

Can FluidHTML Make Flash Popular Again?

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HTML, XML, and...FHTML? If the developers of FluidHTML, launched at TechCrunch50 yesterday, have their way, FHTML [1] will be the next big markup language. In a nutshell, the server-side language allows programmers to create Flash-like applications in a format that makes sense to any skilled HTML user.

Besides opening up Flash coding to a whole new set of programmers, FHTML allows deep linking--just like HTML--so applications created using the markup language can easily be crawled by search engines. This is key for companies that want the aesthetics of Flash but have been hesitant to rely on it because of its lack of indexability. "People want the look and feel of flash, but they need deep linking," explained Michael Collete, CEO of FHTML. That need for deep linking has led to a decline in the popularity of Flash in recent years.

FHTML is completely ready for use, with Sotheby's currently testing it out for its online retail catalog. Collette told me that the company, which has thus far raised \$375,000, is also working with an as yet to be named online Webreader for newspapers. FHTML is entering an A round of funding in October for \$1 to 2 million.

Once the product is fully launched, sites will be allowed to use it for free until they exceed a certain amount of traffic--say, 50,000 hits a month. At that point, FHTML will charge an annual subscription fee of \$100 to \$500.

FHTML faces some big challenges. It's not easy to get programmers to switch languages, even if FHTML does resemble HTML. But there is clearly a need for what FHTML has to offer. During my brief interview with Collette at the FHTML table, someone from another company came up and announced that they wanted to use the markup language with their Web site, set to launch this week in Flash.