

Introduction

I'll be upfront about it: I wrote this book for myself. I was working on one too many sites with impossible browser-spanning specs while trying to harness the demanding CSS requirements, both self- and client-driven. While I found a wealth of information about CSS hacks and filters on the Web, it was overwhelming. I wanted a central resource that I could rely on to quickly give me the solutions I needed with the deeper understanding I craved. I couldn't find it in any one place—so I wrote it.

My hope, and fervent belief, is that there are a lot of designers in the same boat. CSS has come on in a whirlwind and the reality of the browser situation demands that you deal with it on its own terms or get blown away. There are, of course, numerous ways to handle CSS display issues. Rather than try to force one method to the exclusion of others, this book offers the full gamut of techniques. For example, if you don't feel comfortable applying multiple hacks to adapt a single style sheet, you can use any of the JavaScript or server-side methods for serving the right CSS file to the right browser. I did, however, attempt to ensure that whatever suggestions I made validated; where there was no recourse, the invalid technique is noted as such.

CSS Hacks and Filters follows, roughly, an old-to-new, simple-to-complex structure. The oldest browsers CSS designers are still struggling with are covered first, followed by more up-to-date, standards-based browsers. Internet Explorer's proprietary conditional comment technology is important enough (given Internet Explorer's continued prevalence and CSS bugs) to deserve a chapter by itself. In all these early chapters, I tackled real-world CSS problems and explained how the hacks covered can solve them. Later chapters explore the intersection of CSS with other Web technologies such as JavaScript, the Document Object Model (DOM), and application servers. Graphics and other visual media weigh heavily in the modern Web, and manipulating them properly with CSS is the subject of Chapter 7. Accessibility is a well-deserved hot button and techniques for applying CSS in a responsible fashion are explored in Chapter 8.

The latter portion of the book is intended to offer practical examples for designers trying to put it all together—and keep it there. You'll find separate chapters on CSS layouts, navigations systems, and debugging. My ongoing work with Dreamweaver persuaded me to present a couple of additional real-world chapters to address the use of CSS in Macromedia's world-class and widely used authoring tool: one chapter is on core CSS use in Dreamweaver and the other concerns Dreamweaver templates and CSS. This “getting-it-done” attitude is carried over into the two appendixes. The resources listed in Appendix A should give you a full spectrum of jumping-off places, and the tables in Appendix B are intended to help you find a safe place to land.

Knowing the passionate nature of the CSS community, I fully expect to get an earful or two. If you'd like to get in touch with me to share an opinion or ask a question, please feel free to write me at jlowery@idest.com. You'll find more book-related information on my site at www.idest.com/csshacks/.