

## **Web Standards in the OPAC - Monday, June 14, 2004 - MIT Boston**

Discuss how ALEPH sites are using cascading style sheets (css), meeting accessibility requirements, and integrating ALEPH OPAC design with the rest of the library website. Bring your ideas for a lively discussion!  
Alexander Jerabek (McGill University), Facilitator

-----Minutes taken by Kerry Bouchard, session recorder-----

NAAUG OPAC Standards Discussion Session

Monday, June 14, 2004; Boston

The discussion session on standards in the Aleph OPAC was led by Alexander Jarabek from McGill University. Alexander gave a session on standards in the OPAC at last year's NAAUG after McGill migrated from Aleph 14.2 to 14.2.5 (frameless version). He was able to rework some of the Aleph OPAC screens until they validated as "XHTML 1.0 Transitional", with all visual presentation and layout controlled with CSS.

Alexander said that there are three standards he sees as especially relevant to the OPAC: XHTML, CSS, and the WAI-WCAG. He later pointed out that including Document Type definitions in HTML pages is important to ensure that browsers correctly render CSS code. Testing designs on more than one browser - especially PC and Macintosh - is important. Alexander noted that maintainability is a good argument for taking the time to write to standards - a single stylesheet can be used for multiple applications, and stripping presentation code from pages makes the individual pages easier to maintain. Being able to show that a site conforms to standards also provides a useful defense against complaints from people with "off brand" browsers that may not render the pages correctly.

The W3C has defined three conformance levels for their accessibility guidelines. Alexander pointed out that some of these guidelines are tricky to implement, and can even lead to undesirable effects -- for example, following the recommendation to have a default value for every field on an HTML form could result in users accidentally submitting data that they didn't intend. Only one member of the group reported having been approached about ADA compliance - this was before implementation of the Aleph frameless OPAC. No one reported being under pressure to ensure strict standards compliance.

U.C. Davis reported that two campuses in their system reviewed their web sites for ADA compliance, and found them mostly in conformance, with some minor tweaking needed to fix problems with Y/N radio button options. Harvard reported that their OPAC implementation performed reasonably well with the JAWS screen reader. They identified a problem with the user had to reverse-tab to get to the "Send" button for the search form because it was in the middle of the screen. Also, some of the popup windows generated by the Aleph OPAC don't have titles.

Several members of the group expressed dissatisfaction with Ex Libris' incomplete support of web standards. They noted that when the Course Reserves module was announced, Ex Libris said that the staff web application would only work in Internet Explorer 6. The default OPAC HTML pages still have places where presentation is controlled with font tags instead of CSS. The current OPAC has hard-coded popup windows for some links; sites that don't want that have been forced to insert JavaScript functions that turn off the popups. Tables that cram too much information into one row can create accessibility problems. There

may be a bug in a function the OPAC pages use to test for Unicode-compatible browsers.

Submitted by Kerry Bouchard, Mary Couets Burnett Library, TCU

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-----Facilitator's Report-----

There was a general discussion about the lack of standards compliance of the Aleph OPAC and what members of the discussion group have done to improve the web interface.

Several issues were identified and addressed:

1. Conformance to accessibility guidelines
2. Conformance to (x)html and css specifications
3. Problems arising from javascript, images, and embedded functionality in the ALEPH web files

A question was posed to Alan Oliver, the ExLibris representative, that was later discussed at the Ex Libris Answer Panel [plenary] regarding ExLibris' support for web standards in the ALEPH OPAC (and by extension their other web interfaces - Course Reserves Module, SFX, Metalib, etc.):

Since ExLibris is concerned with establishing new standards such as OpenURL v1.0 and NISO Metasearch, as well as supporting current standards, why do they not make more of an effort to adhere to other existing standards such as XHTML, CSS, DOM, Javascript/ECMAScript, and WAI-WCAG?

The question was posed at the plenary during which Dan Trajman asked to speak afterwards to Tom Wilson and Alexander Jerabek for further clarification. Alexander had a brief meeting with Dan Trajman and Carmit Marcus to elaborate on the problems with non-compliant web interfaces. Mr. Trajman asked that a document be drafted to explain the issues and outline some recommendations. Alexander volunteered to coordinate with an informal group of concerned librarians to put this together.

Submitted by Alexander Jerabek, McGill University Libraries

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