

The Sitemorse Knowledge base is the repository of knowledge about the Sitemorse system.

Every time a new feature is added, a question asked or anything our technical team believe might be appropriate is recorded here.

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Code quality - HTML 5

What is HTML 5?

HTML 5 is the long-awaited successor to HTML 4, the standard web markup language which has been with us for well over a decade now. If the development of a new web standard has mostly passed you by so far, you can expect to hear a lot more about it over the coming months as media interest increases. For example, coverage of the recent release of Internet Explorer 9 and Firefox 4 has focused attention on the abilities of both these browsers to handle HTML 5-based content. However, if you inferred from this that release of HTML 5 is imminent, you'd be wrong - it's a long way off yet.

So what's the timetable?

It won't surprise anyone in the online world to hear that the HTML 5 project has already been running for many years, is behind deadline and growing in complexity by the day.

In point of fact, HTML 5 is being developed by not one but two bodies: the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C - www.w3.org) and the Web Hypertext Application Technology Working Group (WHATWG - www.whatwg.org). Many key players are participating, including the four major browser vendors (Apple, Mozilla, Opera and Microsoft) and a range of other organisations and individuals with diverse interests and expertise.

Work commenced in 2004, but it was not until 2008 that the W3C Working Group published the First Public Working Draft1 of the official specification. The original timetable envisaged that HTML 5 would reach final sign-off by late 2010 but that date has come and gone. At April 2011, the latest plan is to move to 'Last Call' (an invitation to communities inside and outside W3C to confirm the technical soundness of the specification) in May 2011, with a target of 2014 for full 'Recommendation' (i.e. when HTML 5 becomes the officially recognised standard).

Why do we need HTML 5?

HTML 4 has been around for well over a decade now - an eternity in the technology world - and publishers seeking new techniques to provide enhanced functionality are being held back by the constraints of the language and browsers. HTML 5 is an attempt to meet that challenge with an improved, unified and consistent markup language for both content and applications, resulting in significant benefits across the entire panoply of modern web-enabled devices ('interoperability', as it's known).

Just two examples of the key differences between HTML 4.1 and HTML 5:

Better multimedia

One key 'interoperability' challenge is to take multimedia to the next level. Although multimedia has made breathtaking progress in recent years, developers rely heavily on APIs and plugins to make it work - resulting in problems such as the iPhone not supporting Flash. HTML 5 includes video and audio elements designed to enable multimedia to be embedded into web pages directly. This