## Some standard sources for web designers about coding practices

https://alistapart.com/ - especially in the 2000s. Closely linked to Jeffrey Zeldman, who also was the public face of the Web Standard Project (https://www.webstandards.org/) to get all browsers to interpret CSS correctly. Pushed for the adoption of CSS in early 2000s and then began to look more closely at UX once the coding 'battles' were over. Later set up A Book Apart (https://abookapart.com/) publisher and An Event Apart (https://aneventapart.com/) conferences, so still tends to set a lot of the agenda for web development/design.

https://www.smashingmagazine.com/ - has taken over somewhat from ALA, also runs conferences and publishes books about web design/development practice.

https://css-tricks.com/ - started as CSS only but also covers the rise of JavaScript (e.g. React, Vue.js and other client-side coding practices that allow you to create apps/complex interactions in the browser like google maps or facebook).

## A personal history of web tracking

The first things I used were nedstats in 2002? to just see how many people were visiting my blog. This was just a JavaScript snippet - I think for many web developers our relationship to tracking is just a line or two of code that people tell us to add - we aren’t really curious about what it does, it’s just 'add this to get something useful'.

Later on bloggers discovered referrer logs which told you which links (usually from other blogs) were bringing traffic to your site. These were simple scripts implemented in PHP usually. There was also a short period of people creating tracking/statistics solutions as products they would sell to other bloggers to install on their own servers - thinking of Shaun Inman’s mint here (https://haveamint.com/). The big change was google analytics going free - everyone added that and a few bloggers also added google ads (https://daringfireball.net/2003/06/drop\_a\_dime). I’ve never found google analytics to be very easy to use though, so it’s there and running but it never gave me as much useful information as the community developed resources did.

The growth of content managed websites (eg Wordpress, Drupal), where there is a ‘theme’ controlling the global header and footer of each page’s HTML does make it much easier to add tracking to all pages of a website as you can just paste the code into the template and then rebuild/republish the whole site - it’s surprising how many big sites aren’t that easy to make global changes to as different sections of the site are owned by different business functions and are using older/newer back-end code.

With the growth of RWD there was and is a growing focus on ‘web performance’ where third-party code is often pointed out as the culprit when sites load slowly - Harry Roberts is a big name in this field (https://csswizardry.com/2018/05/identifying-auditing-discussing-third-parties/). This is also reflected in the instrumentation provided to web developers within the chrome and Firefox web developer tool where the browser will show what’s loading in what order and how long it takes (https://developers.google.com/web/tools/chrome-devtools/network).

There are also relevant ideas explored in industry literature like *Mobile First* by Luke Wroblewski (2011) which encourage web people to really slim down sites (https://abookapart.com/products/mobile-first) - as does the move towards thinking about UX and specialised UX people being an important part of any redesign.

For e-commerce - for non-backend developers this was pretty difficult until things like woo-commerce became part of WordPress, Shopify launched, and Stripe made it really easy to take payments if you wanted to build stuff yourself. So I would definitely see a split in the amount of resources you would need to create a successful e-commerce site as before and after those utilities became mainstream.

The idea of tracking people from one site to another isn’t anything that occurred to me back then - I wanted to know how many people were visiting my site and where they were coming from - cookies were only used to keep sessions alive for admin panels to update databases, etc. It was only facebook that started to make me realise this sort of things was happening.

For the sites I worked on professionally in the 2010s tracking was added to particular pages of a bigger site on a per-campaign basis, part of an assemblage that would include email campaigns, off-line ads and flash or HTML 5 banner ads. It was really difficult to find useful information about how to build banner ads - it's kind-of web agency-only knowledge - there aren't any blogs or books about how to build these things. There is the IAB (https://www.iabuk.com/) but that's about it.

I did also start to use google analytics a fair bit to track 'events' - you add code (e.g. https://www.searchenginewatch.com/2018/03/19/how-to-set-up-event-tracking-in-google-analytics/ - in the source it's anything starting ga('send', 'event'...) with the information you send to google) to particular HTML elements to see if people click on an important ‘order now’-type button, and we did install something called crazy egg (which has been around for a while: https://www.crazyegg.com/) to create heat maps and generally track clicks. There are also products out there that can record, reconstruct and play back entire user sessions on your site - they are quite creepy (like https://www.hotjar.com/).

For all these the sell for developers is ‘just add this line of JavaScript and get all this!’ - what that JavaScript is actually doing is really difficult to reconstruct and you don’t get many clues from the people selling the software.