal of HTML from its inception in 1990. Tim Berners-Lee wrote his NeXT browser/editor in such a way that he could determine the style with a simple style sheet. However, he didn't publish the syntax for the style sheets, considering it a matter for each browser to decide how to best display pages to its users. In 1992, Pei Wei developed a browser called Viola, which had its own style sheet language.



However, the browsers that followed offered their users fewer and fewer options to influence the style. In 1993, NCSA Mosaic, the browser that made the Web popular, came out. Stylewise, however, it was a backward step because it only allowed its users to change certain colors and fonts.

Meanwhile, writers of Web pages complained that they didn't have enough influence over how their pages looked. One of the first questions from an author new to the Web was how to change fonts and colors of elements. At that time, HTML did not provide this functionality – and rightfully so. This excerpt from a message sent to the www-talk mailing list early in 1994 gives a sense of the tensions between authors and implementors:

*"In fact, it has been a constant source of delight for me over the past year to get to continually tell hordes (literally) of people who want to -- strap yourselves in, here it comes -- control what their documents look like in ways that would be trivial in TeX, Microsoft Word, and every other common text processing environment: "Sorry, you're screwed."*

The author of the message was Marc Andreessen, one of the programmers behind NCSA Mosaic. He later became a co-founder of Netscape, a company eager to fulfill the request of authors. On October 13, 1994, Marc Andreessen announced to www-talk that the first beta release of Mozilla (which later turned into Netscape Navigator) was available for testing. Among the new tags the new browser supported was center, and more tags were to follow shortly.

## The Trouble with Browsers

While CSS was still just a draft, Netscape had pressed on with presentational HTML elements like multicol, layer, and the dreaded blink tag. Internet Explorer, on the other hand, had taken to incorporating some of CSS piecemeal. But their support was spotty and, at times, incorrect. Which means that by the early aughts, after five years of CSS as an official recommendation, there were still no browsers with full CSS support. That came from kind of a strange place.

When Tantek Çelik joined Internet Explorer for Macintosh in 1997, his team was pretty small. A year later, he was made the lead developer of the rendering engine at the same as his team was cut in half. Most of the focus for Microsoft (for obvious reasons) was on the Windows version of Internet Explorer, and the Macintosh team was mostly left to their own devices. So Starting with the development of version 5 in 2000, Çelik and his team decided to put their focus where no one else was, CSS support.

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