



W3C Standards Are Not Enough



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W3C standards = good

- Consistency – lynchpin of standards!
- Faster updates/maintenance
- Achieve better usability, accessibility, SEO
- Springboard to Cool Stuff™ like mashups

I don't need to convince this room, right?



We want standards!

- But, there's a problem
- Other people don't want standards
- In fact, other people **don't care**
- So we advocate standards compliance



In a perfect world

- Everyone would agree to use standards
- Everyone's budget would be endless
- There'd be no politics in the workplace



The reality

- People don't always agree with you
- You will need to work the system
- You will need to pick your fights
- It's not actually that easy



Isn't compliance good enough?

- The web industry has been fighting for standards implementation for years
- That fight isn't over
- So compliance ain't bad, right?



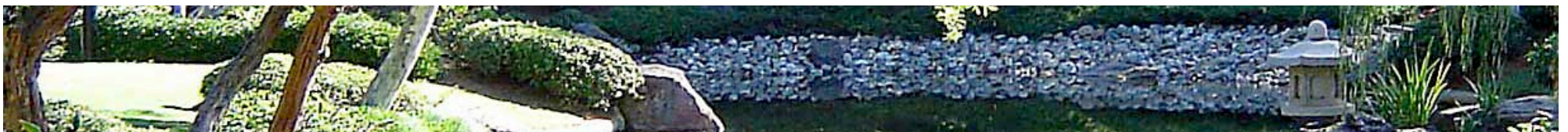


Well... actually...





W3C standards are bad for
your professional health.



W3C Standards Are Not Enough!

- Standards don't handle the human factor
- Compliance alone is dangerous
- The standards don't cover everything
- So don't use up all your Fight just yet...





W3C standards are a **bad goal**.



Hard to get

- Standards tell you where to aim but not how to get there
- It's also quite hard to get a company to embrace W3C standards on their own merit.



W3C standards are a hard sell

- They sound like “more work” to other geeks
- They sound boring and expensive to managers
- W3C standards are just not sexy. Sorry!



The human factor

- Technology generally isn't the problem
- People are usually the problem
- You often spend more time convincing people to do something than actually doing the development.



The problem with validation

- Automated tools can find *invalid* code, but only a human can find *bad* code
- Compliance can breed a false sense of security
- Terrible sites can pass validation



It validates...

You are welcome to
use this gate. Please
be quite in the
Cathedral grounds.

座堂範圍內，
請保持寧靜。



There are big gaps between standards

- We do more than W3C standards cover
- Who here uses something not covered by a W3C specification?



A day in our lives

Microformats, RSS/Atom, widgets/UWA, Flash, graphics, audio, video, PDFs, frameworks, hacks, programming/scripting languages, legal issues like privacy and copyright, user experience design, visual design, content suitable for the web, browser support standards, conditional comments, IE8 and X-UA-Compatible, workflows... *gasp*





...and what if it will never validate?



Not all sites validate

- Some sites *cannot* validate
- Third-party code, uncontrolled code, locked down templates... there are lots of reasons
- Does that mean your site is crap?
- Does that mean you just give up?





We need to reset our thinking.



Don't talk about W3C compliance

- We are trying to get people excited about hard, boring, obscure details
- We are selling ourselves short
- We are making life hard for ourselves



Don't *aim* for W3C compliance

- If you make compliance your big goal, that's all you can possibly get
- Careful what you wish for...



We need a new goal

- But that's ok
- We never **actually** wanted standards compliance
- We want something that **includes** it





We want **quality** – not compliance



Use quality as your touchstone

- Quality is a non-technical value
- Anyone can understand it
- Politically viable – hard to argue against
- Incorporates everything we want to do





Quality is a much better goal
than compliance.



How to achieve “quality”

- Get management buy-in
- Document what “quality” actually means
- Get a big stick to whack recalcitrants

...how do you do that?



Selling the drama

- Standards don't sell their own benefits
- **You** have to do that
- Translate standards into things people care about



Things the specs don't say

- “this will save us money”
- “this will make us rank well in Google”
- “this will maintain brand consistency”
- “this is industry best practice, not doing this makes us look lame”
- “this will prevent us getting sued”



Play to the audience

- Managers and techies generally respond to different aspects of standards
- ...so don't fight it!
- Remember not everyone shares your values



Try reverse management

- Push the idea of quality
- Managers will probably ask for metrics
- They will want documentation
- Make it their idea...





Make your own internal standard.



Internal standards

- Incorporate W3C standards
- Use standards compliance as a *baseline*
- Create your own complementary standards
- Define *how to apply* existing standards
- Explicitly state “common knowledge”



Set up an integrated approach

- Quality web requires an end-to-end process
- That means people other than web developers have to do work for the web site
- To get that, you will need to document what you need from them



Documentation helps

- Organisations put faith in documentation
- You need documentation to hold contractors and third parties accountable
- Other people can't follow your standard if you don't write it down



How formal should they be?

- Internal standards should be **policy**, endorsed by an appropriate level of management.
- They should be **documented** - word of mouth does not cut it.



Who should write them?

- Subject Matter Experts!
- Generally not managers
- It should be one (keen) person or a small (keen) group.
- Since you're here, it probably means **you**...



~~Bath?~~ Documentation?



What's an internal standard?

- “Our workflow starts with IA.”
- “We require W3C compliance.”
- “We use the progressive enhancement methodology.”
- “We have reserved ID and class names for the following `<div>s...`”



Corollaries

- “Content creators must write or source text alternatives for images and multimedia.”
- “The marketing department has ownership of the website’s brand consistency.”
- “Content owners are responsible for checking copyright and privacy issues.”



Nail down details

- Code commenting formats
- Versioning schema
- Browser support matrix
- Code proformas



What they are not

- “The vendor says it’s standards compliant.”
- “We made our own DTD!”
- “We just lowered the baseline.”
- “It’s ok, we use Dreamweaver!”
- “We got ourselves some *Web 2.0!*”



How far to go?

- You can extend to a full internal framework
 - Identify your site's design patterns
 - Define page structures and content modules to drop into those structures
 - Define `<body>` class schema
 - End up with a website code library



Documentation

- Be as concise as possible
- Split things up
- Tailor to the audience
 - Policy should be management friendly
 - Procedure should be geek-friendly





So what's the payoff?



Benefits of internal standards

- Create a **culture of quality**
- Achieve W3C standards on the way
- Facilitate an integrated approach
- Define what *everyone* has to do, and *why*
- Help deal with the human factor



Handle the human factor

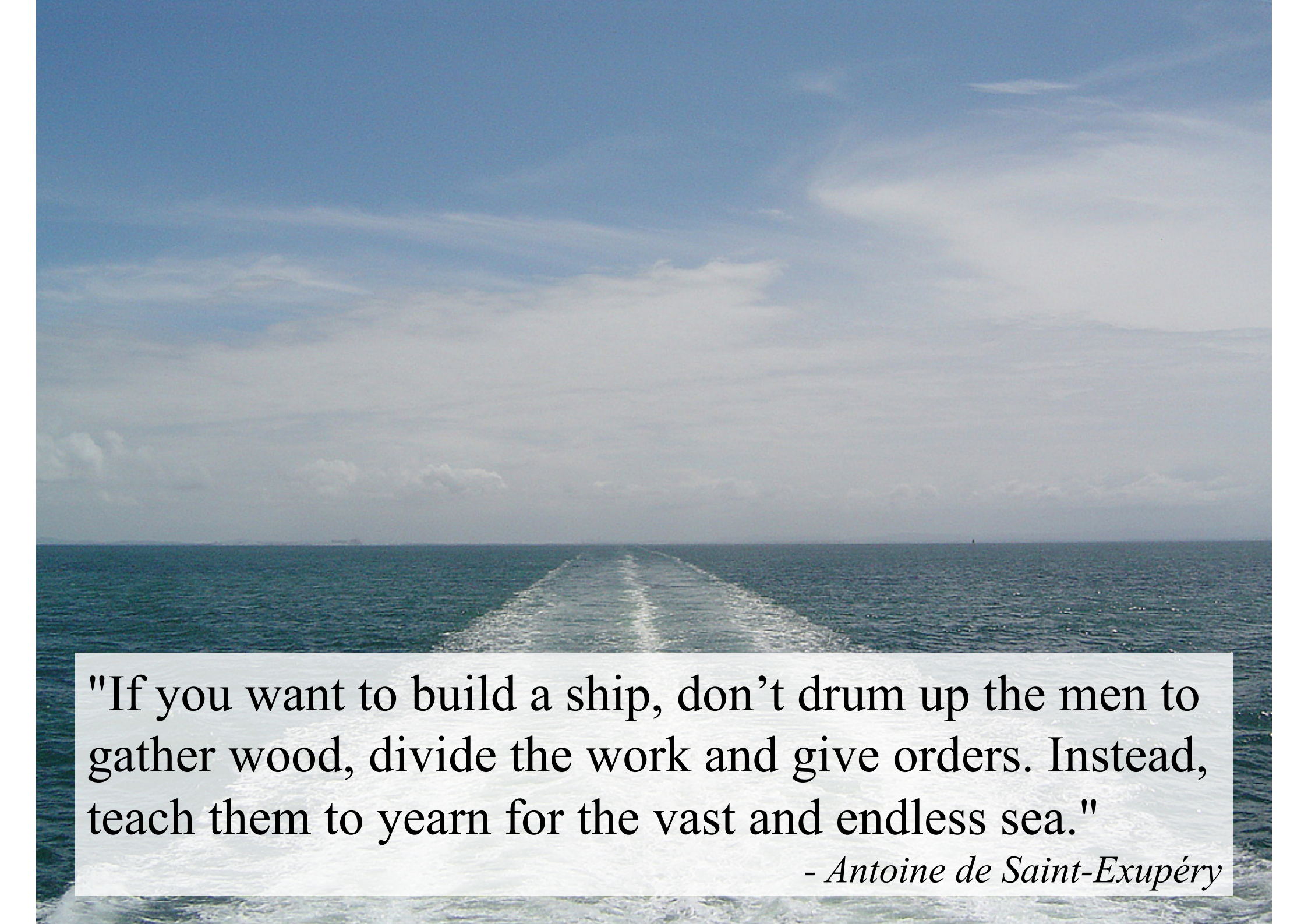
- People are not required to obey the W3C
- People *are* required to obey their boss
- Endorsed internal standards give web standards some authority



Take-home points

- Internal standards are the way to reap the rewards of web standards.
 - W3C compliance does not guarantee quality
 - W3C specs don't tackle your company politics
 - W3C specs leave huge gaps
 - Your standards can fill those gaps and set you up to produce quality web sites.





"If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea."

- Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Questions?

- Don't be shy...



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