

Outlook 2007: Where the CSS doesn't flow.



Don MacVittie, 2008-28-05

I manage the newsletter for DevCentral, and every so often we put one out - my goal is monthly, but of late that's not been close - and with it I get all of the headaches of supporting every HTML rendering engine under the sun. Except Lynx... we've come that far at least.

Since our last newsletter, some team members have upgraded to Outlook 2007. Imagine my surprise when HTML/CSS that works everywhere else didn't work - surprise because none of you mentioned it, and surprise because Outlook 2003 views it just fine.

So for the first time, I had reason to look into Outlook 2007 HTML/CSS support.

Wow.

If you don't know this yet, the short version of this story is that Microsoft decided to meet users' demands for true compose/read WYSIWYG by defaulting both to MS-Word.

That would be great if MS-Word did HTML/CSS. It doesn't. Not just "it's really big and bloated", but there are some attributes that just plain aren't supported. The one that got us was background-image. Yeah, no background images on elements for you in Outlook 2007. Or for anyone else, for that matter.

It seems that a Project Manager (at least) over at Microsoft needs to read my "[Over-Engineered vs. Good Enough](#)" blog post. When confronted with a reasonable demand: "We want readers to see the email as we composed it" (reasonable if your system is billed as WYSIWYG anyway), the option to take is not the one that cuts out functionality that (a) Has existed in your product for many versions and (b) is part of a standard you otherwise support. And they should have seen that. This feels like the horrid old days of *good enough* all over again. Or the new days of hubris, one of the two.

What will I do for the newsletter? Nothing. Nada. Zip. Zilch. *It's not broken, Outlook 2007 is.*

I'm done ranting. I'm disappointed in MS, I had truly thought they'd grown out of the "you'll do what we want" stage, but I guess Vista should have told me differently.

Here are the relevant links to the problem if you, like me, occasionally manage a newsletter:

Highly detailed MSDN document: <http://msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/library/aa338201.aspx>

Marketing Blog with English explaining the problem: <http://www.imediaconnection.com/content/13877.asp>

Okay, I'm not done ranting. Why does MS list everything they *do* support in their MSDN document before what they don't?

News Flash: When you downgrade a product, users only care about what doesn't work today that did yesterday.

Wow, am I in a mood today or what?

Don.

/imbibing: Mt. Dew, trying to wash Lori's Salt Pork out of my system - yeah, it's as bad for you as it sounds. Or worse.

/reading: Still Fields of Honor.

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