



Accessible XHTML and CSS Web Sites Problem - Design - Solution

Jon Duckett



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Jon Duckett published his first Web site in 1996 while studying for a BSc (Hons) in psychology at Brunel University, London. Since then he has helped create a wide variety of Web sites and has coauthored more than ten programming-related books on topics from ASP to XML (via many other letters of the alphabet) that have covered diverse aspects of Web programming, including design, architecture, and coding.

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Preface

This book is designed to help existing Web page authors update their skills. We all know that technology can move at a blistering pace, and sometimes it can seem very hard to keep up with the changes. This book will help keep you up to speed by teaching you about three of the hottest issues for Web page authors to learn about: XHTML, CSS, and accessibility.

You'll be glad to know that, because this book is for those of you who already know how to write Web pages in HTML, I won't be boring you with the basics of how to write a Web page from scratch. Rather, it will enable you to extend the knowledge you already have by presenting examples and information that reflect the way the Web has changed in the past decade.

Since the birth of the Web, many new technologies have been released, and almost as many have vanished without a trace. XHTML and CSS, however, have emerged as mature technologies that are likely to be around for many years to come. They were specifically designed to replace HTML, and as you would expect, you will find many advantages in writing Web pages using XHTML and CSS as opposed to writing them in HTML, although they share a lot of similarities, as you will see.

You should also be aware that companies increasingly face legal obligations to ensure that their Web sites meet accessibility standards. These standards are intended to ensure that as many people as possible are able to access the content of a site, without discriminating against any groups of users. Therefore, it is important to learn how to build pages that meet these accessibility requirements.

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Introduction

In this book, I will show you how XHTML and CSS actually make it easier and quicker to write and maintain pages. I will also show you how the correct use of XHTML and CSS enable you to create Web pages that work in many different types of browsers (not only in different versions of Netscape and Internet Explorer, but also on the various devices that can access the Web these days, such as mobile phones and TV set top boxes).

While XHTML *is* the successor to HTML, it is not a completely new language. In fact, much of the markup you already know remains exactly the same, so you should be creating XHTML pages in no time at all. However, some new rules control the way you write your elements (or tags) and attributes, and where they can appear in the document. In addition, you are encouraged not to use any of the elements or attributes that controlled the appearance or presentation of pages, such as the `` element and attributes such as `bgcolor`, `color`, and `face`. While you may think that this would result in some very boring pages, this is the point when CSS steps in.

CSS, or Cascading Style Sheets, is the new way to control the presentation (and sometimes even the layout) of your pages. CSS uses rules, which are applied to certain elements, to indicate how the content of that element should appear. An example of a CSS rule might be one that says the content of all `<h1>` elements should be displayed in an Arial typeface.

Although CSS is a new language for you to learn, having already learned HTML, you have a big advantage because many of the so-called *properties* in CSS are very similar to attributes, such as the `face` attribute on a `` element or the `bgcolor` and `color` attributes.

The third topic covered in this book is accessibility, and you may already be well aware of how very important it is to ensure that your pages are accessible to everyone (especially if you don't want a court order to rebuild your site). Accessibility focuses on making Web sites site accessible to as many people as possible, and this particularly affects those with disabilities, such as those who might not be able to read small fonts or who might have motor control difficulties. In the same way that architects have had to design public buildings so that they are accessible by a wheelchair, Web designers must learn to create pages that are accessible to those who may not be able to read as easily as you or I, or who might not have such good control over a mouse.

In the last section of this book, you will learn about guidelines developed by both the U.S. government and the W3C (the World Wide Web Consortium, an organization dedicated to creating specifications for the Web) to help ensure that Web sites are accessible to as many people as possible. Adhering to these guidelines not only ensures that you will stay on the right side of the law, it also ensures a larger potential audience for your sites.

Although you can find books dedicated to each of these topics, if you have already been creating Web sites with HTML, there really is no need to wade through several thick books; rather, you just need to bring your existing skills up to date. That's where this book comes in. Using this one volume, you can update your existing skills, and by doing so you should find that your skills remain marketable for a good time to come.

About the Book

This book introduces each of these new technologies by taking a Web site written in HTML 3.2 (a fictional site that was built in the late 1990s) and updating it to use XHTML and CSS and to ensure that it meets the accessibility guidelines. You will meet this fictional site in Chapter 1, and each subsequent chapter addresses the different skills you need to learn to update the site. At the end of each chapter, you will see how the site has been adapted following the principles you learned in that chapter.

Who This Book Is For

This book is written for anyone who has learned to use HTML to create Web pages and wants to remain current with changes that have occurred over the past few years regarding how to write them, but who does not want to read a separate book on each of the key topics.

It is possible to cover XHTML, CSS, and accessibility in this one book because it is assumed that the reader has already written Web pages in HTML, and therefore knows what elements and attributes HTML contains and how a Web page is constructed. By not repeating these basics, it is possible to get on with the topic in hand: learning how these technologies have evolved.

The book has been designed so that you can dip into each topic separately, without having to read the rest of the book, so if you want to learn about accessibility right now, you can go straight to Chapter 7. Similarly, if you only want to learn the differences between HTML and XHTML at the moment, you need only read Chapter 2 for now.

The book is also ideal for Web developers who use serverside languages such as ASP/ASP.NET, PHP, JSP, or ColdFusion, because developing in these languages usually requires that you write code that creates HTML to send to the browser. Therefore, if you use one of these languages, you can benefit from this book by learning how to send accessible XHTML and CSS to the browser instead of plain old HTML.

Indeed, the example site that runs throughout this book has been designed with serverside developers in mind. While the original site is written in plain HTML, it could easily have been HTML that is generated from database content; for example, the product list pages demonstrate how any tabular data could be represented, and the individual product pages could easily have been generated by any kind of content management system.

In other words, whatever level you are at, if your job involves creating Web pages to send to a browser, this book will help you keep your skills up to date.

What This Book Covers

By the end of this book, you will have evolved from being an HTML author to being an author able to write Web pages that are attractive, accessible, and that conform to the new Web standards of XHTML and CSS.

To begin, you will learn the differences between HTML and XHTML. You will learn to write both *Strict* and *Transitional* XHTML 1.0. You will also be introduced to the way in which XHTML is likely to develop in the future, with XHTML 1.1 (also known as modularized XHTML).