Best Practices: Making Mobile-Browsing Better

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an overview of work being done within the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) to improve the mobile-browsing user experience, particularly work within the W3C MWI Best Practices Working Group.

Keywords

mobile browsing, standards, standardization, best practices, conformance, conformance criteria

INTRODUCTION

Interoperability and usability problems make mobile browsing an unsatisfactory experience for many users. The W3C Mobile Web Initiative (MWI) brings together authoring tool vendors, content providers, adaptation providers, handset manufacturers, browser vendors, and mobile operators to solve those interoperability and usability problems and thus to work toward improving the overall mobile-browsing user experience.

In particular, the W3C MWI Best Practices Working Group (BPWG) is chartered to produce guidelines and conformance criteria to support the development of Web sites that provide an appropriate user experience on mobile handsets and other mobile devices.

Mobile browsing in developing countries

By following the guidelines and conformance criteria developed by the Best Practices Working Group, content providers also help to ensure that their content will be more accessible to users of mobile browsers in developing countries (where devices are typically even more constrained in their resources and capabilities than those in other countries). Thus, the work of the Best Practices Working Group also helps to further enable mobile browsing as a usable service in developing countries.

CURRENT SITUATION AROUND MOBILE BROWSING

At the time of writing of this paper, the general situation with respect to deployment of mobile browsers on handsets is:

- better handsets (with faster CPUs and more RAM) and with better browsers pre-installed have become available (making quality mobile browsing possible from those devices)

- mobile operators are providing faster data speeds over their networks (making productive mobile browsing feasible on those networks)

- more mobile operators are also offering flat rates for data access on their networks (making mobile browsing affordable on those networks)

Many users worldwide have handsets with mobile browsers installed. Yet, despite mobile browsers being available to a significant number of users, many are not actively using the mobile browsers on their handsets.

When asked their reasons for not making use of the mobile browsers on their handsets, many users describe having a very unsatisfactory user experience with mobile browsing when they have tried it: pages loading too slowly, poor formatting of pages, and other problems.

Some, but not all, of the problems described may be solved by having better browsers on handsets; however, many of the problems can be solved by content providers working toward making their content "mobile friendly" or "mobile considerate"

The energies of the Best Practices Working

Group focus on helping content providers to do that — by providing them with specific guidelines and conformance criteria they can follow to improve the user experience of their content on mobile devices.

SCOPE OF W3C BPWG WORK

The fundamental objective of the Best Practices Working Group is essentially to enable the reach of the Web to be easily extended onto mobile devices, by providing guidelines, checklists and best practice guidelines which are easy to comprehend and implement.

Following the best-practice guidelines benefits content providers by enabling more users to access their content and services from more types of devices.

The intent of the Best Practices Working Group is not to force content providers to limit the scope of their content delivery to only those mechanisms which are available on mobile devices. Rather, the guidelines produced by the Best Practices Working Group are intended to enable content to be used across a range of devices and contexts.

Toward that end, the Best Practices Working Group has set for itself the following tasks:

- Creation of materials to guide authors in develop web sites that conform to the requirements of a "mobileOK" trustmark , based on existing standards and taking into account existing best practices. Dimensions of analysis associated with "best practices" include, but are not limited to:

  - Valid markup

  - Content adaptation guidelines

  - User experience issues

- Defining the meaning of conformance to best practices

- Development of mechanisms by which the level of conformance to best practices can be assessed.

- Creation of appropriate materials, for site builders and tools vendors, including:

  - Authoring guides

  - Informative tutorials

  - Requirements for validation tools

The mobileOK trustmark

Work on creation and establishment of the mobileOK trustmark. includes provision for machine-readable and human-readable forms of the mark, discoverability of sites that conform, and outreach to the organizations that are consumers of the trustmark.

BPWG DELIVERABLES

The charter for the Best Practices Working Group is still under review, but in its current form, it provides for the working group to produce the following specific deliverables:

- W3C mobileOK Scheme 1.0
  A W3C Note that ties the pieces of mobileOK together and has definitive information on how and when the trustmark can be used

- W3C mobileOK Basic Tests 1.0
  A W3C Recommendation that describes a set of machine-verifiable tests based on the Best Practices guidelines

- A mobileOK Basic checker Reference Implementation and Test Suite

- Standard Delivery Context
  A document describing a common set of features for which authors can develop content

- Mobile Web Best Practices 2.0
  A W3C Recommendation that revises Mobile Web Best Practices 1.0 "Basic Guidelines" to provide additional guidance for developing content suitable for the Standard Delivery Context

- mobileOK Pro
  A W3C Recommendation that offers a level of the mobileOK trustmark that implies a higher degree of conformance to the Best Practices

- Labels for mobileOK
  A W3C Recommendation describing how to label content as conforming to mobileOK and how to find content so labeled, including vocabulary specifications

W3C MEMBER SUPPORT

As a group operating within the W3C, which is an industry consortium comprised of member organizations, the activities of the Best Practices Working Group are supported by (in fact, driven by) the member organizations who choose to participate in the work of the group.