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Introduction To Web Technologies

By Richard Lowe

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There are literally hundreds of difficult technologies available to the webmaster. Making proper use of these technologies allows the creation of maintainable, efficient and useful web sites. For example, using SSI (server side includes) or CSS (cascading style sheets) a webmaster can change every page on his web site by editing one file.

A few of the more common technologies are listed below.

ASP – Active Server Pages are used to perform server-side scripting. This is a way to get things done on the web server, as opposed to, say, JavaScript, which lets you get things done on the client (browser). Although there is a Unix and Linux version of ASP, it is primarily intended for use on Microsoft web server based systems.

ASP is useful for tasks such as maintaining a database, creating dynamic pages and respond to user queries (and many other things as well).

CGI – Common Gateway Interface is one of the older standards on the internet for moving data between a web page and a web server. CGI is by far and away the most commonly used method of handling things like guestbooks, email forms, message boards and so on. CGI is actually a standard for passing data back and forth and not a scripting language at all. In fact, CGI routines are commonly written in interpreted languages such as PERL or compiled languages like C.

CSS – You use Cascading Style Sheets to format your web pages anyway that you want. CSS is complicated, but the complication pays off by being able to create web pages that look much better than otherwise. One very nice feature is the ability to define formatting commands in a single file, which is then included in all of your web pages. This lets you make one change to modify the look of your entire site.

HTACCESS – The .htaccess file allows you to set parameters for your web site and folders (directories). The most common use is to protect directories by defining usernames and passwords. Htaccess can be used for many other things as well, including

denying access to specific addresses, keeping out hostile spiders and redirecting traffic transparently to the user. The downside of htaccess is the language used is often extremely obscure, difficult to understand and extraordinarily precise. A small error in your htaccess file can disable your entire web site until the error is fixed.

Java – Java is a client–side (meaning it's executed by the browser not the server) language. It is efficient and very powerful. The primary advantage of Java over ActiveX is Java has a sane security model (called the Sandbox Model), while the ActiveX model is so imbecilic as to defy imagination. Java is also much less likely to crash systems. On the other hand, Java is substantially slower than ActiveX, and there are many tasks that simply cannot be performed in Java because it is denied access to the operating system and disk itself.

JavaScript – This is a scripting language which is interpreted and executed by the browser. It is very useful for getting tasks done on the client, such as moving pictures around the screen, creating very dynamic navigation systems and even games. JavaScript is generally preferable on internet sites because it is supported on more browsers than VBScript, which is the chief competitor.

Office – The Microsoft Office suite includes a number of tools, including Word, Excel, Access and Powerpoint. Each of these tools has the ability to save in HTML format and has special commands for the internet. This is especially useful, for example, if you work in an office where people are trained in Excel and you don't want to retrain them to create web pages. On the other hand, if you are creating internet web sites (as

opposed to intranet sites) you probably would be better off using web specific products to edit your web pages.

Perl – A great scripting language which makes use of the CGI standard to allow work to be done on the web server. PERL is very easy to learn (as programming languages go) and straightforward to use. It is most useful for guestbooks, email forms and other similar, simple tasks. PERL's primary disadvantage is the overhead on the server is very high, as one process is created each time a routine is called, and the language is interpreted, which means the code is recompiled each time it is run. For complex tasks, a server-side scripting language such as PHP or ASP is much preferred.

PHP – This language is, like ASP, used to get work done on the server. PHP is similar in concept to ASP and can be used in similar circumstances. PHP is very efficient, allows access to

databases using products such as MySQL, and can be used to create very dynamic web pages.

SSI – If your site is hosted on a typical Apache server, then you probably can use something called Server Side Includes. This is a way to get the web server to perform tasks before displaying a web page. One of the most common uses is to, well, include common text. This is great when you have, for example, a navigation system which is common to all of your pages. You can make one change in an SSI file and thus change your entire web site.

SSI is very common but has really been superseded by languages such as PHP. The overhead of SSI on the server is high as each page is scanned for SSI directives before passing it to the browser.

VBScript – Visual Basic Scripting was Microsoft's answer to JavaScript. VBScript is a good tool for any site which is intended to be only displayed by the Internet Explorer browser. In my opinion, VBScript should never be used on a web site – JavaScript is preferable due to a wider acceptance among browsers.

Richard Lowe Jr. is the webmaster of Internet Tips And Secrets at <http://www.internet-tips.net> – Visit our website any time to read over 1,000 complete FREE articles about how to improve your internet profits, enjoyment and knowledge.

Use an 'Inverted Triangle' in Your Introduction

By Ron Sathoff

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When I was teaching public speaking, one of the biggest complaints I heard from my students was, "I don't know how to start!" This is a problem that goes well beyond classroom speeches, however. Many of the questions I get from business speakers are also about introductions: Should I use a joke? Should I just state my position right away? How do I get the audience's attention?

One tool that I have found to be very useful when trying to write an introduction is called the "Inverted Triangle." This concept is used mainly in journalism, but it works great for speech introductions as well. When writing your introduction, visualize it as a triangle with its widest part at the top and the point at the bottom.

This triangle represents how specific your information is at any given time in your introduction. The wide part at the top represents fairly general information, and, as the triangle becomes narrower, the information becomes more specific. In essence, the inverted triangle is just a way to remember that you should go from the general to the specific in your introduction.

I've found that the best way to put this into practice is to start off by talking about some general issue or problem. Then, I try to apply it more specifically to the audience that I am talking to. Then I become even more specific by advocating a particular plan or solution.

As an example, if you were giving a presentation on your business opportunity, you might begin by talking about the economy (general), and how hard it is for some people to make ends meet (a little more specific). Then, you would discuss how nice it would be for your audience to have some extra money to pay bills or buy that luxury item they've always wanted (more specific). Then, finally, you would introduce your opportunity as a way that they could accomplish this (even more specific).

As you can see, this format is a nice way of leading into a subject. By using the triangle, you can "ease" your way into making your main point at the end of the introduction. The

inverted triangle certainly isn't the only way to structure an

introduction, but it is very helpful when an introduction doesn't spring instantly to mind.

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