

Is it OK to copy HTML Markup Language?

QUESTION

I have a question on the legality and ethics of copying html and/or CSS from another site. Here is the scenario: I find a website whose general layout and design is appealing to me and I notice that the html is nice and clean. I copy all the source html, as well as the CSS file. I change ALL the content to my own content, text, images, etc. I make some tweaks to the CSS to modify the colors, background images, and fonts.

Is this OK? All the content is my own, but I have used the html/CSS framework that somebody else wrote. I haven't done this, just pondering the question. I don't think I would mind if somebody did this to me.

Is html and CSS copyrightable?

ANSWER

There is nothing anyone can do to stop you. It's still copyrighted work, and it's still stealing. If you think the "look" is clean, you will most likely also be stealing graphics.

However, the truth is the code itself most likely came from some other source in the first place, so in a sense we've all borrowed, exchanged, intermixed and added our own flavor to chunks of code to make it our own.

Those that would argue this are probably under the impression they have created something that has never been done before, and are most likely to jump in here and cry copyright. But the truth is, any chunk of html or CSS you copy from a site is likely to be out there in duplicate thousands of times.

From your standpoint, you are likely to run into the same problem car owners have that have no understanding of how their car works: you steal this thing and try to add your content and it breaks, and you have no idea why.

Your best shot is to go ahead and view those html and css files, examine them, see how they work, and apply some of the methods used in them, but make it your own. Add your own flair, understand the logic behind the original creation, you'll be doing the author a much better service in studying their work rather than just copying it and pasting it.

"I wouldn't mind" - once you've done the work, wrangled for hours over a cross-browser problem and finally solved it on your own, get it all debugged and working, trust me - you will see this very differently.