

THE **WEB NATIVE** DESIGNER

Paul Robert Lloyd

Geek in the Park
13 August 2011

WEB v NATIVE

- These two words **often appear in direct opposition**: Web v Native.
- ‘Native’ refers to designing custom experiences for specific (mobile) devices, taking advantage of the platforms they sit on.
- Omission of ‘native’ from the other side suggests this needn’t be true on the Web.

WEB
NATIVE

v

DEVICE
NATIVE

- Maybe we should **rephrase this argument?**
- Maybe it's just a pointless argument to have anyway!
- Can often be resolved simply with 'it depends'.

WEB & DEVICE NATIVE

- **Needn't choose** between one or the other.
- A **combination of approaches** can satisfy needs of any given project.
- **Understand the strengths of each** and use all to our advantage.

WEB NATIVE

- I want to talk about how we can take advantage of the web platform.
- **What does it mean to design for the web**, as a medium in its own right.



Photo by Robin Robokow
<http://flic.kr/p/AqLWt>

Happy 20th birthday!

- Last weekend the web celebrated it's **20th birthday**.
- Yet sometimes it feels we're losing our way.
- Have we forgotten what the web actual is?.

QUESTION

What are the three core web technologies?



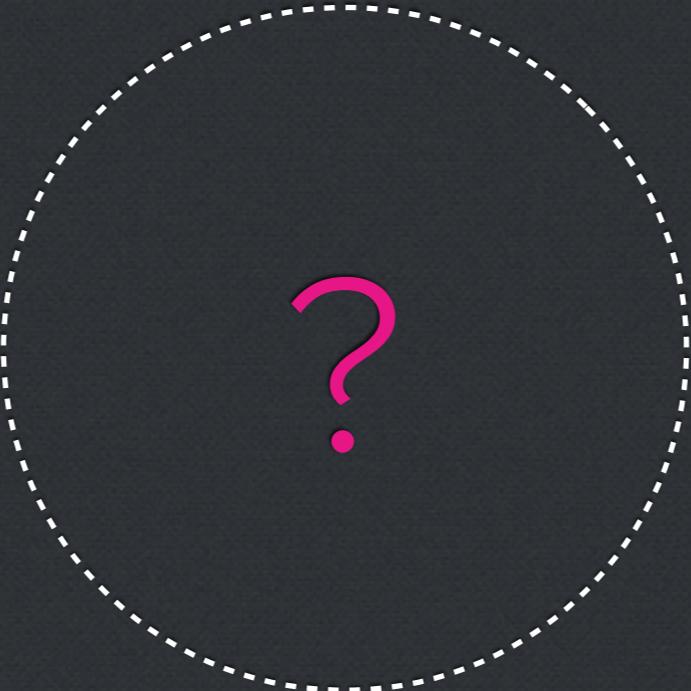
- Quick question.
- What three core technologies form the foundation of the web?

QUESTION

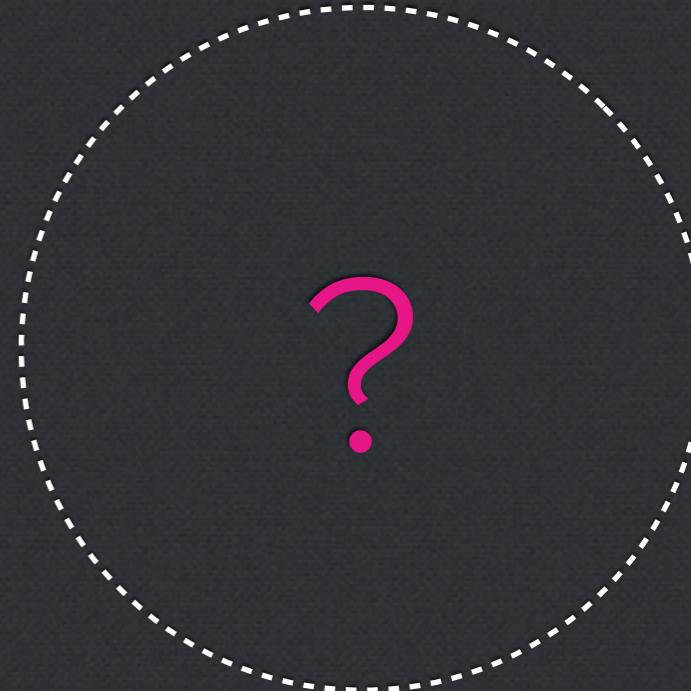
What are the three core web technologies?



HTML



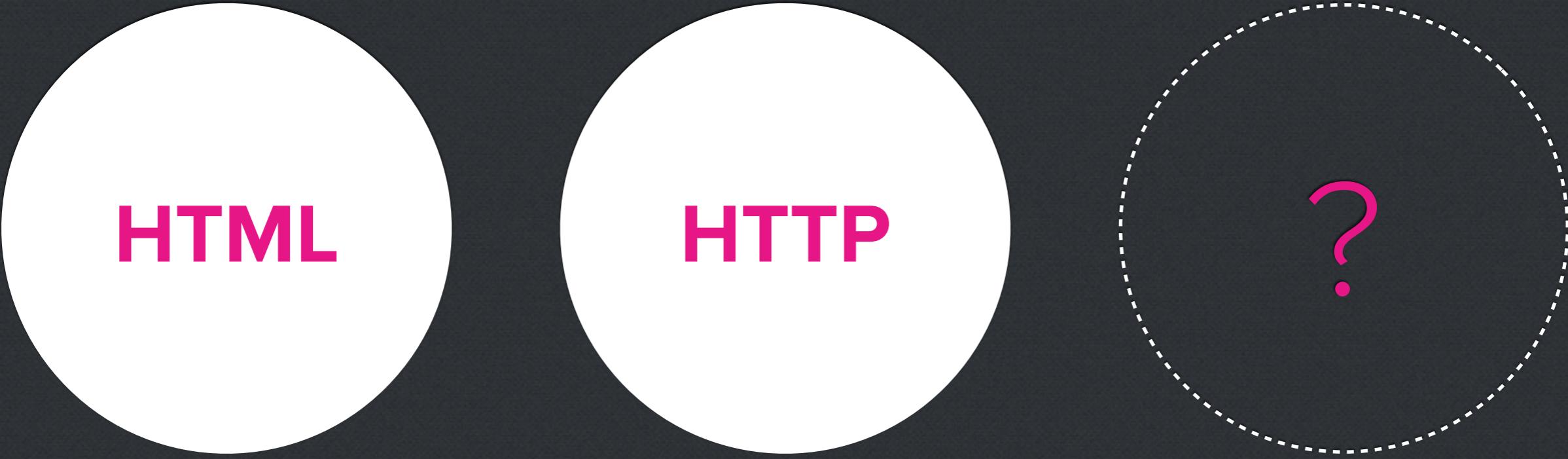
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QUESTION

What are the three core web technologies?



HTML

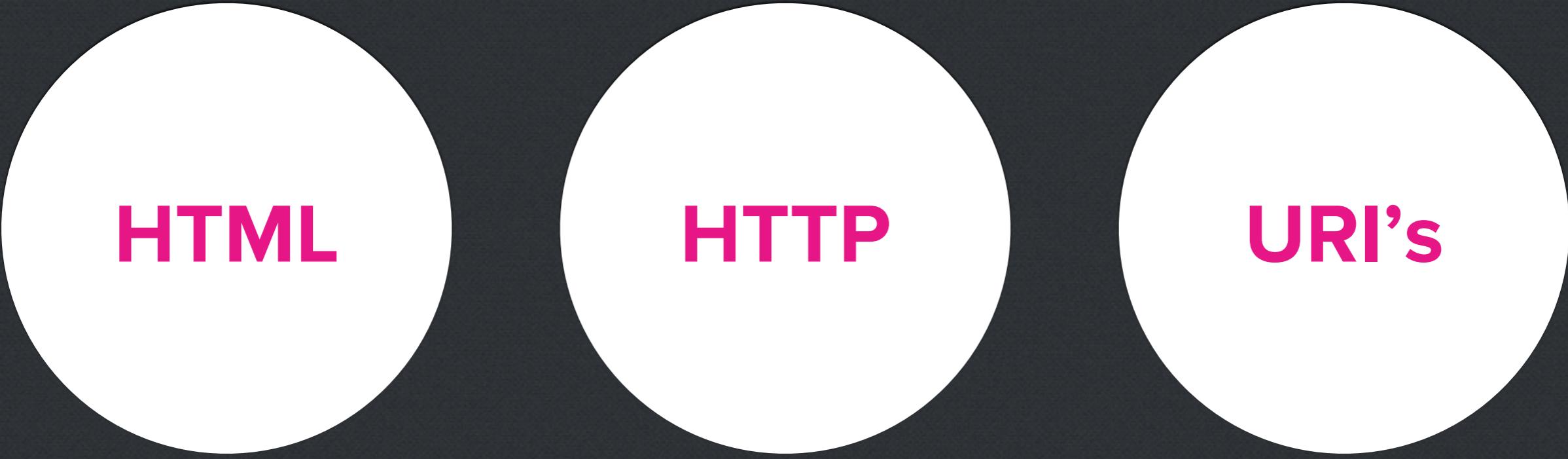
HTTP

?

- HTTP: The means of which HTML pages are transferred.

QUESTION

What are the three core web technologies?



HTML

HTTP

URI's

- URI: Allows you to follow a link, regardless of the content it leads to.
- Easy to get excited by new CSS techniques or the latest JavaScript frameworks.
- CSS and JS merely additions we can use for when pages appear in certain environments.

“

The primary design principle underlying the Web’s usefulness and growth is universality... it should be accessible from any kind of hardware that can connect to the Internet: stationary or mobile, small screen or large.

TIM BERNERS-LEE

Long Live the Web: A Call for Continued Open Standards and Neutrality

- Tim Berners-Lee recently wrote an article in Scientific American.
- Reminded us of Web’s key design principles.
- Primary principle ability to view on any device or platform, accessible by all users (now and in the future).

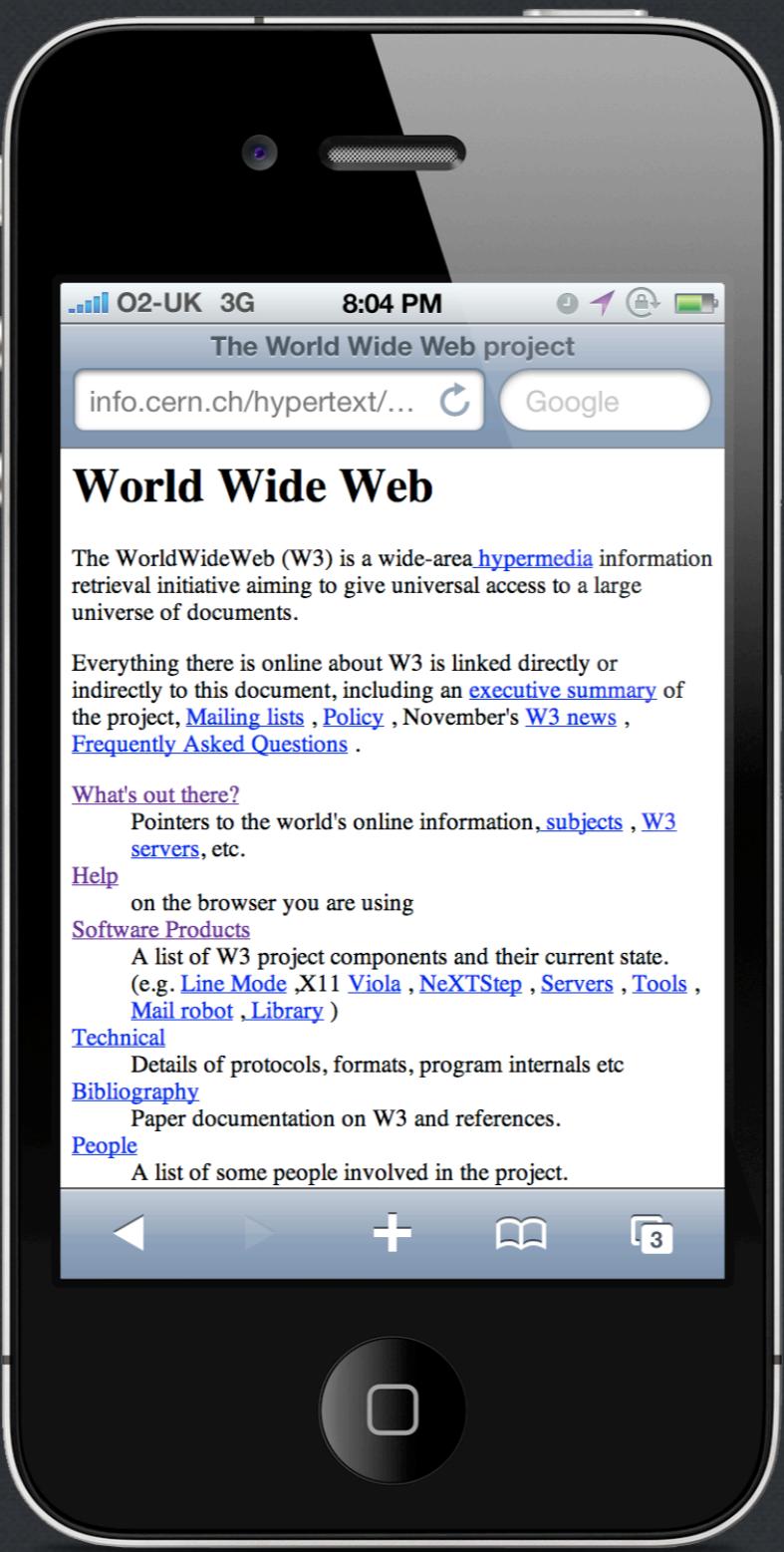
“

Want to know if your ‘HTML application’ is part of the web? Link me into it. Not just link me *to* it; link me *into* it. Not just to the black-box frontpage. Link me to a piece of content... That is the web: The beautiful interconnection of navigable content.

BEN WARD

Understand the web

- At its simplest, the web is linked addressable content.
- Sites may be built using web technologies, but if they can’t provide URLs that point to specific resources, if I can’t link to or bookmark content, they’re not part of the web.



Fully responsive!

- Here is the very first website, on an iPhone.
- A little embarrassing that it works better than most websites being built today.
- After twenty years, the web is a robust well supported platform.
- By using structured HTML, sites are accessible, responsive and cross platform **by default**.

BAD EXAMPLES

- Often those services cited as great examples of the web that are breaking it.
- Twitter has a JavaScript dependant URL scheme.
- Facebook (and Disqus) are dependant on JavaScript for their ‘social plugins’.
- Huge holes are appearing in the fabric of the Web.

“

As of August 1st, we will discontinue support for the following browsers and their predecessors: Firefox 3.5, Internet Explorer 7, and Safari 3. In these older browsers you may have trouble using certain features and **eventually these apps may stop working entirely.**

VENKET PANCHAPAKESAN (GOOGLE)

Our plans to support modern browsers across Google Apps

- Google has now removed support for Apps/Gmail in older browsers.
- What is an e-mail application but lists, input fields, textareas and submit buttons?
- Oversimplifying, but if Google's products were built using Progressive Enhancement, then announcements like this needn't be made.
- There was much **celebration from web developers** to this news.
- But shouldn't it have been met with consternation?



- Anything you do with CSS and JavaScript risks minimising web's native adaptability.
- Let's look at the tools we're using everyday and see how we can enhance that flexibility.

HTML

Content

- Let's start at the beginning with this foundational layer.



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Published on Monday, 28 March
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- I recently designed my website.
- This is how it may appear a typical web browser.

The Brasilia Palace Hotel -- Paul Robert Lloyd (p1 of 4)

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Arrival

Your taxi having parked directly beneath the slender building, you are greeted by two understated glass doors that slide open and invite you to enter. Descending a long shallow ramp you soon arrive in the lobby which sits under a low hanging mezzanine. If you've visited many of Niemeyer's other buildings, you'll know that such an entrance is a common feature, yet it is an architectural trick that works surprisingly well.

After checking in and taking the swift lift ride up to your floor, you arrive in a spacious lobby area, decorated with wood panelling and furnished with a pair of chairs carefully selected to evoke the building's style. Finding your room is easy; there are only two corridors to choose from and rooms are numbered sequentially. Long corridors are familiar ground in hotels but here they are accentuated on one side, illuminated by daylight filtered through angled shades that adorn the front of the building. Retiring to your room feels efficient yet relaxing.

Period furniture

— press space for next page —

Arrow keys: Up and Down to move. Right to follow a link; Left to go back.
H)elp O)ptions P)rint G)o M)ain screen Q)uit /=search [delete]=history list

- But this is my website too!
- We often think of the web as a visual medium.
- Websites can be viewed in anything from a text browser like Lynx, or services like Instapaper/Readability.
- These purposely strip away any visual design—and people prefer these stripped down views.

CONTENT

- Without any visual design or layout constraints, where do we start?
- **Content is the only constant** we have.
- Content doesn't have any device dependancies (media descriptions).
- It's the single thing that defines your mark-up.
- Ultimately it's **the thing we're delivering to our users**, so it better be good.

“

In order to embrace designing native layouts for the web – whatever the device – we need to shed the notion that we create layouts from a canvas in. We need to flip it on its head, and create layouts from the content out.

MARK BOULTON

A Richer Canvas

- Mark Boulton talks about designing from the content out.
- You may have seen this quote already.

CONTENT FIRST

- Think about content first; **content give us our constraints.**
- “What’s a good size for this text?”
- “How long can this line go before it comes too difficult to read?”
- “What’s the best way to present this product information?”
- “What’s the essential information I need here?”
- “What pieces of content aren’t flexible; ad units/info-graphics for example”
- **Content can form the basis of our design.**

TIP

Design with real content.

- Rather than designing ‘buckets’ for future content, temporarily filled with Lorem Ipsum, I use real content wherever possible.
- If I don’t have real content, I use something representative.
- This can spark discussion about whether it’s appropriate, gets clients focused on content.
- Design with real content and you’re presented with the horrible realities (long usernames, columns of text without matching heights).
- Let content be your guide.

css

Presentation

- Of course, when available, the presence of visual design can help express your brand, improve readability and create the right mood and expectations.
- Yet be mindful that adding this layer risks breaking the web's native adaptability.

RESPONSIVE DESIGN

- That's why developments like Responsive Web Design are so encouraging.
- Now we can create designs can adapt to meet differing devices.
- Question: Does everyone understand what I mean when I say this?



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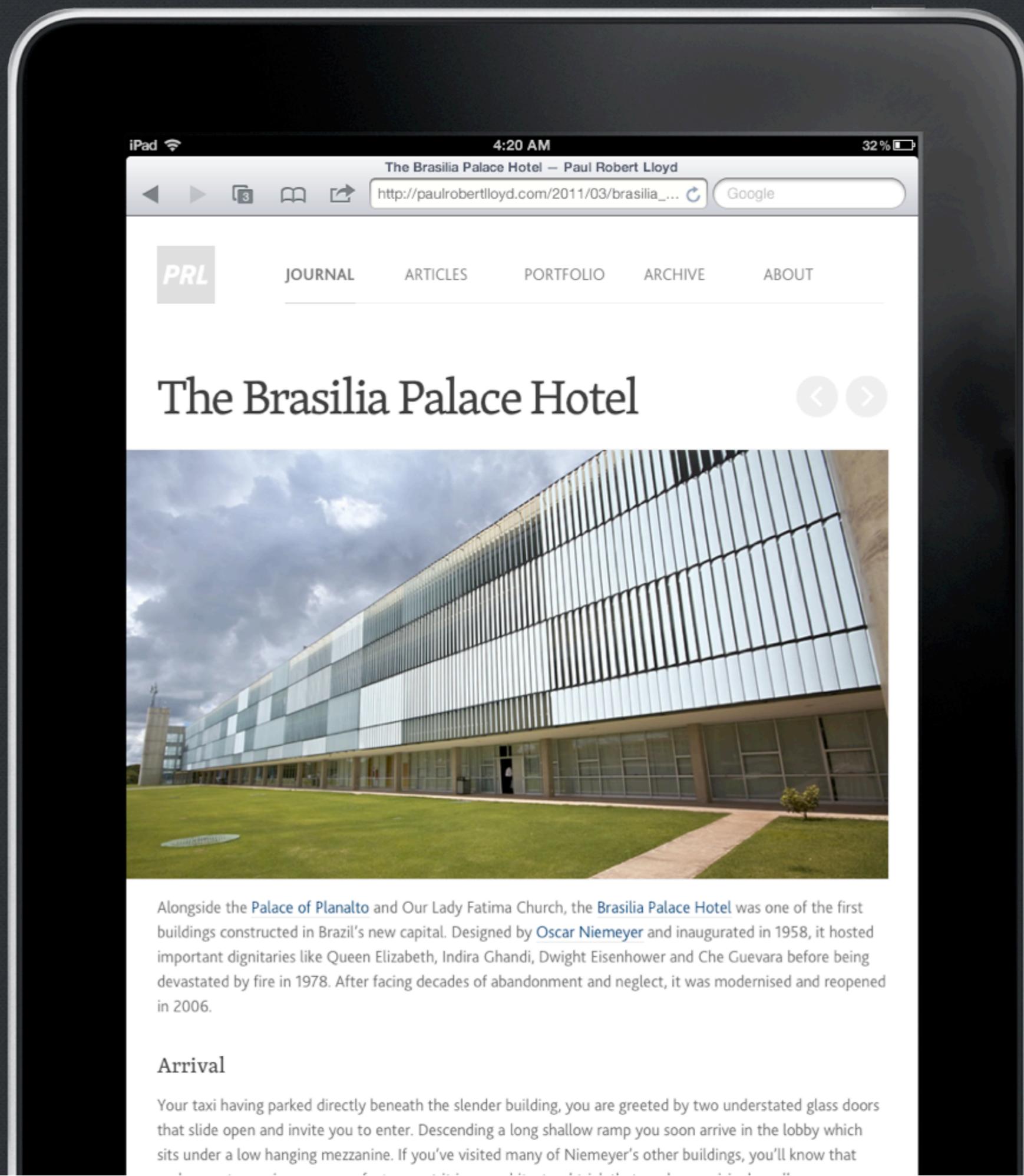


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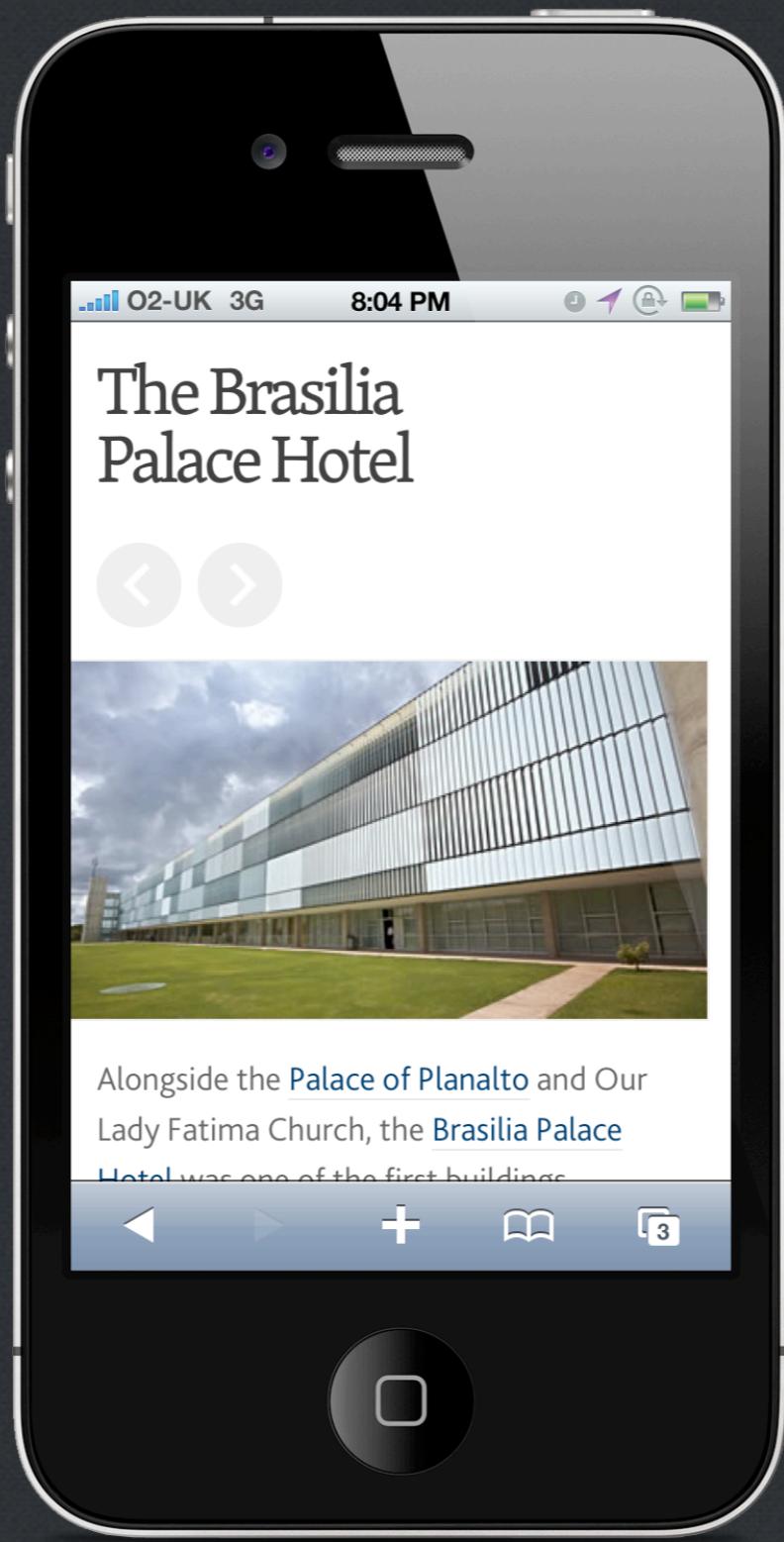
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- Here's my website again.



- Here it is on the iPad.



- Here it is on an iPhone.
- Apologies for using only Apple products, they just look nicer!

CONTEXT

- As we create more adaptive experiences we're running into questions of context.
- Scenarios.
- Mobile users: on the move using low bandwidth small screen devices?
- Desktop users: time rich and are connected to fast broadband connection?
- New devices like tablets, and various means of connecting to the network making it harder to judge. e.g. Using an iPad in front of the TV.
- Our preconceived notions of mobile context are now out-of-date.

“

Mobile users want to see our menu, hours and delivery number.

Desktop users definitely want this 1Mb PNG of somebody smiling at a salad.

MAT ‘WILTO’ MARQUIS

Tweeted on 27 April 2011

- I like this quote.
- In fact it’s our existing desktop experiences, gorging on large screen estate and presumed super-fast network connections are the ones requiring optimisation.
- Have we been adding content just to fill increasing space?
- Look to simplify, but be careful not to remove content or functionality based on false assumptions.

NO SILVER BULLET

- Realise that Responsive Web Design isn't a silver bullet.
- Chiefly concerned with layout (media queries can only query display attributes).
- Input methods, bandwidth and even the environment are also important.
- These are harder to test for. Some may never be known.

TIP

Experiment and share your findings.

- Easy to think that Responsive Design is a new technique, an add-on to existing process.
- Indeed many people experimenting with it on small sites and their own blogs.
- **Field test your design** on as many devices (browser resizing doesn't cut it).
- As we use this techniques on larger sites, going to run into issues (i.e. navigation).
- Learn from native platforms too. My current work on iPad applications is informing my approach to certain aspects of web design (expectations around touch based UI).

TIP

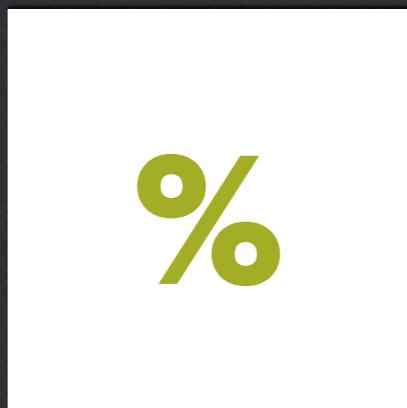
Beware of fixed or device specific values.



PRINT



SCREEN



WEB



- Bonus tip!
- If we're designing for a universal medium accessible on any device, using specific pixel values of common hardware seems short-sighted (320 and up).
- My general rule is to be wary of mentions of fixed values or types of device.
- We can optimise for certain values if we know them to be popular, but not base underlying design decisions on them. Breakpoints.
- Maybe we can think of certain units applicable to certain media?

JavaScript

Behaviour

- JavaScript allows us to drastically improve websites, giving them device native-like experiences.
- Yet this is often the layer that is breaking the web most, as developers start building products from this layer in.
- Perhaps we're making these mistakes as we're trying to make the web behave more like the desktop?

THE MISBEHAVING BEHAVIOURAL LAYER

- High percentage numbers for those with **JavaScript enabled** not the full story.
- **Applications that disregard visual design** likely to strip it of any behaviour too.
- What happens when faced with **low bandwidth or poor connectivity**?
- JavaScript may be supported, but that's not to say it will always load (code errors).

TIP

Think of enhancements not fallbacks.

- Rather than think of fallbacks, should be thinking of enhancements.
- Maps are a good example. Nearly every map provider allows for embedding of static maps. Include this in your page first (content first).
- Only the presence of working JavaScript is this then replaced with an interactive version.
- The BBC takes this approach seriously. Often they create server-side solutions, that are then replaced client-side if JavaScript is available.

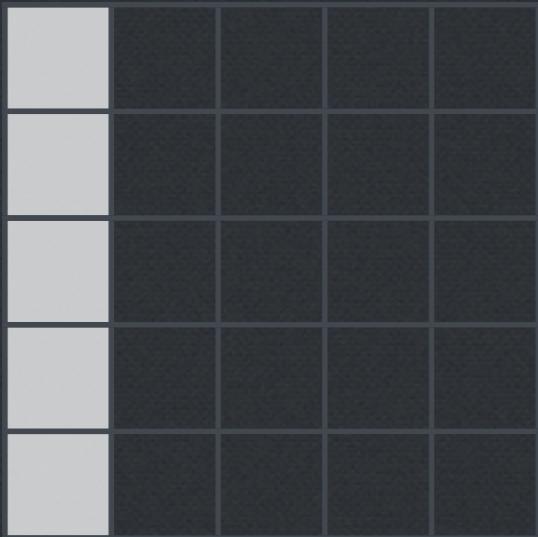
Erm...

I thought this talk was about design?

- So far talked about HTML, CSS, JavaScript... I thought this talk was about design?
- It is! All these factors require design thought.
- Again, the web is not solely a visual medium.
- The design of your URL scheme is just as important as any page layout.

DEVELOPERS = DESIGNERS

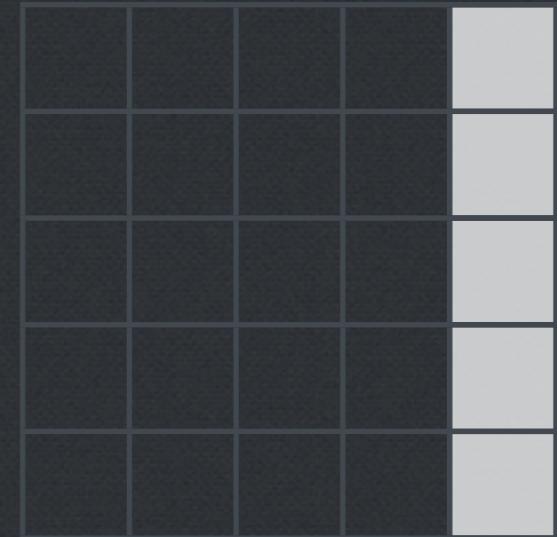
- Most exciting aspect of responsive design is how it effects the design process.
- We need to stop thinking in terms of separate roles.
- Designers over here, the developers over there.
- These two terms are interchangeable; a graphic designer can develop a design language, a developer may design a database schema.



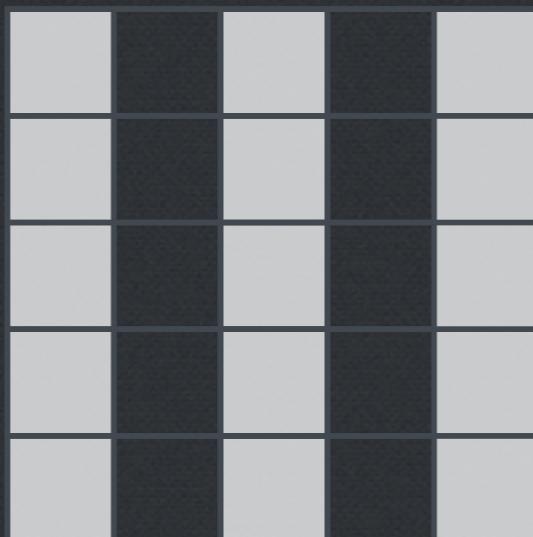
USER EXPERIENCE
DESIGNER



INTERACTION
DESIGNER

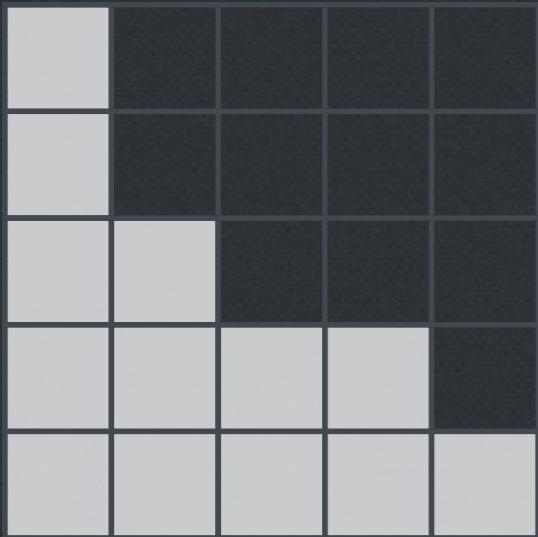


FRONT-END
DEVELOPER

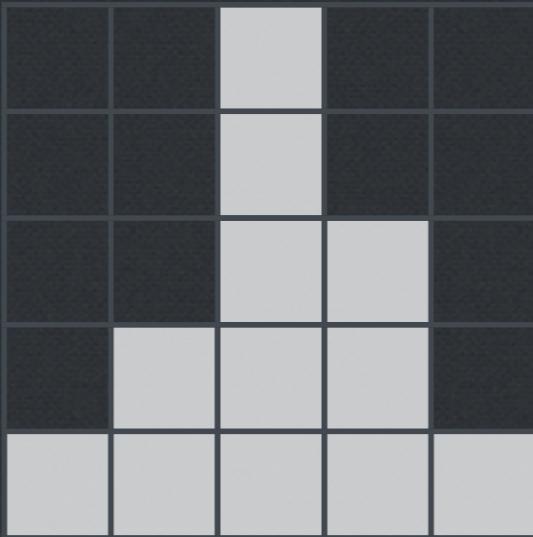


ENTIRE TEAM

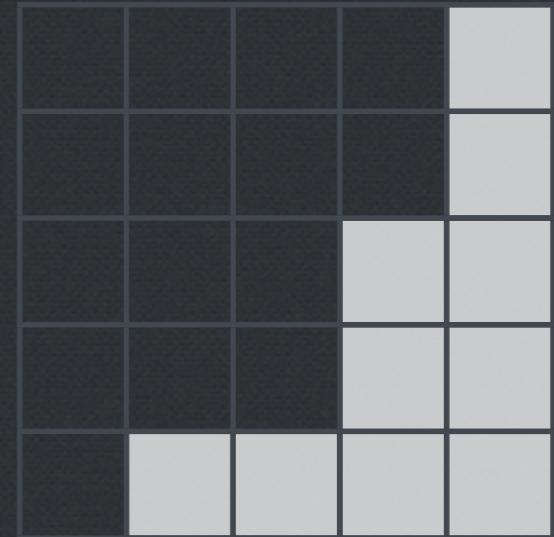
- Focused and narrow skill-sets mean gaps in understanding can appear between different members of your team.
- As we start to build websites that scale across devices, so it becomes harder to work in isolation.



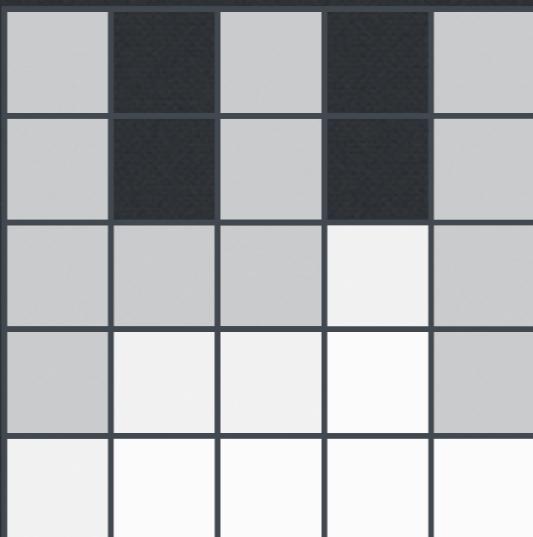
USER EXPERIENCE
DESIGNER



INTERACTION
DESIGNER



FRONT-END
DEVELOPER



ENTIRE TEAM

- Look to increase our range of skills; learn from the people working around you.
- ‘Generalist specialists’ or ‘T-shaped’ meaning tall and broad.
- Discussion around different problems and solutions can be more fruitful.

“

Being T-shaped means you can shift yourself and **provide value at just about any stage or type of project**—like sketching, wire-framing, visual design, and code.

MARK OTTO

Fatten those T's

- Mark Otto recently wrote about ‘T-shaped’ designers.
- Design process needs to become more collaborative.
- At the beginning of projects with clients and throughout timeline of a project.
- Designers need to work in tandem with developers.

TIP

Only use static images to aid collaboration.

- The casualty of this revised process needs to be the static image comp.
- Not enough information to design a website with and never was.
- Fireworks still useful for brainstorming and thinking about visual design, but should only be used as part of a larger collaborative process.
- Think about other tools that can make you more content focused (PDD's, Mobile First).
- Only through iteration, testing, trial and error—Involving both designers and developers—can we hope to build the products we aspire to create.

This is hard!

(That's what she said)

- Designing for the such an adaptable medium isn't easy, but can be really satisfying.
- Accept the challenge and stop searching for shortcuts.
- Increasing number and variety of internet-connected devices.
- So design for the web as it was intended and benefit from its native adaptability.
- We need to build our products upon strong foundations; HTML, HTTP and URLs.
- That foundation can only be strengthened by feeding it better content.

Thank-you.

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- Thank-you!