

Browser Comparison

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Firefox 1.0.4

Firefox's default theme is fairly intuitive and clean but extremely bland. Most things are roughly where you would expect them to be and Mozilla have made an effort to make IE users feel at home with the menu system. Firefox boots reasonably quickly but it doesn't seem to be much better or worse than any of the others in that regard and I don't consider 3 seconds faster or slower to load as a valid reason to choose one browser over another. Firefox loves rendering pages written to W3C standards. It also handles most sites written with older invalid or Microsoft only code, but there are some exceptions that will probably require Internet Explorer if you can't avoid the sites in question.

Internet Explorer 6 SP2

Once upon a time I was a big IE user. You could tell when I was working on a computer because more often than not there were about 10 to 15 separate Internet Explorer windows open on the desktop.

Internet Explorer renders old school web pages well, but pages using the recent standards often require CSS hacks to render properly in IE. Sites written specifically for IE often cause troubles with other browsers without workarounds and Internet Explorer is now the browser most holding back web standards, (Mostly because it hasn't changed significantly since 2001.) Having said that Microsoft have been pressured to reform their IE development team and the picture may well be different in a year or so.

Netscape 8

Netscape 8 is the odd one in the pack here. They have endeavoured to take the best of both Firefox and IE and put it all in one browser. The idea is a good one, but their choice of Internet Explorer rendering as the default choice puzzles me. I'd have preferred to see the decision made automatically where possible based on a page's doctype (or lack thereof) or via a pre-parsing engine that compares the page code it is reading with what is understood by each rendering engine (with an easy manual override).

Interestingly Netscape 8 seems to render significantly faster when you use Firefox's rendering engine than IE's though I have no idea if that is because of the engines themselves or the mechanism that Netscape uses to call them.

Opera 8

I must confess have something of a soft spot for Opera, it was the first non Microsoft browser I had tried that taught me that "Web browser" wasn't synonymous with "Internet Explorer". That earlier Opera version (5.x) wasn't good enough

to keep me away from IE mostly due to bad Javascript DOM and odd rendering issues but it showed me that Microsoft didn't really know how to write a tight fast browser without bloat. Opera 8 looks very clean, even with the Google text ads running under the menu bar.

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