



This is an excerpt from Joy Of Code's Workshop - Introduction To XHTML And CSS. For further details see joyofcode.com or contact Bud Kraus, friendly@joyofcode.com, 973 235 1452.

So one day, in the middle of a lecture I was giving on web design at Pratt Institute in New York City, I get distracted with an idea which has become my "Old World, New World" rant. I stumbled on one huge idea that made me realize, "I got it." An epiphany.

Put simply, the Old World is Print, a world of fixed dimensions. One where space is divided by absolute sizes - inches, centimeters, fonts expressed in points. A world that can be completely controlled by creatives and designers. A world where 10,000 brochures are printed and they are all clones of each other.

A world adored by control freaks. A world without users.

The Electronic Canvas

This space, the electronic canvas, is the New World, the world of Computer-Mediated Communications. This world is proportional and scalable. Little involves absolute size. Measurement is relative.

Every display device - monitors, large projection screens and handhelds, to name a few - feature very different display parameters. Take the computer monitor. What one sees on screen will be controlled by the operating system, the type and size of the monitor, the browser itself and, most important, the display driver being used.

If you think of your screen as a canvas, then the display driver (software built into an operating system) controls how big or small that canvas is. The electronic canvas has stretching - or some say liquid - properties. A 640 X 480 display driver renders a canvas which is 640 pixels (picture elements or a unit of screen measurement) wide by 480 pixels high. A display driver that is 800 X 600, is 800 pixels wide by 600 pixels high. Another driver, one that many people favor, is 1024 X 764.

The smaller the display driver numbers, the bigger things will appear on the screen. Go ahead, play around with display driver settings. On the Windows platform, get to Display Controls via the Control Panel, or by right clicking your mouse on the Desktop. In the Display window, select the Settings tab. **Note which driver is being used**, then go ahead and experiment by changing that setting. Once you have a different driver selected (this is not hard to do), go surfing.

What you'll find is that web pages look very different using different display drivers . Some pages are well designed - in my humble opinion - because no matter which driver you use, the page looks great as it scales to the size of the canvas (which is controlled by the display driver). But you'll find more pages that look good with only one driver and waste screen real estate (space) because of an overuse of fixed fonts and other absolute sizing layout properties. This tells you one thing - the designers of that page are trapped in the Old World.

Take a look at an inspirational read, "[The Myth of 800x600](#)", by James Kalbach. He has an M.A. in Information Science and is the Head of Information Architecture at Razorfish, Hamburg. I couldn't explain it any better than he nice guy too does - and he's a