Accessibility and you

A broader view.

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Brown Bag @ gumtree/ebay/paypal/skype – June 2009, London, England

Access

There is an amazing amount of misconceptions about accessibility. In its very basic form it means that we don't block out people because of conditions they cannot readily change.

Availability

This is different to availability, which is an absolute must when it comes to anything we offer customers. We need our web products to be up and responsive, or have a good call center to fill in when they are down. The mere idea of having a web product came around so we are available 24/7 and on the cheap.

Lack of barrierrs

The German term for accessibility is “Barrierefreiheit” which means "lack of barriers". This actually makes more sense. It doesn't mean however that the German market is better or more switched on. They could be but other things keep them from being really effective.

Law and orders

The issue is that a lot of accessibility work is being done to comply with legal requirements. This is a wonderful "covering our arse" tactic, but it will not result in good, accessible solutions. Fear of lawsuits or persecution makes you creative in avoiding these but also distracts you from the goal of producing something that makes sense for all users out there. We are not here to comply with laws, we're here to make things work for people.

People

http://www.flickr.com/photos/rileyroxx/169900126/

People is what our work should be about. How can we make people happy with what we provide? How can we make sure that everybody has a very good time using our products, comes back for more and tells all their friends about it?

Myths

The main problem is that instead of keeping our eyes open and peeled on the future we are very quick to believe in accessibility myths. Most of the time because they sound like a quick solution to a large and complex issue.

Disconnect

The next issue is that the world of accessibility and the world of web development is terribly disconnected. I get the feeling that the accessibility world stopped seeing the web and its technologies as something that evolves around 1999. The web development world (or at least the loudest advocates) on the other hand are fed up with people not staying up-to-date and start yelling for abandonment of technology that is still very much in use.

Irony

http://www.flickr.com/photos/evilnickname/2105464658/

http://www.chigarden.com/2007/10/tutorial-making-the-ie-voodoo-doll/

Internet Explorer 6 is the bane of the existence of every web developer out there. The reason is that people do not upgrade it because it does the job. I call this the good enough syndrome. For very outspoken advocates of accessibility, IE6 on Windows is also the only browser which supports assistive technology to the fullest. The reason is that monoculture allows you to build things once and then patch instead of evolving your product. Assistive technology is a very expensive piece of kit and the market is scared of losing that source of income.

Innovation on the web is driven by being open. Show your software to the world and people help you find and fix bugs. People also tell you about issues they encountered that you hadn't thought of. Open your data to the world and people show you more effective ways of using it or how mixing it with other data sources can tell stories hidden in your information. The accessibility world doesn't work like that yet. The reason is once again that most clients want to know about legal compliance rather than really caring about the end result.

Disability

One other problem is that accessibility is always connected with disability. Disability is a topic that makes us feel uneasy talking about or acknowledging. It is also a tricky subject to talk about because of the language differences and it is easy to say a non-PC term without wanting to.
I've found that people like to deal with it by targeting single instances that are easy to grasp. How does a blind user deal with that? Cool, let's fix it for him. Disability is much larger than that and exists in numerous levels of severity.

One thing that makes me very happy to see is that the internet user market is shifting. The biggest and fastest growing group of internet users is something you would not expect.

“

The highest level of discretionary income in the US is held by older Americans, especially those between 64-69, at $6,920.00 per year. The age group with the highest concentration of online buyers is the 50-64 age segment, with over 25% making online purchases.

http://www.imtc.gatech.edu/csun/stats.html

“The fastest growing segment of the U.S. population is the 65 and over group. The U.S. Census Bureau projects that the population of those 65 and over will more than double between now and the year 2050, to 80 million. The result of all this – a large and rapidly expanding market of web users that have significant disposable income and a need for accessible web sites.

With this shift we have to reconsider the approach of our web products. Elderly people have different needs than the young go-getters that we are. Right?

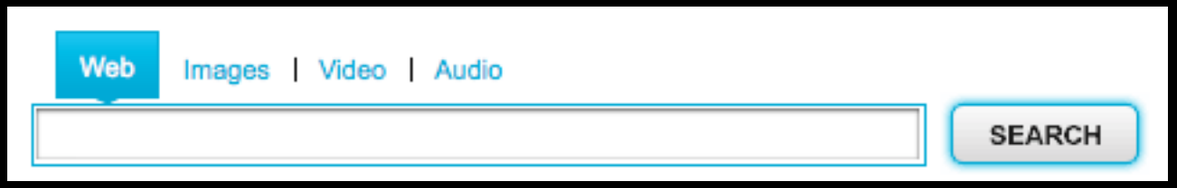
“As we age, most people experience a decrease in vision, hearing, physical abilities, and cognitive abilities. The percentages of people with disabilities increases significantly with age – 13.6% at age18–44, 30% at 45–64, 46% at 65–74, 64% at 75–84. Use of AT increases with age, with 52% of AT devices used by those 65+.

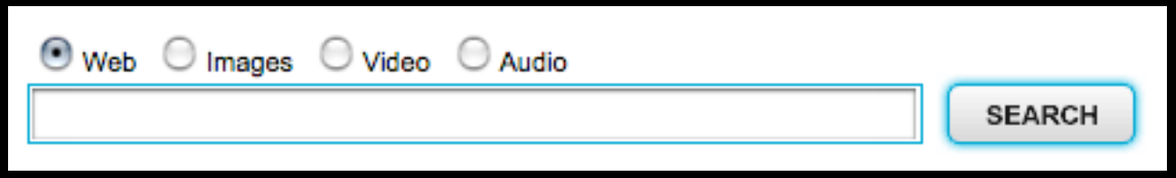
Same Needs

Elderly and disabled people do not have different needs than other people, all they have is a more obvious need for the same things.

Simplicity

The first thing to think about is keeping things simple. Build working solutions with the technologies at your disposal and enhance them iteratively after checking that the enhancement can be applied.





http://uk.tv.yahoo.com/

Usable Interface

It is interesting to see how many times we do this wrong. Instead of sending users onto a path that leads them to the first sensible result and thus giving them a positive learning experience we overload them with information hoping they pick the right one. Marketing and internal policies dictate what goes on the first thing we show end users. Developers fail the same way: being power users ourselves we tend to pack in feature after feature instead of making the interface a journey of sensible pieces of information.

One company had this down like nobody else. Nintendo. With the Wii they broke all the barriers of conventional gaming ideas. Instead of learning a complex system of buttons and levers all you needed was move the game controller as you would play the game in real life. This breaks boundaries and barriers. Elderly people and the Wii are no problem – on the contrary, they are in use in rehab centers.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K_ARvhT6Gzc

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-R2WWgH1Jdc

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pzp8S_7yspM&

Multi channel

One thing that people keep forgetting is that the internet is not a single access channel media. The web can be accessed in various ways: from a computer, a games console, a mobile device, a TV set, a Kiosk system and many more channels. This means that you can not deliver a one size fits all solution - instead you should concentrate on not blocking these access channels.

http://uk.tv.yahoo.com/

TV Tonight

What's on Now

Find a channel

Switch display mode

- Grid
- Hourly table

Times shown here:

1. 20:00 3 hours earlier
2. 21:00
3. 22:00 3 hours later

BBC 1

1. 20:00-20:30 Rogue Traders
2. 20:30-21:00 Traffic Cops
3. 21:00-22:00 The Hottest Place on Earth
4. 22:00-22:25 BBC News at Ten
5. 22:25-22:35 Regional News and Weather
6. 22:35-23:35 Question Time

BBC 2

1. 20:00-20:50 Natural World
2. 20:50-21:00 The Rabbits of Skomer
3. 21:00-22:00 Oil Spill - The Exxon Valdez Disaster
4. 22:00-22:30 The Graham Norton Show
5. 22:30-23:20 Newsnight

ITV1

1. 20:00-21:00 The Bill
2. 21:00-22:00 The Truth about Super Skinny Pregnancies
3. 22:00-22:35 News at Ten and Weather
4. 22:35-23:40 Dexter

Channel 4

1. 20:00-21:00 10 Years Younger
2. 21:00-22:00 Cutting Edge
3. 22:00-23:05 Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares USA

Five

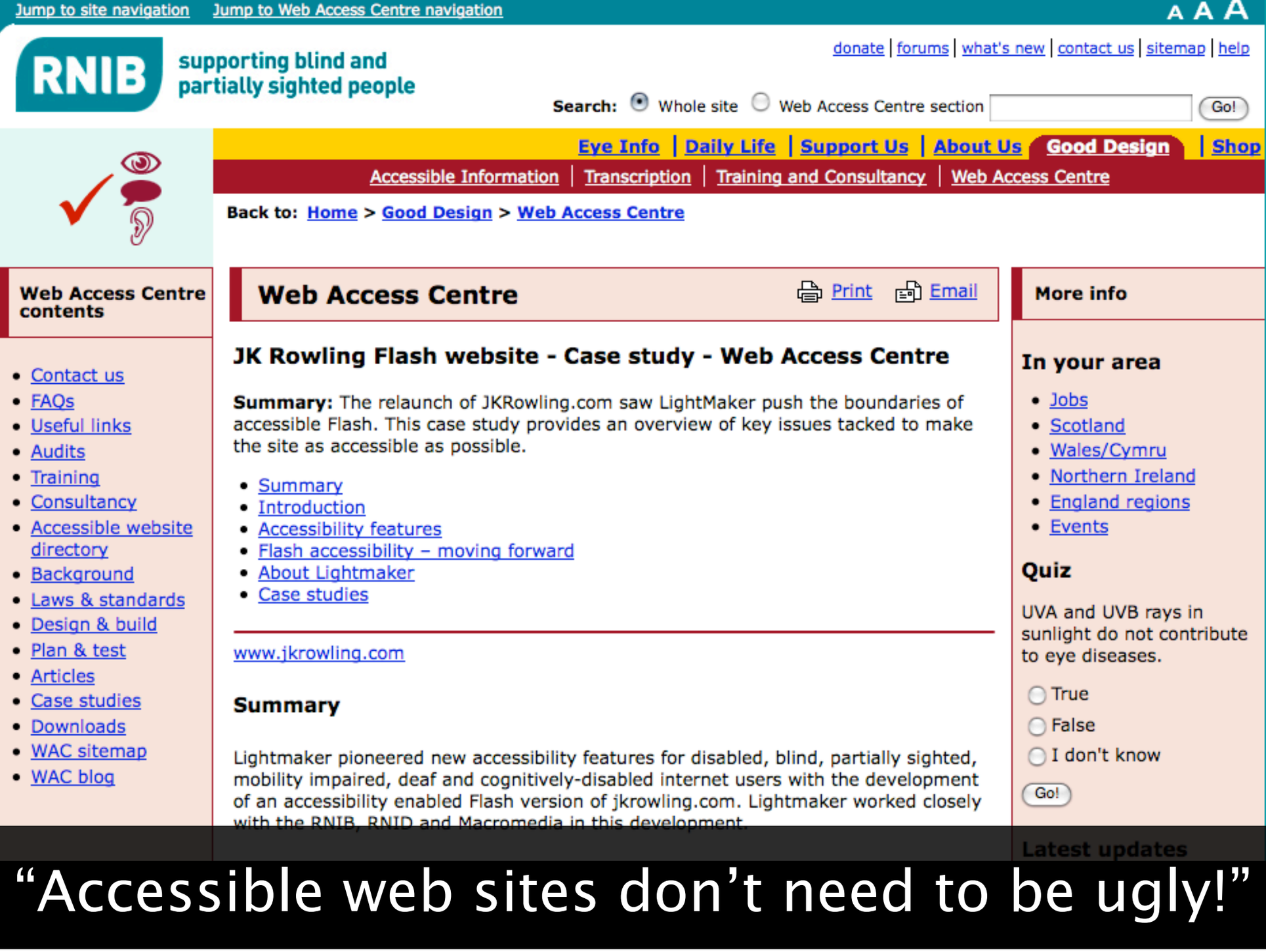
1. 20:00-21:00 I Own Britain's Best Home 2009
2. 21:00-22:00 The Mentalist
3. 22:00-23:00 Law & Order: Criminal Intent

Sky Movies Premiere

1. 20:00-21:45 Semi-pro
2. 21:45-23:30 I Am Legend

A jolly good time

My main bugbear with web sites and products is that people think that creating accessible products means making them less pretty and not with the full set of features. The scary thing is that the expert sites do give that impression.



"Accessible web sites don't need to be ugly!"

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF Shopmobility

LOCKTON AFFINITY
Insurance for wheelchairs and mobility scooters

The Shop Mob Click HERE

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Safety Considerations
Some customer views
About the Federation
News Items
Useful Links

Affiliates Only

WELCOME TO THE NFSUK WEBSITE ...

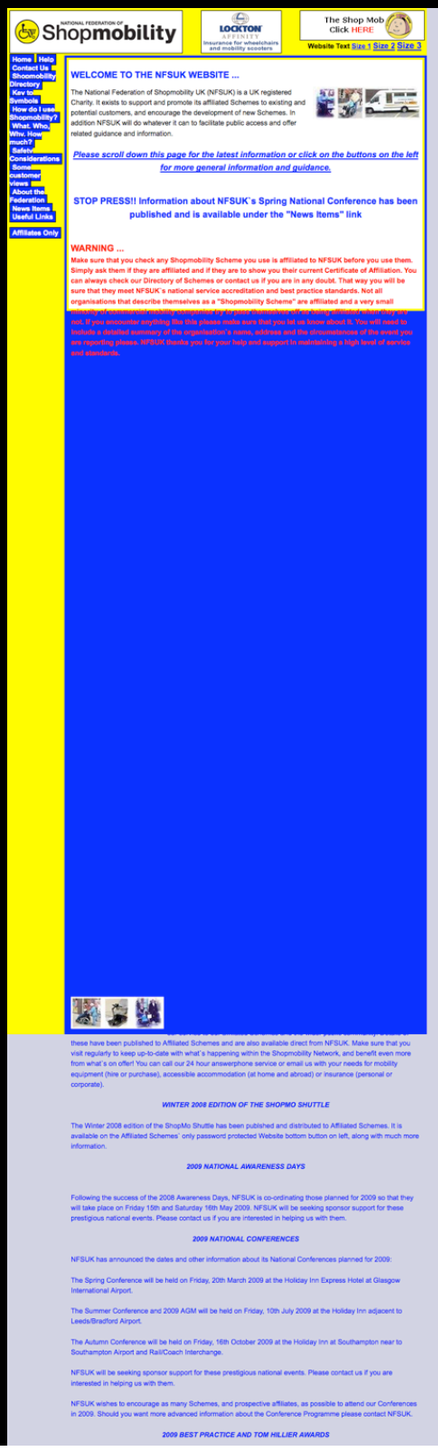
The National Federation of Shopmobility UK (NFSUK) is a UK registered Charity. It exists to support and promote its affiliated Schemes to existing and potential customers, and encourage the development of new Schemes. In addition NFSUK will do whatever it can to facilitate public access and offer related guidance and information.

Please scroll down this page for the latest information or click on the buttons on the left for more general information and guidance.

STOP PRESS!! Information about NFSUK`s Spring National Conference has been published and is available under the "News Items" link

WARNING ...

Make sure that you check any Shopmobility Scheme you use is affiliated to NFSUK before you use them. Simply ask them if they are affiliated and if they are to show you their current Certificate of Affiliation. You can always check our Directory of Schemes or contact us if you are in any doubt. That way you will be sure that they meet NFSUK`s national service accreditation and best practice standards. Not all organisations that describe themselves as a "Shopmobility Scheme" are affiliated and a very small minority of commercial mobility companies try to pass themselves off as being affiliated when they are not. If you encounter anything like this please make sure that you let us know about it. You will need to



http://www.shopmobilityuk.org/

Making it sexy

You can however build something that is sexy and accessible if you put enough effort into it. Take for example the "Yahoo Currency Converter":http://finance.yahoo.com/currency-converter?u#from=USD;to=EUR;amt=1 which makes my life much easier and is highly accessible. It needed some "effort and dedication to get it that far though":http://developer.yahoo.net/blog/archives/2009/01/accessible_converter.html

Yahoo! Developer Network Blog

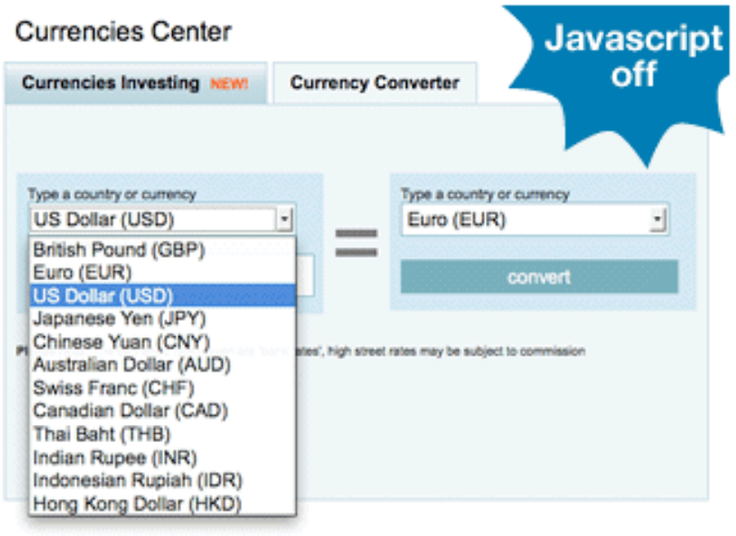
« Previous | Main | Next »

JANUARY 21, 2009

Making the new Yahoo! Currency Converter accessible

When my fellow coworker, the user experience designer **Graham Beale**, and I started thinking about the new **Yahoo! Currency Converter** we had a few clear objectives:

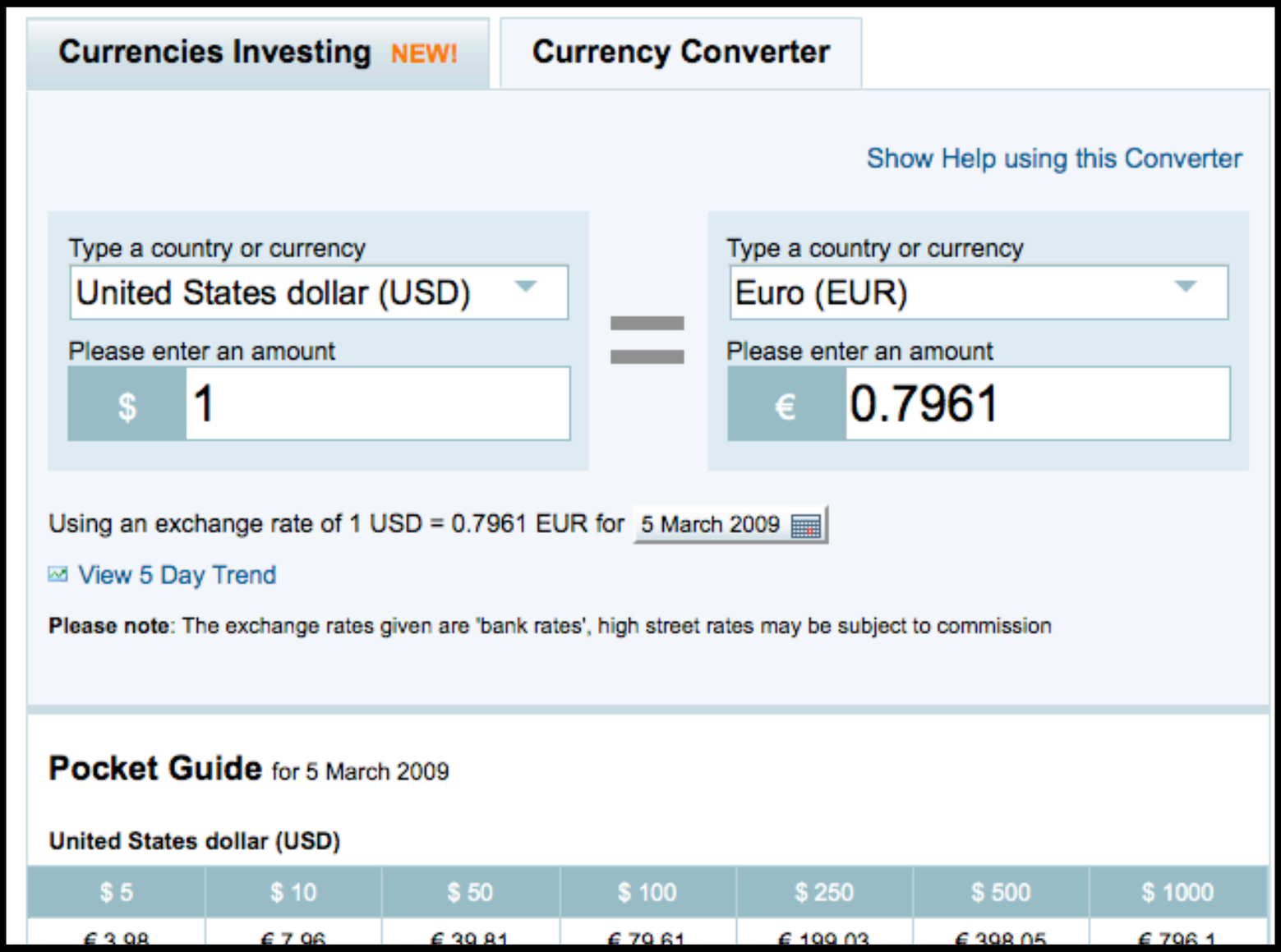
- make it as easy as possible to use
- make it work without page reloads
- make it fast
- make it accessible to everyone



For the last, but not at all least, point we were lucky and very happy to have **Artur Ortega** on our team. Artur is not only a brilliant backend engineer but also a screenreader user himself. Without his endless testing and suggesting workarounds, this application would not have been possible.

To arrive at the application you can use today, we went through an intense prototyping and user testing phase with many different iterations. Some of those iterations are still in the converter as parts of our progressive enhancement concept and all of them are based

http://developer.yahoo.net/blog/archives/2009/01/accessible_converter.html



http://finance.yahoo.com/currency-converter?u#from=USD;to=EUR;amt=1

If you look at the currency converter then you'll also realize that the URL is something I can send in a link to somebody and it will make sense immediately to that person. This way I can publish and promote my product to a much larger audience. I can even allow people to send different versions of the same product catered to different needs with url parameters.

http://finance.yahoo.com/currency-converter?u#from=USD;to=EUR;amt=1

http://finance.yahoo.com/currency-converter?u#from=AUS;to=GBP;amt=20

http://finance.yahoo.com/currency-converter?u#from=EUR;to=USD;amt=12.21

http://delicious.com/tag/elephants

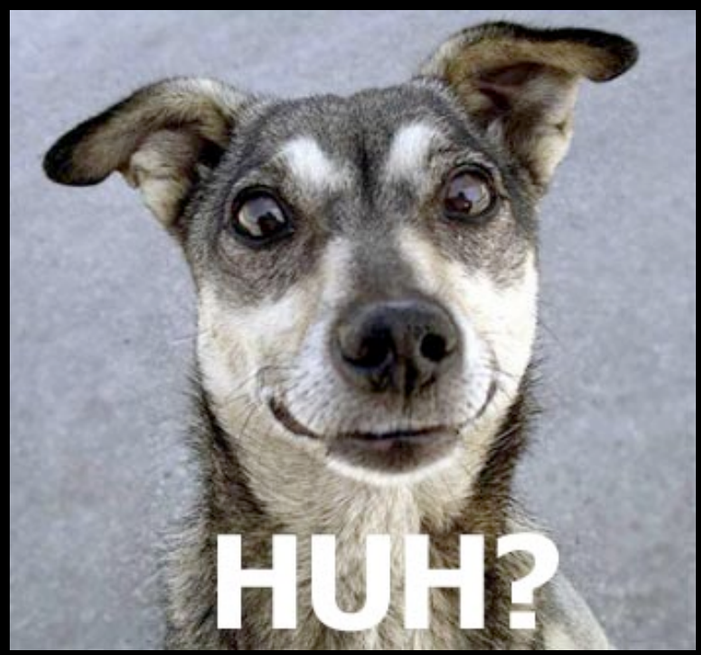
http://delicious.com/tag/donkeys

http://delicious.com/tag/rabbits

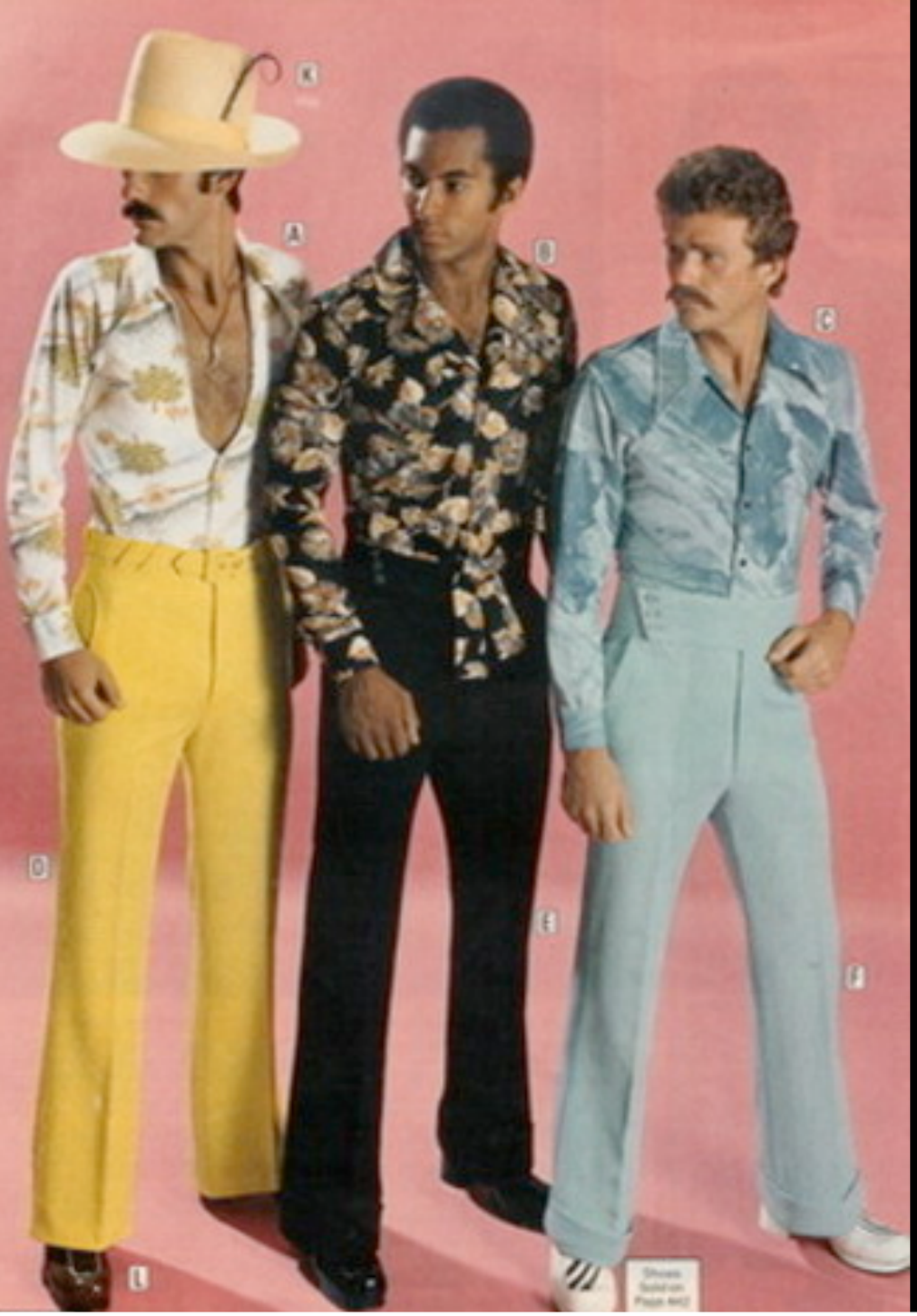
http://www.flickr.com/photos/tags/elephants

http://www.guardian.co.uk/travel/restaurants

http://www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/publicwebsite/public_jkrowling.hcsp



Bad URLs don't look like a big problem but they are extra effort that is not needed.



Pimping

That's all well and good, but what if you have already a solution in place? In most cases these days we will have a massive system already that is hard or impossible to change.

Hackable

As Tristan Nitot of Mozilla puts it - "the web is hackable":http://standblog.org/blog/post/2009/06/03/The-Web-is-hackable

I mean "hackable" in the sense that one can decide to experience it in ways that were not exactly what the author decided it would be. In short, the Web is not TV. It's not PDF either. Nor Flash. Using systems like Mozilla Jetpack, YQL, GreaseMonkey and Pipes I can easily prototype changes that should be done to web sites to make them more accessible. These are simple things like injecting language attributes or labels. A lot of HTML problems are in web sites because the maintainers are not aware of the barrier they cause.

Not all his inventions were groundbreaking

Embed photo:

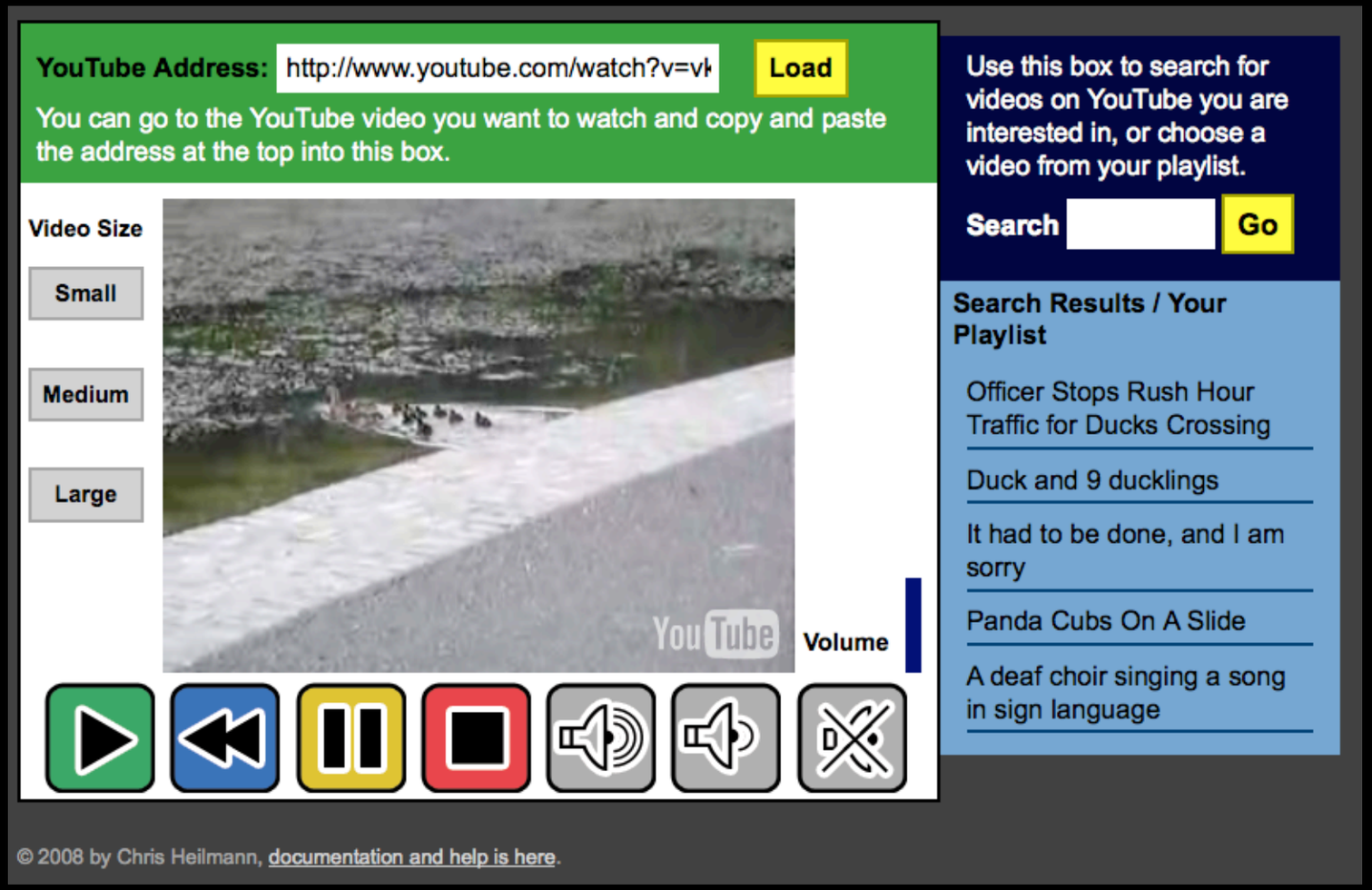
```
<a href="http://www.flickr.com/photos/codepo8/3592787210/"><img
src="http://farm4.static.flickr.com/3656/3592787210_7114a2234c_m.jpg" alt="Not all his
inventions were groundbreaking by  you."></a>
```

This is an example of enhancing a product with Greasemonkey. As you can see I collect a lot of photos and needed a quick way to access the link for copy and paste. With JavaScript and GreaseMonkey this was easy.

Mashable

http://www.flickr.com/photos/nedrichards/2314696728/

If you really want to help, open your data out to the world and let the millions of developers out there show you how things can be fixed. Praise them, invite them and support them and we all win. Build an own API, or if you don't want to go that far, build some open tables for YQL.



Scripting Enabled

Hacking the web to be more accessible

"Scripting Enabled":http://scriptingenabled.org was the first accessibility hack event and is completely open for you to organize, too.

Scripting Enabled

Hacking the web to be more accessible

Styleable

Techies are easy to reach but to build a beautiful and accessible web we also need to reach out more to the designer world. Accessibility is not an enemy of beauty, there is a lot of interesting and creative challenge and gain in making things work across the board.

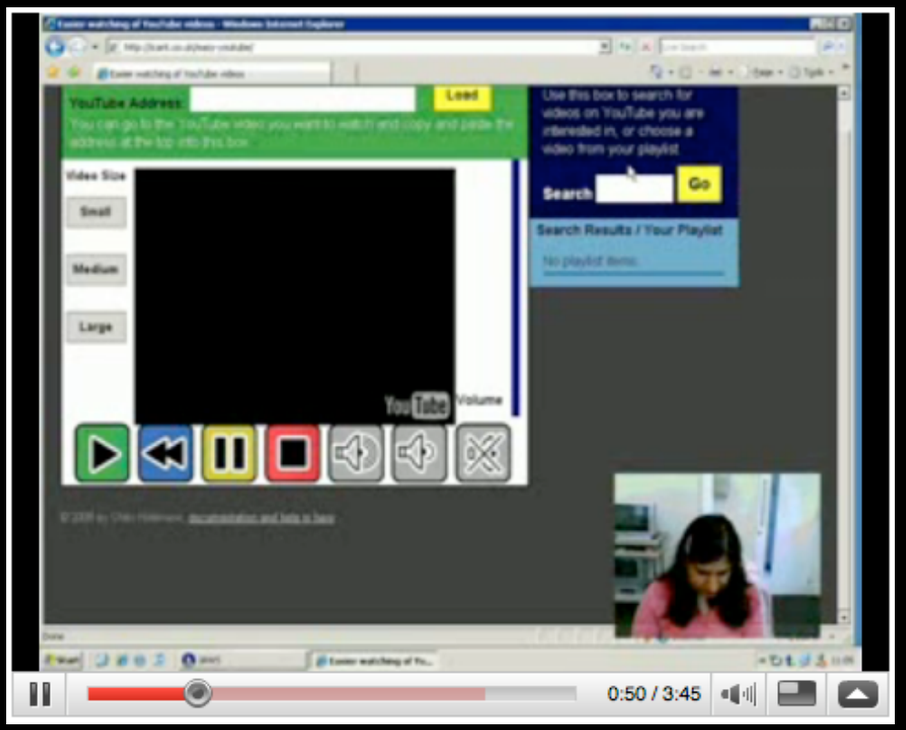
Educating

http://www.flickr.com/photos/pascale_pictures/3034691276/sizes/o/

I hope that you now have a better idea just how many options you have to make the web a more accessible place. Our training and teaching on the subject should be closer to people's needs rather than technical implementation of guidelines. Let's talk to HR about this.

Reward

The reward for building an accessible web is not only monetary. First and foremost we make the media we work in reach a lot more people, all of which can contribute to the web but are stopped before they can even consider it. Check these videos to see just how much more empowered people feel if they get an interface they can work with.



http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CwsDKaaIgg8&

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QiuT0y0KR6I

To make this work for you, all you need to do is put some dedication into the whole subject. You can be very accessible companies but everybody has to understand what is going on.

Collaboration

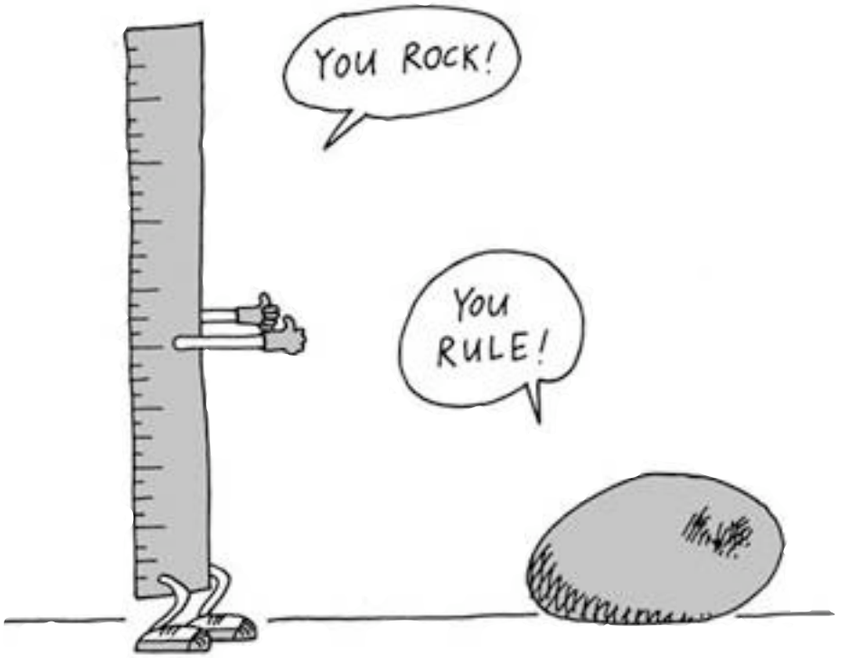
Together we are stronger. If more and more companies show that they are understanding the need for accessibility and want to do the right thing but lack the backup from the accessibility world we can fix the web.

T H A N K S !

Keep in touch:

Christian Heilmann

http://wait-till-i.com

http://scriptingenabled.org

http://twitter.com/codepo8