<designing web graphics>

How to Prepare Images and Media for the Web

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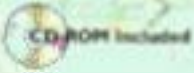
by Lynda Weinman



New Riders

Elmers, the sweetest kitty soul that ever was, who also passed while I was writing this book.

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Designing Web Graphics

By Lynda Weinman

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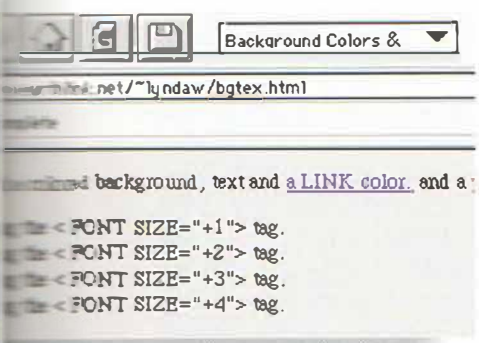
CHAPTER 1 Browser Hell!



Web browsers are the adversaries of all Web designers. What is a browser, and what does it do? It's software that reads Web pages and displays them for you. There are many different World Wide Web browsers, and no two are alike. Unfortunately, this means that different browsers interpret the visual content of a Web page differently. If you are a designer, this means you have the maddening task of designing a presentation that is subject to change according to which browser its being viewed from.

Why do browsers interpret the pages differently—shouldn't there be fixed standards? The browser interprets HTML (Hypertext Markup Language) code, which is the type of programming required to author Web pages. HTML uses "tags" for including links, graphics, and other media on a Web page.

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HTML was created as an attempt to be a universally accepted, cross-platform standard language for displaying information, text, and visuals on the Web. Standards usually involve a standards committee, and committees often take a long time to agree on what they will officially support. HTML of the old days allowed for one-color text, text that was left-justified with paragraph breaks, left-justified images, and little else. This understandably created frustration among designers and Web browser developers, who wanted to see the Web evolve faster than the time it took outside committees to make formal decisions.

Entrepreneurial developers (primarily Netscape) took matters into their own hands and made Web browsers that supported more options, without the blessings or participation of the HTML standards committee. New HTML code was developed that was supported only on proprietary browser systems, starting with Netscape and followed by others. This created outrage among some, and an outpouring of support from others who created an avalanche of Web pages that included these new, unofficial HTML features.

As designers, it is not surprising that we want as many design features for the Web as we have access to in our desktop programs. HTML today lets us do a lot more than it used to, and we are grateful for every small morsel of design flexibility newly thrown our way. The downside is that some of these new design options have created a more confusing Web design environment. HTML has gone from being a universally accepted, cross-platform language to an every-browser-for-its-own kind of free-for-all.

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Deciding Which Browser to Create Your Site For

What can a conscientious Web designer do about Browser Hell? You have some decisions to make. Do you go for the lowest common denominator and forget about layout, colors, font sizes, backgrounds, and all the other advanced features this book discusses? Or, do you push design to its fullest and force your viewers to use a specific browser, at the risk of excluding some? This personal decision will certainly depend on the content of your Web site. Some Web sites are appropriate in dull text only, or with limited graphics, whereas others are not. You and/or your client get to choose.

One solution that more and more Web designers are embracing is to set up multiple Web pages on sites that are maximized for which browser they are being viewed from. This involves creating duplicate sets of pages that are optimized for advanced browsers and limited browsers, so Web pages look like they were intended to when viewed under differing browser conditions.

Browser Comparison

I've been curious to see a visual browser comparison for some time. It's one thing to *hear* that pages look different on different browsers, but it is better to *see* how different they are. Pictures at times can say much more than words. It should be noted that browser versions change—usually for the better! After this chart is published, it is guaranteed to go out of date, as browser versions often change and improve. If you are designing for a specific browser, be sure to check to see if the chart here represents the latest version. I've included the browser version numbers next to each browser name for this purpose. If you want to search for current browser software, there are great search engines (programs that search through databases) on the Web. Try the following:

- **Browser Watch**
  http://www.ski.mskcc.org/browserwatch/browsers.html
- **Yahoo, WWW, browsers**
  http://www.yahoo.com/Computers_and_Internet/Internet/World_Wide_Web/Browsers/
- **Infoseek Search, browsers**
  http://www2.infoseek.com/Titles?qt=browse
- **Lycos Search**
  http://query3.lycos.cs.cmu.edu/cgi-bin/pursuit?query=browse

Browser Stats

To get an idea of which browsers are being used by whom, check out the various statistical Web sites listed here. There's no consensus to these findings, and some have more updated versions of the stats than others.

- **Browser Watch**: http://www.ski.mskcc.org/browserwatch
- **Browser Stats from Yahoo's Random Link:**
  http://www.cen.uiuc.edu/~ejk/bryl.html
- **Craig Knudsen's Stats:**
  http://www.btg.com/~cknudsen/stats/current.html
- **Jayfar's Web Survey:** http://www.netaxs.com/~jayfar/

NOTE

If you read the stats on browsers, there's no telling who has it straight. I've seen reports that vary this widely:

Netscape ranges from 56–74 percent

AOL ranges from 4–11 percent

Mosaic ranges from 3.5–13.7 percent

Internet Explorer ranges from 3.5–24.5 percent

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Here are the types of Web design features the browser comparison test analyzed. This represents a list of Web page features and corresponding tags that you might or might not choose to include in your pages:

Align Test

- Centered Image/Text Alignment
- Image Alignment <img src align>
- V-Space, H-Space Alignment <img src vspace hspace>

Color Test

- Colored backgrounds/text <body bgcolor text link vlink alink>
- Font size control <font size>
- Header type sizes <H1>

Pattern Text

- Pattern backgrounds <body background>
- Transparent GIFs file format support
- Border control <a href><img src border>
- JPEGs file format support

Tables and Horizontal Rule Test

- Tables <table> <tr> <td>
- Padded tables <table border>
- Horizontal rules <hr> <hr size> <hr width> <hr align> <noshade>

Table 1.1 is a chart depicting these categories and the different Mac browsers we tested. Table 1.2 is a chart depicting these categories and the different PC browsers we tested.

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Table 1.1 Browser Comparison Chart for Macintosh Browsers

	Netscape v.2.0 b1	Mosaic v.2.0.1	AOL v.2.6	eWorld v.1.0.1	MacWeb v.098a
Alignment					
Center Image/Text Alignment	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
Image Alignment	yes	yes	partial	partial	no
V-Space H-Space Alignment	yes	no	no	no	no
Colors/Text					
Colored Backgrounds/text	yes	no	yes	yes	no
Font Size Control	yes	no	no	no	no
Header Size Control	yes	yes	yes	yes	partial
Pattern					
Background Patterns	yes	no	yes	yes	no
Transparent GIF	yes	yes	yes	yes	no

	Netscape v.2.0 b1	Mosaic v.2.0.1	AOL v.2.6	eWorld v.1.0.1	MacWeb v.098a
Border Control	yes	no	no	no	no
JPEGs	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
Tables/Horizontal Rules					
Tables	yes	yes	no	no	no
Padded Tables	yes	no	no	no	no
Custom Horizontal Rules	yes	no	no	no	no

Table 1.2 Browser Comparison Chart for PC Browsers

	Netscape v.2.0 b1	Internet Explorer v.2.0 beta	Mosaic v.2.0	AOL v.2.5	NetCruiser v.2.0	Prodigy v.9.18.00
Alignment						
Center Image/Text Alignment	yes	yes	yes	no	yes	no
Image Alignment	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	partial
V-Space H-Space Alignment	yes	yes	no	no	no	no
Colors/Text						
Colored Backgrounds/ Text	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no
Font Size Control	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
Header Size Control	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
Pattern						
Background Patterns	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no
Transparent GIF	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	yes
Border Control	yes	yes	no	no	no	partial
JPEGs	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no
Tables/Horizontal Rules						
Tables	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no
Padded Tables	yes	no	no	no	no	no
Custom Horizontal Rules	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no

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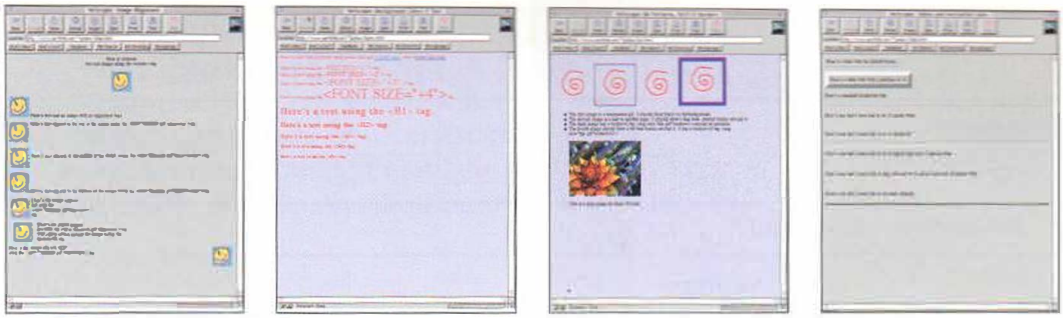
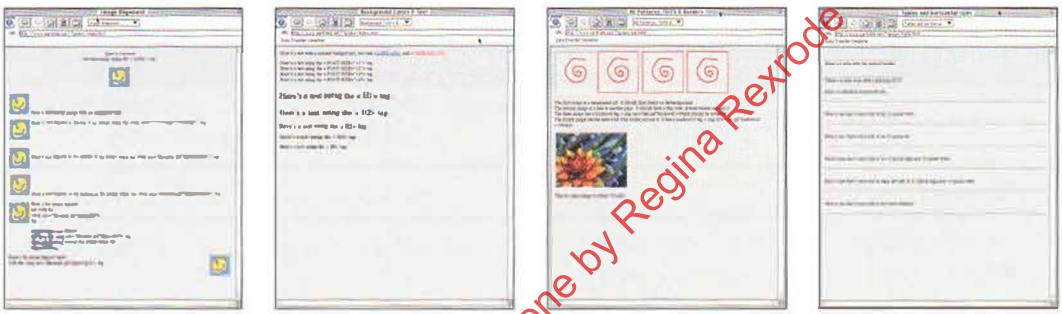
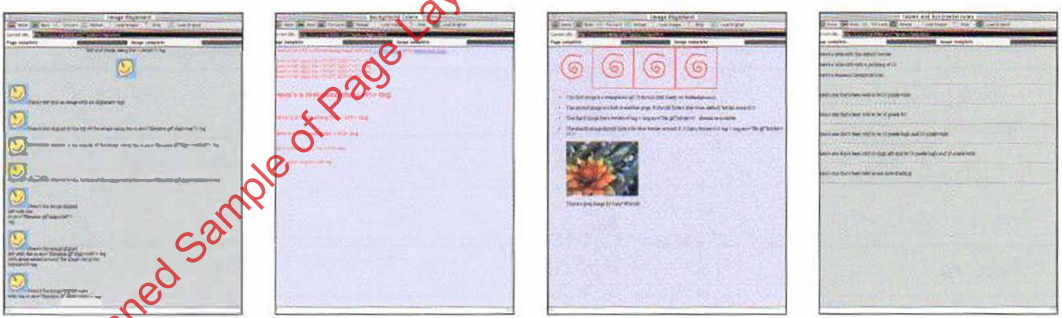


Netscape Mac v.2.0 b1



Mosaic Mac v.2.0.1



AOL Mac v.2.6

eWorld v.1.01

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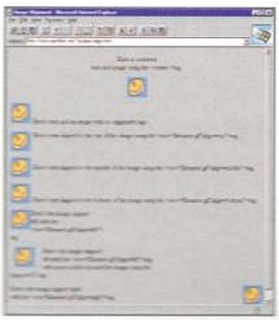
MacWeb v.098

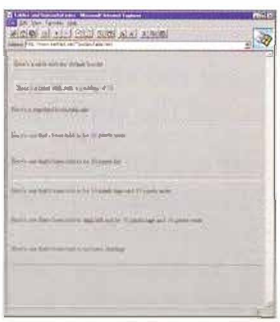



NetScape Windows v.2.0 b1




Mosaic PC v.2.0



Internet Explorer v.2.0 beta

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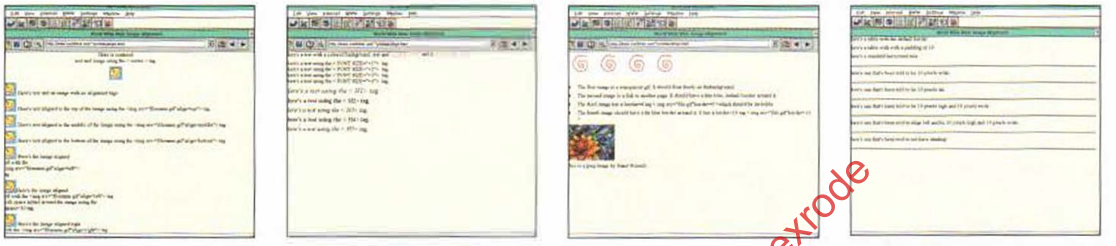
AOL PC v.2.5



NetCruiser PC v.2.0

Prodigy PC v.9.18.00

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Understanding the HTML for the Browser Comparison Test

The browser test involves a series of four HTML documents that include features that designers might want to control on their Web pages. For each of the browsers analyzed here, I loaded the identical Web page to see how it displayed the same information.

If you are interested in learning how to do HTML coding, it's useful to study other people's source code. This is the way many people teach themselves HTML. You can backward engineer anyone's code by choosing a menu item within your browser called View Source. This option will open a text editor automatically on your computer and show you the raw HTML code. I am providing the HTML scripts for the browser comparison tests, in case you want to study how I created them. They are printed here and also are on the CD-ROM in case you want to conduct your own browser comparison test on a browser that wasn't included in this chapter.

Text and Background Colors Page

This page was designed to show whether the browser supported colored backgrounds using hexadecimal callouts (see Chapter 5), and font and header sizing (see Chapter 9). Here's the code that was used to generate this page. No graphics were used. The file was written in a

standard word processor, and saved as a *text only* file with the extension .html at the end of it.

```
<HTML>
<HEAD>
<TITLE>Background Colors & Text</TITLE>
<BODY BGCOLOR= "ccccff" TEXT ="ff0000" LINK ="017ed1" Vlink="a614e3">
</HEAD>
<BODY> Here's a test with a colored background, text and <a href="link">
a LINK color.</a> and a <a href="index.html">visited link color</a>
<p>
Here's a test using the <FONT SIZE=""+1">&#60 FONT SIZE=""+1"&#62
   </font> tag.<br>
Here's a test using the <FONT SIZE=""+2">&#60 FONT SIZE=""+2"&#62
   </font> tag.<br>
Here's a test using the <FONT SIZE=""+3">&#60 FONT SIZE=""+3"&#62
   </font> tag.<br>
Here's a test using the <FONT SIZE=""+4">&#60 FONT SIZE=""+4"&#62
   </font> tag.<br>
<H1> Here's a test using the &#60 H1&#62 tag.</H1>
<H2> Here's a test using the &#60 H2&#62 tag.</H2>
<H3> Here's a test using the &#60 H3&#62 tag.</H3>
<H4> Here's a test using the &#60 H4&#62 tag.</H4>
<H5> Here's a test using the &#60 H5&#62 tag.</H5>
</BODY>
</HTML>
```

BG Patterns, TGIFs, and Borders

This HTML page was generated to examine whether the browser supported pattern tiles (see Chapter 6), transparent GIFs (see Chapter 8), border control on image links (see Chapter 14), and JPEGs (see Chapter 3). Two graphics were used. One was the pattern element, which was 100×100 pixels at 72 dpi, saved in Index Color mode as a Gif89a. It was saved with the file name pat.gif. The other graphic was a JPEG image by 3D computer graphics wizard Rand Worrell, and was saved in RGB 24-bit color at medium quality as a JPEG and is titled rand.jpg. Here's the code that created the page:

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```
<html>
<head>
<title>BG Patterns, TGIFS & Borders</title>
<Body background="purpat.gif"></head>
</body>
<img src="spiral.gif">
<a href="index.html"><img src="spiral.gif"></a>
<a href="index.html"><img src="spiral.gif"border=0></a>
<a href="index.html"><img src="spiral.gif"border=10></a><p>
<UL>
<P>
<P>
<LI>The first image is a transparent gif. It should float freely on the
background. <br><LI>The second image is a link to another page. It
should have a thin blue, default border around it.<br><LI>The third
image has a border=0 tag &#60 img src="file.gif"border=0 &#62which
```

NOTE

As you learn more about the Web, you will begin to hear about HTML version numbers. HTML 1.0, HTML 2.0, HTML 3.0, and HTML+. As hard as you try to know what official HTML really is and who supports it, you will never succeed because it is, and always has been, in flux. Browsers change, HTML changes, and to top it off, browsers create their own HTML tags.

If you're confused, you are not alone. It's a difficult situation for everyone involved, but that's the price one pays for pioneering technology. For up-to-date HTML information, look to the following URLs.

HTML 3.0 Specs:

http://www.w3.org/hypertext/WWW/MarkUp/MarkUp.html

HTML 2.0 Specs:

http://www.cs.tu-berlin.de/~jutta/ht/draft-ietf-html-spec-01.html

HTML+ Specs:

http://www.w3.org/hypertext/WWW/MArkUp/HTMLPlus_1.html

Summary

Now you've seen for yourself how different browsers can be from one another. I believe it's always better to be informed than ignorant, so you've been duly warned about the existence of Browser Hell. You'll have to decide, based on what audience you're targeting, which browser to design for and which features to include on your pages. Here are some tips:

- Not all browsers are equal.
- You can't make one screen work for all browsers unless you limit the features you use to the lowest common denominator of the most limited browser.
- If you want to make graphic pages that cater to both the high- and low-end browsers, you would have to make duplicate pages that are laid out differently in order to optimize for different browser conditions.
- If you choose to create pages that only work well on one browser, put a disclaimer on your first page, such as "This page is Netscape-enhanced, or view with Netscape 1.1N and higher."
- A great way to learn HTML is to study other people's Web pages.

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