



Is That a Sherpa on Your Shoulder?

Aaron Gustafson
Group Manager, The Web Standards Project
Principal, Easy Designs LLC

**What
happened
to WaSP?**

We started out by
spreading the word to
anyone who'd listen.



We led browser upgrade campaigns.



We took browsers to
task for their sins
against web standards.



We goaded software developers into embracing standards.



In many ways you could say we won the battle over web standards.



So why are so many web sites still built without using web standards?



We've been preaching to the converted.

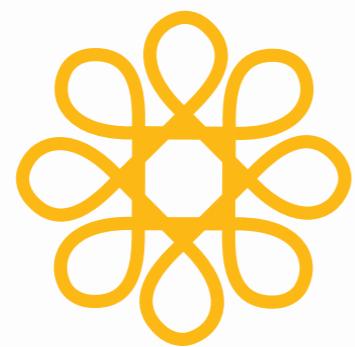


There are a lot
of people we
haven't reached.



But we want to change that.





WaSP

INTERact

interact.webstandards.org





biz.webstandards.org
(coming soon)





WEB STANDARDS
SHERPA





WEB STANDARDS **SHERPA**

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Journeying towards best web practices.

[ABOUT](#)

PREVIOUSLY
[Improving the Tweet Box](#)
by [Aaron Gustafson](#)

THIS WEEK

Stop Hiding Behind Products

by [Jared Spool](#)



Jared recounts why Products, a generic label commonly found on websites' main navigation, may not actually help a potential customer find what they want.

[BEGIN THE CLIMB →](#)

COMING NEXT
[Making Donations Easier](#)
by [Dan Rubin](#)

[SEE ALL REVIEWS →](#)

TOP DISCUSSIONS

3 How are you making sure your content isn't hidden behind generic labels?

THOUGHTS POSTED: 1



[Aaron Gustafson said:](#)

I completely agree that we should be more explicit in our labeling, but I always find myself having a hard time coming up with more explicit labels when the contents of a given section of a site are only generally related. For the Snow Melters,...



Feed Shirley!
SUBMIT A SITE FOR REVIEW

LOOKING FOR SOMETHING?

TOPICS

[SEARCH](#)



“Web Standards Sherpa’s experts provide helpful, pragmatic and up-to-date advice on best practices for web professionals everywhere.





Limit your usage to two fonts (three at the absolute most) to help viewers focus on the words, not how many different fonts are saying them.



Good design, when it's done well,
becomes invisible. It's only when it's
done poorly that we notice it.





Webstandards.org: Context & Audience on the Homepage

No. 1 → 24 FEBRUARY 2011 | [Content](#)

The **Web Standards Project** is a grassroots coalition fighting for standards which ensure simple, affordable access to web technologies for all.

Recent Buzz

HTML5? Check. Accessible HTML5? Um...
By Aaron Gustafson | February 1st, 2011

The Paciello Group and others are examining the accessibility of HTML5 implementations across the current slate of browsers. Their findings are a little disheartening.

In a recent blog post, Steve Faulkner of the Paciello Group began to examine how HTML5, which is supposed to help improve the accessibility of web sites and applications, is being exposed to assistive technologies. The current state of things, as documented on [HTML5Accessibility.com](#), leaves a considerable amount to be desired.

The current accessibility support implemented in browsers lags behind their implementations of the sexy new features themselves. These are

Current WaSP Projects

InterAct: Web Standards Curriculum
InterAct is a living, open curriculum based upon web standards and best practices, designed to teach students the skills of the web professional.

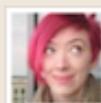
Small Business Outreach
WaSP's Small Business Outreach Committee seeks to broaden the reach of web standards by informing small businesses about best practices in commissioning and building websites.

Small Business Update
A while back I announced WaSP's new small business outreach effort and, thanks to your help, we've been making great progress.

By Aaron Gustafson | August 5th, 2010

Content strategy is the practice of planning for, designing, and managing content in the long term. It can help you avoid all sorts of trouble, even if you're not a big company with thousands of employees. All organizations need smart content structure, rules, and governance plans so, to make the most of your content, you can source it in the best possible ways.

YOUR SHERPA



Erin Kissane

Erin Kissane is a content strategist and editor who has been doing some kind of web content work since Netscape Navigator 2.01 was an awesome browser.

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HASHTAG: #sherpa1

TALK

How do you handle content challenges beyond initial creation?

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STANDARD FACT

2002 CPN.com opt-in standard and CEN standard



Each of these content chunks includes a linked heading, a blurb about the project, a linked subhead, and a blurb that appears to deal with a particular aspect of the project. Three of these smaller blurbs also include an author attribution and posting date.

So far, so good. Now let's take it apart.

Easy fix: consistency

The most obvious content-related problem in this area of the page is one of inconsistency. Although the presentation of the four project sections is consistent, a quick reading of the content reveals several irregularities in the content of the topical blurbs:

- “InterAct” is also spelled “InterACT”—and more importantly, it seems to be part of two different projects in ways that are a bit confusing.
- The four topical blurbs use three different points of view (first person plural, first person singular, and third person).
- Some topical blurbs lack author attributions and dates.

InterAct: Web Standards Curriculum

InterAct is a living, open curriculum based upon web standards and best practices, designed to teach students the skills of the web professional.

InterAct Learning Tracks

The InterAct curriculum framework has 6 learning tracks. Adapt and reuse our resources. Contribute your own content and ideas.



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The topical blurbs are inconsistent.

These minor inconsistencies are easy to miss—especially when a site grows organically and without formal structural oversight. But even these small shifts in style and point of view can be confusing to readers, and they detract from the visitor's sense of a unified, organized brand.

The implementation-level fix for this problem is to go in and make these pieces consistent by adding or removing information, and standardizing editorial style in the blurbs. But although that's useful, it's a one-time repair that won't do anything to help keep the site consistent in the future. So after they fix up the specific, it would be smart for WaSP to:



but solving this well will produce real rewards. WaSP needs to be clear about who these chunks of content are for, and what they're supposed to accomplish. Only then can the content creators write and publish content that includes appropriate contextual cues and useful suggestions on what to do next. This means if the intended audience includes non-insiders, the site should make stronger attempts to contextualize WaSP's projects in inviting ways.



GOING THE EXTRA MILE

If you're working with more than one or two content creators, you may want to establish a style guide to serve as a reference for consistent language use, and give it to all content creators and editors. While you're at it, consider creating an editorial calendar that shows what content will be published when, along with interim check-ins and reviews as needed. It won't force you (or your writers) to write, but it can really help keep things organized—which can, in turn spur actual content creation.

Finally, if you're working with lots of content creators—or if you have dozens or more pages of content—consider making [content templates](#) to help define and maintain the substance of your content, as well as its style.



PITFALLS TO AVOID

- Avoid creating public-facing content that focuses on internal goings-on without first inviting site visitors to understand why this information matters.
- Skip internal jargon and special titles for things and ideas that can be explained using simpler terms.
- Don't ignore minor inconsistencies in style and presentation—they add up to create an impression of a fragmented organization or brand.



THINGS TO DO

- Define a clear audience (or audiences) for the content of the site, and of the front page: who is the content for?
- Define the purpose of each page and major chunk of content: what is the audience meant to learn or do?
- Convey information in terms that are helpful to these audiences, whether those terms match internal language or not.
- Make realistic plans for updating your content, and design your site to embrace these plans, instead of fighting with them.
- Standardize presentation of like content—including information architecture, visual design as well as editorial style.



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FURTHER READING

- Jonathan Kahn, "[Content Strategy for the Web Professional](#)", Lucid Plot, 9 September 2009
- Kristina Halvorson, "[The Discipline of Content Strategy](#)", A List Apart, 16 December 2008
- Jeffrey MacIntyre, "[Audit, Plan, Build, Grow: A Methodology for Content Strategy](#)", Web Content 2010, 16 April 2010

How do you handle content challenges beyond initial creation?

[TELL US →](#) [SEE WHAT OTHERS SAY →](#)

Web Standards Sherpa's experts provide helpful, pragmatic and up-to-date advice on best practices for professionals everywhere.

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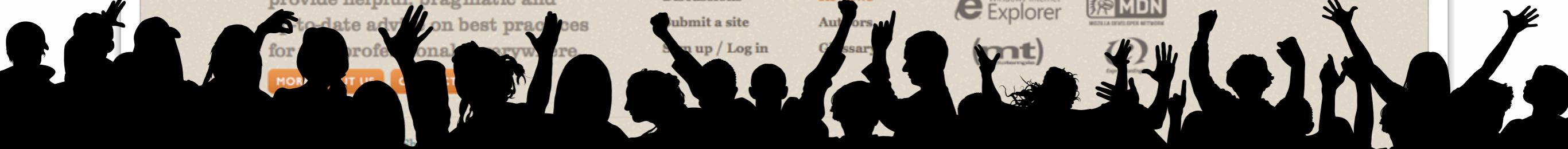
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Thank you.

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