

Is the semantic web a failure?

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Although counter-intuitive at first sight, the concept of a failed semantic web takes shape at a closer examination. But first, a definition of the semantic web is in order; as it is accepted now, the semantic web is the next evolutionary step from 'Web 1.0', in which web pages generally lack semantic meaning and web pages are written in HTML which mixes presentation with content.

The advent of technologies such as XML and the XML version of HTML, XHTML were promising, since the line between content and presentation was clearly drawn. However, the fact that the semantic web was possible and desirable did not necessarily translate into it becoming a reality - there were still billions of web pages written in older versions of HTML, which prevented browsers from adopting a tougher stance towards badly written HTML code.

This pressure to assure backwards compatibility resulted in the continuing proliferation of web pages which do not respect the tenets of the semantic web, since there is little pressure to do so - the browsers are still forgiving. Even with pages which have the XHTML DTD, browsers will be less strict since many of them are not well-formed XML documents.

In conclusion, the semantic web remains an idea, a concept, rather than an accomplished fact. The realities of the web make it nearly impossible to achieve in practice, but nevertheless a useful concept which encourages best practices.