

# Sometimes people don't like it when you enforce a standard

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Your average computer user wouldn't recognize a standards document if they were hit in the face with it.

I'm reminded of a beta bug report back in 1996 regarding how Outlook Express (then called "Microsoft Internet Mail and News") handled percent signs in email addresses (I think). The way Outlook Express did it was standards-conformant, and I sent the relevant portion of the RFC to the person who reported the bug. Here's what I got back:

I have never read the RFC's (most people, I'm sure, haven't) but I know when something WORKS in one mail reader (Netscape) and DOESN'T WORK in another (MSIMN).

The problem, restated to comply with your RFC:

MS Internet Mail and News DO NOT HANDLE PERCENT SIGNS like the RFC says.

That first sentence pretty much captures the reaction most of the world has to standards documents: They are meaningless. If Outlook Express doesn't behave the same way as Netscape, then it's a bug in Outlook Express, regardless of what the standards documents say.

There are many "strangenesses" in the way Internet Explorer handles certain aspects of HTML when you don't run it in strict mode. For example, did you notice that the font you set via CSS for your BODY tag doesn't apply to tables? Or that invoking the submit method on a form does not fire the onsubmit event? That's because Netscape didn't do it either, and Internet Explorer had to be bug-for-bug compatible with Netscape because web sites relied on this behavior.

The last paragraph in the response is particularly amusing. The person is using the word "RFC" as a magic word, not knowing what it means. Apparently if you want to say that something doesn't work as you expect, you say that it doesn't conform to the RFC. Whether your expectation agrees with the RFC is irrelevant. (By his own admission, the person who filed the bug didn't even read the RFC.)

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