

What the Tech?!: Browser Wars by Joe McCormick

When using the Internet, one question will seem to always remain in the spirit of competition: which browser should I use? A browser is the program you use to navigate the Internet and all of its fantastical wonders. Five browsers make up 98% of the current market: Microsoft's Internet Explorer (IE 49.9%), Mozilla's Firefox (31.5%), Google's Chrome (11.5%), and Apple's Safari (roughly 5%). I'll give you my experience with using them and why I think these numbers look the way they do.

I started out, as many do, using IE. When the Internet became popular in the late 90s, IE was booming along with Windows, the operating system-of-choice. Fast-forward to today and their relationship is stronger than ever. Until recently, IBM, Hewlett-Packard, and Dell basically shipped all PCs with Windows, and consequently IE. I learned how to use the Internet with IE, but a lot of that experience was plagued with programming errors. You would be confronted by a window asking if you wanted to "Send Error Report" or "Don't Send," and you knew when you clicked the latter, it was all over. This is a major reason why IE became "the highest rated browser to download another browser." Sure, you could start it back up and return to what you were doing, but after doing this multiple times a day for many years, two programmers thought of a new way.

Those two, Dave Hyatt and Blake Ross of the Mozilla project, released Firefox to the world in 2004 as an experimental project. Since this time, Firefox has become the beloved browser of programmers and web-jockeys everywhere. A big part of this is that Firefox rarely crashes, at least not at the rate IE did. Firefox is "open source software" which means computer programmers are able to reprogram it; this allows for Add-ons, programs built to enhance the browsing experience. Some Add-ons give Firefox greater compatibility with certain programming languages, and others help you in some unbelievable ways; one, InvisibleHand, will randomly pop up while your shopping, and alert you if the product can be purchased cheaper elsewhere. While other browsers do have Add-ons, Firefox made them what they are and should be attributed to part of the browser's success.

However, another fast rising success in the market is Chrome, Google's take on the web. Chrome was built on the idea that web browsing should be fast, and they've actually done a pretty good job achieving that. While it's hard to precisely measure just how fast each browser is, Chrome's graphical interface is drastically reduced to only the necessities. When I used it I felt like it was faster; however, browsing speed mainly stems from the Internet connection, so there are some factors to consider. Another cool thing about Chrome is that the address bar also doubles as a Google search bar which can save time when researching online.

Admittedly, I do not have a vast amount of experience with Safari. I imagine it is the preferred choice of Mac users who don't use Firefox as whenever I use a Mac I generally see one of the two. It used to be that Macs would ship with Netscape, and for a time IE. In 2003 Apple's Steve Jobs announced to his faithful followers that OS X, the Mac operating system, would ship with Safari. Baring my limited use, I can only imagine that Safari brings the same kind of high quality programming that you generally find on a Mac system. Its limited market share can be attributed to the fact that OS X also sees roughly 5% market share worldwide.

So really, the choice is up to you. I personally use Firefox at the moment because I think they continuously try to stay on the cutting edge when it comes to keeping up with the newer programming languages. These languages are the main causes of crashes and time wasted, so I think they're important to consider. The popularity of IE stems from it being the first and most widely distributed; Firefox because of their dedicated community of users; Chrome because they value the time you spend online; and Safari because of its proprietary relationship with Apple. Just remember, it doesn't really matter which one you use; what matters is your satisfaction, put that first.

Got a question for What the Tech?! Email wtt.globe@gmail.com for questions or comments.