

**Your DOCTYPE is showing: Where do we stand in the battle for Web standards? (Part II)**

## **Overview**

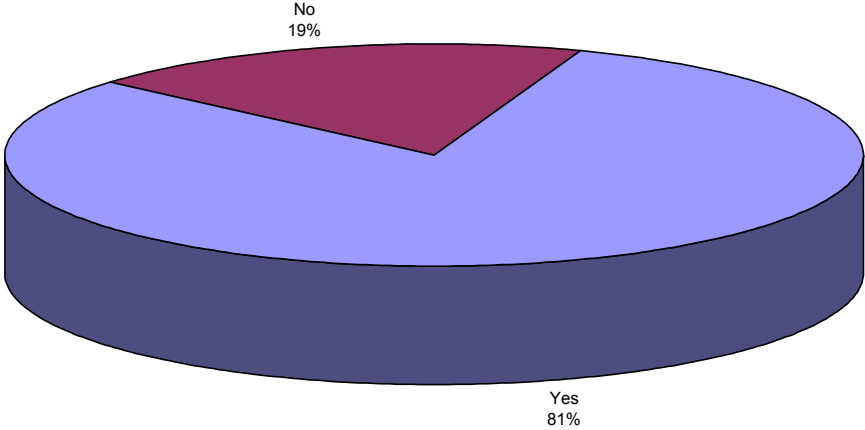
The Web Standards Project began in 1998 with the noble goal of “promoting core Web standards and encouraging browser makers to do the same, thereby ensuring simple, affordable access for all.” At HighEdWebDev 2006, I reviewed where higher education stood when it comes to adopting and adhering to Web standards? How have things changed in 2007? And are we better or worse on this front than the corporate world?

## **Study and Findings**

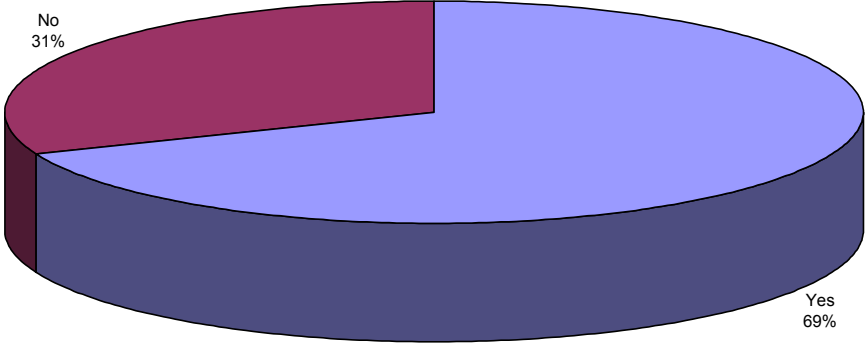
To begin to answer these questions, I looked at the homepages of 1,138 colleges and universities (using the Educause membership directory) and the homepages for 2007’s Fortune 500 companies and asked:

- 1.) Does the site include a complete DOCTYPE?
- 2.) If so, does the site validate to that standard

# Does the homepage declare a DOCTYPE?

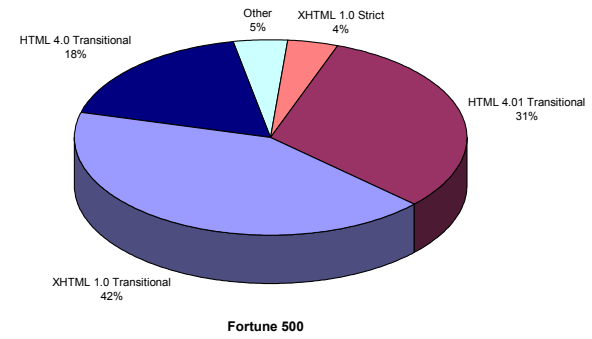
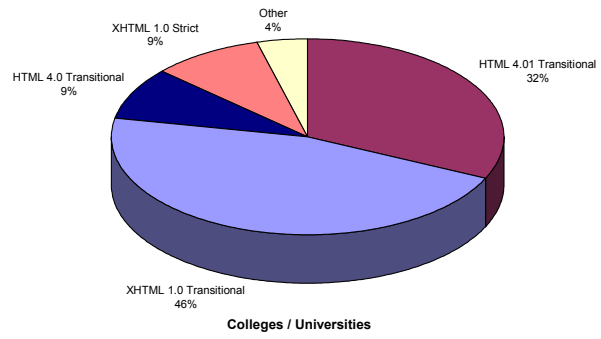


Colleges / Universities



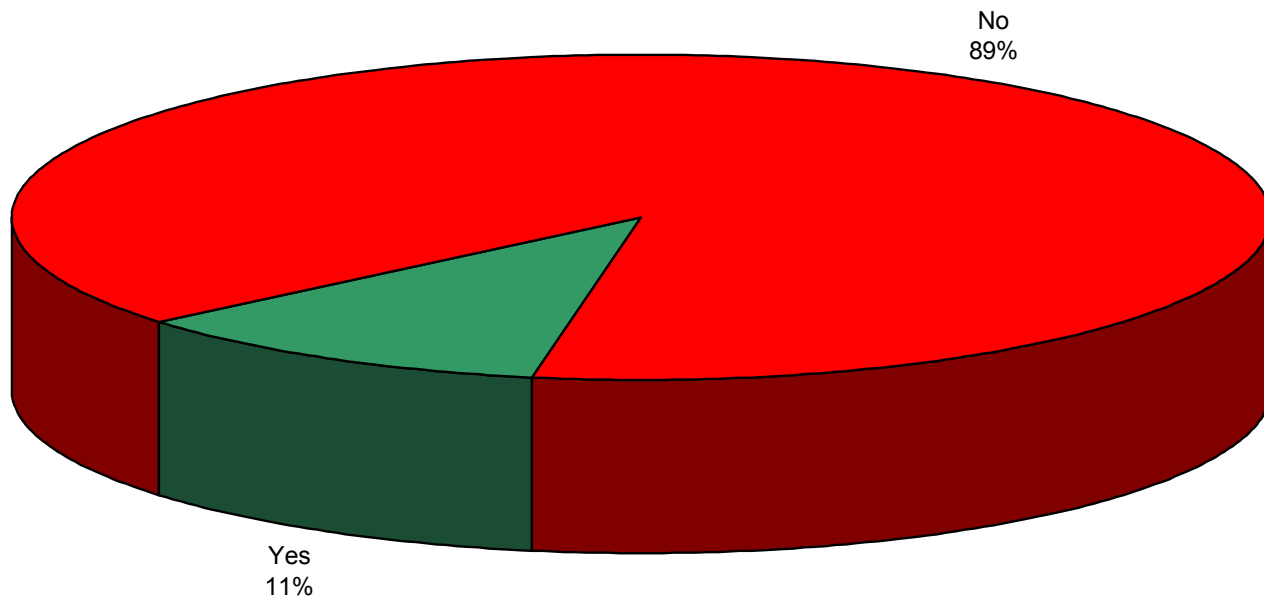
Fortune 500

- 81% of the college homepages declared a DOCTYPE. This is up from 72% in 2006. Only 69% of the Fortune 500 companies declare a DOCTYPE, up from 59%.
- The most popular DOCTYPE for both the college and corporate homepages is XHTML Transitional. This marks a change from last year, when both groups declared HTML 4.01 most often.

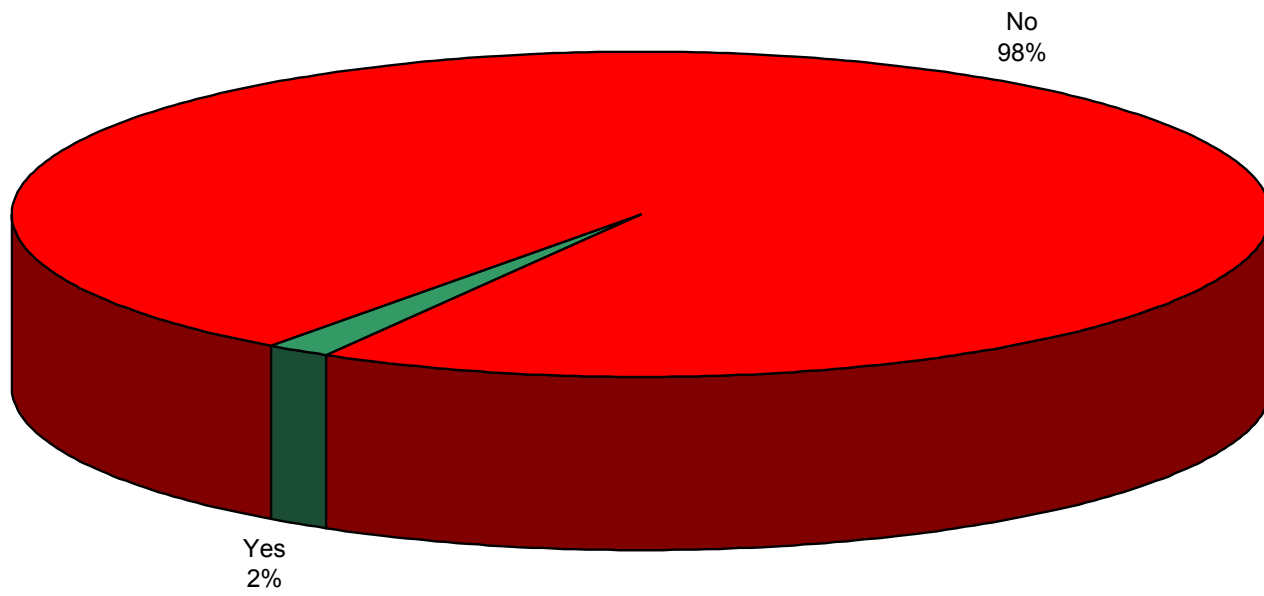


## Commonly Used DOCTYPE

- Of those sites that declare a DOCTYPE, **only 11%** of the college homepages validate to that standard. In the corporate world, that figure slips to **2%**. Colleges went up a notch from 2006's numbers (10%), while companies slipped (3%)



**Colleges/Universities**



**Fortune 500**

# What does this tell us?

Compliance with Web standards is still the exception rather than the rule on both corporate and higher education Web sites, though colleges and universities have done a relatively better job promoting Web standards on their sites than the business world.

As Web browsers, Web authoring tools, content management systems, and Web-enabled devices continue to evolve, more education is needed regarding the fundamental benefits of using and adhering to Web standards.

# What is a DOCTYPE?

A DOCTYPE (or “Document Type Definition” or “DTD”) defines the version of (X)HTML you are using on your Web page, and tells standards-compliant browsers how to render your pages. It also tells validators like the W3C’s Validation Service (<http://validator.w3.org/>) what standard to check your site against to make sure it complies with that standard.

You declare a DOCTYPE by adding a chunk of code to the top of each of your Web pages. It is important to use a complete DOCTYPE; broken or incomplete DOCTYPES will throw some browsers out of “standards” mode and into “quirks” mode, resulting in some unexpected changes in how they render your (X)HTML or CSS.

Here is an example of a complete DOCTYPE, this one for XHTML 1.0 Transitional:

```
<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD XHTML 1.0  
Transitional//EN"  
    "http://www.w3.org/TR/xhtml1/DTD/xhtml1-  
transitional.dtd">
```

# Why validate?

Producing a site with code that validates to a Web standard is of course only one step in creating a clean, accessible, and usable site. It's not a sufficient condition, but I'd argue it is a necessary one. So what are some of the benefits of producing a valid site?

## Consistency and compatibility

When you validate your site, you find and fix all those little coding errors that could cause your site to break in odd and unexpected ways.

You're also taking a huge step toward ensuring that your site will be compatible with wireless devices, screen readers, and other devices that have yet to come along.

## Accessibility

Validation encourages the consistent use of basic accessibility features. For example, a site with `<img>` tags that do not include alt text will not validate in HTML or XHTML.

## **Clean and lean code**

Of course, it is possible to produce a bloated, overly complicated site out of valid code, but it usually doesn't shake out that way. Validation usually encourages cleaner, leaner code, which leads to all kinds of goodness: smaller file size, faster load times, reduced load on servers, easier to find and debug problems, easier for multiple team members to maintain

## **Search engine optimization**

No one knows for sure what goes into a search engine's "secret sauce," but search engine robots are basically like text-only Web browsers, and errors in your code can cause them to ignore important elements inside header tags, for example, or keyword-rich link text. Validation would catch these errors.

## **First step on the road to Greater Things**

Where validation goes, semantic markup often follows. Before you know it, you'll be separating presentation from markup with CSS, breaking out of table layouts, the works!