Creating Effective Web Pages

4th Edition

HTML & XHTML

The Definitive Guide

O'REILLY®

Chuck Musciano & Bill Kennedy

HTML and XHTML

The Definitive Guide

Fourth Edition

Chuck Musciano and Bill Kennedy

HTML and XHTML: The Definitive Guide, Fourth Edition
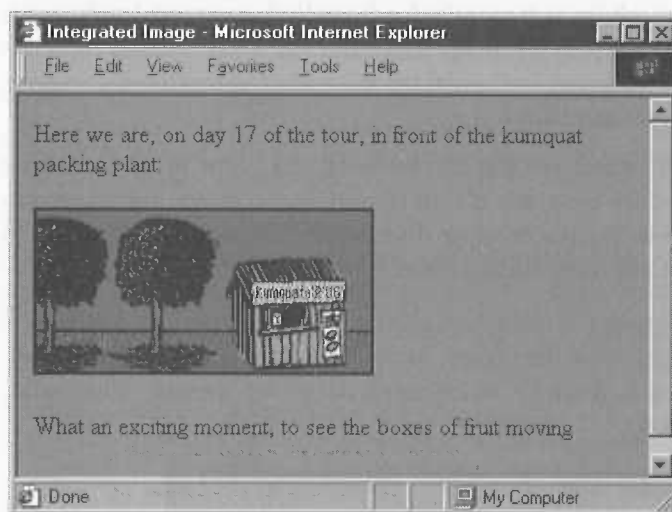by Chuck Musciano and Bill Kennedy

Figure 5-8. Image integrated with text

5.2.6.2. The lowsrc attribute

To the benefit of users, particularly those with slow Internet connections, Netscape provides the `lowsrc` companion to the `src` attribute in the `<img>` tag as a way to speed up document rendering. The `lowsrc` attribute's value, like `src`, is the URL of an image file that the browser loads and displays when it first encounters the `<img>` tag. When the document has been completely loaded and can be read by the user, Netscape retrieves the image specified by the `src` attribute.

The `lowsrc` image is a low-resolution, abbreviated version of the final `src` image that loads faster by comparison to quickly give the reader an idea of its content until the final, higher-resolution image eventually replaces it onscreen. But the `lowsrc` attribute can also be used for some very special effects.

Netscape uses the `lowsrc` image's dimensions to reserve space in the document for both the `lowsrc` and `src` images, unless you explicitly allocate that space with the `height` and `width` attributes described later in this chapter. Hence, if the dimensions of the image specified in the `src` attribute are different than those for the `lowsrc` image or your explicitly included height and width values, the `src` image will be reduced, enlarged, stretched, or compressed to fit in the allotted space. Moreover, the `lowsrc` and `src` images needn't be identical, so you might take advantage of the delayed rendering of the `src` image for simple animation.

The `lowsrc` attribute is for Netscape only. Other browsers ignore it and only load the image specified by the `src` attribute. Netscape won't load either image if the user chooses not to auto-load images. In that case, both images will load in order when the user clicks the images button or clicks the image icon placeholder. No

browser loads the `lowsrc` image only; you must include a `src` image, otherwise nothing will appear except the missing image icon.

5.2.6.3. *The alt and longdesc attributes*

The `alt` attribute specifies alternative text the browser may show if image display is not possible or disabled by the user. It's an option, but one we highly recommend you exercise for most images in your document. This way, if the image is not available, the user still has some indication of what it is that's missing.

In addition, the latest browsers display the alternative description in a text box when users pass their mouse over the image. Accordingly, you might embed short, parenthetical information that pops up when users pass over a small, inline icon, such as shown in Figure 5-9.
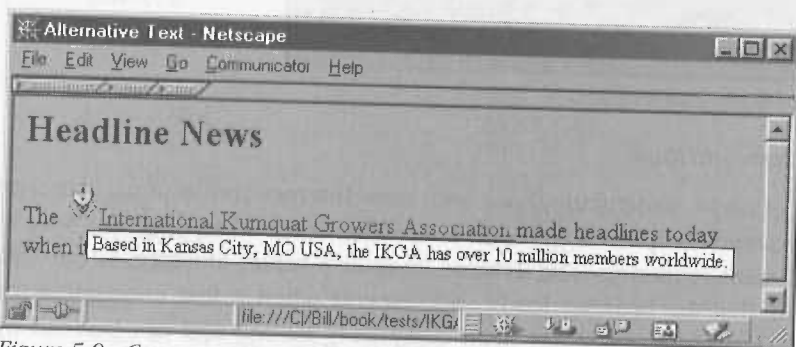

Figure 5-9. Contemporary graphical browers display `alt` *in a temporary pop-up window*

The value for the `alt` attribute is a text string of up to 1024 characters if you include spaces or other punctuation. The string must be enclosed in quotation marks. The alternative text may contain entity references to special characters, but it may not contain any other sort of markup; in particular, no style tags are allowed.

Graphical browsers don't normally display the `alt` attribute if the image is available and the user has enabled picture downloading. Otherwise, they insert the `alt` attribute's text as a label next to an image placeholder icon. Well-chosen `alt` labels thereby additionally support those users with a graphical browser who have disabled their automatic image download because of a slow connection to the Web.

Nongraphical, text-only browsers like Lynx put the `alt` text directly into the content flow just like any other text element. So, when used effectively, the `alt` tag sometimes can transparently substitute for missing images. (Your text-only browser users will appreciate not being constantly reminded of their second-class web citizenship.) For example, consider using an asterisk as the `alt` attribute alternative to a special bullet icon:

`<h3><img src="pics/fancy bullet gif"`

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