

FRAGMENTED FUTURE

By Darcy DiNucci

The Web has become an almost iconic cultural reference—ubiquitous and familiar. Even your grandmother can recognize a Web page by its typical brochure-like displays of Times or Arial text, eye-grabbing graphics, and highlighted hyperlinks. What we need to remember, though, is that the Web, as we know it now, is a fleeting thing. Web 1.0. The relationship of Web 1.0 to the Web of tomorrow is roughly the equivalence of Pong to *The Matrix*. Today's Web is essentially a prototype—a proof of concept. This concept of interactive content universally accessible through a standard interface has proved so successful that a new industry is set on transforming it, capitalizing on all its powerful possibilities. The Web we know now, which loads into a browser window in essentially static screenfuls, is only an embryo of the Web to come.

The first glimmerings of Web 2.0 are beginning to appear, and we are just starting to see how that embryo might develop.

Ironically, the defining trait of Web 2.0 will be that it won't have any visible characteristics at all. The Web will be identified only by its underlying DNA structure—TCP/IP (the protocol that controls how files are transported across the Internet), HTTP (the protocol that rules the communication between computers on the Web), and URLs (a method for identifying files). As those technologies define its workings, the Web's outward form—the hardware and software that we use to view it—will multiply. On the

front end, the Web will fragment into countless permutations with different looks, behaviors, uses, and hardware hosts. The Web will be understood not as screenfuls of text and graphics but as a transport mechanism, the ether through which interactivity happens. It will still appear on your computer screen, transformed by video and other dynamic media made possible by the speedy connection technologies now coming down the pike. The Web will also appear, in different guises, on your TV set (interactive content woven seamlessly into programming and commercials), your car dashboard (maps, Yellow Pages, and other traveler info), your cell phone (news, stock quotes, flight updates), hand-held game machines (linking players with competitors over the Net), and maybe even your microwave (automatically finding cooking times for products).

The world of myriad, ubiquitous Internet-connected tools, often referred to as Internet appliances, has long been predicted. Until now, though, that world has been described vaguely, indicated by a bit of hand-waving rather than any concrete product specs. Now the first generation of Internet appliances—Web-ready cell phones and personal digital assistants (PDAs)—has begun to appear. And while these devices are still fairly primitive, they do offer some clues to the likely future of the breed.

For designers, the first thing to notice is the different considerations concerning form that are already appearing. The kind of Web

page you can display on a cell phone or Palm Pilot is a far cry from the kind you'd create for a computer monitor. The format is not only much smaller (think 2" of screen real estate instead of 17"), but on-board storage is either minimal or nonexistent, and keyboards for alphanumeric information entry are usually missing. In fact, the hardware will be different from device to device; compare the interface of the Palm Pilot with that of the GameBoy, for instance. Do you have a 20-pixel, 200-pixel, or 2000-pixel screen width? Pen entry, joystick, or touch screen? Each device's input and output methods will demand different interface designs.

Besides the hardware differences, designers will have to consider an ever-widening array of connection speed capabilities. Web pages meant to be viewed on full-size monitors or TV screens will soon be able to take advantage of high-bandwidth connections such as cable modems and DSL connections. Mobile appliances such as PDAs rely on much slower connections: The two-way radio planned for the Palm VII, for instance, gets about 10 Kbps. While wireless speeds will likely see gains in the future, the chasm between wired and unwired speeds will likely remain wide, and both connection models will be important.

The lesson is inescapable: Web development—Web design, programming, and production—will split into fragments mirroring the fragmented Web appliance scene.

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Take Five—Please

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gram's designers focus on their clients' marketing orientation—whether they sell museum exhibits, investment management, or higher education.

A big difference between Pentagram's most recent volume and its first is that the identities of its individual partners are now underplayed, to promote a unified corporate image. The 1972 book had full-page photographs of the partners and information about their backgrounds, making it easy for us to envision who might have had a leading role in a particular project.

Pentagram Book Five makes it far more difficult to identify the voices and visions of individual designers, as it does not identify the contributions each has made, or even each project's team leaders or office. Although Randall Rothenberg's introduction describes and praises Pentagram's operating structure of individual teams at great length, the partners put the work itself in the foreground, primarily with extensive photographs and text describing the working process. We have no opportunity to explore the characteristics of the New York office, for example, whose projects often have a character distinct from those of Pentagram offices in other cities around the world.

Some would argue that the pervasive market atmosphere of the late 1990s nullifies the issue of a designer's individual vision, but the question is relevant to *Pentagram Book Five*, a story of the agency's accomplishments. While the groupthink approach may serve the ends of self-promotion and client solicitation, it hides aspects of Pentagram that would interest general readers. We are not privy to the separate voices of any of the design teams, and we must read between the lines (and images) for the more interesting details of how design decisions are

likely to have been made. As a result, Pentagram's corporate image is somewhat enigmatic: The designers seem ready-for-hire for any client, as there seems to be no consistency to the kinds of clients it chooses to work with. Their rhetoric shifts with the client, engaging in typographic shouting for the Public Theater's *Bring in 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk* and kitschy nostalgia for the signage of Celebration, Florida, the Walt Disney Company's new town near Orlando.

Pentagram Book Five is beautifully produced, with 700 color photographs, but it looks and reads like a five-pound, \$50 annual report. The introductory project texts are distinctly uncritical and typically boast of how Pentagram's interventions improved a client's market performance. And *Book Five's* account of the signage program for Celebration is downright disturbing. While

newspapers around the country have featured articles describing Celebration residents' dissension of Disney's draconian civic ordinances and its inept management of the town's school, the vapid *Pentagram* text calls the development a "suburban utopia" and characterizes the Disney sensibility as one of "measured wit and large doses of quiet good humor."

Like *S,M,L,XXL*, *Pentagram Book Five* is heavily inflated. There are many more pictures than necessary to describe a project, and single images are frequently spread across two pages like a Neiman Marcus catalog layout. The book's weight and bulk are annoying, particularly in contrast to the lightness of the information provided within. While such a lavish presentation may impress a future client, it serves neither the intelligence nor the pocketbook of any interested reader.

Framgmented Future

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The Web publishing community seems still to be in denial of this inevitability. The W3C has published guidelines for using HTML 4.0 to create Web pages for mobile devices, advising designers to stay away from frames, scripts, complex tables, images, and other space-hogging elements. They recommend the use of HTML 4.0's <MEDIA> tag to attach appropriate style sheets, tailored for the small screens and other limitations, to your Web pages. But the reality is that the days of one-size-fits-all pages are over (if they ever existed). No single set of pages can or should be created to fit all Web devices. You'd be foolish to use a Palm Pilot interface on a 36" TV screen or to try displaying MTV on a cell phone screen. How can a single Web interface possibly suit such disparate devices?

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The initial signs bear out this hypothesis. The handful of Web-connected cell phones already on the market each have different display standards and interface models, leaving it in the hands of each service provider to produce content for its own subscribers. When 3Com announced its Internet-compatible Palm VII, it also announced a proprietary Web publishing format to support it, featuring an icon-based interface limited to simple queries and a pint-sized page format for publisher responses. The underlying technologies are the same as for what we might now call "traditional" Web pages, but the publishing format and interface are quite different.

This initial chaos can be tamed, to some degree, over time. Actually, the battle has already begun. A W3C standards group, dubbed the Wireless Application Protocol consortium, has formed to begin devel-

oping display, interface, and production standards for mobile devices like cell phones and PDAs. Setting standards for phones makes a lot of sense, and cell phone makers have some incentive to do so. The existence of standards not only would free them from the task of doing their own publishing, but would also open the market to third-party publishers—leading to a profusion of content that would in turn sell more phones. But, because of the hardware issues described earlier, it's unlikely that standards set for cell phones would work well for PDAs. And for practical and competitive reasons (the tendency of any company to differentiate among its own products), we're bound to see a proliferation of new Web publishing formats.

It's way too early to say how many fragments Web publishing will break into. The field will be evolving

for years to come. As new devices appear, developers will cleave to existing standards when practical, and strike out on their own when it provides competitive advantages. The process will doubtless be similar to the one we've already witnessed in the world of the browser as defined by Netscape and Microsoft. These companies first strove for dominance by accentuating their browsers' differences, then acceded to standards when doing so offered benefits in the marketplace.

In the end, way down the line, some set of standards for different devices will probably be developed—say, one for cell phones, another for game machines, and one for household appliances. The process will be long and unpredictable, though—an organic system of mitosis, mutation, and natural selection that we can only regard with wonder.

Trash Palace

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Initially, they got their presswork done by sneaking into UT's design department at night, but when demand grew, they decided to set up a shop of their own. Without much seed money to start, Yee-Haw Industries was opened—where else?—in a former riding-mower shed and trailer in Belcher's mother's yard in Corbin, Kentucky. Belcher and Bradley purchased presses and type fonts after scouring the local Yellow Pages and traveling to Tennessee, West Virginia, and New York to find retired pressmen who were delighted to turn their outmoded equipment and type cases over to young people committed to continuing the craft. Vandercook proof presses (the SP-15 and SP-25 models) were acquired to print posters, and two tabletop platen presses were added for small-format jobs. The studio also eventually added 1000 cases of lead fonts, a huge collection of ornaments and dingbats, and a wood type collection of 150 fonts. Although Yee-Haw does most of its design work the old-fashioned way—by hand—Belcher and Bradley do complete a small portion of designs on the computer.

For both Bradley and Belcher, starting a letterpress fulfilled many of their desires: It enabled Bradley to expand on his printing and lettering talents and allowed Belcher to escape the confines of computer-based design, to enjoy the tactile pleasures of hot-metal typesetting, and to work on her own painting. Belcher revels in the fact that Yee-Haw can complete projects from start to finish without dealing with the numerous prepress issues involved in offset printing. "We do it all, right here, and we don't have to involve anyone else," she says, adding, "except maybe the client." Nevertheless, Yee-Haw has formed collaborative relationships with local illustrators whose work suits its

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