

W3C releases mobile site practices

Mobile content far beyond ringtones and wallpapers is on its way with the recent release of guidelines for designers of Web sites solely for the mobile phone.

The candidate recommendation for the "Mobile Web Best Practices 1.0" guidelines was published Monday by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) and is being backed by 30 companies which include Nokia, Vodafone and NTT DoCoMo from the Mobile Web Initiative, which is encouraging the adoption of these guidelines in order to advance the goal of "One Web."

W3C, an international consortium where member organizations and full-time staff work together to develop Web standards, is jointly run by the MIT Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory, the European Research Consortium for Informatics and Mathematics, and Keio University.

Other supporters part of the Mobile Web Best Practices Working Group include AOL, France Telecom, and ICANN-appointed registry for the .mobi domain as well as Google and Microsoft. In fact, Google announced Wednesday that mobile phone users can get free access to Google e-mail, news alerts and headlines, and a personalized Google homepage for mobile devices and PDAs; while Microsoft unveiled Sunday its unified communications plan for 2007 Office software applications and includes partnerships with telecom and mobile manufacturers such as Motorola to have devices that are compatible for the new Office features.

Comparing the mobile Web in 2006 to that of the Web in 1996, the W3C has said that much of the same conditions are the same such as lack interoperability, child protection, and problem with accessibility. However, they acknowledged that the current 2006 mobile Web climate suggests more potential connected users, content, develops and industry more than it did in 1996 for the Web.

While the mobile Web surfing bug hasn't quite hit since the emergence of convergent devices, Internet and telecom industries are doing their best now to lure PC Internet surfers to continue their online activities on mobile devices by addressing Web functionality fundamentals on the mobile.

But creating Web sites for the mobile is so far requiring communication between content providers, mobile operators, device manufacturers, browse venders, adaption providers, and authoring tool vendors who not only must answer to the challenge of usability but also screen dimensions, image formats, non-text items, color support, size limitations, browser features, and device capabilities, among other things.

And when it comes to content, the W3C and its supporting members are hoping to extend the Web content producing experience to mobile devices in less problematic ways as the new market emerges.

"There are many devices, but one Web," said Daniel Appelquist, chair of the Mobile Web Best Practices Working Group. "Practical guidelines on how to create content once that can be delivered to the plethora of devices saves developers and organizations time and money, and has the added benefit of not breaking the Web."

As the W3C noted, the recently released advanced guidelines are a how-to to author technical Web content that works well on mobile devices geared at developers, designers, and content producers, aimed at improving the experience of the Web on mobile devices.

According to the candidate recommendation, "'One Web' means making, as far as is reasonable, the same information and services available to users irrespective of the device they are using," adding "that it did not mean that exactly the same information is available in exactly the same representation across all devices."

Content guidelines included:

- Services that should be available as some variant of HTML over HTTP.
- Addressing non-text content since many devices don't support embedded objects or script because users are unable to load plug-ins to add support.
- Keep device capabilities in mind, ensure that content is suitable for use in a mobile context, and use clear and simple language.
- Because many mobile devices do not implement cookies or offer an incomplete implementation or even stripped away on some devices, designers are suggested to use URI decoration for session management instead.

Moreover, the W3C has also launched a wiki to collect observations and suggestions on techniques and implantation experience of the Mobile Web Best Practices 1.0., it said.

According to the W3C's Mobile Web Best Practices Working Group, it expects to request that its director advance the guidelines after further testing of implementation experience and practice is gathered.

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