

# Joy of Code <Intro To HTML>

This is an excerpt from my online class, Intro To HTML. To see more about it go to [joyofcode.com](http://joyofcode.com) or contact me, Bud Kraus, [bud@joyofcode.com](mailto:bud@joyofcode.com) or 9732351452

## Appendix F: Old World, New World

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 features a canvas which is proportional and scalable. Little involves absolute size. Measurement is almost always related to some other factor, that is, measurement is indirect.

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 screen resolution (the number of pixels measured horizontally and vertically) being used.

If you think of your screen as a canvas, then the screen resolution (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 screen resolution of 640 X 480 renders a canvas which is 640 pixels (picture elements or a unit of screen measurement) wide by 480 pixels high. A screen resolution that is 800 X 600, is 800 pixels wide by 600 pixels high. Another screen resolution, one that many people favor, is 1024 X 768.

The lower the screen resolution 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 screen resolution is being used**, then go ahead and experiment by changing that setting. Once you have a different screen resolution selected (this is not hard to do), go surfing.

What you'll find is that web pages look very different using different screen resolutions. Some pages are well designed - in my humble opinion - because no matter which screen resolution you use, the page looks great as it scales to the size of the canvas. But you'll find more pages that look good in only one resolution 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.

#### Update

I think I wrote this article back in 2004. The subject really belongs to CSS as it's all about web page *design* issues and that's certainly not the purview of HTML.

While my concepts are still correct - the size of the canvas is different because the user has the option of changing screen resolutions - I am not such a hardliner as I once was. For example, using pixels to set the width of elements and font sizes is a good solution for most designs.

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 does - and he's a nice guy too!!

## Design Philosophy

Think I'm talking philosophy? You better believe it. See John Allsop's "[A Dao of Web Design](#)" which looks at web design through the prism of the Tao Te Ching.

Now don't get me wrong. I understand all too well the issues web designers and developers face in setting a typography that one can live with in the New World. Corporations have branded identities which need to be protected. If you say, "Don't set your font size to 12 pixels because it makes little sense in this environment. Rather, set it to 100% of the user's font size preference," they will look at you as if you are from Mars.

This Old World, New World paradigm is no trivial matter. Whole corporate structures have been successfully built upon the Old World model. Take a well known company I did some work for, whose roots are in book publishing (it doesn't get more Old World than that). They were building an online bookselling service and they were hellbent on making their web pages look like flyers and brochureware, something with which they had a lot of experience. The web site not only looked awful, it was completely hard coded, that is, unscalable to the user's preferences. It looked bad in ANY display driver. However, it was their corporate tradition, it was how they thought, how they were organized, that caused them to show the world that they did not understand the New World. And yes, all this user interface stuff has a huge effect on relations with users, and whether the user's experience will be satisfying and lead to some intended result.

## The Universe Of Relativity

Compare that with how Amazon and eBay look and function, and you'll see examples of consumer centric companies that know how to deliver great online experiences. They understand the operating environment of the online world. They understand this medium and work with it and not against it. That means knowing that this is a universe of relative sizing and proportionality - relative and proportional to preferences set by users in their browsers.

I've gone on a bit long here. I don't expect you to get this all at once. These ideas lay at the foundation of my web design classes which are practical and conceptual. Don't fret or worry if this all does not come together in one second. It takes time. You may even struggle with it depending on your background. Me, I never came from the Old World, so it was easier but it still took time for these ideas to sink in.

There is much more to learn, and as you do, more of this will make sense--if it hasn't already.