

What are XForms?

HTML forms, such as email forms and order forms, are perhaps the most important components of a website. Without forms, webmasters would not be able to collect information from their site visitors, and they would not be able to accept online credit card orders from their customers, which is the heart and soul of ecommerce. Imagine how useless the internet would be if it were just a bunch of information and pictures with no way to communicate or conduct business. Now that the internet has been around for a little over 10 years, HTML forms are starting to become outmoded and obsolete. The kind of forms that website owners now want to compose for their websites are so incredibly diverse and complicated that simple HTML code no longer suffices. So, another way of building forms has evolved in response to this need. The answer is the XForm. XForms provide a superior way to build web-based forms that are richer, more versatile, and device independent. All new versions of browsers being introduced are going to support XForms. How are XForms different from regular HTML forms? Well, XForms use XML for data definition, and use HTML or XHTML for data display. XML is a markup language like HTML. However, XML enables you to define and create your own tags. So, using XML for data definition gives programmers more flexibility for data definition. Data entered into an XForm is stored in an XML document and then transported over the internet using XML. XForms are going to become immensely more important as time goes on, because so many different kinds of electronic gadgets that run on different platforms are equipped with internet access, and since XForms use XML, XForms are compatible with most or all of these various devices. It is possible to add XForm elements directly into other applications that run on XML, such as SVG (Scalable Vector Graphics), VoiceXML (speaking web data), and WML (Wireless Markup Language). This compatibility of an XForm with so many different platforms is what makes it so significant. Web browsers that run on a cell phone, for example, may not be able to display certain HTML forms because HTML defines precisely how a form is to be displayed. If that cell phone has a browser that is not capable of displaying that HTML form exactly as the HTML code specifies, then the person trying to access that form on their cell phone may not be able to input data into the form, or the browser may not be able to display the form at all. The advantage of an XForm is that it leaves it up to the browser to decide how to display the form. Thus, XForms can run on any platform running on any type of device, be it a handheld computer, cell phone, or personal computer. In a nutshell, XForms are forms without all the limitations associated with HTML forms. So, if you are a web designer or programmer, be wary of the fact that some people will not be accessing your forms from an ordinary PC. So, you should learn how to create XForms to accommodate your end user, so that the form will work properly regardless of what sort of device they might be using to surf the net.

About the Author

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