The Truth About HTML5

Luke Stevens
RJ Owen

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About the Authors

Luke Stevens is a Sydney-based designer who cut his teeth with PageMill in the 90s, wrangled Content Management Systems in the 00s, and switched to web apps in the 10s. With a passion for design, some brief formal print design training, and more than a decade of insatiable curiosity about new web technology, he has built sites of all shapes and sizes for clients all over the world, usually with ExpressionEngine. Currently in-between client work he tweets nonsense [@lukestevens](#) and works on his web app at [AnalyticsExplorer.com](#) which he will, he swears, release in 2014.

RJ Owen is an experienced front-end developer who has worked in a variety of technologies on the Web for more than ten years. He is a frequent speaker at industry events such as SXSW and Adobe's Max conference. RJ started his career as a Flash developer before moving to the open Web and then to design and customer insight work, which he totally loves. When not working or writing, RJ spends time chasing his children or enjoying the mountains of Colorado, where he lives and works.

About the Technical Reviewer

Andrew Zack has been at the forefront of implementing successful Internet marketing strategies since 1996. He has authored a book and been a technical reviewer for numerous industry publications. Mr. Zack's industry expertise includes business development, IT project management, Internet marketing, SEO implementation, operational software, and web site development and coordination.

Foreword

HTML5 is a mess. It's also one of the most exciting technological advances perhaps ever (a big claim, especially for something I just described as a mess).

There are quite a few books, most of them excellent, on HTML5. Some cover the markup exclusively. Some cover markup and JavaScript APIs. Others still focus on a specific development challenge, such as games.

This book is a little different. Rather than simply looking at the *what* and *how* of HTML5 (though it does that as well), it endeavors to explain the *why* and *why* not of HTML5.

And it's a passionate, informed, opinionated critique of much of HTML5 to boot.

Along the way, you'll learn a great deal about HTML5 markup and additional HTML5 features such as the new audio and video elements, the Canvas element, the History API, and related features such as SVG.

But ideally, most of all you'll learn to think critically about HTML5 as a tool and adopt the good parts, for good reasons, and ignore the less than useful parts, for the right reasons as well.

Luke Stevens has written a book all web designers and developers who care about their code should read. So go ahead and read it!

John Allsopp
Author, Developing with Web Standards
Cofounder of Web Directions
Web evangelist

Introduction

Introduction From RJ

Hi. I'm RJ, your average HTML developer. I've been working with code since I was a kid and quickly gravitated to the instant gratification that comes from making beautiful things for computers, especially online.

I did the updates and revisions for the most recent version of this book, and I have to tell you, you are in for a wild ride. A year ago I was just like you—a person who hadn't read this book. I came into it thinking HTML5 was pretty neat. I had done a few "HTML5" sites, read a few blog posts, enjoyed the fancy logo, and maybe even bought the official HTML5 T-shirt (yeah, I did). I liked the new elements because they were, you know, semantic. I liked evolving beyond Flash. I liked (the idea of) SVG.

Wow, did I have a lot to learn. What follows from here is a journey into a strange and unbelievable world. If you're like I was, then very little of what comes next is going to be what you expect, and even less of it will seem reasonable. HTML5 is not what you think it is. Buckle up: Luke Stevens is taking us all to school, and between you and me he drives a little like a maniac.

Introduction From Luke

Hi. I'm Luke, your average, garden-variety web designer. I've been building web sites for more than a decade, use ExpressionEngine as my CMS, and have enjoyed both working in-house and full-time freelancing.

I thought it would be fun to write a short book about HTML5. I thought HTML5 would be simple. I thought writing about it would be straightforward. And I thought the respected voices in the design community would be telling everyone what it is (and what it isn't) simply and clearly, particularly with the plethora of other HTML5 books out there.

I was wrong.

Fortunately, this book (and I hope your experience as a reader!) is infinitely better for it. And I hope once you've read it you'll share my concern about the strange direction basic markup has taken and my excitement for the new HTML5 (and related) technologies that are coming soon to a browser near you. That includes Internet Explorer —Microsoft, finally, truly gets web standards.

What seemed impossible just a few years ago—a far-fetched, almost utopian ideal of *all* browser vendors, including Microsoft, competing tooth-and-nail to support bleeding-edge web standards—is now a reality. Innovation in web standards is happening at break-neck speed, and my hope is this book gets you up to speed not only with the fundamentals of HTML5 but with the broader picture of where the Web as a whole is heading, especially as we look toward a post-Flash future.

As you make your way through the following chapters, please keep in mind this book is as much of a *critique* as it is an explanation of HTML5. By taking a critical look at *why* things are the way they are, my hope is you save hours by not having to worry about things that don't matter (particularly when it comes to basic markup) and your eyes are opened to how the HTML5 sausage gets made. It may not always be pretty, but if you spend your days in the trenches building web sites, knowing *why* things are the way they are will help guide your design and development decisions in a very direct way.

That said, there's plenty of exciting technology in and around HTML5 too, so be sure not to miss the later chapters on graphics technologies like Canvas and SVG, the state of audio and video in HTML5, and the more developer-oriented HTML5 features including a new way of handling something as fundamental as a page request.

(Also note we will be focusing almost entirely on HTML5 as defined by the HTML5 spec, with the addition of SVG and a few other related initiatives such as Schema.org and WebGL. "HTML5" has become a buzzword that can mean everything from the HTML5 spec itself to CSS3 and modern JavaScript to just "cool and new and not Flash." We'll be mostly sticking with the features in the actual HTML5 specification.)

I love the web design community because it's filled with smart, excitable, curious, opinionated folk who will call you on your BS. This is an opinionated book, not a dry explanation of the technology, and I'll be stating my views pretty strongly. I look forward to you doing the same. Passionate, considered debate makes us all smarter. So please, write it up on your blog, send me happy/sad/angry e-mails (luke@itsninja.com), talk to me on Twitter (@[lukestevens](https://twitter.com/lukestevens)), or whatever you like.

I look forward to the discussion.

And now I'd like to ask a couple of favors.

First, if you enjoy my writing, then please tell your friends, colleagues, Twitter followers, blog readers, and pretty much anyone who will listen about this book. Like a lot of authors, I rely on readers like you to spread the word (and the links). If you can help me out by spreading the word about this book via good old-fashioned word of mouth, I'd *really* appreciate it. Thank you.

And second, if you use Google Analytics and want to get more out of it, I'd love you to check out my web app Analytics Explorer (<http://analyticsexplorer.com>). Analytics Explorer brings all the great data that Google Analytics buries to the surface through a simple, elegant interface, and combines it with great tips on improving your site. You can add your clients, send them nicely designed regular reports, and focus your work on improving metrics that matter, not just making the proverbial logo bigger. My hope is it will make your own design practice (and your client's sites) more productive and profitable. After all, all the HTML5 in the world won't help you if your conversion rates are lousy and your bounce rates are sky-high. (We'll return to this theme in the final chapter of this book when we look at Performance Based Design.) Check it out: <http://analyticsexplorer.com>.