Web Typography & Drupal

Putting Arial Out To Pasture

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What We'll Cover

✤ Design & Typography: what & why

✤ Web Fonts:

  ✦ How they work (& don't)

  ✦ Where they work (... & don't)

  ✦ Why developers hate them...

  ✦ ...and why they don't have to

✤ How they can be a bit more **awesome**

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I Will Not Bash Helvetica*

✤ But it's not always the best tool in our toolbox as designers

✤ Why? Because...

or its low-rent cousin Arial

This

Type

Sucks

(but yours doesn't have to)

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Type is Important

✤ The typefaces we choose become the physical embodiment of the information we convey with the sites we design

Type is Important

✤ Companies (read: our clients & employers) spend lots of money developing their brand image

✤ Much of that image is conveyed through specific selection & design of their typefaces

Type & Its Importance
(in 120 seconds or less)

✤ Basic design tools to convey meaning, emotion & message:

1. image

2. color

3. composition

4. language (prose)…

5. *and the typeface itself*

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Why Give One Up?

* The Swiss style dictates that type should convey only the meaning of the words it spells out

* *But that eliminates the **one tool** that **covers most of the page***

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Josef Müller-Brockmann Was Livin' The Dream

✤ 17 years of the web & still no decent alternatives in sight

✤ Admit it: text-as-gif was a worse hack than the transparent spacer.gif

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A Slow Boat To China

✤ Options have been few & flawed

✦ Text-as-GIF
(hard to maintain)

✦ Font tags in HTML & CSS
(constrained by availability)

✦ Cufon & sIFR
(if you've used it, you understand)

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So What's a Designer To Do?

Turns Out, Lots

✤ With adoption of @font-face and related font download specs in CSS3

✤ ...and the involvement of the type foundries themselves

✤ ...and even more persistence on the part of the web design community

Enter: Typekit

- Typekit launched in 2009, followed by Fontdeck, Fonts.com & more

- Enables easy embedding & broad support for thousands of fonts

- (Yes, you can also use free/open source options and host yourself. You should try it – it's fun.)

- Don't forget: it's new. There are rough edges. It pays to remember...

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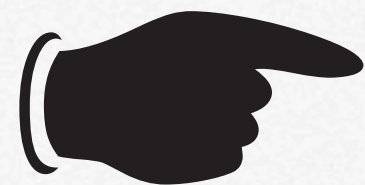
☞ **Web Fonts Are Still a Bit of a Wild West Affair.**

Let Me Give You a Hint

- Fonts were made to be printed; screen appearance was secondary (in order to aid in that whole 'writing' part)

- Explosion of devices, OS's & resolutions requires adjusting screen appearance often at sub-pixel level

- That practice is known as 'hinting' (or 'dumping hundreds of man-hours & untold mounds of money into making type not suck on Windows')

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Hinting is Tricky

✤ See: 'How to draw a line on the screen that falls between two pixels'

✤ or 'Things that are like painting a portrait while blindfolded with one color & no hands'

✤ See the blogs at Fonts.com & Typekit.com to learn more

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Open Source Type

- ✤ We're all fans of Open Source –

- ✤ So why wouldn't we all use Google Web Fonts or just host ourselves?

- ✤ Google is a tech company – not a type one

- ✤ Commercial services are dedicated to bettering the web font experience and release updates & new features all the time

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Um, I Thought This Was a Drupal Conference

- ✤ So what's the point, you ask?

- ✤ Over a dozen (& counting) web font services, all with slightly different syntax & features

- ✤ Scott Reynen's @font-your-face module handles many (more if you help) – even allowing mixing services on same page

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Do That Drupal Voodoo You Do

- We use Drupal because it saves us time & lets us do more

- We've all got a 'secret sauce' of modules, configurations & themes

- Web fonts are no different – having a plan & a starter setup is huge

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So What Does It Take?

- ✤ Font selection & pairing: don't be shy about body text too

- ✤ Research & test: no substitute for actually seeing it yourself in IE (< 9)

- ✤ Note well: ClearType won't fix everything, and XP shipped with it off anyway

- ✤ Take it for a spin - it's easy to try (seriously - it's one line of code)

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Now You Might Cry

(maybe just a little bit)

✤ Ready? Fire up that new design for your client or your boss and...

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Ugly or Nothing

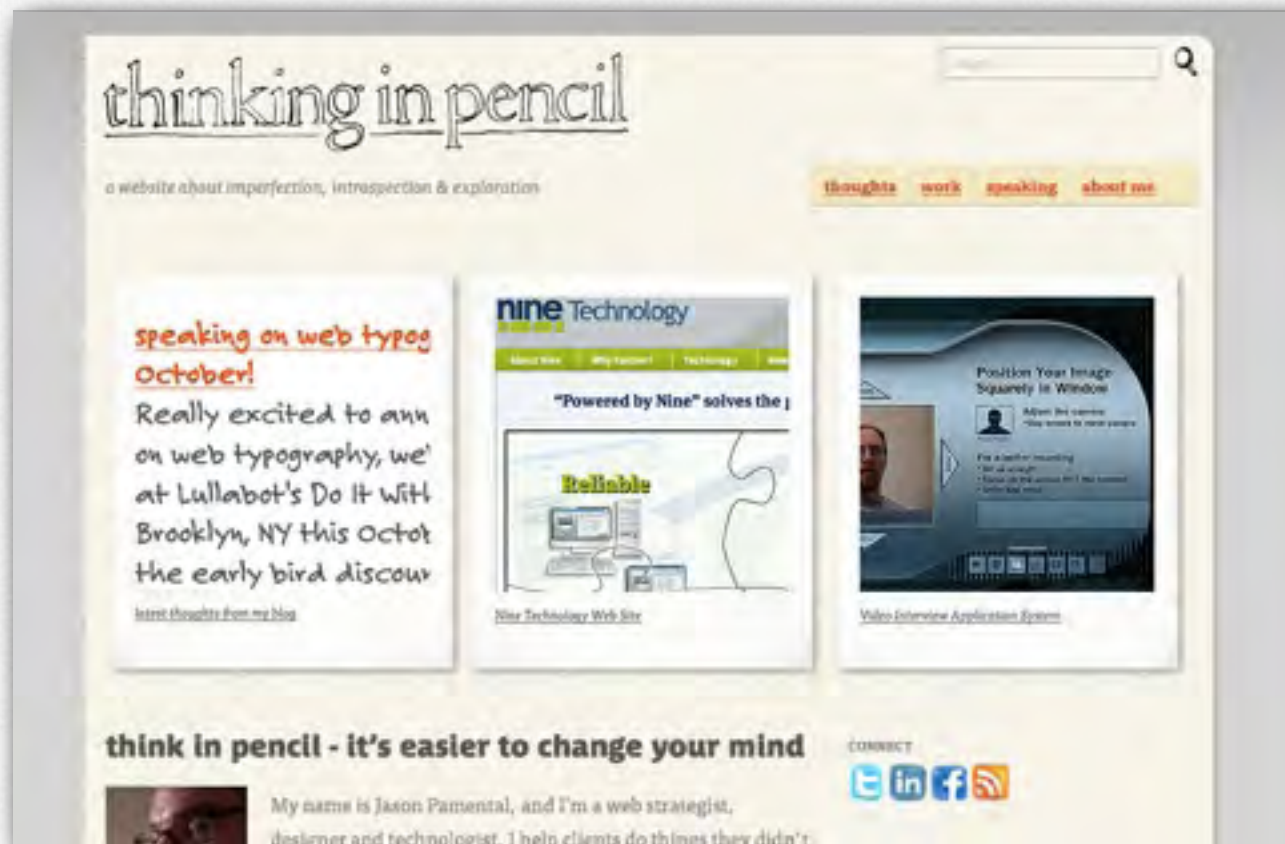Firefox: displays page w/fallbacks first,
then 'pops' into web font

Webkit: draws page without rendering
any type until web font loads

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Ugly or Nothing

Firefox: displays page w/fallbacks first, then 'pops' into web font

Webkit: draws page without rendering any type until web font loads

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What's FOUT About

- ✤ FOUT (Flash Of Unstyled Text) is what happens before those lovely web fonts load

- ✤ Ugly or Nothing – either can be a deal-breaker with clients

- ✤ You can mitigate either with Google's WebFont Loader & some creative layering of your CSS

WebFont Loader

- Several services (Fonts.com, Typekit & Google Web Fonts) support it

- Injects classes into your HTML indicating status of web fonts in your page: loading, active, inactive

- Allows you to craft 'loading CSS' using web-safe fallbacks, adjusting size, line-height & letter-spacing

It's the Responsive Thing To Do

- ✤ Adjusting your CSS can eliminate jarring redraw/reflow of your text

- ✤ Makes sure your design holds up during loading & on older devices

- ✤ Can even have <noscript> CSS-only loading for further refinement (Fonts.com only I think)

- ✤ It's the web – things go wrong, and a professional will plan for that

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Prove It Doesn't Suck

(quoth the front-end dev)

✤ Choose fonts with care & only enable the weights you will use

✤ Use WebFont Loader & CSS to even out the experience & match design

✤ Provide appropriate fallback options

✤ Let someone else handle bandwidth, distribution and updates (most services use a CDN – do you?)

What About 日本?

- ✤ File size for most weights of Western fonts is ~40-60k

- ✤ Could be ~200k+ for Arabic or...

- ✤ Over ~2MB for Japanese

- ✤ Embedding that would be... unwise

- ✤ Fonts.com can dynamically subset that font and deliver only the characters used on the page

That's a Lot of Work

- ✤ But the user wins: better design, enhanced readibility, richer experience

- ✤ And the client wins: better branding, greater engagement

- ✤ And **we** win: by pushing the boundaries further, we take design to a higher level – and get more & better work because of it

What's the Drupal Connection?

✤ Rewind to our 'secret sauce' from Slide 19

✤ Much of what's required need only be set up once & then tweaked

✤ Just like styling the 404 page – it just shows you care that little bit extra

✤ I've included this & other Responsive Web Design ideas in Schoolyard's 'base' theme, making it possible to replicate baseline work quickly

And Now, a Demo

✦ I've written about some of these techniques for the Fonts.com blog, the latest including a demo download

Web Font Fallback Test Page

Excerpt from Moby Dick

by Herman Melville

"Let the owners stand on Nantucket beach and outyell the Typhoons. What cares Ahab? Own
to me, Starbuck, about those miserly owners, as if the owners were my conscience. But look
its commander; and hark ye, my conscience is in this ship's keel.—On deck!"

Web fonts loaded

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No web fonts, uncorrected

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Web fonts loaded

Thank You!

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many thanks to Monotype & Schoolyard for their support

Resources

✤ Fonts.com & their blog
http://blog.fonts.com

✤ Typekit & their blog
http://blog.typekit.com

✤ Google's Web Fonts
http://www.google.com/webfonts

✤ Ethan Marcotte's excellent book
Responsive Web Design
(from abookapart.com)

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