

Using HTML 4, Special Edition, Mark Brown and Jerry Honeycutt, Que. Copyright 1998 (Fourth Edition). \$39.99, softbound, 1103 pages plus companion CD-ROM. ISBN 0-7897-1449-3. Category: Internet-Web Publishing.



Have you been a little slow getting on the Web bandwagon? Are you an experienced HTML web developer, wanting to learn what's new in version 4.0? Is multimedia your cup of tea, and you're wondering how to deploy video or sound on the web? Surprisingly, *Using HTML 4, Special Edition* can be just what you're looking for no matter how new or experienced you are with Web development. The book even provides some information about the emerging web standard called XML, a sort of Burger King HTML ("have it your way"). And if three pounds of reference aren't enough to convince you of its value, the book also contains a CD-ROM reference with over 140 MB of tryout software, sample graphics and other aids.

Taking a tip from the net itself, the book has two tables of contents, a summary "Contents at a Glance" (itself two pages long) and a more detailed and traditional table of contents. The book starts slowly enough with the first section, "Publishing a Web Site." Here, if you do not already know, you receive a brief history of the Internet and overview of developing and installing web pages. Lest you think this is all something you can skip, this section also highlights how to develop and run your own web server.

The next section describes "Creating Basic Web Pages with HTML 4.0." As you might guess, this treatment is extensive and runs for 11 chapters and 250 pages. Instead of providing an encyclopedic description of each available HTML tag, the authors describe the web development process step by step, from "Creating Basic HTML Documents" to the advanced "Inserting Objects into a Web Page," covering ActiveX Controls and Java Applets.

The next major section presents a 130-page description of advanced web page design, "Creating Advanced Web Pages With Dynamic HTML." I found this title confusing, and the section longer than it ought to be. The first chapter is only slightly related to the title, dealing with making your web site accessible to impaired and international users. The subject, important as it is, is unrelated to dynamic HTML. Later, the authors rightly

admit that creating dynamic HTML pages that will work for everyone (the whole point of the web, right?) is nearly impossible due to fundamental differences in the way the two major browsers from Microsoft and Netscape.

I was surprised, and gratified, to find that the authors provided a comprehensive guide to non-HTML, multimedia subjects. In a book with HTML in the title, I wouldn't have expected 160 pages dealing with multimedia. The authors start with graphic formats and a refresher about the two main categories, bit-mapped and vector. They then proceed to some helpful advice about both good aesthetics and technical choices in using graphics on web sites.

The authors then proceed to descriptions of audio, video, animation, and multimedia applets. One section I found particularly helpful was the chapters on new streaming technologies, allowing you to use very large audio or video material on your site without forcing web visitors to wait for interminable downloads. As they do throughout the book, the authors provide an excellent balance between overview tutorials and technical details.

Note: Even with a 1998 copyright, the book already omits two new multimedia announcements: The Precision Graphics Markup Language (PGML), a proposed graphics standard from Adobe to the World Wide Web Consortium, and QuickTime version 3, a multimedia architecture from Apple. But you can't fault the authors; that is simply life in the fast lane of the web.

The next three major sections are definitely for those of you who have progressed beyond HTML coding and multimedia. These sections are titled "Pushing Content," "Scripting on the Web Server," and "Managing Your Web Site" are generally for advanced webmasters. However, even here there are two subjects worth noting by all: Techniques to assure that others can find your site using major search system, and an overview of the next big web Tsunami, XML. XML, acronym for Extended Markup Language, will require several more books the size of this to explain its full use. Briefly, XML allows you to create your own web tagging schemes, the ultimate in customization.

There is one subject that I think the authors pared down more than necessary: Adobe Corporation's digital paper system called "Portable Document Format" or PDF. Although strictly speaking this is not a web multimedia object type, and not HTML, its use is becoming so pervasive on the web that it deserves greater mention than it received.

The last major section is "Learning By Example." In a little over 100 pages the authors describe the web development process (as opposed to standards), from storyboarding to promoting your site and even publishing e-zines, or electronic on-line magazines.

Companion CD-ROM

The companion CD-ROM contains scripts and source code mentioned throughout the book, separate electronic books, third-party and more. You'll find coding samples, collections of graphics for web page construction, and web page authoring tools. The software includes plug-ins, freeware (including Internet Explorer 4.0), shareware and time-limited trial copies.

Summary

If you are looking for an HTML reference with rigorous and exhaustive specifications and explanations of each tag, this book falls short (and such a reference would require another three pounds). However, since the World Wide Web Consortium (<http://www.w3.org>) already makes that available, you probably can do without the extra weight. Having said that, whether you are a web newbie or an experienced webmaster, this book is definitely a useful addition to your technical bookshelf.

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