

It is easy to take for granted the amazingly sophisticated technologies that brings us the internet. The internet's success stems from "ancient" technical standards including those by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) that you could easily think are just not relevant in a modern commercial internet.

But with the growing realisation that online success starts with a quality sales-focussed website, these standards are not only relevant, but can provide a competitive edge for your website.

What is the W3C standard?

A web page is mainly software and when visiting a site, we see that software's *output* on our browser (i.e. Internet Explorer, Fire Fox, Safari etc.) Your website's W3C declaration informs the browser how to interpret and present the website's output.

Over the years there have been a few generations of W3C standards as website technology has evolved, so it's very important to specify the *correct W3C standard* that matches your website for the optimal outcome.

It's much like knowing which type of fuel to put into your car (leaded, unleaded, diesel etc) If you use the wrong fuel, then the car is unlikely to run optimally, and may even breakdown.

It's the same with websites and browsers. If a site claims to be constructed using a particular W3C standard but contains standards related defects or doesn't even have a standard; the site may not be displayed how it was intended or may fail to display completely.

Impacts of W3C non-compliance

Your website may look OK to you, but it may look *completely different* on other browsers or browser versions. This is a well known and very frustrating aspect that web developers have to continually deal with called *cross-browser compatibility*.

Avoiding browser compatibility issues is the under-lying objective of the W3C standards.

As an illustration of the extent of browser variations a website has to accommodate, the Succinct Ideas website had visits from 9 different browser types with **43 individual software versions** in just 6 months!

Browser compatibly issues can prevent your website's menu system from working properly; obscure important content, or even make the entire site impossible to view on particular browser versions.

The problem is you can't even see those defects to make an assessment of its impact on your prospective client unless you use that specific version of that particular browser.

Is W3C non-compliance costing you online sales?

Sales prospects will not invest their valuable time if your offerings are displayed in an unusable or distorted arrangement. The visitor's poor online experience also creates a negative impression of your organisation which further prejudices your sale opportunity.

A non-compliant website will not only undermine your business' credibility, but it scares sales leads away that you didn't even know you had! It's a *sales prevention* website!

Testing for W3C compliance

W3C have made assessment easy by providing a free validation tool: <http://validator.w3.org/>

Enter the website address and the validator will test the web page using the W3C standard the site claims to comply with.

If the validator reports *no doctype found* then your site does not even declare a W3C standard.

The validator results include references information on how to resolve any issues encountered, although much of it is *deep geek*.

How to get W3C compliant

W3C compliance is something your web developer can do when building your site if they know it's important to you, and of course it is!

Depending on your website's technical sophistication, achieving W3C compliance may be as simple as setting options in the web development tool (i.e. Dreamweaver etc) before publishing the site; or it may involve an extended debugging session requiring deep technical knowledge on HTML and W3C standards.

Which W3C standard?

Speak to your web developer to determine which W3C standard best suits your site. Each W3C standard version comes in two forms 'strict' and 'transitional'.

In my view it is better to fully comply with the less disciplined transitional standard than to not comply with the more onerous strict standard.

Technical folks may object to this, but we are focussing on *complying* with the W3C standard for a sales objective, not technical perfection.

Edits can lead to compliance issues.

W3C compliance issues can creep into your site through edits and additions so it is important to retest W3C compliance following these modifications.

No W3C standard at all?

Many sites I encounter have no W3C declaration at all. These sites unfortunately run a real and genuine risk of inconsistent display over a variety of browser types and so the opportunity for compromising potential sales and business reputations is real.

The W3C badge

If demonstrating W3C compliance is important for your business, the W3C validator provides details on how to display a W3C logo on your compliant web pages.

Where to go from here

1. Assess each page in your site for W3C compliance
If there are issues, take them up with your web developer for resolution.
Note that if your website brief did not specify W3C compliance then it is not reasonable to expect this to be a warrantable issue.
2. Re-test W3C compliance when web site edits or modifications are undertaken.
3. Have your website tested in the browser and version editions that visitors are using to ensure it displays fully and as intended to your target audience.
Source the list of browsers and browser versions being used from your website activity statistics. NB Typically Internet Explorer represents around 80%, Firefox 15%, Safari and others the balance.
4. Specify W3C compliance for your next web site design specification to ensure you are maximising the sales opportunity for your website from the ground up.

If your business has a quality based culture, you will understand the value of operating a standards based website.

Even if you don't, you will still draw comfort from the knowledge that visitors to your website will enjoy a consistent view of your online business no matter which browser they use.

I hope you find this helpful information to coax your website into becoming a viable sales tool.

If you think the information in this newsletter is useful, I encourage you to forward it to peers, business associates etc.

Previous newsletters; business presentations etc are available from www.succinctideas.com.au and my blog www.thedigitalmarketer.com.au

If you do decide to plagiarise my work, please acknowledge it with a link to my website **J**

Sincerely,

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Website Sales Review wizard

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