

Q-and-A: Tim Berners-Lee, professor, inventor of World Wide Web

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Tim Berners-Lee hasn't been idle since he invented the World Wide Web 25 years ago.

In addition to his day job as a computer science professor, Berners-Lee has been guiding the development and spread of the Web. As the founder and director of the World Wide Web Foundation, he promotes making the Web affordable, accessible and open to everyone. As the founder and director of the World Wide Web Consortium, the standard body for the medium that's also known as the W3C, he oversees the process of adding new features and capabilities to the Web.

The W3C recently gave its official stamp of approval to HTML 5, the latest update to the coding language that underlies websites and apps. The last major update to HTML was in 1997. The 1,300-page standard promises a wealth of [new features](#) intended to allow developers to design sophisticated Web pages and Web-based apps.

Berners-Lee spoke with the San Jose Mercury News about the new standard and how the Web is evolving. The interview is edited for length and clarity.

Q: Why has it taken so long for the W3C to give its stamp of approval to HTML 5?

A: The whole thing about HTML 5 is it's not just a markup language, it's a computing platform, one that's ubiquitously deployed. It's very big and

very powerful.

You don't just produce a new version of HTML overnight. There are a lot of people involved. There are people who would much prefer to get a feature in there and go on to the next feature, to develop and develop and develop. In a way, it's been like that. There's been a rapid deployment.

On the other hand, there are some people for whom the idea of a standard, of having a fixed point, is very valuable. That stability is useful for people who teach, for training programs, for books on the standard, for governments. Stability and consistency are important for some important communities. There are some people who are going to be using HTML 5 for years.

Q: What are some of the most significant new things in the HTML 5 standard?

A: It's tough to pick one thing, since the whole is much more than the sum of parts. But the video tag is a great example.

You look at the history. You had these competing plugins, and they were constantly out of date.

Once you put the video tag into HTML, it makes it much easier for everybody. You no longer need to use plugins. It makes it so much easier for the developer.

Q: How do you use the Web? Are there any sites or services that you use regularly?

A: We do all our work at the W3C on the Web - everything. We have a mantra: If it's not on the Web, it doesn't exist. When discussing things in

a meeting, everything we do, the minutes of the meetings, it's always on the Web.

Q: Given that the Web came of age in the PC era, how do you think the shift in computing to smartphones will affect it?

A: It's not just the smartphone. People will be accessing the Web on smartphones and laptops. People will be using ultra-high-resolution TVs as a Web browsing screen.

For years we had a mobile Web initiative to make sure our standards work really well on mobile devices. Responsive Web design lets you make sites that work on mobile, they adapt and are aware of screen size. A site may completely change its attitude and the way it works with the user. On a small screen, it may get more conversational because you can't just point and click.

It's really exciting. It's about getting the Web to lots more people. It's because of mobile that the Web is increasing so dramatically.

Q: There's been a big shift in the developer community away from making PC and Web apps to making mobile apps. Does that worry you?

A: What's going on is a convergence between the two. It used to be a question of do you go to the website or do you download the app to read a magazine. Now with HTML 5, with a JavaScript environment, really what's happening is the same as on a computer. You can program a Web page to do anything in an app that you can do in a browser.

The HTML 5 recommendation is a milestone in that convergence path, rather than a battle between the two. People are using the Web app capabilities in HTML 5 to make native apps.

There's a difference between running it or installing it and using it as a Web page, but the difference between those two things is starting to become very small.

There is an issue if you make an app that's not on the Web. It's not as interesting. You can't link to it, you can't tweet about it, and you can't discuss it as easily.

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Tim Berners-Lee

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Birthplace: London

Position: Professor of engineering, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; professor of Web and Internet science, University of Southampton, U.K.; founder and director of World Wide Web Consortium (W3C); founder and director of World Wide Web Foundation.

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