ALT-TAB: Better APEX Tabs

Scott Spendolini
Director & Co-Founder

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Welcome

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About the Presenter

- **Scott Spendolini**
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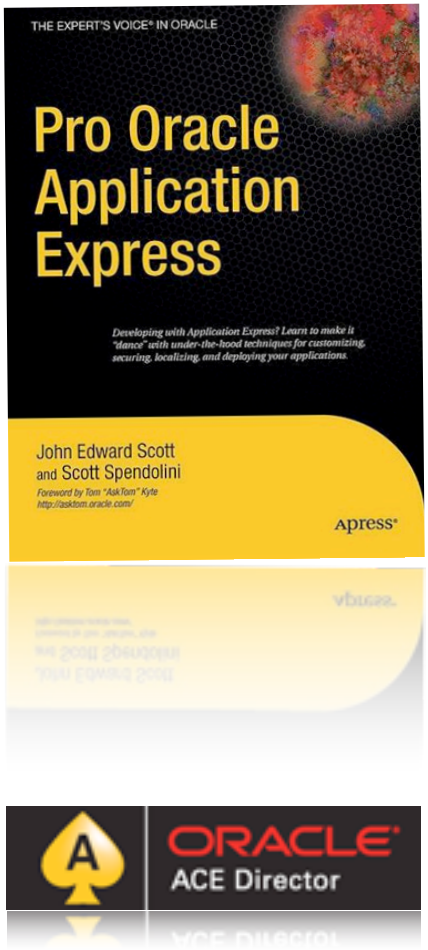
  - @sspendol
  - Ex-Oracle Employee of 10 years
    - Senior Product Manager for Oracle APEX from 2002 through 2005
  - Founded Sumner Technologies in October 2005
  - Co-Founded Sumneva in January 2010
  - Oracle Ace Director
  - Co-Author, Pro Oracle Application Express
  - "Scott" on OTN Forums



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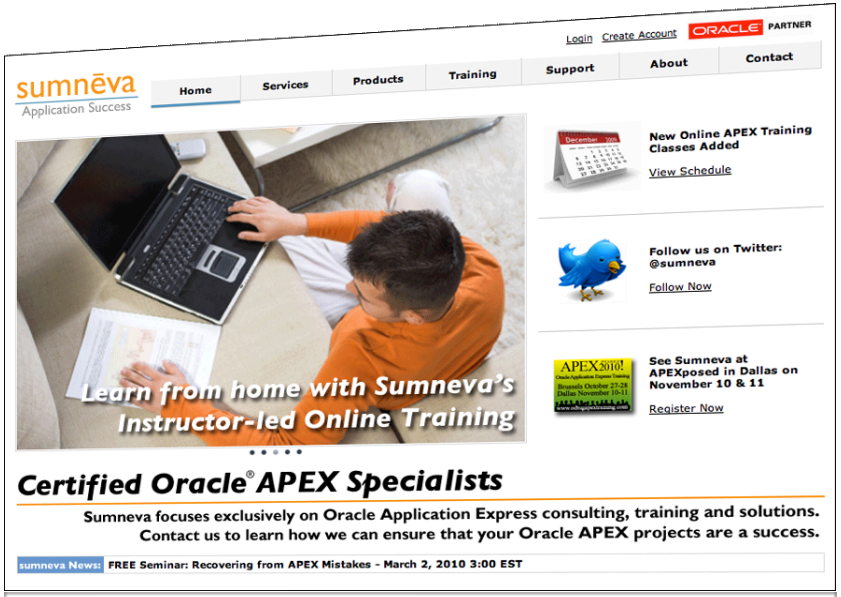

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Agenda

- Overview
- Alternative Tabs
  - jQuery UI
  - CSS Dropdown Menu Framework
- APEX 4.0 UI Changes
- Summary

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APEX 4.0 UI Changes

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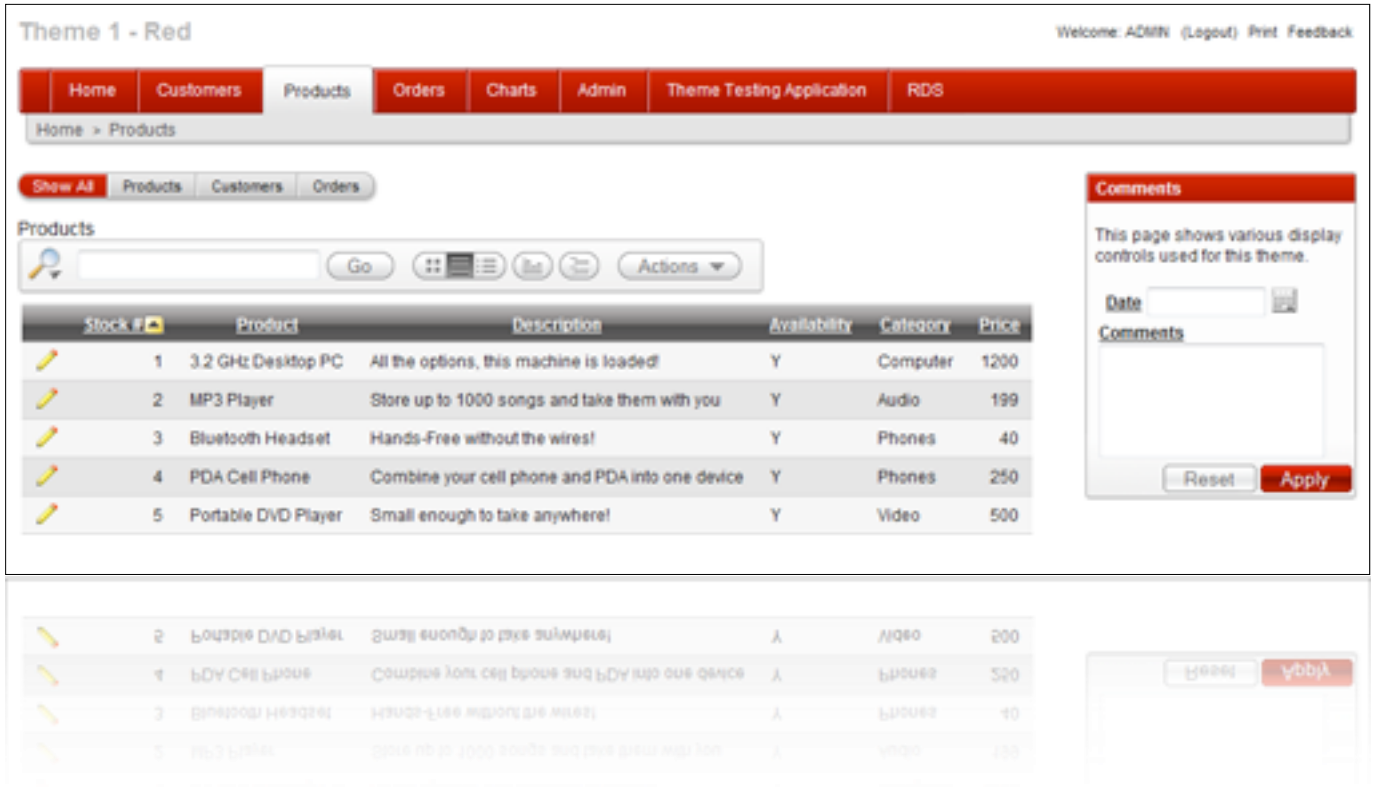
New APEX 4.0 Themes

- Several new themes included in APEX 4.0
  - Total of 20 Interchangeable Themes



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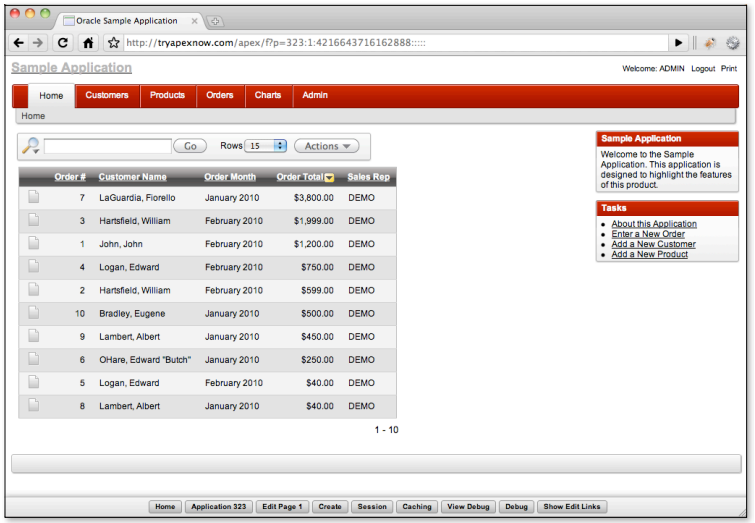
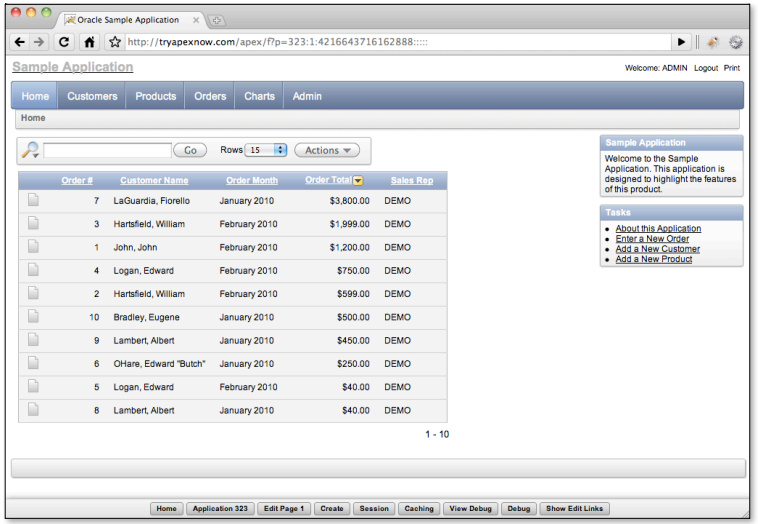
Themes

- All new themes are DIV-based
  - Only 5 are IE6 Compatible
  - Denoted by the * next to their names
- Most themes have been "cleaned up" to better meet standards and/or to fix bugs





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Backward Compatibility

- Five Themes still use **HTML tables** for their layout
  - Ensures compatibility with **older browsers**
  - **Table-friendly themes** include:
    - Theme 13
    - Theme 15
    - Theme 16
    - Theme 18
    - Theme 20

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New Features in APEX 4.0 Templates

- "Embedded" Regions
  - Can now easily have a Region within another Region
  - Part of the Region properties

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DIV-Based Layout

- Most of the new APEX 4.0 Themes use a **DIV-based layout model**
- What is a DIV?
  - A container for blocks of content
  - More practical than **TABLEs** for overall design
    - Can and do still use **TABLEs** for row/column reports
  - Easier to manipulate & manage with JavaScript/jQuery

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DIVs

D E M O N S T R A T I O N

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Structure of an APEX 4.0 Template

- Each page is made up of several DIVs
  - header
  - tabs
  - topbar
  - messages
  - body
  - footer
- Each DIV has sub-DIVs
  - And those DIVs may also have sub-DIVs

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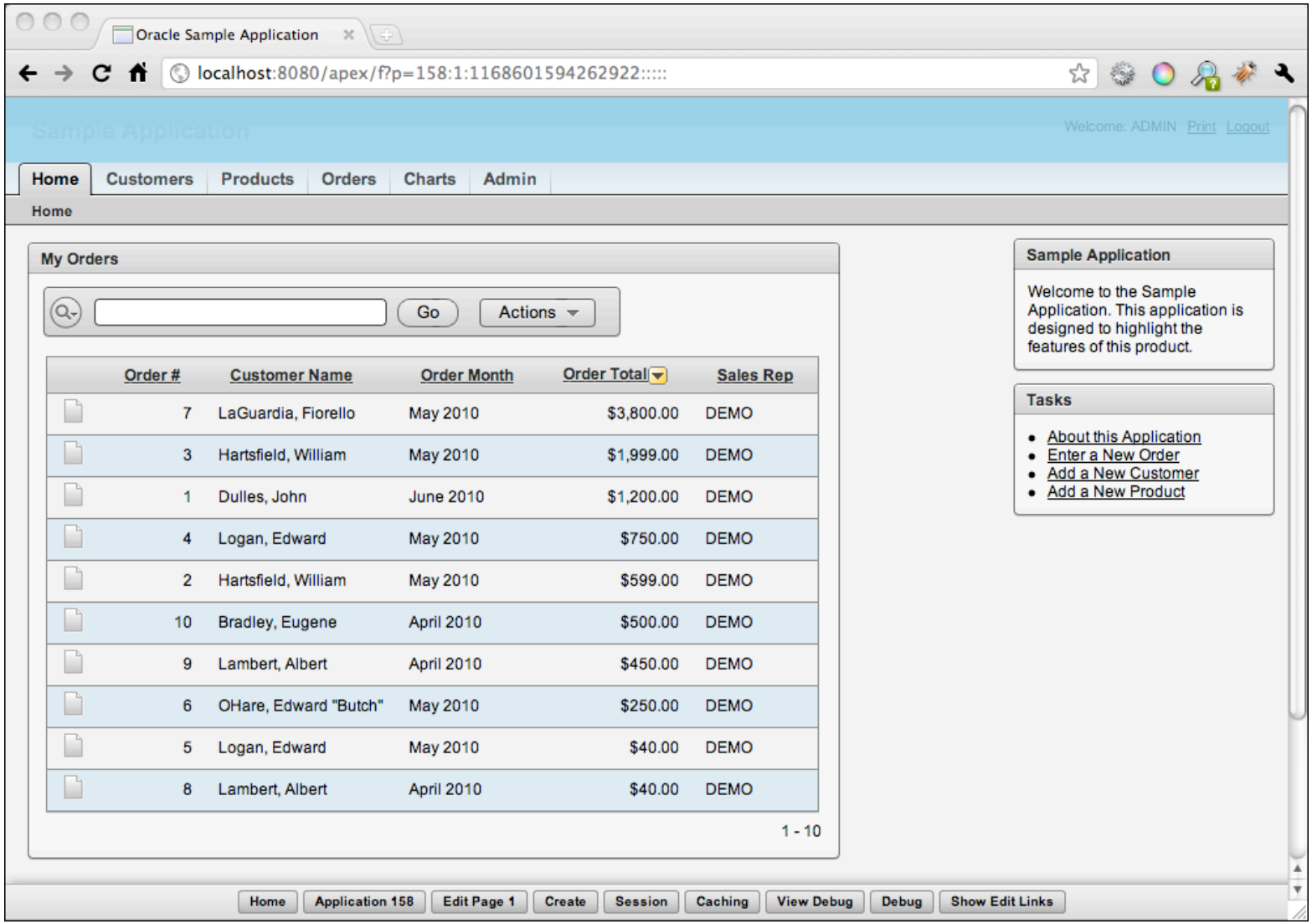
HEADER



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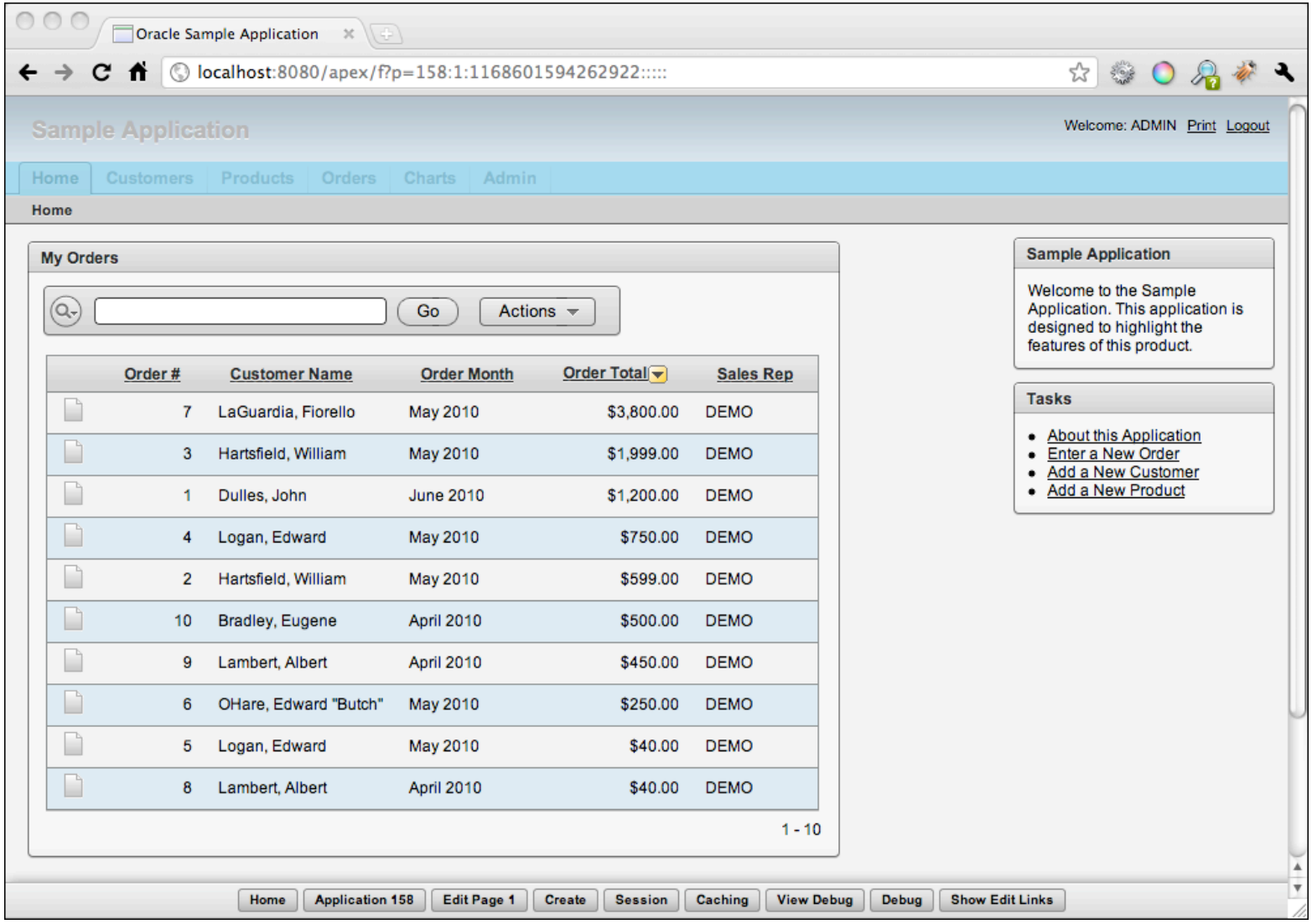
TABS



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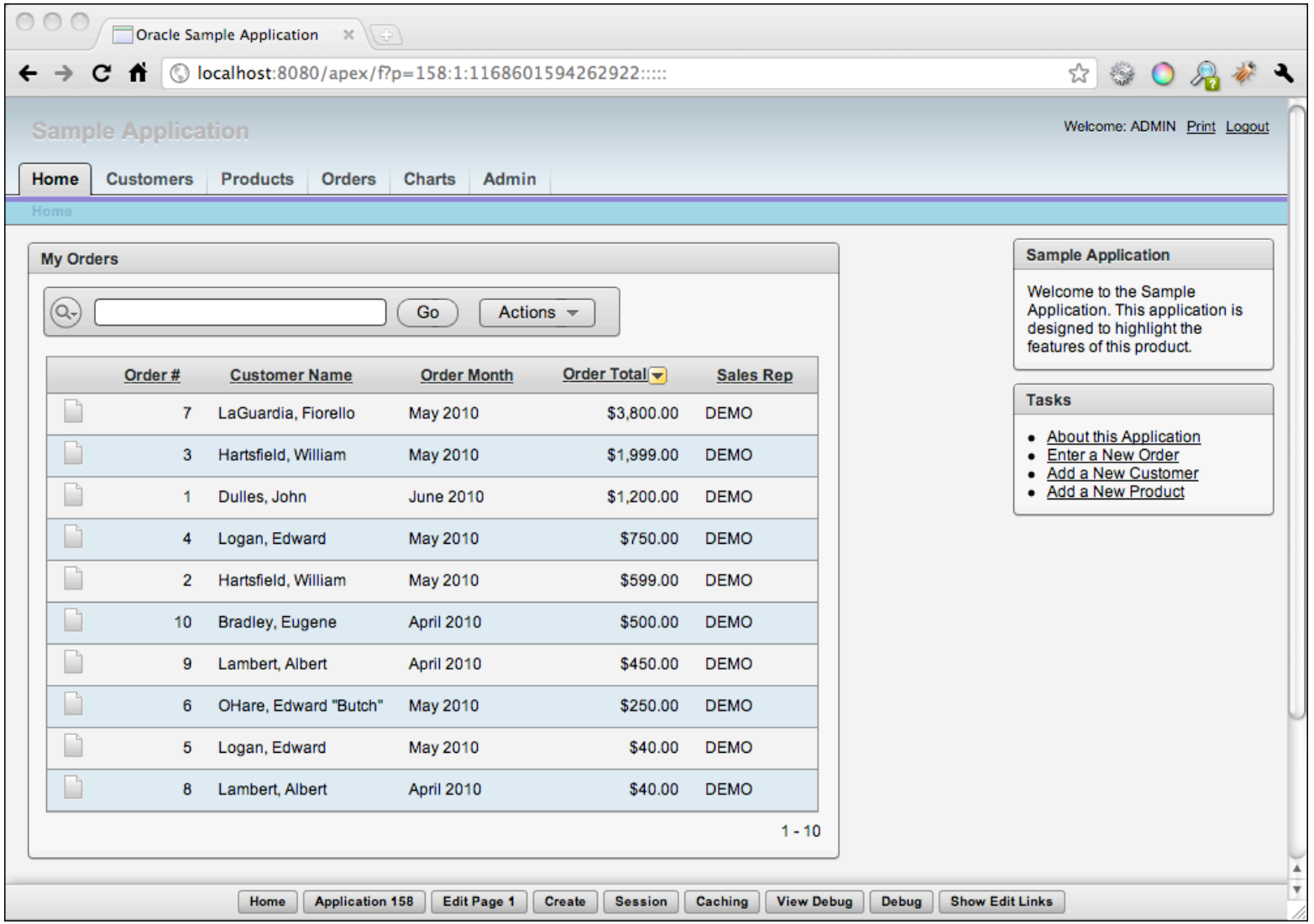
TOPBAR



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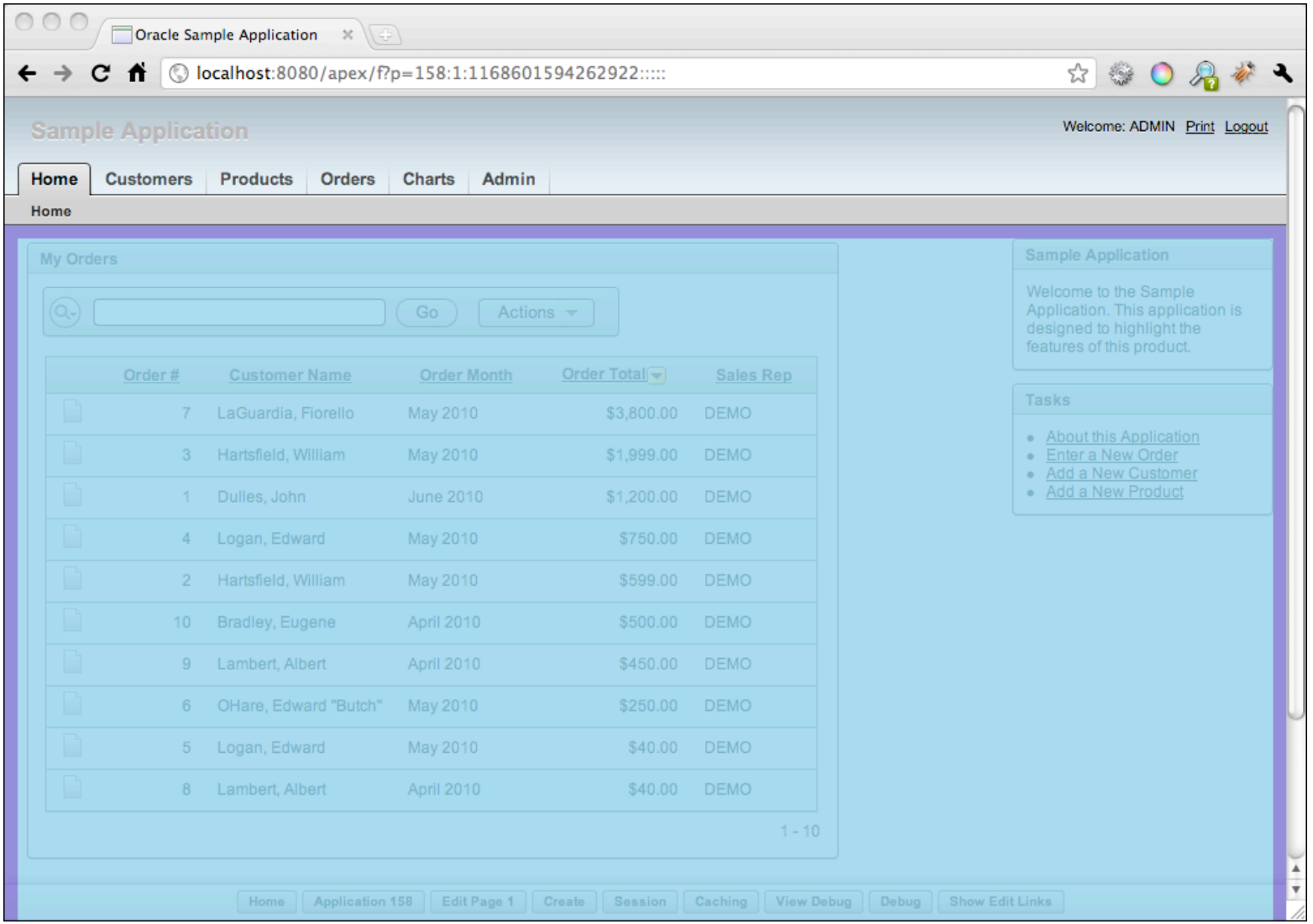
BODY



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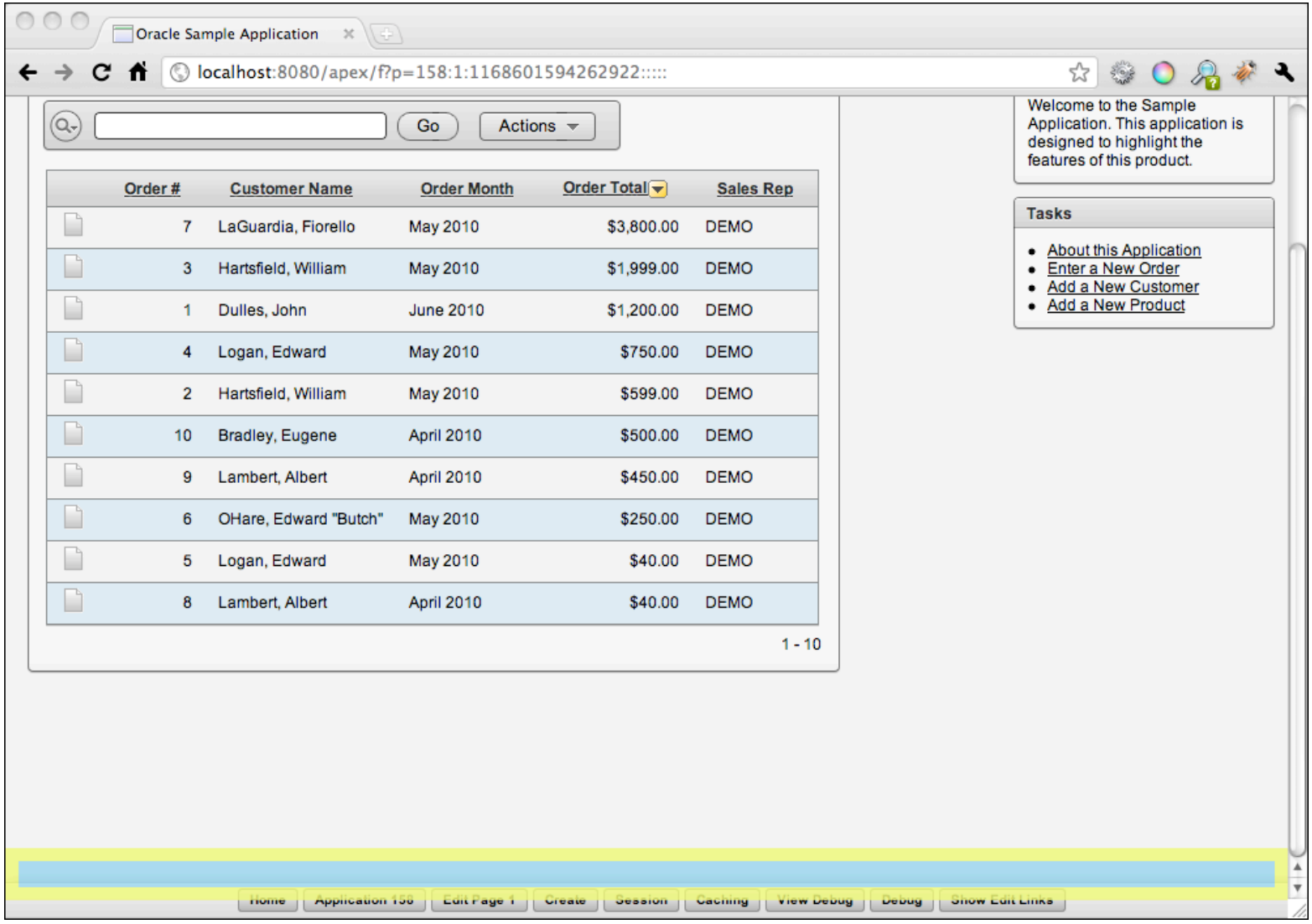
FOOTER



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Page Header

```
<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//W3C//DTD XHTML 1.0 Strict//EN" "http://www.w3.org/TR/
xhtml1/DTD/xhtml1-strict.dtd">
<html lang="&BROWSER_LANGUAGE." xmlns="http://www.w3.org/1999/xhtml"
xmlns:htmldb="http://htmldb.oracle.com" xmlns:apex="http://apex.oracle.com">
<head>
  <title>#TITLE#</title>
  <link rel="icon" href="#IMAGE_PREFIX#favicon.ico" type="image/x-icon">
  <link rel="shortcut icon" href="#IMAGE_PREFIX#favicon.ico" type="image/x-
icon">
  #HEAD#
  <link rel="stylesheet" href="#IMAGE_PREFIX#themes/theme_4/css/theme_4_0.css"
type="text/css" />
  <!--[if IE]><link rel="stylesheet" href="#IMAGE_PREFIX#themes/theme_4/css/
theme_4_0_ie.css" type="text/css" /><![endif]-->
  <!--[if IE 6]><link rel="stylesheet" href="#IMAGE_PREFIX#themes/theme_4/css/
theme_4_0_ie6.css" type="text/css" /><![endif]-->
  <!--[if IE 7]><link rel="stylesheet" href="#IMAGE_PREFIX#themes/theme_4/css/
theme_4_0_ie7.css" type="text/css" /><![endif]-->
</head>
<body #ONLOAD#>
<!--[if lte IE 6]><div id="outdated-browser">#OUTDATED_BROWSER#</div><![endif]--
>
#FORM_OPEN#
```


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Page Body

```
<div id="header">
  <div id="logo"><a href="#HOME_LINK#">#LOGO##REGION_POSITION_06#</a></div>
  #REGION_POSITION_07#
  <div id="navbar">
    <div class="app-user">#WELCOME_USER#</div>
    #NAVIGATION_BAR#
    #REGION_POSITION_08#
  </div>
</div>
<div id="tabs">
  <div class="frame">
    <div class="bg">
      <div class="tab-holder">
        #TAB_CELLS#
      </div>
    </div>
  </div>
</div>
<div id="topbar">#REGION_POSITION_01##REGION_POSITION_04#</div>
<div id="messages">#SUCCESS_MESSAGE##NOTIFICATION_MESSAGE##GLOBAL_NOTIFICATION#</div>
<div id="body">
  <table class="tbl-body" cellspacing="0" cellpadding="0" border="0" summary="">
    <tbody>
      <tr>
        <td class="tbl-main" width="100%">#REGION_POSITION_02##BOX_BODY#</td>
        <td class="tbl-sidebar">#REGION_POSITION_03#</td>
      </tr>
    </tbody>
  </table>
</div>
```


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Page Footer

```
<div id="footer"><div class="content">
  #REGION_POSITION_05#
  <div id="customize">#CUSTOMIZE#</div> 
</div></div>
#FORM_CLOSE#
</body>
</html>
```


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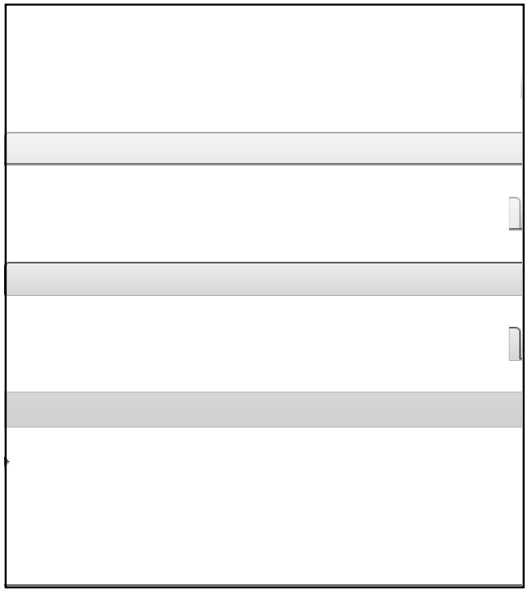
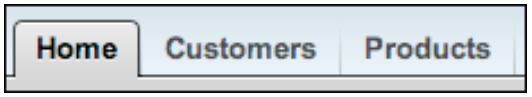
Sprite Maps

- **Sprite Maps** consolidate several smaller images into one large image
  - Faster to load one larger image vs. several smaller images
- Only a **portion of the image is displayed** on the page
  - Controlled by CSS **background-position** attribute



Tabs Sprite Map Image



Actual Tabs

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Sprite Maps

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Tabs

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History of Tabs

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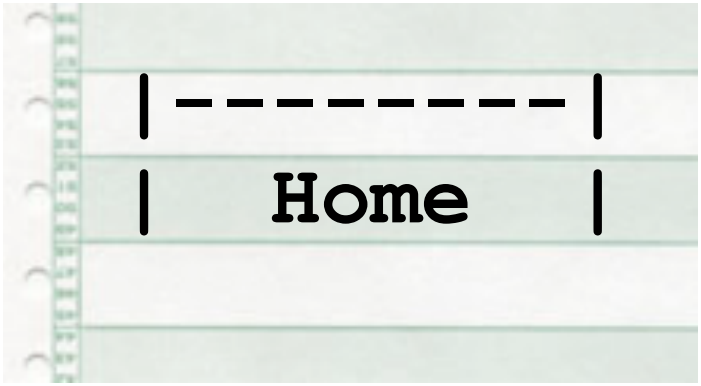
History of Tabs

- The first tab was developed in 1962 by IBM & DARPA
  - Data was stored on over 2,000 punch cards
  - Took over 3 hours just to load
  - Used all 16KB of RAM
- End Result:



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History of Tabs

- Tabs have been a **common navigational device** since the early days of **client-server** applications
  - Once HTML-based applications became popular, it wasn't long before the tab followed
- **Most web sites** today - both large & small - **make some use of tabs** in one way or another
  - Google, Amazon, Twitter, Facebook, Yahoo, etc.

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Amazon.com circa 1999

- When Amazon.com launched in **1995**, it didn't look very good
  - At least not by today's standards
- It also didn't have any tabs
  - As did many sites of that time period

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AMAZON.COM CIRCA 2000'S

- However, its UI quickly evolved over the years
  - As the site expanded, so did the number of tabs used:

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Amazon.com Today

- Today, Amazon.com opts for a **navigation list** on the left side **in lieu of tabs** on its home page

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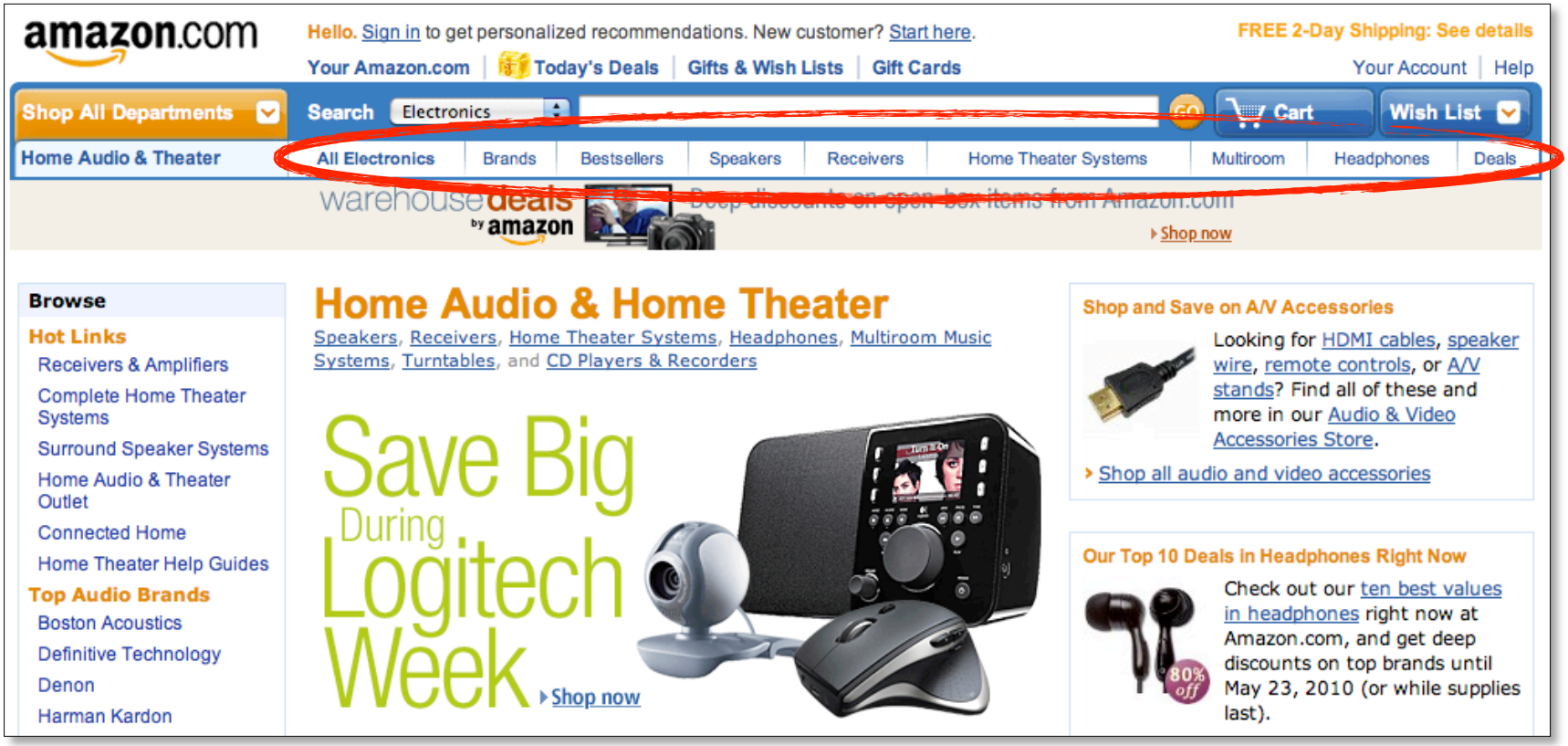
Amazon.com Today

- Once you select a department, you will see a subtle line of **sub-navigation tabs**



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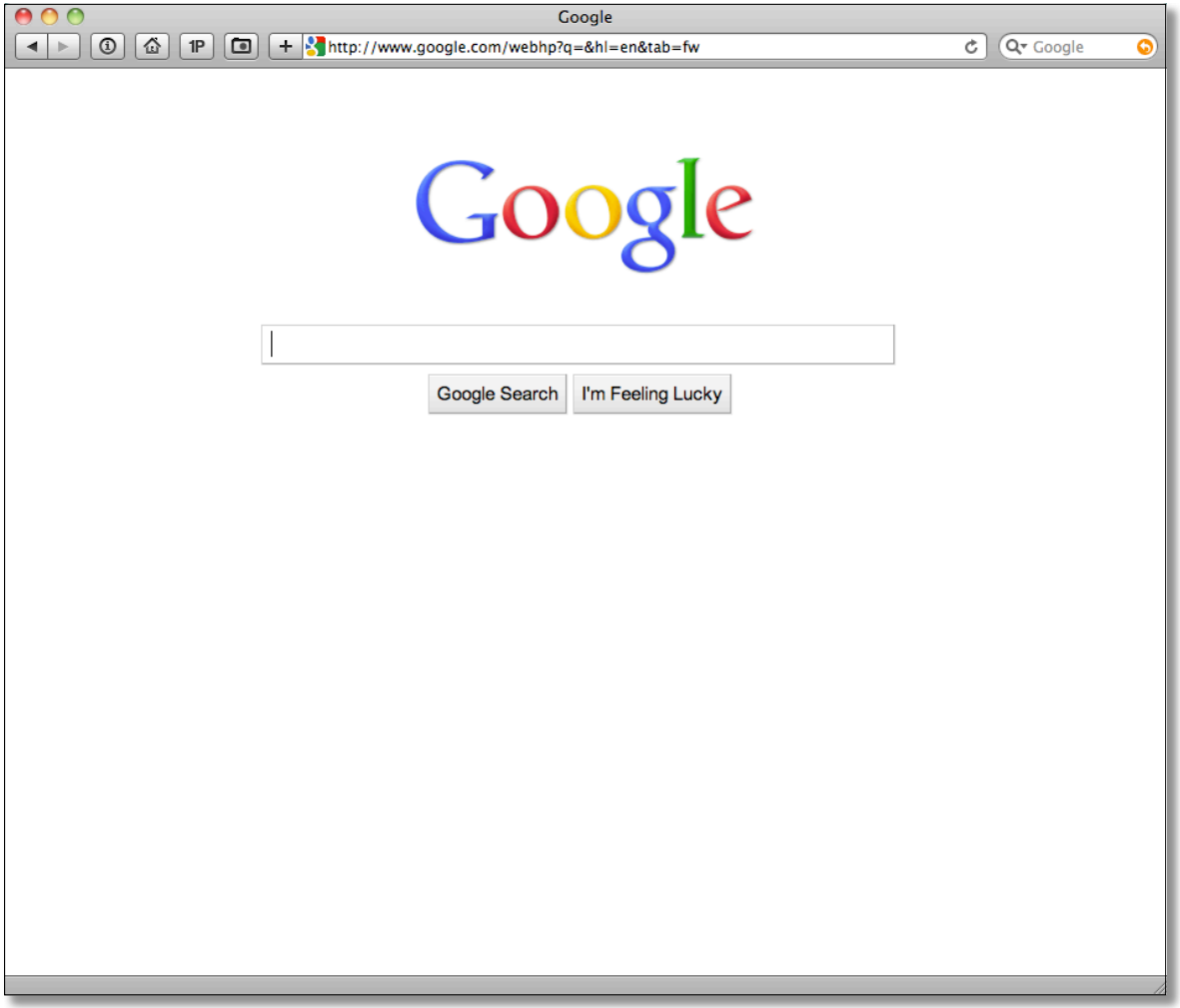
Google's Tabs

- Simplicity + Consistency > Complexity



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Apple's Tabs

- (Simplicity + Consistency) * Style > Complexity

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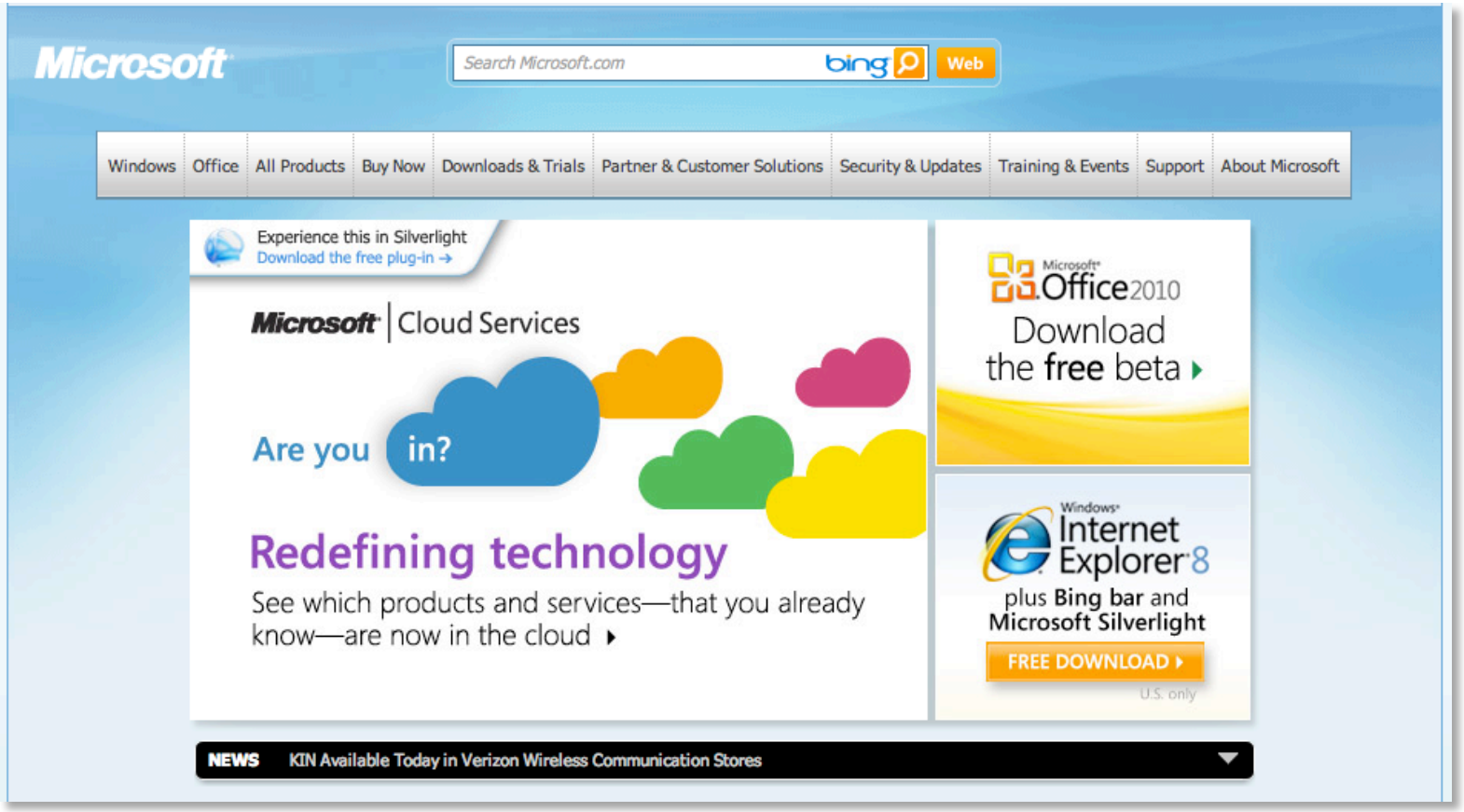
Microsoft's Tabs

- Simplicity + Consistency > Complexity



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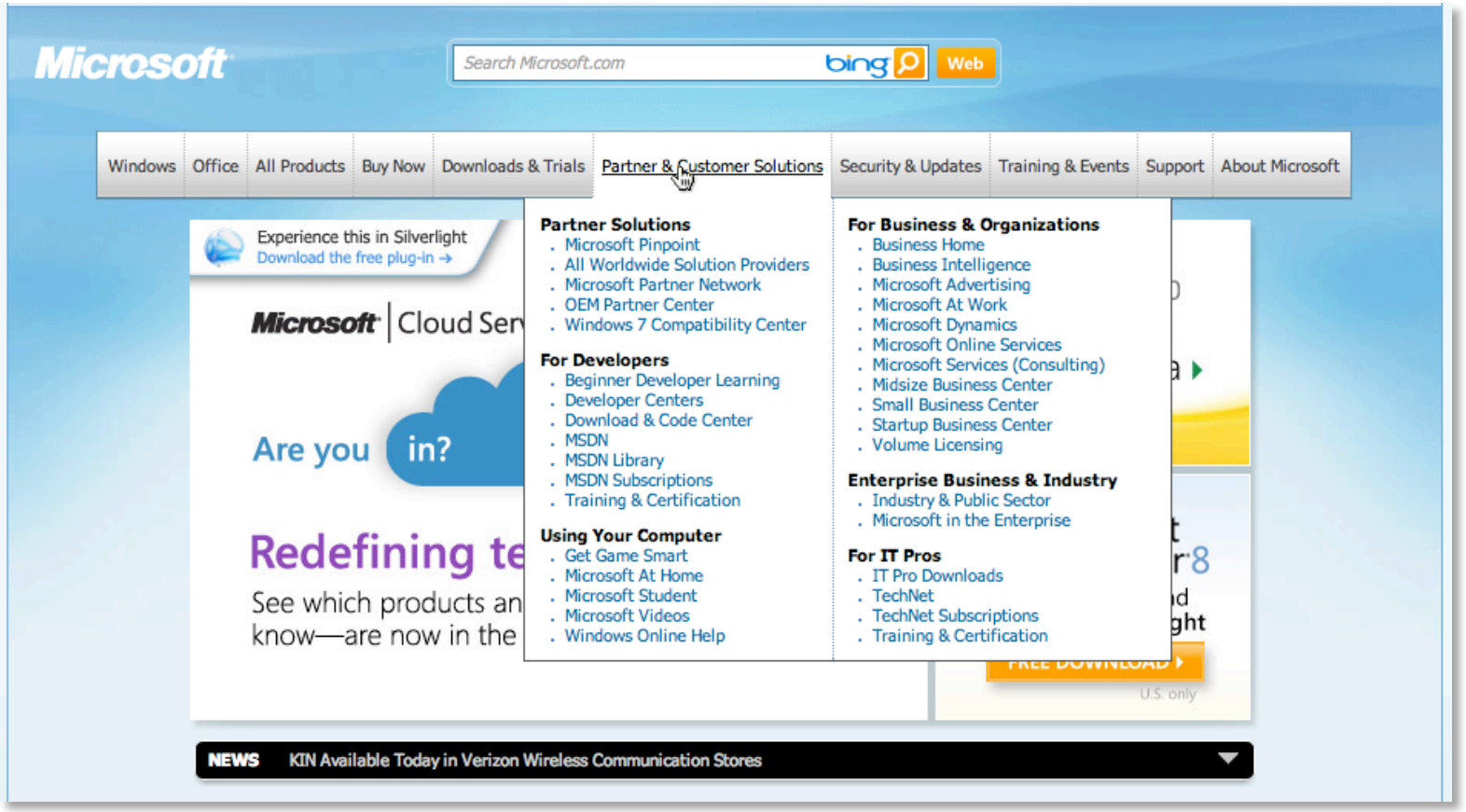
Microsoft's Tabs

- Simplicity + Consistency + Complexity = 0



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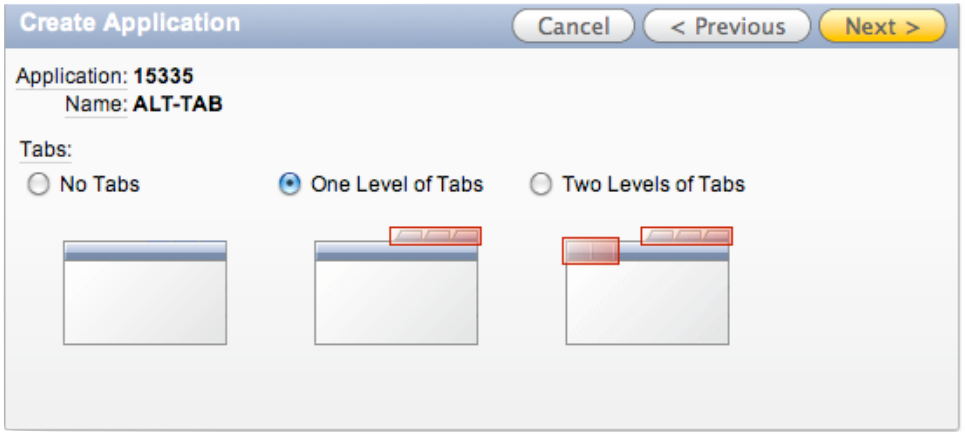
APEX & Tabs

- Almost every APEX application ever written makes use of some form of tabs
- Why is this so?
  - **Default option** when creating an application
  - Tabs are a **de-facto** navigation control
  - "**Easier**" to use than other types of navigation controls
  - **Why Not?**



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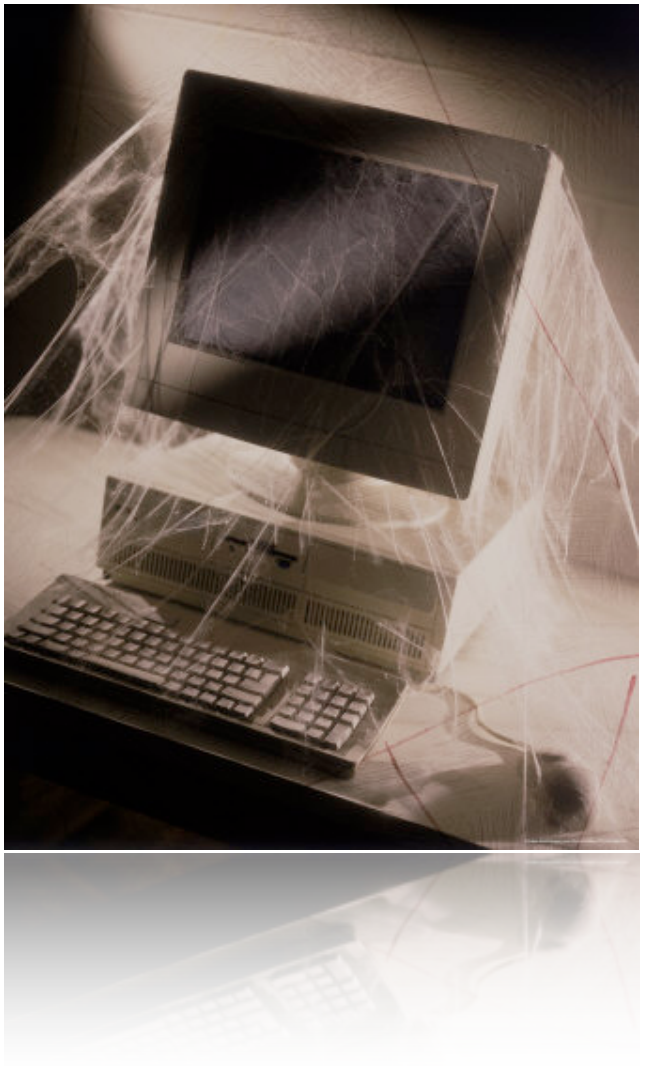
APEX Built-in Tabs

- APEX's tab mechanism has **changed little** over time
  - Almost the same in **APEX 4.0** as it was in **HTML DB 1.6**
- APEX provides support for **no**, **one** or **two** levels of tabs
- **Overall UI** used to make up tabs is **in need of a refresh**
  - APEX 4.0 helps, but the underlying infrastructure is the same



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PC LOAD LETTER

- To say that APEX's built-in tabs are frustrating to use would be a vast understatement...

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Upside Down

- **One-Level** APEX tabs - the most common type - are actually created **upside-down**
  - What seem to be the **Parent Tabs** are actually something called the **Standard Tabs**
    - Which is another name for **Detail Tabs**
  - All **Standard Tabs** will have a **pseudo-tab** as their Parent or Master tab
    - Thus, you're essentially **creating orphaned tabs**
  - Very confusing when converting from one to two levels of tabs, as you need to create new master or parent tabs

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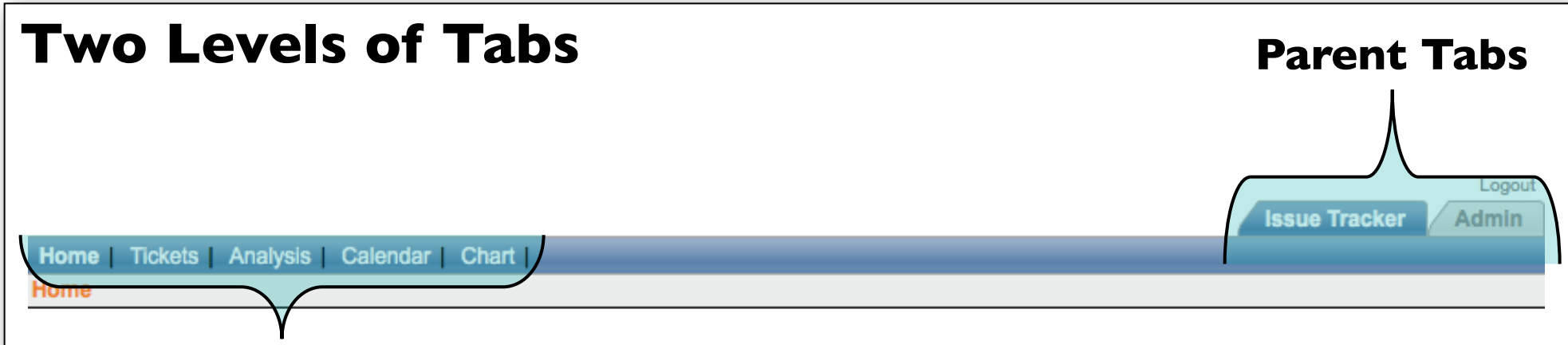
Upside Down

One Level of Tabs

Pseudo Parent Tab

Two Levels of Tabs



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APEX Tab Deficiencies

- Several things have to line up just right for tabs to work properly:
  - Correct **Page Template** must be selected
  - **Tab** must be current for the corresponding **Page**
  - **Page** must be mapped to the corresponding **Standard Tab Set**
  - **Standard Tab** must be mapped to the corresponding **Standard Tab Set**
  - **Standard Tab** must map to the corresponding **Parent Tab Set** or **Pseudo Parent Tab Set**

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APEX Tab Deficiencies

- APEX uses a **JavaScript** function **to submit the page** when tabs are clicked
  - **APEX 3.2:** `doSubmit('TabName');`
  - **APEX 4.0:** `apex.submit('TabName');`
- Deficient for a couple of reasons
  - JavaScript was **required for basic navigation**
    - Issue with some mobile devices
  - **Google would not follow or index** the tab's links
    - Harder to get a site indexed

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GETTING FRUSTRATED

~~Working~~ with APEX Tabs

D E M O N S T R A T I O N

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APEX 4.0 Tab Enhancements

- **Little has changed** in the way tabs are implemented in APEX 4.0
  - Still just as confusing
- There are a couple new reports and several new regions that attempt to make tabs easier to use
  - Found under **Shared Components > Tabs**

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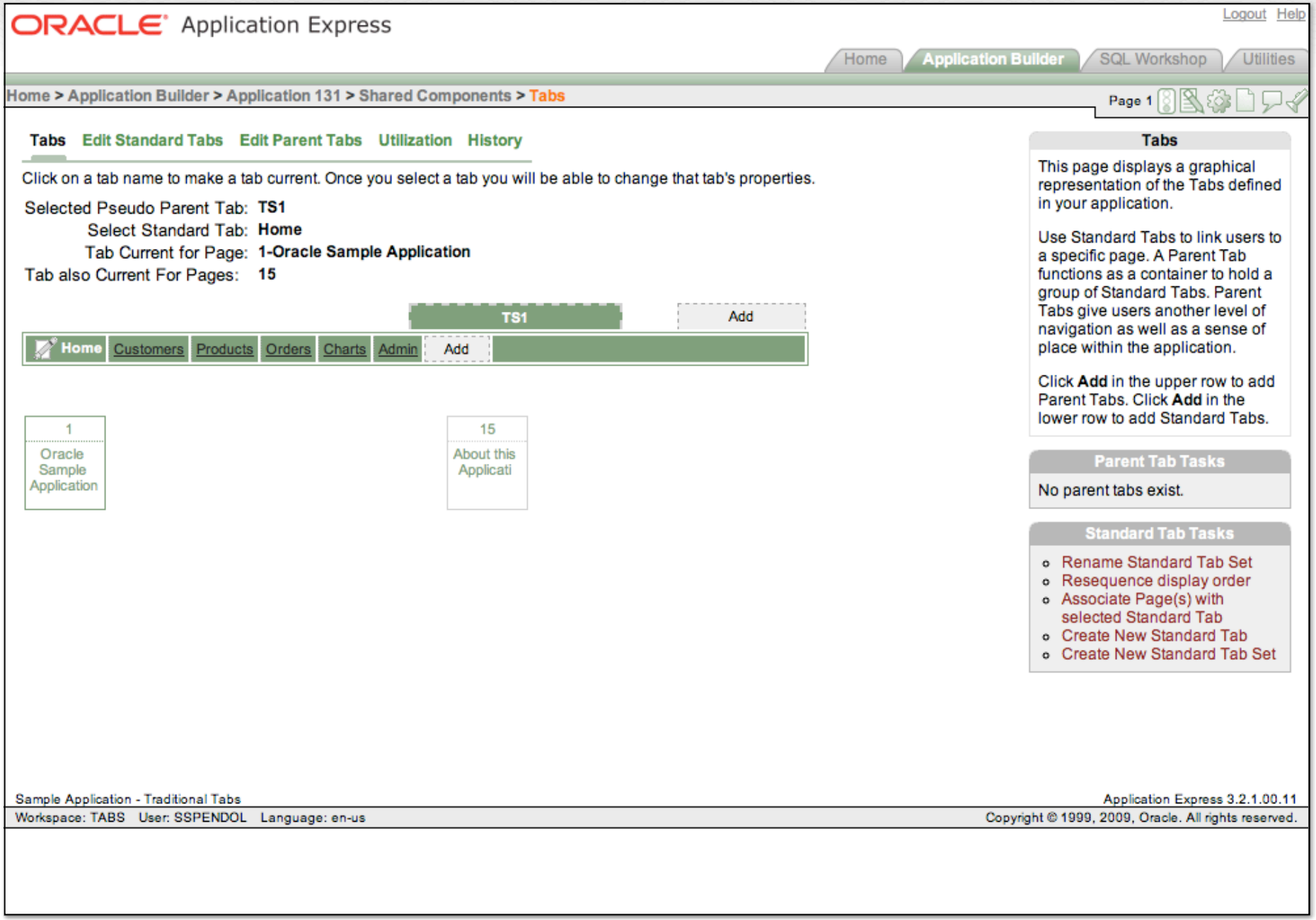

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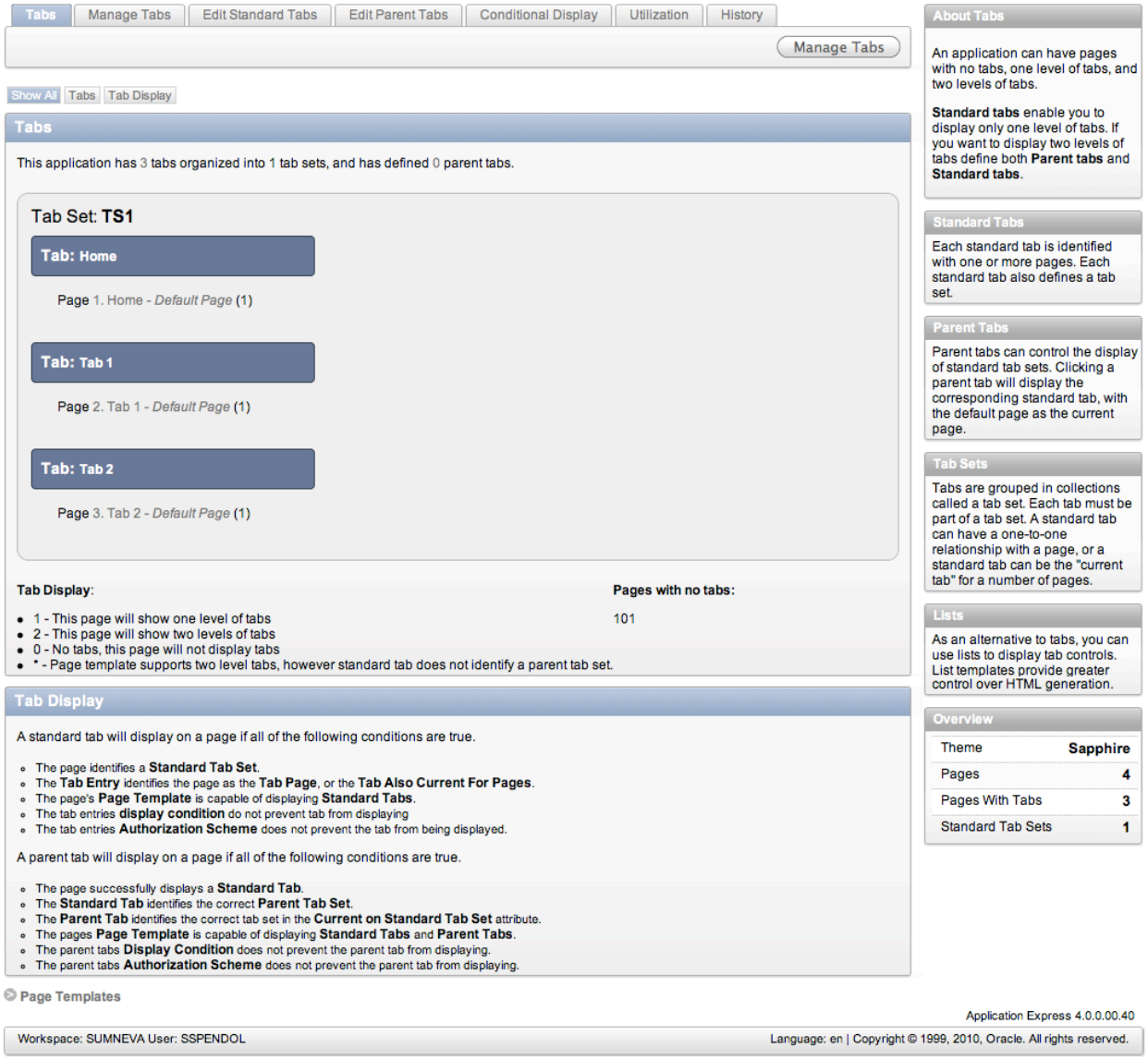
APEX 4.0 Tabs Management Page



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Tab Summary

Tabs

This application has 3 tabs organized into 1 tab sets, and has defined 0 parent tabs.

Tab Set: **TS1**

Tab: Home

Page 1. Home - *Default Page* (1)

Tab: Tab 1

Page 2. Tab 1 - *Default Page* (1)

Tab: Tab 2

Page 3. Tab 2 - *Default Page* (1)

Tab Display:

- 1 - This page will show one level of tabs
- 2 - This page will show two levels of tabs
- 0 - No tabs, this page will not display tabs
- * - Page template supports two level tabs, however standard tab does not identify a parent tab set.

Pages with no tabs:

101

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Tab Display

Tab Display

A standard tab will display on a page if all of the following conditions are true.

- The page identifies a **Standard Tab Set**.
- The **Tab Entry** identifies the page as the **Tab Page**, or the **Tab Also Current For Pages**.
- The page's **Page Template** is capable of displaying **Standard Tabs**.
- The tab entries **display condition** do not prevent tab from displaying
- The tab entries **Authorization Scheme** does not prevent the tab from being displayed.

A parent tab will display on a page if all of the following conditions are true.

- The page successfully displays a **Standard Tab**.
- The **Standard Tab** identifies the correct **Parent Tab Set**.
- The **Parent Tab** identifies the correct tab set in the **Current on Standard Tab Set** attribute.
- The pages **Page Template** is capable of displaying **Standard Tabs** and **Parent Tabs**.
- The parent tabs **Display Condition** does not prevent the parent tab from displaying.
- The parent tabs **Authorization Scheme** does not prevent the parent tab from displaying.

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Other Details

About Tabs

An application can have pages with no tabs, one level of tabs, and two levels of tabs.

Standard tabs enable you to display only one level of tabs. If you want to display two levels of tabs define both **Parent tabs** and **Standard tabs**.

Parent Tabs

Parent tabs can control the display of standard tab sets. Clicking a parent tab will display the corresponding standard tab, with the default page as the current page.

Standard Tabs

Each standard tab is identified with one or more pages. Each standard tab also defines a tab set.

Tab Sets

Tabs are grouped in collections called a tab set. Each tab must be part of a tab set. A standard tab can have a one-to-one relationship with a page, or a standard tab can be the "current tab" for a number of pages.

Overview

Theme	**Sapphire**
Pages	**4**
Pages With Tabs	**3**
Standard Tab Sets	**1**

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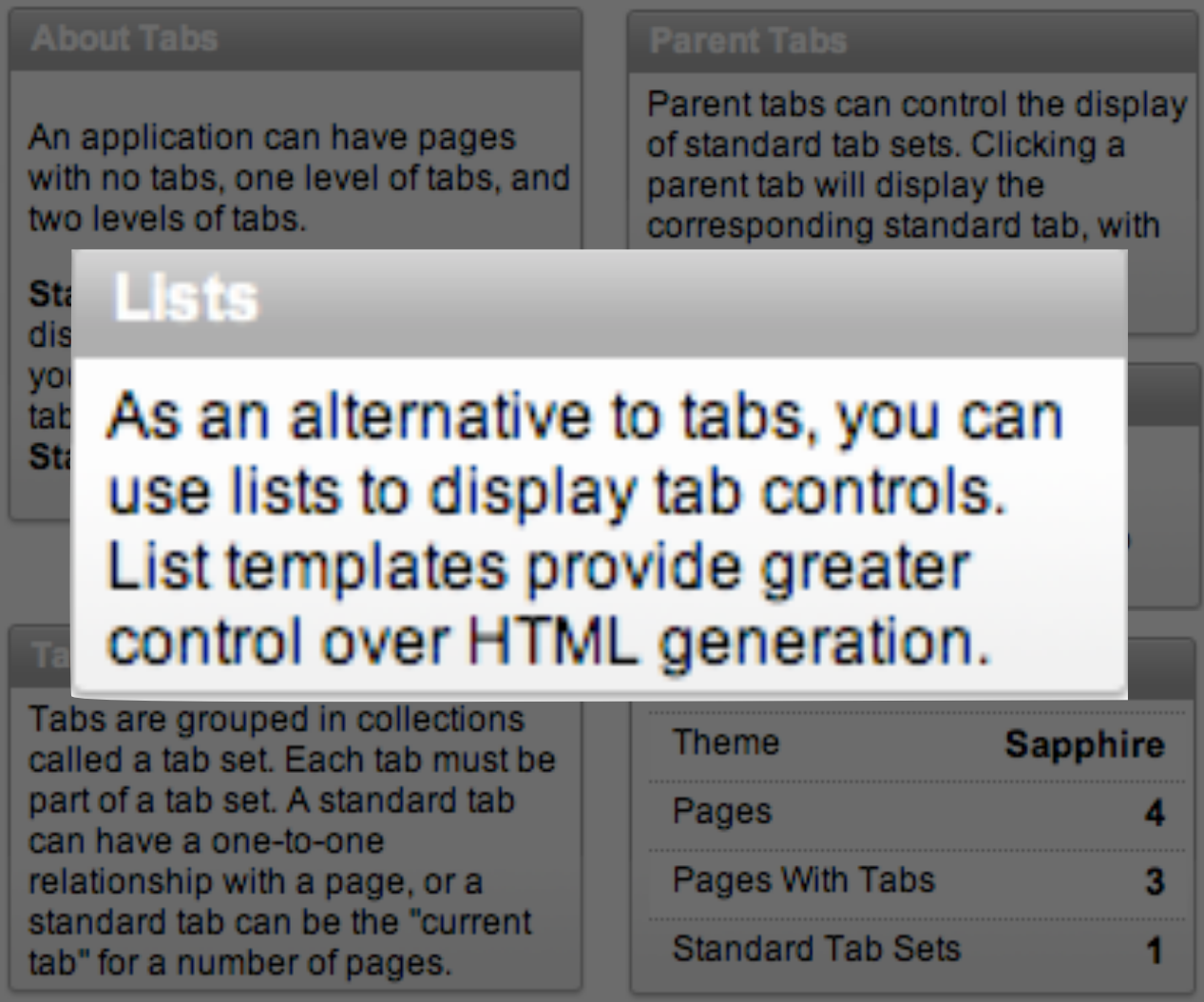
Other Details



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Alternative Tabs

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jQuery UI

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jQuery UI

- Provides a set of **UI components** that sit on top of jQuery
  - Tabs, Calendars, Widgets, Buttons, Effects, etc.
- **APEX 4.0** will have both **jQuery** & **jQuery UI** included
  - Can easily be installed to work with APEX 3.x as well

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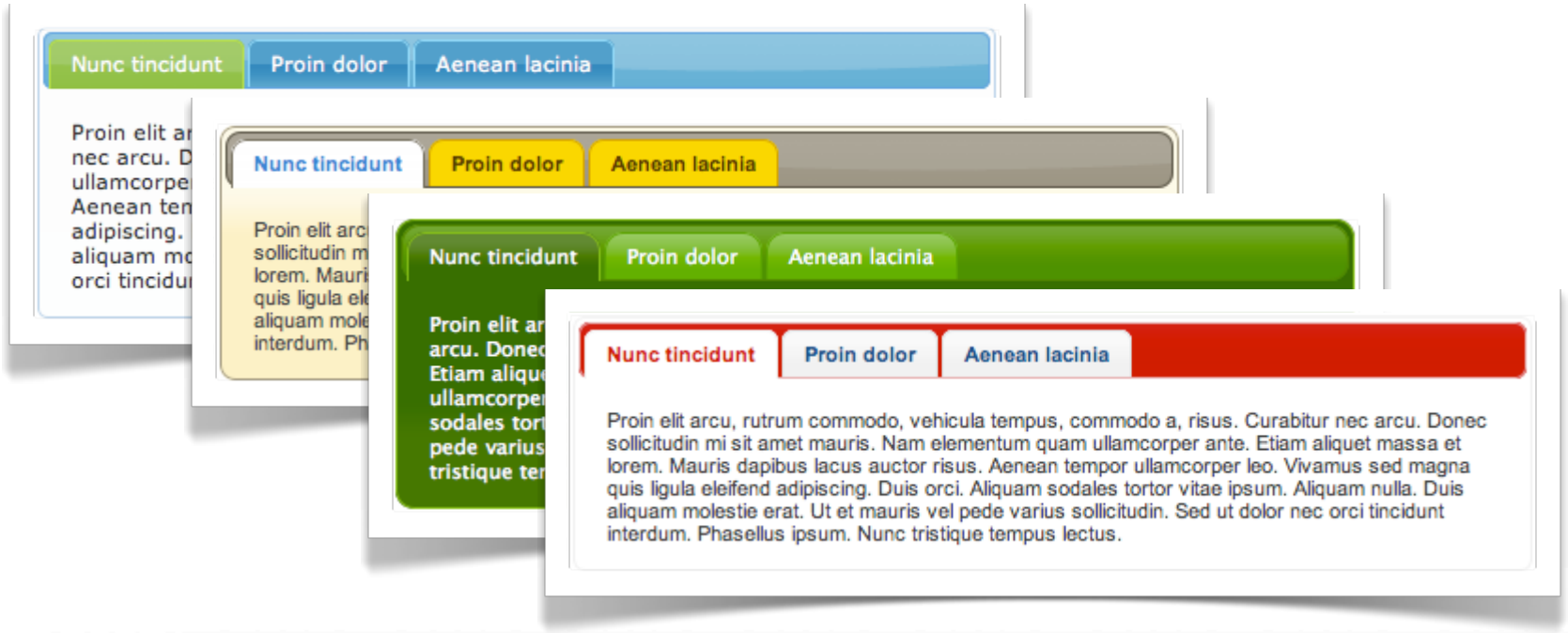
jQuery UI Tabs

- Robust, configurable jQuery IU component that can be styled to match almost any UI theme
  - Contain hooks into jQuery to capture all types of events
  - Support for loading content via Ajax



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jQuery UI Tab Drawbacks

- No easy support for sub-tabs
- Require jQuery & jQuery UI
  - Not an issue with APEX 4.0+
- Involves working knowledge of jQuery & JavaScript to implement
- Must make modifications to existing templates in order to properly integrate
- ***In APEX, jQuery UI Tabs are better suited to hide & show regions; not pages***

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jQuery Tabs: Get 'Em While They're Hot

- Blog entry by Dan McGhan on how to integrate jQuery UI Tabs & APEX
  - Concise, easy to follow steps
  - Takes only minutes to implement
  - **http://www.danielmcghan.us/2009/07/jquery-tabs-get-while-they-hot.html**

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jQuery UI Tabs

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CSS Drop-down Menu Framework

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Overview

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CSS Drop-down Menu Framework

- Free framework for CSS-based menus
  - Licensed under **GNU GPL**; donation requested
  - http://www.lwis.net/free-css-drop-down-menu/
- **Modular Design** with support for themes
- Easy to **Deploy** & **Transform**
- **Cross-Browser**
  - Only IE6 requires JavaScript; all modern browsers do not
- **Extremely Lightweight & Fast!**

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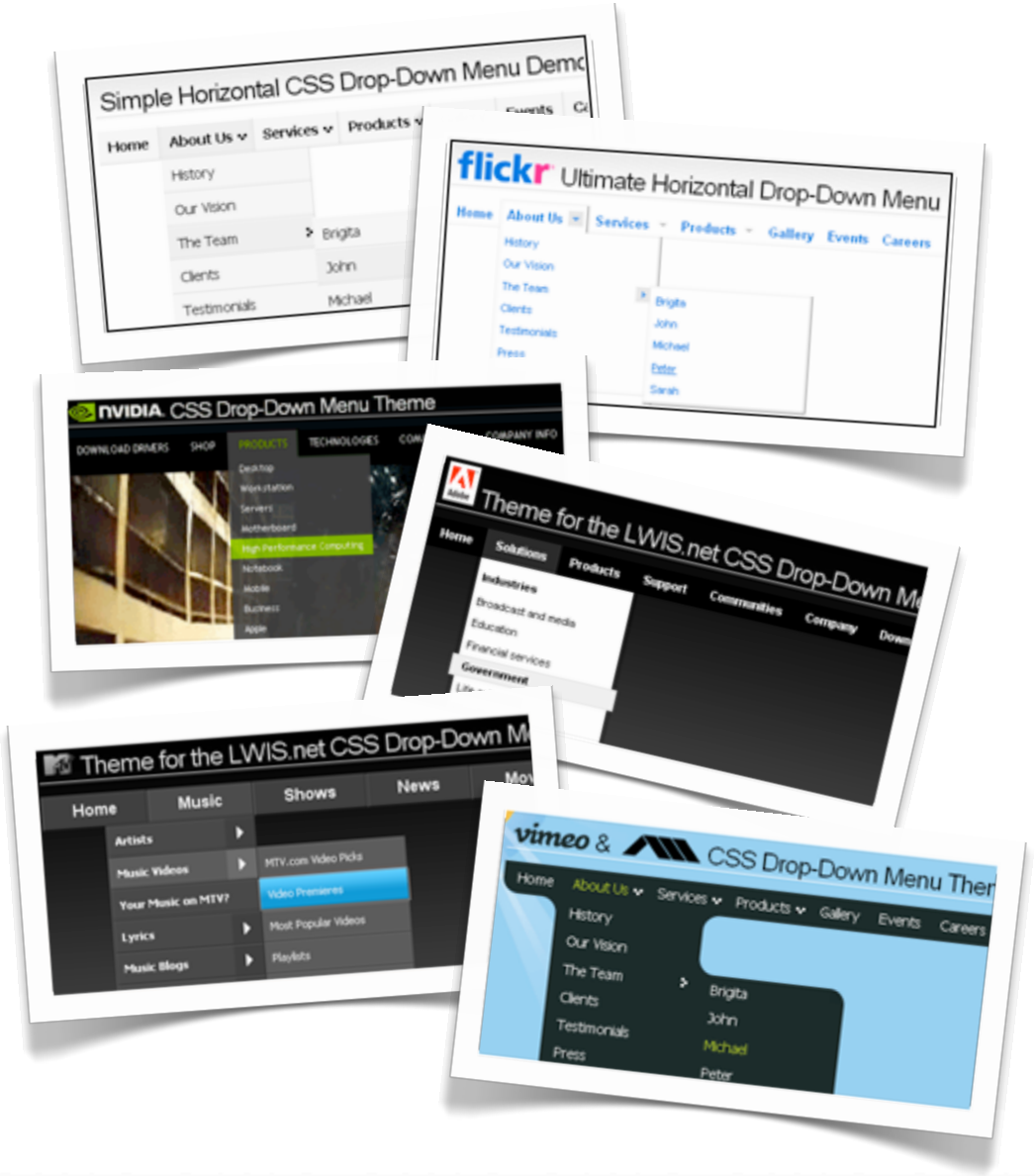
Theme Support

- Support for **Themes**
  - Easily modifiable via **CSS**
- Included Themes:
  - General Purpose
  - Flickr
  - NVIDIA
  - Adobe
  - MTV
  - VIMEO



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CSS Drop-down Menu Framework

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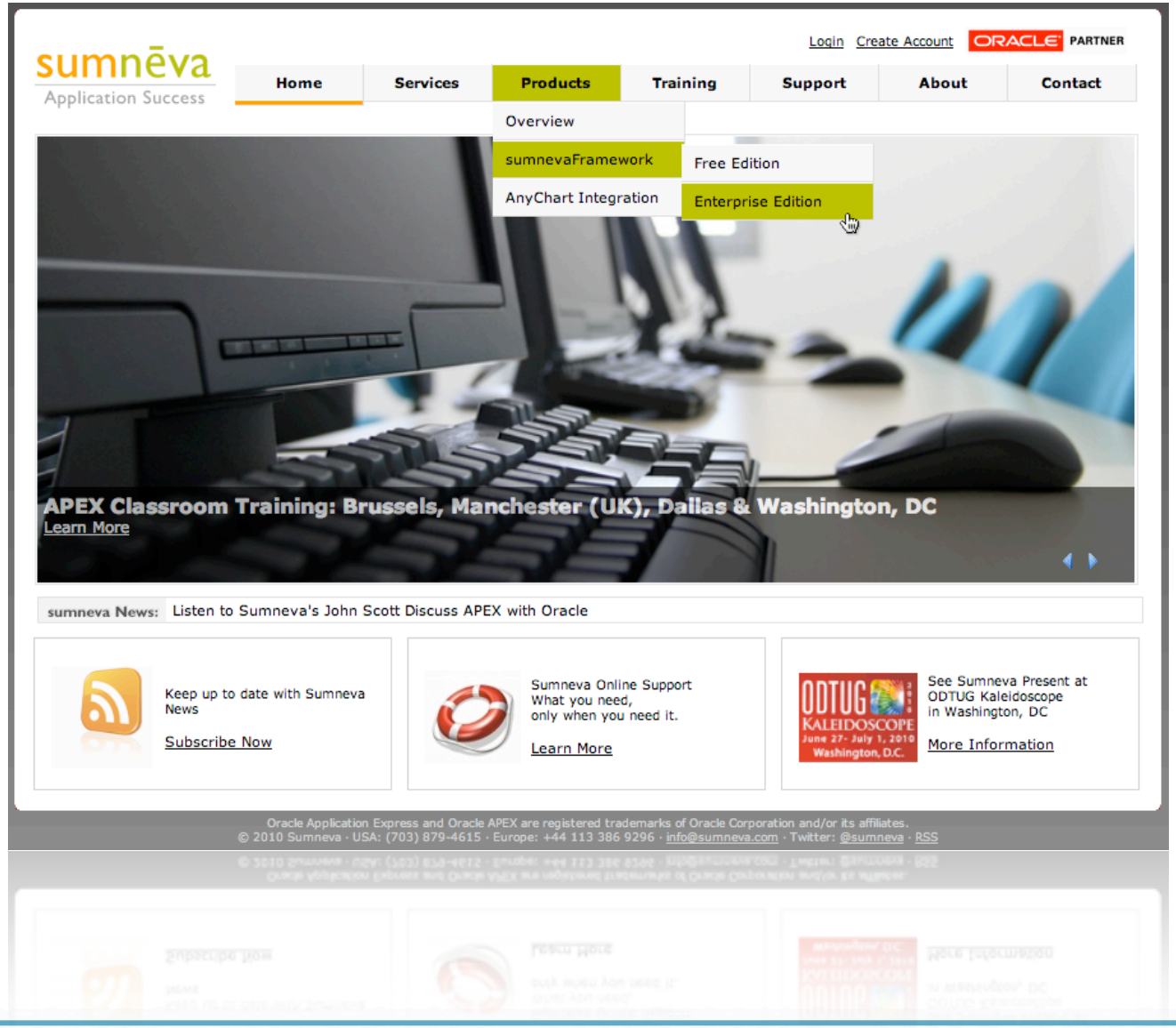

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Structure vs. Style

- All structure & style are completely separated
  - Structure: **HTML**
  - Style: **CSS**
- This approach has a number of benefits
  - Style of a site can **quickly & easily be changed**
  - **Structure** of a site is much **simpler & easier to maintain**
  - Site will be more **Section 508 Compliant**

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In general, separating the structure from the style is a good design principle that should be applied everywhere.

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Structure

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How It Works

- CSS Drop Down Menus simply use an **HTML list** to create the **structure** used for the tabs
  - Simple & Uncluttered
- **Cascading Styles** are then applied to the list to give them their **style** or user interface
  - Developer has **complete control** over the styles used
  - And **never has to modify** the corresponding **HTML**

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The Result

- Thus, this HTML Code:

```
<body>

<h1>Simple Horizontal CSS Drop-Down Menu Demo</h1>

<!-- Beginning of compulsory code below -->

<ul id="nav" class="dropdown dropdown-horizontal">
    <li><a href="./">Home</a></li>
    <li class="dir">...</li>
    <li class="dir">...</li>
    <li class="dir">...</li>
    <li><a href="./">Gallery</a></li>
    <li><a href="./">Events</a></li>
    <li><a href="./">Careers</a></li>
    <li class="dir rtl">...</li>
</ul>

<!-- / END -->

</body>
</html>
```

- When combined with a CSS file or files...
  - Yields this Menu:

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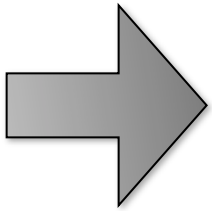
HTML Lists

- `<ul>` and `<li>` are HTML tags that make up bulleted "**lists**" when rendered on the page
  - Each will also **require a closing tag** after its corresponding content

```
<ul>
 <li>One</li>
 <li>Two</li>
 <li>Three</li>
</ul>
```



- One
- Two
- Three

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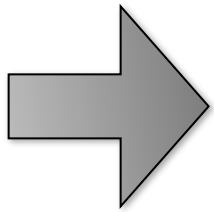
Multiple Level Hierarchies

- By embedding additional **<ul>** tags, we can create a **hierarchical list** with any number of levels:

```
<ul>
 <li>One</li>
 <ul>
  <li>Two</li>
  <li>Three</li>
 </ul>
</ul>
```



- One
  - Two
  - Three

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CSS Drop Down Menu Example

```
<ul id="nav" class="dropdown dropdown-horizontal">
    <li><a href="./">Home</a></li>
    <li class="dir">About Us
        <ul>
            <li><a href="./">History</a></li>
            <li><a href="./">Our Vision</a></li>
            <li class="dir"><a href="./">The Team</a>
                <ul>
                    <li><a href="./">Brigita</a></li>
                    <li><a href="./">John</a></li>
                    <li><a href="./">Michael</a></li>
                    <li><a href="./">Peter</a></li>
```

```
<li class="dir">About Us
    <ul>
        <li><a href="./">History</a></li>
        <li><a href="./">Our Vision</a></li>
        <li class="dir"><a href="./">The Team</a>
            <ul>
                <li><a href="./">Brigita</a></li>
                <li><a href="./">John</a></li>
                <li><a href="./">Michael</a></li>
                <li><a href="./">Peter</a></li>
                <li><a href="./">Sarah</a></li>
            </ul>
        </li>
        <li><a href="./">Clients</a></li>
        <li><a href="./">Testimonials</a></li>
        <li><a href="./">Press</a></li>
        <li><a href="./">FAQs</a></li>
    </ul>
</li>
```

```
        <ul>
            <li><a href="./">Enquiry Form</a></li>
            <li class="dir"><a href="./">Map &amp;amp; Driving Directions</a>
                <ul>
                    <li><a href="./">Map</a></li>
                    <li><a href="./">Driving Directions</a></li>
                </ul>
            </li>
            <li><a href="./">Your Feedback</a></li>
        </ul>
    </li>
</ul>
```

- Home
- About Us
  - History
  - Our Vision
  - The Team
    - Brigita
    - John
    - Michael
    - Peter
    - Sarah
  - Clients
  - Testimonials
  - Press
  - FAQs
- Services
  - Product Development
  - Delivery
  - Shop Online
  - Support
  - Training & Consulting
- Products
  - New
    - Corporate Use
    - Private Use
  - Used
    - Corporate Use
    - Private Use
  - Featured
  - Top Rated
  - Prices
- Gallery
- Events
- Careers
- Contact Us
  - Enquiry Form
  - Map & Driving Directions
    - Map
    - Driving Directions
  - Your Feedback

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Style

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Style

- All style definitions are stored in **Cascading Style Sheets** or **CSS** files
  - Visual attributes of the list elements, such as:
    - Width
    - Background Color
    - Font & Font Size
    - Margins & Padding

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CSS Zen Garden

- Example site which illustrates how the same HTML file can look dramatically different by only changing the contents of the CSS
  - Different graphic artists submitted only a CSS file & associated images and the best are on display
  - Dramatic illustration as to what can be achieved using only Cascading Style Sheets
  - View all of the designs online:
    - **http://csszengarden.com**

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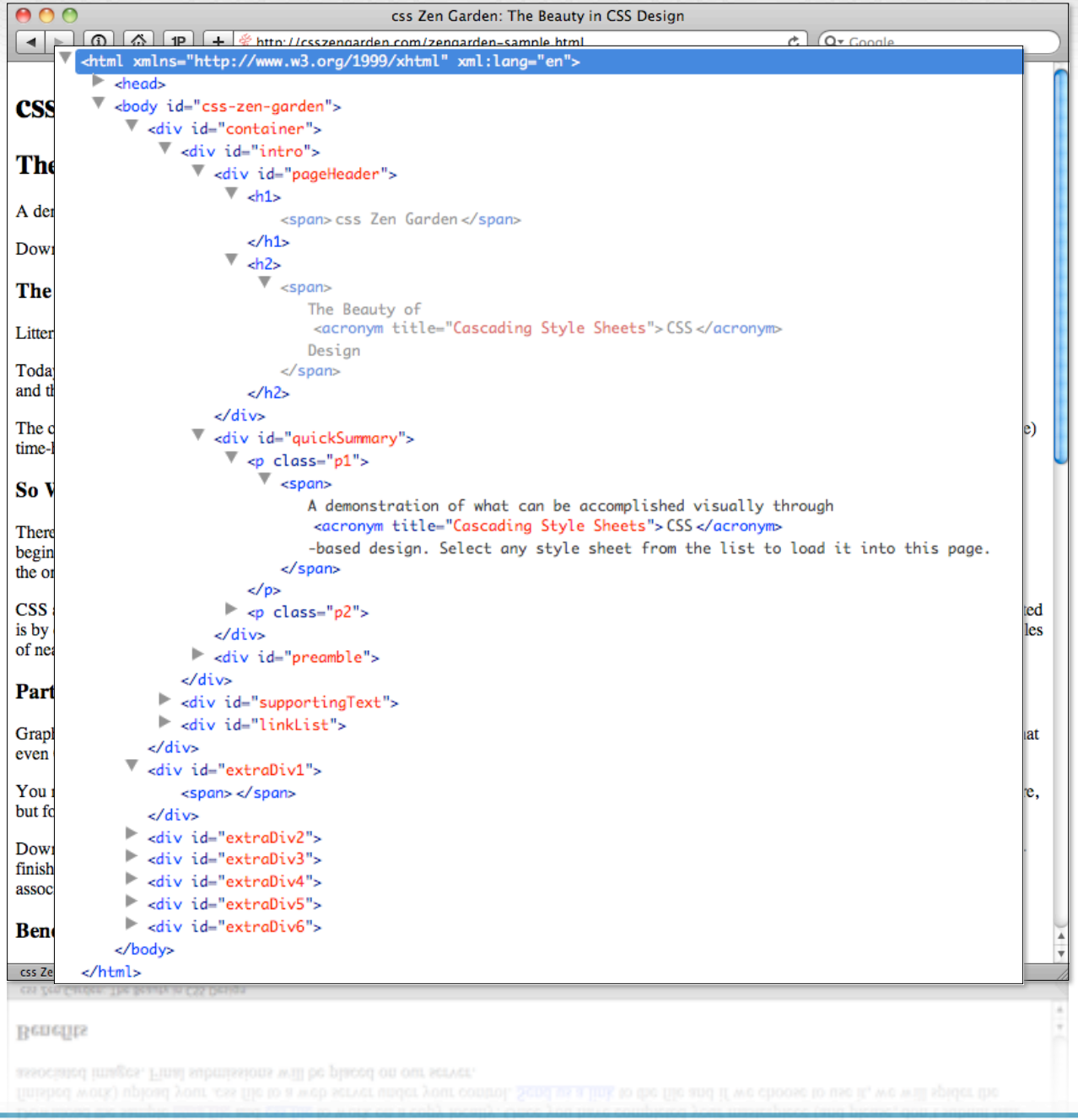

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CSS Dropdown Menus CSS

- CSS Dropdown Menus requires three CSS files:
  - **dropdown.css**
    - Sets high level element attributes, such as **<ul>** & **<li>**
  - **default.advanced.css**
    - References default.css
  - **default.css**
    - Almost all formatting changes made here
- Each of these can be modified as needed to match your graphic design specifications

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Integration with APEX

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Integration with APEX

- It's fairly **simple to integrate** CSS Dropdown Menus with APEX
  - Done using an APEX **list & custom template**
  - List will contain the **structure** for the tabs
    - Can be as many levels deep as you like
  - Template will be 100% HTML and reference the corresponding CSS files, which contain the **style**
    - The List template will take care of creating the hierarchy automatically

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Steps to Integrate

1. Create a List

- Add an entry to the list for each tab & sub-tab that you want to include

2. Crete a List Template

- Using the CSS Dropdown Menu HTML files as a guide

3. Create a List Region on Page Zero

- May want to alter the page template and use a custom region position for better alignment/control

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Lists: Best Practices

- Group Pages in blocks of **100** or **1000** based on which "tab" will be current
- Set the Current List Entry attributes as follows:
  - **List Entry Current for Pages Type**
    - **Exists SQL Query**
  - **List Entry Current for Condition**
    - `SELECT 1 FROM DUAL WHERE :APP_PAGE_ID BETWEEN 600 AND 699`
- Thus, any page from 600-699 will set this tab to the current tab

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Creating a List & List Template

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Before List Entry

- **List Template Before Rows**
  - ```
    <link href="/c/css/dropdown/
    dropdown.css" rel="stylesheet"
    type="text/css" />
    <link href="/c/css/dropdown/themes/
    default/default.advanced.css"
    rel="stylesheet" type="text/css" />
    <ul id="nav" class="dropdown dropdown-
    horizontal">
    ```


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    ```

Template Definition

- **List Template Current**
  - `<li><a href="#LINK#" class="currentTab">#TEXT#</a></li>`

- **List Template Current w/Sub Links**
  - `<li><a href="#LINK#" class="currentTab">#TEXT# ▼</a>`

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Template Definition

- **List Template Non-Current**
  - `<li><a href="#LINK#">#TEXT#</a></li>`
- **List Template Non-Current with Sub List Items**
  - `<li><a href="#LINK#">#TEXT# ▼</a>`
- **ListSub List Template Before Rows**
  - `<ul>`

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Sub List Entry

- **Sub List Template Current**
  - `<li><a href="#LINK#">#TEXT#</a></li>`

- **Sub List Template Current w/Sub List Items**
  - `<li><a href="#LINK#">#TEXT# ▶</a>`

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Sub List Entry

- **Sub List Template Noncurrent**
  - `<li><a href="#LINK#">#TEXT#</a></li>`
- **Sub List Template Noncurrent w/Sub List Items**
  - `<li><a href="#LINK#">#TEXT# ▶</a>`
- **Sub List Template After Rows**
  - `</ul></li>`

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After List Entry

- **List Template After Rows**
  - `</li></ul>`

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Summary

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Summary

- APEX's tab mechanism is **dated** and **hard to use**
  - Most applications do, however, use it
- But it's **easy** to **retrofit Lists** to work as tabs
- Implementing new tabs gives your application a bit of **sizzle** that will make it **stand out** among other applications
  - While also allowing older browsers to be able to still view your site

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