Should designers code? A new Wix tool may solve an age-old dilemma

Editor X — a foreboding name for something that may actually provide hope in creative circles.

But sitting in a dark room on a wintry night, no doubt others around me also broke out into a cold sweat while watching the Editor demoed on stage. Wix's brand new tool is a solution to problems sadly familiar to anyone who's used something like Adobe Muse, which flashbacked to me that evening as the clunky, unintuitive exemplar of what happens when you try to build websites without template or code. In other words, basically everything Editor X is, on first impressions, an improvement on.

Muse luckily met its end in 2018, by which point platforms like Wix had already cornered the market in website design software. The web development brand was set up in 2006 by – rather mysteriously – an ex-member of a secret Israeli intelligence task force in cybersecurity. The years since then have seen an increased debate in whether designers should learn to code, and more range in the kind of screens we read the internet on.

Arguably what those years haven’t yielded much of are options for designers and agencies looking to build a site from scratch without also having to learn advanced coding from scratch. Could it be that Wix have really cracked that particular code? And what could that mean for the creative community?

‘Less complex than Photoshop’

At its launch event last week, as held in the tasteful environs of New York’s Meatpacking District, Wix unveiled the crown jewels of the Editor X toolset: responsive breakpoints that allow one to fully customise a website’s design to any viewing size, with changes made in, say, a tablet template not impacting on the mobile or desktop forms.

That responsiveness extends to how objects anchor to specific points whilst you change the size of the screen, the instant reorganisation of elements when resizing, and the scaling of text dependant on window size. Impressive stuff, but not miraculous in the eyes of seasoned coders. The features just described have been part and parcel of Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) language ever since the introduction of the Grid and Flexbox models.

If you’re not a coder, then your eyes may be feeling heavy reading this. According to project’s head Mor Philosoph, that makes you the target market for Editor X.

“As the web evolves and CSS standards and tools mature, any designer is faced with more advanced challenges to make more

elaborate websites across more devices. They have to do it more quickly, competitively, as the market expands."

"(For) we managed to extract the complexities of CSS, but combine it with the WYSIWYG design we're known for," Mor explains.

After speaking with Mor, I'm face to face with Wix CEO Avishai Abrahami, the former task force member mentioned earlier. Far from being a mysterious 'Mr. X', Avishai is as relaxed a Regular Joe I've ever met, speaking openly about Wix's latest offering without any marketing jabber. For example, when asked whether Editor X could turn any design bod into a web designer overnight, his response is a more humble suggestion of a few days.

“You need to spend time with it, understand the concept, get comfortable,” he says. “But if you use Photoshop, know that this product is *less* complex than Photoshop.

“For 99.9% of projects, if you’re using Editor X, then you don’t need to have learnt how to code.”

Considering Wix’s pivot to design circles – and its 2017 acquisition of art portfolio staple DeviantArt – I wonder whether Avishai sees a little of himself in this new audience of designers and illustrators.

“A lot,” he replies. “I started my career as a developer when I was 11. And then at 15 I was part of a hacker group – and I *hated* hacking.

“(Before then) I was doing a lot of code that generated computer graphics, and I always loved that. So Wix is pretty much a dream for me, using algorithms and software to enable the creation of design and art.”

Editor X is now available in beta form; and keep an eye on *Digital Arts* for release date news.

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