

HTML5

There has been a lot of talk in web design circles round HTML5 especially with regarding it being seen to take over from Flash and Apple's very vocal support for it. This paper seeks to broadly inform on the main issues for non-technical people and includes a rationale for our stance on it at this time within our applications.

First of all what actually is HTML5?

HTML (it stands for Hypertext Markup Language) used to be developed under the auspices of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). However some members of the consortium were not happy with the direction the W3C was taking HTML. Broadly they felt that the W3C was not paying enough attention to real-world development needs and focusing too much on XML and XHTML. So they formed a new group called WHATWG (Web Hypertext Application Technology Working Group). They were the ones who developed a new specification of HTML - HTML 5.



Why is it important?

One of the problems with the web is ensuring that web applications behave and perform in the same manner on different browsers as well as providing common standards that allow new features and facilities to be provided for web applications.

HTML5 promises to provide more facilities that will work within your web browser and without the need for additional plug-ins. An example of this is Flash. You can think of Flash as a software toolkit that displays video, graphics and animation. It used to be very much the benchmark for using any moving graphics within web applications. However it was by no means perfect and very much relied on users having the right Flash version installed on their browser. HTML5 allows much of the animation/ video features of Flash to be done more reliably within the web browser with no need for any plug-in. The idea is HTML5 graphics will work in every browser that supports it.

Apple is probably the most vocal critic of Flash and its iOS operating system for the iPhone and iPad does not have Flash support included within it. However iOS and the supplied Safari web browser does support the emerging HTML5 standards. This means that if you want to provide fancy graphic animations on the web for iPhone users you need to develop with HTML5 in mind.

Is everyone supporting HTML5?

In summary, No. At least, not everyone is supporting it equally and at the same pace. In fact it gets even more complicated as the standard is not yet fully complete so none of the browsers can be regarded as being 100% compatible with every aspect. This will come of course, however for now designing sites for HTML5 requires a pragmatic approach that includes assuming many users will not have very compatible HTML5 browsers.

You can test your web browsers compatibility with HTML5 by going to the following site:
<http://html5test.com/>

From what we have seen and as of writing this paper the major browsers performed under this test as follows. The test scores out of a maximum of 400 points.

Safari 5.0 (Mac) scored 301/400

Chrome 10.0 (PC) scored 302/400

Firefox 4.0 (PC) scored 209/400

Internet Explorer 8.0 (PC) 32/400

Internet Explorer 9.0 (PC) 141/400

From the scores above you can see that support is quite patchy and that for most PC users who have Internet Explorer, support for HTML5 is currently very poor indeed (most IE users are on version 8 scoring only 32 out of 400...).

We seek to provide our clients with systems that perform well across all of the above browsers and this means that for now we will only use HTML5 in circumstances where we can be assured of wide compatibility across web browsers. As the standard fully firms up, becomes more embedded and support increases to cover the vast majority of web users then we will certainly seek to introduce facilities that use HTML5. But for now we still recommend and support the W3C standards as they currently exist. For example on graphic provision we still recommend the provision of Flash as a pragmatic means of delivering graphical effects for most websites even though in time its use will likely be phased out as HTML5 (or something else) eventually supersedes it.

Please contact us if you wish to enquire further on any design aspects of the web applications we provide for your use.