

## Hot Topics from the Blogs: September 2004

Welcome to September's edition of Hot Topics from the blogs, this month it seems we've picked up on a number of thoughts on CSS and some resources you may be interested in.

Probably the most important posts I've seen this month refer to **sIFR** – the latest Flash replacement strategy – so that's what I'm starting with.

### *Custom Typography*

Typography has been the subject of a new series of [articles by Linda Goin](#) here on DNzone, so I was intrigued to come across a piece (on the Web Standards site) alluding to AT&T's standards makeover of their [homepage](#) and indicating they would be moving on to use **sIFR**.

**sIFR** I thought – what's that?

**sIFR** stands for [Scalable Inman Flash Replacement](#), and as detailed on [Mike Davidson's site](#), is "a standards-compliant way to deliver rich typographical text in a flexible manner to over 90% of web users".

I won't regurgitate Mike's description here, suffice to say that this technique is just going to be a huge and incredibly useful way of delivering custom graphics to people's browsers, while staying within an accessible framework. How big is it going to be? Well as this [second post](#) points out, at one point the original announcement of sIFR was the 13<sup>th</sup> most popular page in the **entire world!**

This is very much a work in progress with improvements being made [all the time](#).

### *Reworking, Revisiting, Resizing Pt.II*

Last month I mentioned that Douglas Bowman at [Stopdesign](#) had used a redesign of the Microsoft site to exemplify how useful CSS could be in delivering leaner, more efficient code (see [Throwing Tables Out the Window](#)).

Well no sooner had I published August's blog [round-up](#), than I find [this posting](#) from Molly Holzschlag pointing out a Microsoft redesign and major code clean-up.

### *CSS Problems and Experimentation*

I seemed to come across a number of articles this month all looking at various bits and pieces of CSS.

First off [Michael Koch](#) has come up against an issue in Microsoft Internet Explorer, which causes freezing and crashing on encountering certain CSS combinations. His concerns were somewhat assuaged by a [post from Eric Meyer](#), in which Eric details a problem with a **float : left** declaration that suddenly threw his site into confusion. Initially fingers were pointed at XP SP2, but that was quickly deduced to not be the culprit. If you want to have a go at playing detective, Eric's provided a test file detailed [here](#).

As always, there's been a lot of good stuff on Eric's blog – this month he ran a series of articles on the use of tables, finishing by neatly summarising his thoughts on the pros and cons of using tables as a [means to achieve page layout](#).

If you really want to start stretching your mind on presentational matters, how about considering taking out the [default browser styles](#) and seeing what happens to your web page.

Over at [Mezzoblue](#) Dave Shea has been figuring out how to code some CSS to force a block of content to have a [specific height](#). Using the **min-height** property should be the way forward and workarounds can be

used for the non min-height supporting IE, but Safari still used to cause problems. Not any more thanks to Mr. Shea.

Further on this line of CSS layout heroics, Paul Bellows has posted a method of [balancing column heights](#) without any HTML/CSS hacks or tables, but by using JavaScript. A view on the [possible issues and alternatives](#) was provided on the Web Standards Project site.

## ***Editorial Corner***

The people from 37 Signals wrote up their notes from a trip to a talk on [presenting data and information](#) – interesting thoughts on how to make your wonderful content really shine.

Jumping back to Mezzoblu, in response to an amusing aside about [unhelpful critical comments](#), there are (IMHO) some little nuggets in the [comments](#) – Robert Hahn suggests presenting designs (where appropriate) in black and white with placeholder graphics to avoid distraction. The [follow up post](#) and [subsequent comments](#) are also thought provoking – and fun – would you pick a colour by typing your date of birth into a hex colour field?

Plagiarism is always a problem when producing content or ideas – sometimes you won't realise you're being ripped off, and *sometimes*, as a publisher you won't necessarily know when **you're** actually doing the ripping off!

Here's a [cautionary tale](#) about a small company that outsourced some work, and ended up in a whole heap of trouble when their new website turned out to look a lot like somebody else's. Painfully that other website happened to be quite well known. From working in publishing I know what I've caught on occasion, but you can't check every line of every chapter/website/article etc. Memo to self – must stay vigilant.

## ***Accessibility and Web Design***

Whether you explicitly embrace it or not, accessibility and web standards complaint programming is having an increasing impact on web design. Even if you just want to throw pictures up of your cats to show the family, building your site using out of date approaches won't impress anyone.

So [here are some thoughts](#) from Anne Van Kesteren (and his – yes the *his* is correct – readers) about the nastiness of opening new browser windows from links. The [Dive Into Accessibility article](#) referenced reinforces the argument.

Further on the subject of accessibility, [Andy Clarke](#) has noted some thoughts about the use of [alt text](#) and [longdesc](#).

## ***Resources, Resources***

While I'm duty bound, and required by contractual obligation <g>, to tell you how good DMXzone is, I can't claim we're the only resource in the world. So, to round off this months blog round up here's some recent resources, or fledgling resources, that I've browsed across:

- [Standards resources for beginners](#)
- [Absolute versus relative positioning in CSS](#)
- [Suggestions for E-Commerce sites](#) for the festive season
- An introduction to [centering using CSS](#)
- Thoughts on [providing and formatting links](#)
- A [guide to z-indexing](#)

## *Firefox*

In case you haven't already noticed, a lot of the bloggers referenced are [rather keen](#) on the [Firefox](#) browser, which has recently released a [1.0 preview release](#). This is generating a bit of [excitement](#), through some of the new features like [Live Bookmarks](#); a way of viewing RSS news and blog headlines in the bookmarks toolbar or bookmarks menu.

So positive technical features to investigate in this much-lauded browser, as well as the [security related ones](#).

## *I Never Knew That Corner*

From this post about the Microsoft versus Open Source to use [Sender ID or not debate](#), I found out that AOL [open sources their own web server](#). Wow.

## *Blogger Code*

I should have looked it up before, but sadly I hadn't. If you're ever wondering what those cryptic little lists of Unix reminiscent letters (d+ t- x- l, c+ or whatever) are in some peoples blog rolls, then it's a [Blogger Code](#).

I hope you've enjoyed this third trawl of a small part of the blogosphere – once again feel free to let [me know](#) if you've got any thoughts or comments.