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INTRODUCTION

Foreword

Prior to Yahoo! Merchant Solutions, Yahoo! Store users could create their online store either by using the editor, or by learning RTML and creating custom templates. While with some imagination and a few tricks it was (and still is) possible to create a custom design using only the editor, only with RTML can you really break free of the editor-imposed limits and create a truly customized store. Today, with Yahoo! Merchant Solutions, you have another choice: using a third-party web design tool such as Macromedia DreamWeaver or Microsoft FrontPage and Yahoo's "store-tags". With this approach, you can create a store with the tools you are already used to and still keep your store somewhat dynamic by "pulling" information (product names, descriptions, prices, etc.) from the product catalog (Catalog Manager). So why would you even bother looking at templates and RTML? The answer is simple: with traditional web design software, you have to create every single page in your store manually; store-tags only allow you to "substitute" real information from the Catalog Manager into the manually created pages. With RTML, on the other hand, you can create one template, program it to deal with various situations (section pages, item pages, etc.), enter your product information (product names, captions, prices, images, etc.) and the Store Editor can take care of the rest: all the pages will be generated for you including the navigation structure of the store.

Unfortunately, because of the fact that RTML is so specialized and that there is so little literature on the subject, there is a rather steep learning curve associated with it. This is where this book can help. My purpose was to give the reader a guide that shows how to create a custom template with little previous RTML experience. This book follows a “reverse learning process”: rather than requiring you to learn the language and then apply it in real life, it lets you apply it first by giving you enough information to get the job done. Once you have read the book and created your custom template, you can stop right there; or if you become more interested in RTML or find the need to further customize your store, you can learn more. Either way, I hope this book will enable you to create the store of your dreams. Good luck!

Istvan Siposs

Can this really be done in one day?

Whether or not you can create your template in one day depends on a number of factors: your prior knowledge of Yahoo! Stores, whether or not you have your proposed design ready, whether you have at least tried the template editor, and of course, how much time you have to read this book. So, if your design is ready (the one you would like to set up for your store), you know how to edit RTML templates, and you have the time to do this, then yes, you should be able to go through this book and have your custom template done in a day.

If you need prior RTML training (to learn how you can tweak existing templates, for example, you should get *RTML for Yahoo! Stores*, or *RTML 101: The unofficial guide to Yahoo! Store templates*, or go to <http://www.monitus.com/rtml-video.htm> for a brief tutorial.

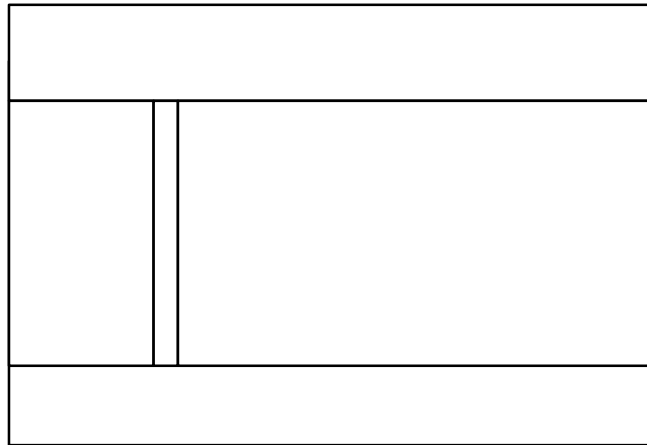
Who should read this book

In order to understand and appreciate what’s contained within this book, you should have a good working knowledge of Yahoo!® Store. You should know how to build a “plain vanilla” store and you should also be comfortable using the store in the Advanced Interface. Because RTML and custom templates generate HTML pages, it is also highly recommended that you

know something about HTML. Finally, you should know at least a little about RTML; if nothing more, just how to modify templates. This book should not be your first introduction to RTML. If you need an RTML foundation, I recommend you start with a copy of *RTML for Yahoo!® Store* or *RTML 101: The Unofficial Guide to Yahoo!® Store Templates* at www.ytimes.info. The book you are now reading will not discuss the Advanced Interface or the elements of RTML.

PLANNING

The Yahoo! Merchant Solutions template editor is not a WYSIWYG (“what-you-see-is-what-you-get”) tool – to say the least. If you have ever clicked on the “Templates” button in the Advanced Editor, you would have seen that the template list is a long list of programs written in RTML. These programs, when executed, produce the HTML output you see when you look at any page of your store in the editor. Therefore, before you start putting together your custom template, you should have a good idea about what you want your web site to look like. In this book, I will show you how to build a custom template for the structure shown below.



This is a very typical web site structure: the entire design is placed inside a table with three rows: the first row contains the site banner. The second row has the navigation bar on the left, a spacer cell to separate the navigation bar from the body, and the body itself. Finally, the last row contains a footer. If your design follows this basic outline you can simply follow this book more or less verbatim. If your design is somewhat different, you should still be able to adopt what you read here to your particular needs. The point is, most designs fit some sort of an HTML table layout, and that is the key to create your own, completely customized template.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Before we actually get down to the details, let me just say a few words about custom and customized templates. There is a difference.

Most Yahoo!® Stores use standard, built-in templates, and while it is possible to create an appealing store simply by using the built-in templates, most stores that are built that way end up looking very similar. You are probably familiar with the not very flattering term “template look.” I rest my case.

There is a smaller but growing percentage of stores that use *customized* templates. The owners or designers of these stores recognized the need to do “something different” that could not be done by tweaking variables or doing HTML tricks. So what these store owners or designers do is change the built-in templates to do a particular thing: to change the order button to an image; add the search form to the top of the navigation structure; or move the utility buttons (Shopping Cart, Info, etc.) to the top of the page. Depending on the design, following this path might make a lot of sense, and it is quite possible to create a very distinct-looking store by modifying the built in templates. Some examples of such stores are www.notetools.com, www.advantagesupplements.com, or www.decorativeandarearugs.com.

Finally, there is an even smaller (but ever growing) percentage of stores that completely break away from the structure provided by the built-in templates. These stores are built using *custom* templates, templates that are created from scratch for a specific design. Examples of these stores are www.theramune.com, www.alwaysdiscounted.com, www.goodbirding.com, and, of course, www.ytimes.info.

It is important to realize that stores built with custom templates don’t use *only* custom templates. There are many built-in templates that can be re-used. For example, the various “body” templates: **page-body**, **privacypolicy-body**, **info-body**, **home-body**, etc. are in most cases just fine once you have your own design “around them.”

Before you start any kind of custom template work, make copies of the built-in templates. The reason for this is simple: you cannot change the built-in templates, only their copies. And, there is no doubt you will want to change one thing or another in those templates.

There are really only six templates that you need to copy: **home.**, **index.**, **info.**, **order-page.**, **page.**, and **privacypolicy.** These are the “base” templates upon which all pages in a Yahoo!® Store are based. When these templates are copied, the Yahoo!® Store system automatically makes copies of all other templates these “base” templates use or reference. If you have already made copies of the built in templates, you are ready to go. Otherwise refer to <http://www.ytimes.info/howtomodtem.html> for instructions on how to copy the templates.