Chapter VI

Emerging Practices and Standards for Designing Business Web Sites: Recommendations for Developers

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Abstract

A well-designed and implemented Web site can give a business the edge in the online environment. In part this can be achieved by utilising the appropriate encoding language, incorporating metadata into Web pages and addressing accessibility issues for the disabled. These aspects of Web site implementation tend to be technically tangible and thus relatively easily definable. However, some of the subjective aspects of Web site development associated with information design, such as information quality, effective information visualisation and presentation also contribute to a successful Web site strategy. In this chapter we report on some of the
emerging technical and information design practices that a developer should consider in the implementation of business Web sites.

**Introduction**

There can be little doubt that an increasing amount of business is being done on the Internet. The Web sites that are at the center of this new way of thinking and working are a constantly growing and evolving entity. It is also clear that a Web site must evolve with time to reflect the changing needs of the organisation it represents and the organisation’s Web site community. Web sites that have been designed appropriately will have a definite edge in attracting users and increase the trend to electronic commerce (Fisher, 1999). Forresters Research has found that simplicity in Web site design is of paramount importance in that it contributes to successful Web site use (Cavanagh, 1999) and simple Web design has been advocated as the differentiator between a successful and unsuccessful Web site (Internet.au, 2002; Nielsen, 2000). Nielsen, one of the champions of usability and simplicity of Web site designs, indicates:

“Design is done for a reason, and if you do it well your business will prosper. If you do it poorly, people will leave your website” (Nielsen, 2002, p. 26).

Furthermore, Web site design is also an evolving practice (Sellitto & Wenn, 2000), with early work by Brody (1996) suggesting that good design should aim at making information visible and manageable — good design needs constant re-design. Appropriate Web design should utilise information as its currency with interface design being a vehicle for conveying that information. The anarchic nature of the Internet, with its constantly changing form, presentation, visualisation and interactivity, does not allow guidelines and standards to be easily applied and adapted to Web site design. When you consider that much of the software used on the Web (browsers, plugins, applets, animation players, etc.) is proprietary in nature, there is no incentive for these software owners to adhere to a form of regulatory control that may result in reduced market share and company profitability. The consequences for the Web user community have been and in some areas still are reflected in episodes of poor cross-platform compatibility, browser interoperability and non-scalable Web
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