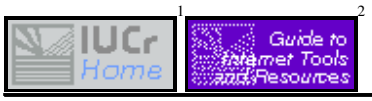

World Wide Web: Introduction

The World Wide Web (W3) is an Internet–based distributed hypermedia system. Tim Berners–Lee dreamed up the W3 to overcome the information–distribution problems of CERN but the genius of its design is such that it has rapidly become the overridingly important application on the Internet. The design elements that have lead to this success are certainly its compatibility with other existing Internet protocols (gopher, ftp, telnet), Berners Lee insistence on interoperability and platform independence both in hardware and software, the incorporation of both hypertext and other audiovisual forms coded in existing formats, its extendibility, the excellent design of the underlying protocols, the choice of a powerful yet simple hypertext markup language (HTML) and the design of a concise addressing system (URL). The originality of W3 lies in the combination of hypertext with the Internet computer network. This results in a seamless view of information from the four corners of the world that is available at the click of mouse.

W3 technology enables a computer–literate individual with minimal resources to become a publisher thus communicating his thoughts, science, art, music or technology to anyone anywhere in the world. The basics of HTML can be learnt in less than 60 minutes and one only needs a rudimentary text editor as a tool. Web documents are fluid in the sense that even when published they can be modified to take account of corrections or new information. In the W3 one also finds virtual documents that are created on the fly in response to an enquiry from a client.

The responsibility for the development of the World Wide Web lies with the World Wide Web Consortium[3], W3C. This exists to realize the full potential of the Web and is an industry consortium which develops common standards for the evolution of the Web by producing specifications and reference software. Its products are freely available to all.

Sources of information

The W3 server of the World Wide Web Consortium[4] is an excellent source of information on the W3. One finds the current and developing standards of HTML and HTTP, addressing, browsers, servers, virtual library, *etc*. There is also a FAQ[5] concerning the World Wide Web available. Otherwise one should try one of the W3 search engines[6] that are available.

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[1] http://www.iucr.ac.uk/iucr–top/welcome.html
[2] int.index.html
[3] http://www.w3.org/
[4] http://www.w3.org/
[5] http://www.boutell.com/faq/
[6] int.search.engines.html
[7] int.index.html
[8] ../ahdf/Howard.Flack.html