

The Flashy Web versus the Intelligent Web

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The new capabilities supported by HTML5 have been compared to Flash. Indeed, for mobile devices, Adobe has abandoned Flash.¹ No doubt, HTML5 has more sizzle than its predecessors but is that what truly matters? Is it intelligent?

Among the various definitions of the word “intelligence” two are highly pertinent:

Goal-directed adaptive behavior. (Sternberg & Salter)

... an agent’s ability to achieve goals in a wide range of environments ... (Legg & Hutter)²

With respect to the latter definition, James Surowiecki has asserted expertise is “spectacularly narrow.”³

If one’s goal is simply to be entertaining or entertained, perhaps flashiness may indeed be what matters most. However, what about achieving other goals in broader contexts?

Regarding the dangers associated with the poor design and misuse of cognitive tools – like the Web – Donald Norman has argued the greatest peril is that of “experiencing when one should be reflecting ... where entertainment takes precedence over thought.”⁴

Based upon the W3C’s XML standard, the vision of the StratML standard (ISO 17469-1) is:

A worldwide web of intentions, stakeholders, and results⁵

Intentions are what we aim to accomplish – not only our near-term objectives but also our longer-term goals. Stakeholders include those who must act as well as those intended to benefit. To determine whether progress is being made and when success has been achieved, results must be measurable.

David Staker suggests:

There are two approaches in life that both oppose and complement one another. Some people prefer one and some prefer the other. Whichever we choose reflects and shapes our approach to life.

“In the style approach” he says, “we are less concerned with what is done, being more concerned with appearance.”

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HTML5#.22Thoughts_on_Flash.22

² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intelligence#Definitions>

³ <http://ambur.net/crowdwisdom.pdf>

⁴ <http://ambur.net/smart.pdf>

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strategy_Markup_Language

By contrast, “In the substance approach, we are less concerned with appearances as we assume that actions will speak louder than words, and achievements will always trump ineffective action.”⁶

With respect to decibel level, Steve Graves has noted the ageless wisdom of Aristotle – those who want to be persuasive but don’t really have anything to say simply speak louder.⁷

In the context of the Web, HTML5 empowers figuratively louder, flashier presentation of information. Depending upon one’s personal style and preferences, perhaps that is enough.

However, if we aim to create a *Strategic* Semantic Web in which we are empowered to join together more intelligently in partnerships to accomplish our objectives, it will be necessary to focus our attention on substance and not be unduly distracted by flash.

What’s your approach to life? Is it based primarily upon style or substance?

⁶ http://changingminds.org/explanations/preferences/style_substance.htm

⁷ <http://www.stephenraves.com/articles/read/style-versus-substance/>