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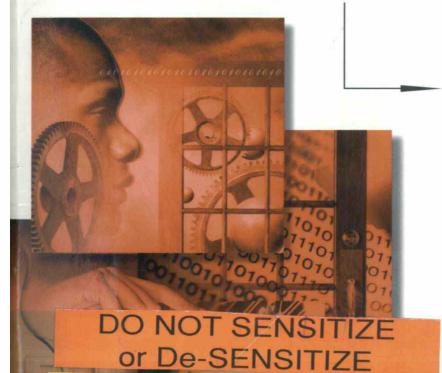
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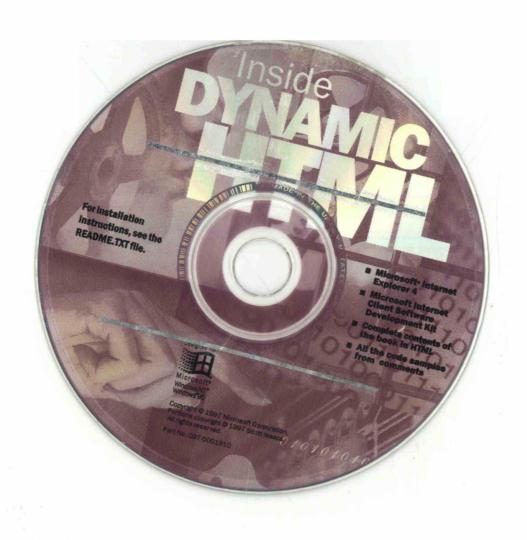
- Dynamic Contents
- Dynamic Styles
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Scott Isaacs

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Acknowledgments	vii
Introduction	IX
PART 1: HTML AND SCRIPTING	
CHAPTER ONE	
Overview of HTML and CSS 3	
New HTML Features	4
Cascading Style Sheets	14
Examining an HTML DTD	26
CHAPTER TWO	
Fundamentals of HTML Scripting 31	
Dynamic HTML Object Hierarchy	32
Authoring Scripts	
Choosing a Scripting Language: JavaScript vs. VBScript	
Advanced JavaScript Techniques	50
Scripting and Web Security	55
CHAPTER THREE	
Dynamic HTML Event Model 57	
General Event Model	58
Event Binding	60
The <i>event</i> Object	
Programming Standard User Events	
Event Examples	80

CH.	APTER FOUR	
	The Browser Window 89	
	The window Object	90
	The Window Environment	
	Window Events	97
	Timer Events	. 102
	The clientInformation or navigator Property	. 108
СН	APTER FIVE	
	Window and Frame Management 113	
	Manipulating the Window	114
~	Creating New Windows	116
	Manipulating Framesets	. 130
	Special Event Considerations	. 144
PART	TII: DOCUMENT STRUCTURE	
СН	APTER SIX	
	The HTML Document 149	
	Referencing the document Object	151
	Changing the Document's Colors	
	Accessing Meta Information About the Document	. 155
	Modifying the HTML Stream	
СН	APTER SEVEN	
	Document Element Collections 167	
	Using the Collections	. 168
	The HTML Structure and Collections	
СН	APTER EIGHT	
	Scripts and Elements 189	
	Identifying Elements	. 190
	Accessing an Element's Attributes	
	Parsing Information	
	Creating New Elements	
	Customizing Elements	

Scripting Individual Elements 207	
Programming the Body and Frameset Elements	208
Programming the Anchor Element	216
Programming the Link Element	222
Programming the IMG and Map Elements	226
Programming the Marquee Element	237
Programming the Object Element	239
Programming the Table Element	240
CHAPTER TEN	
Forms and Intrinsic Controls 251	
HTML Forms	252
Programming Text Input Elements	262
Programming List Elements	
Programming Lists Using Radio Buttons and Check Boxes	
Programming Command Button Elements	280
Programming Label and Fieldset Elements	283
PART III: DOCUMENT STYLE AND ANIMATION	
PART III: DOCUMENT STYLE AND ANIMATION CHAPTER ELEVEN	
PART III: DOCUMENT STYLE AND ANIMATION CHAPTER ELEVEN Dynamic Styles 287	J
PART III: DOCUMENT STYLE AND ANIMATION CHAPTER ELEVEN Dynamic Styles 287 Dynamic Styles and CSS	\ 288
PART III: DOCUMENT STYLE AND ANIMATION CHAPTER ELEVEN Dynamic Styles 287 Dynamic Styles and CSS Style Sheet Properties	\ 288 289
PART III: DOCUMENT STYLE AND ANIMATION CHAPTER ELEVEN Dynamic Styles 287 Dynamic Styles and CSS Style Sheet Properties Inline Styles	\ 288 289
PART III: DOCUMENT STYLE AND ANIMATION CHAPTER ELEVEN Dynamic Styles 287 Dynamic Styles and CSS Style Sheet Properties Inline Styles Changing the class Attribute	288 289 291
PART III: DOCUMENT STYLE AND ANIMATION CHAPTER ELEVEN Dynamic Styles 287 Dynamic Styles and CSS Style Sheet Properties Inline Styles Changing the class Attribute Global Style Sheets	288 289 291 292
PART III: DOCUMENT STYLE AND ANIMATION CHAPTER ELEVEN Dynamic Styles 287 Dynamic Styles and CSS Style Sheet Properties Inline Styles Changing the class Attribute Global Style Sheets Adaptive Layout Techniques	288 289 291 292 295
PART III: DOCUMENT STYLE AND ANIMATION CHAPTER ELEVEN Dynamic Styles 287 Dynamic Styles and CSS Style Sheet Properties Inline Styles Changing the class Attribute Global Style Sheets Adaptive Layout Techniques Data Display Techniques	288 289 291 292 295 311
PART III: DOCUMENT STYLE AND ANIMATION CHAPTER ELEVEN Dynamic Styles 287 Dynamic Styles and CSS Style Sheet Properties Inline Styles Changing the class Attribute Global Style Sheets Adaptive Layout Techniques	288 289 291 292 295 311
PART III: DOCUMENT STYLE AND ANIMATION CHAPTER ELEVEN Dynamic Styles 287 Dynamic Styles and CSS Style Sheet Properties Inline Styles Changing the class Attribute Global Style Sheets Adaptive Layout Techniques Data Display Techniques Text Animation Techniques CHAPTER TWELVE	288 289 291 292 295 311
PART III: DOCUMENT STYLE AND ANIMATION CHAPTER ELEVEN Dynamic Styles 287 Dynamic Styles and CSS Style Sheet Properties Inline Styles Changing the class Attribute Global Style Sheets Adaptive Layout Techniques Data Display Techniques Text Animation Techniques CHAPTER TWELVE Dynamic Positioning 329	288 289 291 292 311 316 325
PART III: DOCUMENT STYLE AND ANIMATION CHAPTER ELEVEN Dynamic Styles 287 Dynamic Styles and CSS Style Sheet Properties Inline Styles Changing the class Attribute Global Style Sheets Adaptive Layout Techniques Data Display Techniques Text Animation Techniques CHAPTER TWELVE Dynamic Positioning 329 CSS Positioning	288 289 291 295 311 316 325
PART III: DOCUMENT STYLE AND ANIMATION CHAPTER ELEVEN Dynamic Styles 287 Dynamic Styles and CSS Style Sheet Properties Inline Styles Changing the class Attribute Global Style Sheets Adaptive Layout Techniques Data Display Techniques Text Animation Techniques CHAPTER TWELVE Dynamic Positioning 329	288 291 292 311 316 325

PART IV: DOCUMENT CONTENTS AND DATA BINDING

CHAPTER THIRTEEN	
Dynamic Contents 371	•
Contents Manipulation	372
Dynamic Contents Properties	
Dynamic Contents and document.write	
CHAPTER FOURTEEN	
User Selection and Editing Operations 39	95
Introducing the TextRange Object	396
Programming the TextRange Object	
Accessing the User's Selection	
Executing Commands	410
CHAPTER FIFTEEN	
Data Binding with HTML 413	
What Is Data Binding?	415
Data-Binding Architecture	416
Data Consumers: HTML Elements	422
Building Basic Pages Using Data Binding	
Writing Scripts Using Data Binding	
Advanced Features	
Inday	451



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INTRODUCTION

The World Wide Web ignited a computer revolution by enabling anyone to publish HTML documents. Until recently, the information in these documents was mostly static, requiring the server to respond to user interactions. With the introduction of Dynamic HTML, the Web paradigm has shifted away from requiring server interactions to creating interactive Web sites and Web applications. Because Dynamic HTML allows HTML documents to interact with the user and change completely on the client, you can create rich Web applications.

Dynamic HTML is built on an object model that extends the traditional static HTML document. This book introduces you, the Web developer, to Dynamic HTML and teaches you how to create pages that are live and interactive on the client. This book assumes a working knowledge of HTML and basic programming principles. It does not teach you HTML or show you how to program in JavaScript, JScript, or VBScript; instead, these languages are used as tools for dynamically manipulating the page.

Near the end of this introduction, you'll find a description of the four parts of this book. Before continuing, read this overview to get a feel for how Dynamic HTML will be presented here through a series of building blocks. By the end of this book, all the pieces for creating live and interactive Web pages will be in place.

Creating Interactive Pages

The concept of creating interactive Web pages is not new—Microsoft and Netscape initially defined a simple object model that was presented as a way of creating interactive pages. On closer inspection, the object model was found to be efficient only for basic form validation. Dynamic documents were mostly a myth prior to Microsoft Internet Explorer 4.0 because the only time a page could change was during its creation. Interactive documents were simulated by completely reloading the page or by embedding objects in the page. Many of these Java applets, ActiveX controls, and even animated GIFs were designed to perform textlike manipulation, which provided a way to work around the static nature of HTML. However, using objects as a replacement for style and contents control is a poor solution.

After examining many of the scenarios for these objects and animated GIFs, Internet Explorer developers realized the need for a more powerful API (application programming interface) for manipulating documents. With an object model that provides full access to the document, authors can take advantage of the layout abilities built into HTML and CSS (Cascading Style Sheets). This object model greatly improves performance by reducing the need for downloading large animated GIFs and applets. Information becomes instantaneously accessible because it is no longer hidden within images or objects.

Dynamic HTML provides the API necessary for complete control over the HTML document. No longer does a page need to be defined while it is loading. After loading, any portion of the page can be dynamically and immediately changed. For example, you can create an application that has expanding and collapsing outlines. When the user expands or collapses the outline, the contents are displayed or hidden instantaneously. Imagine being able to create pages that can automatically change and tailor themselves to the user. All this and more is possible with Dynamic HTML.

The ability to modify a document and have the document automatically reflow itself is the underlying innovation used throughout Dynamic HTML. Traditional browsers were basically document navigation tools that displayed a document and then waited for the user to point to a new document. When a change to the document was needed, either a request was sent to the server for a new page or an entire new page was generated on the client.

Programming Languages

A programming language is used to manipulate the Dynamic HTML object model, but Dynamic HTML is designed to be platform independent and language neutral. Therefore, JavaScript, JScript, VBScript, C++, Java, or any other programming language can be used as the language of choice.

This book uses primarily JScript for accessing the document object model. JScript is Microsoft's implementation of the ECMA262 (European Computer Manufacturers Association) standard designed by Microsoft, Netscape, and other organizations. This standard formalizes the language constructs of JavaScript and JScript so that interoperable implementations can be created. It is important to remember that this standard defines only the constructs of the language. Even though the language is often associated with the object model, this standard does not define the object model. Therefore, when you are determining whether a browser supports a version of JavaScript or JScript, you must be careful to distinguish whether an object model or a language feature is being discussed. The JScript in Internet Explorer 4.0 is compliant with the ECMA standard, but the implementation of JavaScript 1.2 in Netscape 4.0 is not.

NOTE: The terms <code>JavaScript</code> and <code>JScript</code> can generally be used interchangeably to refer to the programming language. <code>JavaScript</code> is used throughout this book because it is more widely recognized.

Applets and objects on the page can also communicate with the page. For example, in Internet Explorer, an object written in Java, C++, or some other language can communicate with the page through the object model. The technique for creating applets that use Dynamic HTML is beyond the scope of this book. However, this book does provide a foundation for understanding the Dynamic HTML capabilities available to such objects.

If you are familiar with the existing JavaScript language and existing object model, you'll find that the extensions for the Dynamic HTML object model are a fully compatible superset. Any pages written for past versions of Internet Explorer or for Netscape Navigator 3.0 will continue to run in Internet Explorer 4.0. This compatibility allows Web developers to take advantage of their existing skills as they learn about these new innovations. If you are new to JavaScript, learning how to program the HTML page allows you to extend and enhance your pages and your users' experience in ways never before possible.

New Features

Dynamic HTML removes all restrictions on access to the document. Dynamic HTML in Internet Explorer 4.0 empowers developers with a number of new features, which are discussed in the following sections.

- MHTML 4.0 and advanced CSS support Internet Explorer 4.0 supports the latest HTML 4.0 standard, CSS1, and many of the new CSS enhancements. These HTML and CSS standards define what is exposed by the Dynamic HTML object model.
- Full access to the document's structure All elements in the document are available through the Dynamic HTML object model. You are no longer limited to scripting the form elements. The style and contents of any element can be dynamically changed, and these changes will be immediately reflected in the document.

In addition, the intrinsic controls have been enhanced to better support HTML and CSS, which allows the Web author to manipulate the appearance of these controls—including setting the text color, background color, and font—on buttons and text controls. The object model behind the intrinsic controls is similar to the object model behind the document and allows easy access to the style and contents.

- **Dynamic style** The document's CSS style sheets can be changed at any time. The document does not need to reload from the cache or communicate with the server. The object model is designed to allow a page to display any changes immediately. For example, the appearance of an element can change as the user moves the mouse or clicks on it.
- **Dynamic contents** The object model allows the contents of the document to be accessed and changed. Again, no server communications are involved, and the response is intended to be instantaneous. For example, you can write a ticking clock utility in standard HTML. You no longer need Java applets or ActiveX controls to change contents.
- Instant user response Dynamic HTML provides a powerful new event model that exposes all user actions to the page. Scripts in a document can respond to all the user's actions within the browser. Based on the user's actions, any aspect of the document's contents or style can be dynamically changed.
- Client/server web pages Internet Explorer 4.0 adds extensions to HTML elements to create data-bound tables and single-record forms and reports. Data is asynchronously downloaded and rendered in the document using a few basic HTML extensions. The data can be cached locally, allowing client-side searching and sorting without requiring assistance from the server. For example, search engines don't need to provide only a few matches at a time. Instead, a search engine can send responses to the client, where they are rendered as they are received. The user can immediately sort and further filter the data entirely on the client, without sending subsequent requests to the server.
- Multimedia and animation effects Internet Explorer 4.0 tightly integrates multimedia and animation effects with the document's contents. These effects include filters that can simulate light sources and shadows and other effects that operate directly on text or controls. Transition effects between images and text, and even between pages, can also be added.

All of these features are based on current discussion within the working groups of the W3C (World Wide Web Consortium). The Dynamic HTML object model is being reviewed by the Document Object Model working group. The

goal of this group is to define an object model that is language independent and platform neutral and that meets a set of requirements for structured documents. The object model defined in Internet Explorer 4.0 meets most of the requirements outlined by the Document Object Model working group.

Defining an HTML Document

HTML is an application SGML (Standard Generalized Markup Language). In an SGML/HTML document, tags add structure to the document's contents. A traditional SGML document has three distinct aspects: structure, style, and contents. With the introduction of Dynamic HTML, HTML now includes a fourth component: behavior. The term *behavior* refers to the interaction between the HTML page and the user. This book's primary focus is on creating HTML-based applications by manipulating the different components of the document. Structure is exposed through a set of element collections; style is exposed on each element and through a style sheets collection; and contents are exposed through each element and through a *TextRange* object. Scripts manipulate structure, style, and contents in response to events to produce a document's behavior.

Structure and Style

Structure provides context for the information contained within a document. For example, the Header elements H1 through H6 are meant to define various headers and their relative importance. An H1 element might be followed by another H1 or an H2 but should not be followed by an H3 element. As HTML quickly evolved, however, the separation between structure and presentation was often ignored. Authors used HTML tags not as a way to provide structure but as a way to define style. The H1 element was often used to mean big, bold text rather than to indicate top-level headers. As a further deviation from SGML, stylistic tags were invented. For example, the and <I> tags were introduced to mark bold and italic text.

When viewing a page, the user (and many times the author) usually does not care about structure. The author's goal is to create an interesting page that will hopefully increase the number of hits, or visits, the Web site receives. This desire for originality was the justification for many of the stylistic tags that were created.

Abusing style does have consequences, however. For one, tools become less powerful. If an author correctly uses structure, an indexing tool can more intelligently index the document's contents. If the tag is used to

indicate that a word is of importance, an index tool can assign a greater weight. However, many authors use simply to display words in boldface, rather than to indicate they have greater importance, invalidating the usefulness of the tag.

A more important reason for properly structuring your page is to improve accessibility to the underlying information. Imagine a browser that speaks the information rather than displays it—perhaps a browser for visually impaired users or even a voice-based browser in your car. This browser needs to be able to extract various connotations from the text. Strong words should be spoken with greater emphasis, and headers should provide an outline of information on the page. If a document used markup for presentation only, the voice-based browser would not be able to properly deliver the document.

HTML also defines a set of rules representing the proper structure of the document. A DTD (document type definition) describes which elements can be contained within other elements. It is important to understand that not all HTML elements should be included anywhere within a document. Usually, when a Web page renders poorly across browsers, it is due to HTML that fails to conform to the DTD. Unfortunately, many of the pages on the Web do not conform to any HTML DTD, and rather than force users to define correct documents, browsers have evolved a lax set of rules for parsing the document that attempt to interpret the author's intent—often with less than ideal results.

Until mid-1996, style in HTML was controlled quite simply by using tags and stylistic attributes, such as ALIGN. Under these conditions, HTML was failing to be a true SGML language, in which structure and style are defined separately. In a true SGML language, a document can have an associated style sheet that defines how the structural elements are rendered. SGML provides a number of languages for defining a style sheet.

In mid-1996, a new language named Cascading Style Sheets was introduced for specifying style in HTML. The CSS specification was coauthored by Bert Bos and Håkon Lie of the W3C, with input from many W3C members, and has been adopted by the major browser implementations. Basically, with CSS a Strong element (and even a Bold element, for that matter) no longer indicates boldface text. Instead, the Strong element retains its traditional purpose, to indicate an important word. A style sheet now specifies that Strong element text should be rendered in boldface:

STRONG {font-weight:bold}

To take full advantage of Dynamic HTML, your document should properly separate the contents and structure from the presentation. Dynamic HTML is easier to use and works more predictably with valid HTML documents. And

as the following chapters will show, manipulating invalid HTML is more difficult and might create unpredictable behavior.

The Organization of This Book

Learning to program interactive pages is a cumulative process. This book begins by explaining basic concepts and then builds on these concepts to teach you how to access the different components of the browser and the document. The following sections provide an outline of the four parts of this book.

Part I: HTML and Scripting

Chapters 1 through 5 introduce the relationship between scripting and the HTML document, describe the browser window, and show you how to use the Dynamic HTML event model. This book assumes a working knowledge of HTML and programming in either JavaScript or VBScript.

Part I introduces the object hierarchy, which exposes the four aspects of the document: structure, style, contents, and behavior. These aspects are discussed in detail in Parts II through IV, and since these areas are closely related, the explanations overlap somewhat.

Part II: Document Structure

In Dynamic HTML, all elements and their attributes are available programmatically. Part II shows you how to access and take advantage of the document element collections and how to manipulate the individual elements within the document. This part also demonstrates how to create rich, interactive forms that can process information on the client without requiring round-trips to the server.

Part III: Document Style and Animation

Tightly coupled with individual elements is the concept of style, the topic of Part III. Using style sheets, the Web author can specify the document's appearance, spacing, colors, and so on.

Part III also shows you how to add basic animation to an HTML page. Dynamic HTML exposes a set of member functions that enable an HTML element to float and move over the HTML page, allowing the creation of simple presentation-like effects. In addition, Dynamic HTML includes a set of powerful extensions that let you add real multimedia animation and transition effects to your Web page. With these enhancements, the HTML contents can be animated using only a few lines of code.

Part IV: Document Contents and Data Binding

Part IV demonstrates how Dynamic HTML allows pages to dynamically reshape themselves. The contents are exposed through properties on each element and through a text object model. With dynamic contents, HTML text and unformatted text can be easily accessed and changed.

Chapter 15, "Data Binding with HTML," shows you how to use Dynamic HTML to create client/server Web pages, including binding an HTML table to a set of data that can be locally manipulated. This feature allows you to create high-speed data-aware pages that can be sorted, filtered, and bulk-edited—all on the client.

Companion CD

The companion CD includes the sample code from the book, together with an indexing page that contains links to all the samples and can sort and filter the links to help you find particular programs quickly.

Also on the CD are copies of Microsoft Internet Explorer 4.0 and the Microsoft Internet Client Software Development Kit. The documentation in the SDK includes a complete reference to Dynamic HTML as well as other helpful information.

The author's personal Web site (www.insideDHTML.com) is a great source for additional information about Dynamic HTML. Microsoft maintains several Web sites related to Dynamic HTML, including the Site Builder (www.microsoft.com/sitebuilder) and JScript (www.microsoft.com/JScript) sites.

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Scott Isaacs is a Microsoft program manager working on Internet Explorer. He has worked on the design of Dynamic HTML from the beginning and frequently presents the technology at industry conferences. Scott also represents Microsoft on working groups of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) for standardizing HTML, CSS, and the document object model. Independently, Scott maintains a Web site, www.insideDHTML.com, that covers the latest Dynamic HTML developments.

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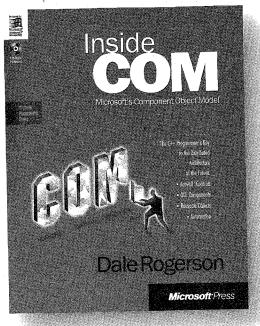
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Scott Isaacs is a leading member of the development team for Microsoft Internet Explorer 4. He is also Microsoft's representative to the W3C for standardizing HTML, CSS, and the object model.



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