

# Best Practices Are Best ...Except When They're Not

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# Obligatory “About Me” Stuff

- Owner, Chief Consultant at South of Shasta
  - Software Development, Training, Design
- ColdFusion, C++, Java, jQuery, PHP, .NET, HTML5, Android, SQL, etc...
- Manager, SacInteractive User Group
- Reformed Video Game Developer (Grim Fandango, SimPark, StarWars Rogue Squadron, etc).
- Music Junkie



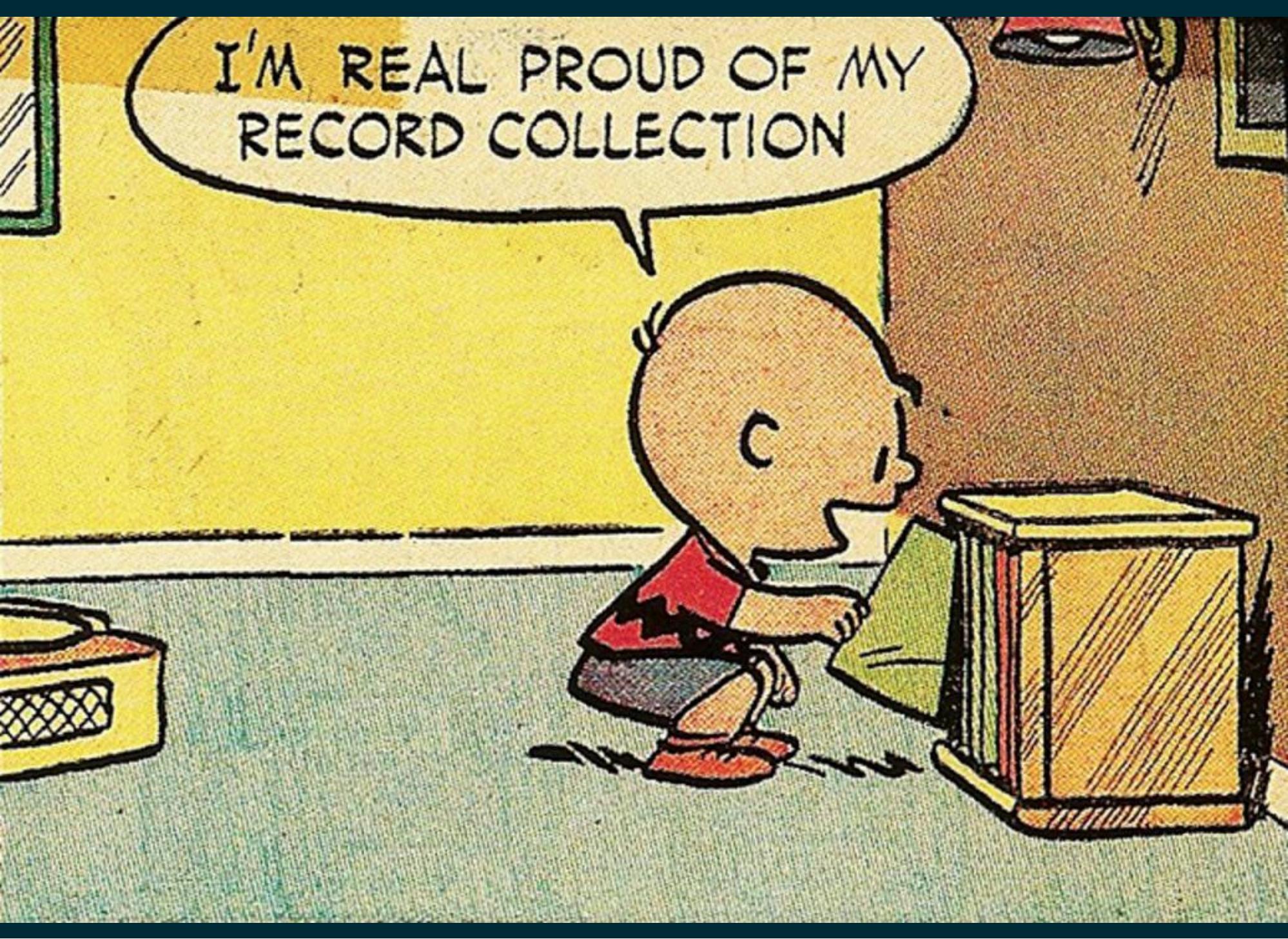








I'M REAL PROUD OF MY  
RECORD COLLECTION





# Today's Agenda

- What is a “Best Practice”?
- An Explanation of “Technical Debt”
- Sometimes I've Had to Break The Rules
- How To Fix Things Later
- Other Resources



# Questions? Ask'em!

- This might turn into a “round table” discussion.
- That's Okay.
- I'll “moderate” if need be.



# I run a consulting business

- Often includes taking over legacy projects.
- Can't always rebuild from scratch.
- Have to make decisions.
- Developers are paid to solve problems
- Does the client care how I solve it?
- What can I fix, given the resource constraints?



# I run a consulting business

- Some factors to consider:
  - Being able to draw a line in the sand.
  - Good. Cheap. Quick.  
Pick two.
  - The 80/20 Rule.



# I run a consulting business

- Make it *work* now and make it elegant in version 2 if need be.
- Do customers care *how* you did it? Or just *that* you did it?



# What is a “Best Practice”?

*Commercial or professional procedures  
that are accepted or prescribed as being  
correct or most effective.*



# What is a “Best Practice”?

- But it is still a practice
- The practice of medicine
- Because sometimes...it's wrong



# What is a “Best Practice”?

- Today's “Best Practice” is tomorrow's “Bad Idea”.
- Best Practices sometimes come and go quickly.
- Good Practices might be better than Best Practices sometimes.



# What is a “Best Practice”?

- Your mileage may vary – deadlines are real
- Client doesn't care what's recommended  
Just want it how they want it
- StackOverflow: “Well I would never do it THAT way!”
- Reality: sometimes you HAVE to do it THAT way



The client shows you their current website.

You both laugh at how terrible it is.

The website features a black background with numerous small, glowing yellow stars. In the upper left and right corners, there are two pieces of toast with lightning bolts through them. A large, stylized blue title 'Boyd's Toast Store!' is centered at the top. Below it, a yellow banner reads 'We sell GREAT toast - best on the world wide web!!!'. A red navigation bar contains links for 'Home', 'Toast', 'About Us', and 'Contact'. The main content area has purple text describing the store's history and quality, followed by a red statement about Godzilla. A speech bubble on the left says 'HAHA WHAT A PIECE OF CRAP! OUR LAST DESIGNER WAS AN IDIOT'. Another speech bubble on the right says 'For real! How did this happen?! This site is a crime against humanity'. At the bottom, there are two large, white, circular icons with black outlines, resembling eyes or speakers.

**Boyd's Toast Store!**

We sell **GREAT** toast - best on the world wide web!!!

[Home](#) [Toast](#) [About Us](#) [Contact](#)

Boyd's has been in business since 2003 selling toast which pretty much kicks your skull in it's so awesome. When you eat our toast, your mouth is taken on an enchanting journey of awe and wonder. If Godzilla shot flaming farts onto your bread - it wouldn't even come close to matching the awesomeness of our toast.

HAHA WHAT A PIECE OF CRAP! OUR LAST DESIGNER WAS AN **IDIOT**

CALL TODAY!!!!!!  
1-888-TOAST-UR-BUTT

For real! How did this happen?! This site is a crime against humanity



# You re-design the website.

It looks nice and works well. This is the high point of the design.

Boyd's  
**Toast**  
It's better than Godzilla farts!

Home Our Toast Who We Are Contact  
1-888-TOAST-UR-BUTT

**The Toast**  
Boyd's has been in business since 2003 selling toast which pretty much changed the world. When you eat our toast, your mouth is taken on an enchanting journey of awe and wonder.  
Go ahead, [take a bite.](#)

**A Little History**  
Matthew Boyd Inman was sitting in his kitchen one day eating bread. He thought to himself "This is super lame! I want this bread to be crunchy and delightful." From there Boyd's toast was born, starting a revolution that would change the world forever.  
[Read More](#)

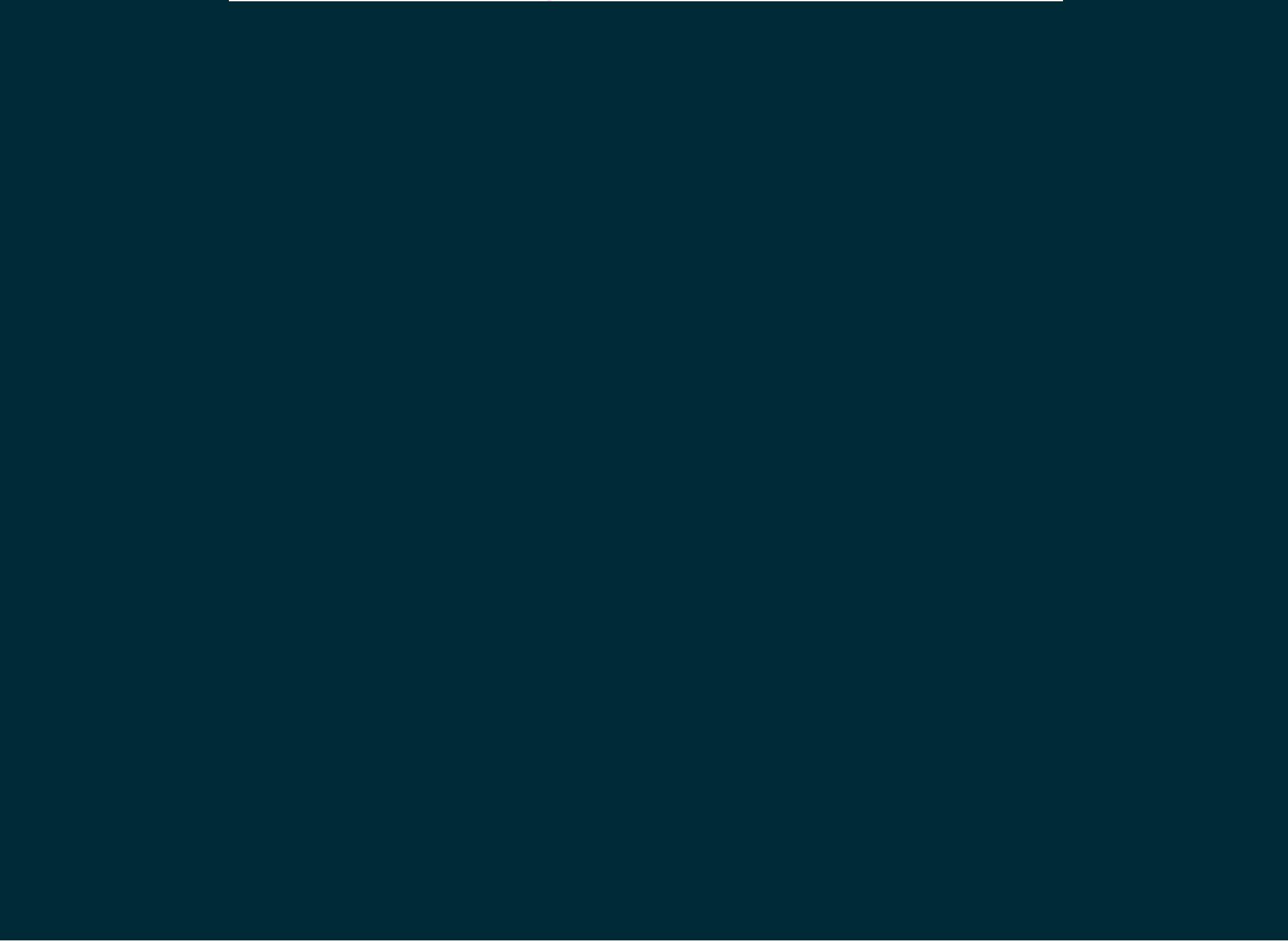
**The Experience**  
Imagine Godzilla unleashing a flaming fart onto some bread. Now imagine what the resulting toast would taste like, but ten thousand times better. That pretty much sums up the experience of having your mouth enchanted by our delicious toast. [View our flavors](#), you know you want to.

**The Flavors**  
**Burnt to Perfection**  
Some of us like our toast a little black.  
**Bacon Toast**  
Bacon plus anything equals amazing.  
**Wasabi Toast**  
Ask for a side of Ginger.  
**Lightning Toast**  
The only toast in the world which is struck by lightning  
[View More Flavors](#)

I love it! Looks amazing!  
I want to make love to it!

TA-DA!

But...



# An abomination is born

The client has completely forgotten that they hired you, the web designer, to build them a great product.

If you were an engineer designing the turbine of a commercial airplane,  
would they interfere then, I wonder?



Hello! Welcome to our websitel! I am miffles!  
I love treats and biscuits! LOL  
PS. My owner is a retard



## The Toast

Boyd's has been in business since 2003 selling toast which pretty much changed the world. When you eat our toast, your mouth is taken on an enchanting journey of awe and wonder. [Click here](#)



## A Little History

Matthew Boyd Inman was sitting in his kitchen one day eating bread. He thought to himself "This is super lame! I want this to be the best toast ever!" So he started experimenting with different ingredients and techniques. His first attempt was

## Flavors

[Burnt to Perfection](#)

[Bacon Toast](#)

[Lightning Toast](#)

[More Flavors](#)





# What is “Technical Debt”?

- No project is perfect
- Shortcuts are sometimes inevitable
- Shortcuts cause “Technical Debt”



# What is “Technical Debt”?

- A dam has a leak.
- Can stick a finger in the leak.
- Eventually you run out of fingers.
- Remove the brick and replace it.



*StackOverflow: Well, I would never do it  
that way!*

*These are the times that I had to do it  
that way.*



# Some real-world bad situations

- Don't do these things just because you don't know the right way.
- This is not an excuse to write bad code or use bad practices.
- Let's look at some stories...



*When might you use CFML  
Instead of CFScript?*



*When the client demands the ability to  
change HTML in the source code via FTP*

*...in Production!*



*ColdFusion: When I used  
CFForm/CFSelect on a recent project*

*...and it was the right thing to do*



*When an open source MVC framework  
wasn't the right answer*

*and “rolling my own” framework was the  
correct decision*



*Is emailing errors to the team always a  
bad idea?*

No.



# When the problem isn't in code

*So... my hands are completely tied and I have to change all of the URL strings that are passed with "Alter" in them (of which there are many) to "altr".*

-- Poor guy on a Google forum, recently



# When the problem isn't in code

- Find a stakeholder, outside of IT
- Communicate the issue
  - In a non-technical way
  - Users have a lesser experience
  - Magic phrase: “Lower click-thru rate”
  - Magic phrase: “Lower conversion rate”



# How To Fix Things Later

- Start small if you have to.
- Bootstrap: “works” fine in table-based websites. Minor side-effects, nothing crazy.
- jQuery can just “sit there” for later.
- LESS / SASS to refactor old CSS.



# How To Fix Things Later

- Source Control.
- Task tracking / ticket systems.
- Testing tools.
- Tools for automating.
- “I don't have time”.
  - 30 minutes a day works wonders! Seriously.



# How To Fix Things Later

- Don't be afraid to ask questions.
- Post on Google Groups, StackOverflow, whatever.
- Talk to people at the conference!



# How To Fix Things Later

- “But when I post on StackOverflow, I get yelled at for doing it wrong!”
- Senior Developer != Great Communicator
- <rant>”how to ask questions”</rant>



# Other Resources

- JoelOnSoftware.com
- Ben Nadel's blog
- "Secrets of the Rockstar Programmers"
- "Head First Java"
- "Head First Design Patterns"
- Any "Head First" books, really.



# Questions? Comments? Need Consulting? ;)

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Thanks!

