HTML5 Is the Buzzword within the web design community, but what do designers within the more traditional print medium need to know?

At a time when many companies are cutting budgets it seems more important than ever for a designer to prove their worth and a broad but applicable skill set seems like the obvious route, but does a print designer really need to retrain in digital?

There is if course no all-inclusive answer for this, It really comes down to the direction you think your work or role is going. Graphic Design has become such a wide-ranging medium, partly brought on ourselves by a thirst for new ways to express creativity through new software developments. There are now so many ways to delve into the world of online design that you can soon find yourself being overwhelmed.

Learning HTML: Where do you begin?

Learning some HTML (the building blocks behind web design) would seem like the natural place to start, and with the likes of Codecademy and HTML Dog it's never been easier. That's not to say you need to learn HTML inside-out to be a good web designer, that is of course down to the developer however even just completing a few quick tutorials is a richly rewarding experiences and more importantly provides the deeper understanding of the capabilities and restrictions of the platform that I believe to be crucial to helping designers communicate with developers and together delivering the project effectively.

But what's all this talk of HTML5, do you have to learn that too?

The first thing to be aware of is that HTML5 isn't a new piece of software, it isn't owned by a company or a specific browser, in fact it hasn't even been officially released yet (this current release date for the first stable HTML5 recommendation is by the end of 2014). Essentially its the 5th revision of the HTML markup language, the internet's coding language with a library of standardized tags (elements) that (without getting too technical) tell your browser how to structure and interpret content. Being a revision it expands upon, rather than completely rewriting HTML4 (the current web standard) meaning that you don't need to relearn things you already know, just think of it as a sort of bolt-on. When combined with the CSS3 (a way to style these elements) and

JavaScript (added functionality) you can produce cutting edge, media rich, beautiful dynamic websites.

What's on offer?

It's hard to summarize HTML5 in a few sentences, to quote Mark Pilgrim "HTML5 is not one big thing; it is a collection of individual features." And this is the key to understanding the importance for designers, its potential. For too long the web has been seen a medium full of restrictions. HTML5 has been developed to quickly and easily add online multimedia and graphical content without having to resort to 3rd party plugins that often slow down the browser. This means that you can for example:

• Display vector graphics directly through the browser by saving content in the new **SVG** (scalable vector graphic) format
• Build dynamic, animated graphics using the new **canvas** element, which can be used for drawing, building graphs, infographics, animations, games and more
• Play audio and video without having to turn to Flash plugins
You can view some great demos on **HTML5 Rocks**

So where's the catch?

Well there is no catch as such, the biggest problem the new technologies brought by HTML5 are facing comes down to its reliance on the users browser being up to date and therefor able to support the new technologies available. There are of course ways of getting around this (for example **tricking browsers** into thinking they support certain tags), but judging by recent browser trends it won't be long before we're all using modern supportable browsers. According to **StatCounter.com** this June Google Chrome (one of HTML5′s biggest supporters) overtook Internet Explorer (notoriously bad for supporting new technologies) to become the world's top internet browser.

Is Flash Dead Then?

What's changed over the past year has been the supposed 'Death of Flash', a statement that although partly true, suggests an extremely prolonged demise. Flash is of course not dead, certainly not in the **gaming** industry where it remains the no.1 platform for gaming apps, but it's becoming less and less of an option for animated web content due to the increasing lack of support on mobile devices.

Apple's refusal in November last year to allow for support on any of its mobile

products has been recently mirrored by Microsoft who announced in August that they would be pulling all support for Flash from their Android devices. App and game development aside this makes Flash somewhat redundant in the mobile space, leaving a window of opportunity for HTML5 to push rich content into the mobile world.

What are Adobe Doing about it?

Adobe have been aware of this for some time and have recently released **Edge Animate**, a web development tool that builds applications based on a HTML5, Javascript, and CSS3 functionality. It is available as a free download from Adobe **Creative Cloud** and could potentially accelerate Flash's demise. I'm looking forward to testing Edge out to see what other animation possibilities its capable of, this will hopefully come in a later post.

Alongside Edge, Adobe have also released **Muse** as part of its Creative Cloud, a wed design package that focused on allowing designers to create websites without having to write any code. This concept is great in theory but like Dreamweaver I've heard mixed reviews on how well the software performs with criticism from many professional web designers when it was released last year. From my own admittedly limited experience however I was pleasantly surprised at how easy it was to use with a simple interface and the ability to import and place graphics directly onto the page, drop in navigation bars, contact forms and other elements with ease. A recent **update** has apparently improved HTML5 and CSS3 output too which I'm keen to test out.

As you can see Adobe are clearly investing in HTML5, they have even set up a site called Expressive Web Beta which acts as a 'resource and showcase of some of the newest, and most expressive features being added to the web today'. Click **here** to explore Expressive Web.

Don't Fear It, Embrace It

I think we can safely say the internet is here to stay and with the continual decline in printed media its much harder for the modern Graphic Designer to avoid the digital medium. The divide between the designer and the developer is becoming increasingly blurred and the more designers embrace this, the more we can creatively push the boundaries of the exciting new technologies available. Whether you want to use a familiar interface like Adobe Muse, learn to write code my hand, or like me prefer the CMS (content management system) approach offered by the likes of **Joomla** or **WordPress** there's the technology out there to suit. The best part is that most of it is free and alongside a wealth of training and support offered by the web design and development community. So what have you got to lose, get designing.

Want to know more about HTML5?

This is obviously a huge, far-reaching topic which isn't an easy job to distill into a short article, I haven't even touched on CSS3 for example. Feel free to get in touch if you're looking for more resources on HTML5 or would like to add your thoughts and insights below.

Below is a screencast of the HTML5 Presentation I went to at Google Campus in July. The presentation by the incredibly knowledgeable Tareq Fadel gives a fascinating visual insight into how the new HTML5 technologies are being used on the web today. I'll warn you now it's quite long (and technical in parts) but worth the perseverance alone to see how you can control the instruments in the Science Museum using HTML5.

Bibliography:

Source URL: http://www.markseabridge.com/html5-for-designers-what-do-you-need-to-know/