

On Sunday, 10 November 2002 at 16:38:27 +1030, David Newall wrote:

“Greg ‘groggy’ Lehey” <grog@lemis.com> wrote:

Just because *I* don’t need an extra large font doesn’t change that some people do. However that was not my point. My point was that it doesn’t matter if the email renders slightly differently.

The trouble is, people carry that to extremes. Look at the illegibly mutilated mail that some people send, long, short, uneven quoting, etc. That’s their argument too.

I sense that the bulk of your objection relates to quoting. Certainly issues such as long or short lines disappear with HTML.

Not at all. They only disappear if you don’t care about the line length. In the last year I’ve been forced on occasion to use a Microsoft-based MUA. In order to display a number of things, I had to use it in full-screen mode. That meant, however, that the displayed lines were about 200 characters long, and there was nothing I could do about it.

In the same vein, that seems to be your only argument (that I could discern) against the different way email displays.

Well, it’s the only argument I’ve presented here, and it’s certainly the biggest one. If I thought about it, I’d probably come up with other ones. I don’t have an a priori objection to higher quality displays, but so few HTML displays are higher quality.

Having put some effort into this issue I don’t see it as insurmountable. The HTML enabled mail client can and should permit clearly text. Everyone’s unfavourate already does this by use of a side-bar. It’s not perfect, but as has been remarked many times, “you only have to make a project good enough to criticise.”

I’m not sure what you’re talking about here. I probably don’t know enough about everybody’s unfavourite to be able to understand. I didn’t know of any MUA which presents anything as a sidebar unless told to by the document content.

What I *would* support would be some other SGML-based format if:

No such thing. Even plain text makes no such guarantee.

For a certain level of identity, it does. You have to assume MTAs and MUAs which don’t perform their own mutilation, and you have to assume that the font is not important, but then it works.

And you have to use it according to convention, such as line breaks at column 70ish,

Line breaks are where I set them. Anything which changes that is messing with my formatting.

implying monospace fonts.

No, but agreed, that makes things easier. I can send you this message in proportional fonts (in fact, I’ve attached an earlier version of this message in a form which could be quite useful). The text width is 15 cm.

That’s not so different to the convention (which sadly isn’t yet widely understood) that HTML mail should be devoid of superfluous embedded objects.

Sorry, I’m missing again. What’s “that”?

Why do you oppose progress simply because it’s less than perfect?

I don’t. I oppose HTML because it’s a dead end.

I’m genuinely trying to see your point of view, but failing. Given that perhaps all of the faults that people make formatting plain text email are non-issues with HTML email,

That is by no means a given.

and given that you concede a need for something better, I wonder why you don’t describe how a good HTML agent could solve the one issue of yours that I do understand.

Basically, I did above: WYSIWIS. HTML breaks this, and badly.

I should imagine that quoted text could be quite clear if preceeded by the usual attribution line and enclosed in a cell with a different coloured background. A reasonable GUI agent should permit cut and paste, or intermingling new text.

How many colours can you distinguish? How many before you lose track of the sequence? How do you print them out? Here I see a total of five mail messages, indicated by the indentation. What colours would you assign to each of them, and why?

One of the reasons why I think that HTML is unpopular for email is that many long respected luminaries are also acting crusty.

People seldom pay much attention to the views of crusty old luminaries :-)

This encourages a belief that the subject needs no discussion; which in turn reduces incentive to innovate in the area of GUI tools.

It seems to me that the topic gets far more discussion than just about anything else I can think of.

I lament that our community leaders don't take a more positive approach. Simply saying that HTML is not the answer so we must stick to plain text is such a negative attitude, and quite stifling to innovation.

Saying that HTML is the answer is definitely stifling to innovation. If we have the answer, why change?

To repeat what I said earlier: I don't think that plain text is the be-all and end-all. But a replacement must be better. I've already suggested SGML markup as one example, but it would have to be a document type which doesn't throw away content.

Greg

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Finger grog@lemis.com for PGP public key

See complete headers for address and phone numbers