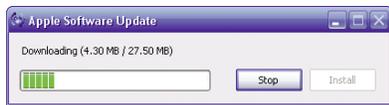


Why update the browser?

You're about to run out the door, just need to look up that phone number on yellow pages online... typing in the address... it's loading, loading... then a dialog box pops up and scolds you: "There are updates ready for you to download. Would you like to install them now?"



It's tempting to see these reminders as annoying and unnecessary, and just click 'cancel' so you can get on with the day. Why is it important to update the browser? The two main reasons are ying and yang, head and heart, peanut butter and jelly:

1. Security – a browser is the door to the computer.
2. Experience – new ideas to make the internet more fun and powerful are continually evolving. Common popular browsers are Microsoft's Internet Explorer (IE), Mozilla Firefox, Opera, Safari, and America OnLine (AOL)



Jen Sharp
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Security

A browser is the door to the computer. It can't be left wide open, unlocked, inviting vagrants! Hackers and phishers recognize this vulnerability and focus much of their efforts on this entry point. It is a vicious circle. As hacking attempts are thwarted by

improvements to browser software, hackers are busy figuring out how to proverbially pick the new lock. So it's back to the drawing board for programmers to improve security again and encourage owners to update software. Astoundingly, an estimated 90% of all virus, worm and spyware infections could have been prevented if the user had installed the latest updates for the browser – as well as the operating system.

How do each of the popular browsers fare in susceptibility? Microsoft automatically installs the IE browser as part of the Windows Operating System (OS). Additionally, updates to IE piggyback off of the automatic updates to the OS. Because these

hacker enters through the browser gives certain access to the entire computer. Although Microsoft products are popular and clearly the market leader, the company suffers acrimonious attacks from disgruntled hackers. There are simply more "bad guys" taking aim at Microsoft products. Microsoft addresses this in their "10 Immutable Laws of Security" found at www.microsoft.com/technet/archive/community/columns/security/essays/10imlaws.mspx.

However, SecurityFocus, located at <http://www.SecurityFocus.com>, reports that IE6 contains 281 known unpatched vulnerabilities since April 2001. IE7, the latest version, is comparably better, with only 24 vulnerabilities since April 2006. This sounds great until one

Known Security Issues

from Secunia <http://secunia.com>

Browser	Extremely Critical	Highly Critical	Moderately Critical	Less Critical	Not Critical
Internet Explorer 6	0	0	4	8	8
Internet Explorer 7	0	0	1	6	2
Mozilla Firefox	0	0	0	2	2
Opera	0	0	0	0	0
Safari	0	0	0	1	2

updates are often cumbersome, lengthy, and debilitating, some users choose to turn automatic updates off. This leaves the front door ajar.

In addition, IE is tied into the operating system. Any nook a

hears that all other browsers have a total of eight vulnerabilities combined!

The large number of known, unresolved security risks with Microsoft's Internet Explorer

Seems like I should know this, but... what is a browser exactly?

Here's a definition from wikipedia.org: A web browser is a software application that enables a user to display and interact with text, images, videos, music and other information typically located on a Web page at a Web site on the World Wide Web or a local area network. Text and images on a Web page can contain hyperlinks to other Web pages at the same or different Website. Web browsers allow a user to quickly and easily access information provided on many Web pages at many Web sites by traversing these links.

browser is a worry but there are some options to increase security.

1. Set the highest level of security possible under Tools > Internet Options > Security.
2. Make up for these deficiencies by taking advantage of the "Trusted Sites" feature, which is a whitelist of domains that a user specifies trust in.
3. The United States Computer Readiness Team, found at <http://us-cert.gov>, recommends also to manually type URLs into the address bar, because a burgeoning tactic of phishers is to have a hyperlink point to a different address than the one shown. Or worse, they parasitically use internationalized domain names with characters only slightly changed from familiar similar addresses.

A simple alternative; choose a better browser

Mac users have great options with Opera and Safari. Both browsers are stable and secure, although Opera seems to have better security while Safari touts better features.

Netscape at one time was a contender in the "browser war" against IE. However, declining in popularity and unable to fund the project, they opened it up to public open source development and renamed it Mozilla. AOL purchased

this project and continued to foster the open development. The results were so positive, they were able to release Firefox in 2004, a stable, secure and advanced browser that has given IE a run for its money. The latest version of Firefox structures its automatic updates so slick that Microsoft is taking notice and trying to reproduce the effect. Besides notifying the user when an update is available, the patches are usually small and download quickly and unobtrusively. Although not invulnerable to problems, Firefox is better at

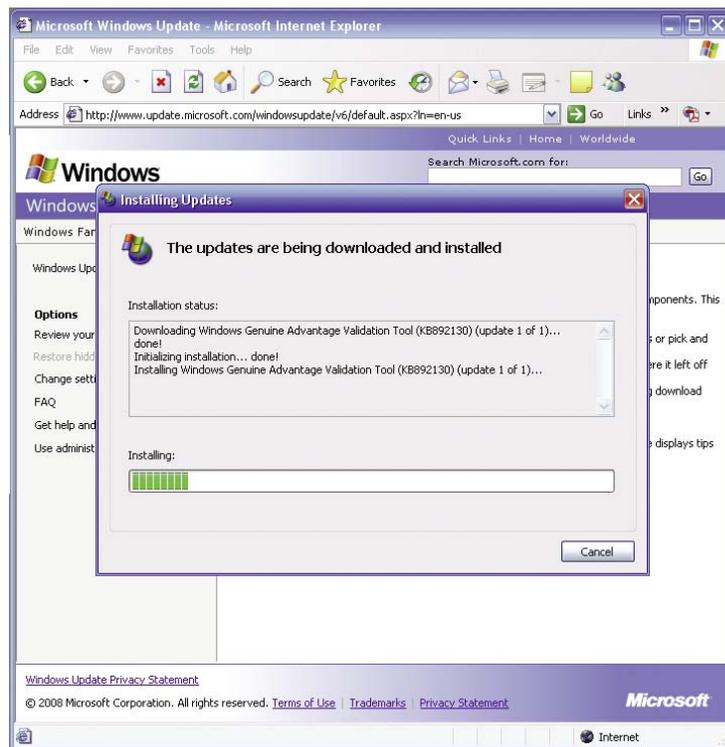
addressing security issues preemptively and transparently. It can be downloaded free from <http://www.mozilla.com>.

Regardless of which Web browser is chosen, a user also will likely have plug-ins, such as Quicktime, RealPlayer, Flash, Java or others. These add-ons enhance viewing, but can also be a security risk. Security issues with browsers on handheld devices are also growing. Keeping these updated is crucial to filling in the gaps, Some common plug-ins and pocket browsers provide a mechanism for automatic updates, but it would be a good idea to specifically check each to make sure of continued access to the latest version.

So why can't browsers fix all the "leaks" in security? There is a way: make the Internet pure text. Not many are willing to trade the present browsing experience for one that is anemic and lackluster!

Experience

New ideas to make the Internet more fun and powerful are



The graphic at left depicts a typical "Windows" update download which may contain the protection necessary to correct vulnerabilities when browsing using the Internet Explorer software.

Why update . . .

continually evolving. Fortunately there is an organization of cooperation between all Web developers so everyone can incorporate and enjoy the predictability of standards. Since 1994, the World Wide Web

validator so Web pages can be checked against the standards.

Web tool definitions

The following Web tool definitions are listed in the chart on this page as they are supported

Secure Socket Layers (SSL) facilitates the encryption that makes sending private data across public access ways possible.

An *Internationalized Domain Name or IDN* is a URL that could contain non-ASCII characters to

Browser	Web tool browser support													
	JPEG	GIF	PNG	HTTP	FTP	SSL	IDN	Java & JavaScr ipt	DOM2	CSS2.1	DHTML	XHTML 1.0	XHTML 1.1	RSS/ ATOM
AOL	Partial	Yes	Partial	Partial	Yes	Partial	No	Yes	No	Partial	Yes	No	No	Yes
IE	Partial	Yes	Partial	Partial	Yes	Partial	Yes	Yes	No	Partial	Yes	No	No	Yes
IE for Mac	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partial	Yes	Partial	No	Yes	No	Partial	Yes	No	Yes	No
Firefox	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Opera	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Safari	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partial	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

synopsis extracted from wikipedia.org

Consortium (W3C) at <http://www.w3c.org> has led the way towards outlining the potential of the fantastic experience the Web can be. It is comprised of members, developers, the general public, and has a full time staff dedicated to this end. The mark of an excellent browser is how well it supports the ideas and technologies purported by the W3C. In addition, individual Web sites can be either compliant or not. W3C has a

by each of the different browsers. There are several formats to display images including *JPEG*, *GIF*, and *PNG*.

Hyper Text Transfer Protocol (HTTP) is simply the method of a "client" (which is the user's browser) requesting information from internet servers (the Webpage).

File Transfer Protocol (FTP) allows users to upload files to a server.

accommodate European languages, or characters from non-Latin scripts such as Arabic or Chinese. It's important to have an expanded way to represent these characters not only to allow users to navigate to the site they intend to visit, but also to thwart phishing scams.

Java and *JavaScript* are versatile scripting languages that add functionality not possible with plain HTML.

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Document Object Model (DOM) helps make pages dynamic. It is required by some JavaScript snippets for functionality.

Cascading Styles Sheets (CSS) is a way of organizing the look and layout on a page. Not only does CSS make updating and maintaining sites quicker and easier, it helps keep coding clean and simple, thereby reducing load times. In addition, screen readers for the visually impaired “hear” pages designed with solid CSS are much nicer.

DHTML / XHTML Hyper Text Markup Language is the most basic set of rules on displaying and positioning text and elements on the screen. Lack of standardization here means the same Web page would look and function completely different depending on what browser it was viewed with. The D stands for Dynamic, which simply combines HTML, JavaScript, DOM, CSS, or other technologies. XHTML just combines HTML with XML, or

Extensible Markup Language which is a general-purpose markup language that allows its users to define their own elements.

RSS / ATOM Really Simple Syndication provides Web feeds so

is one special case to allow exception to perpetually maintaining the latest version: if one does not actually ever connect to the internet with a browser... oh wait, what is a browser is for?

Once done, it needs to be done again. Fortunately, developers are integrating more transparent behind-the-scenes automatic updates.

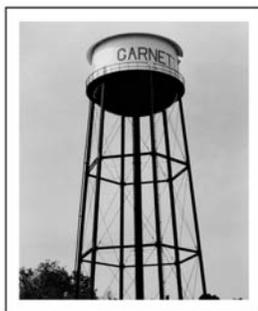
users can subscribe to favorite Web sites and be notified when they are updated. This eliminates the need to check sites manually and the need to give out an e-mail address for other kinds of news notifications. ATOM is an alternate language for Web feeds.

The reason NOT to upgrade

Upgrading a browser is like doing laundry. Once done, it needs to be done again. Fortunately, developers are integrating more transparent behind-the-scenes automatic updates. However, there

I am pleased to again present one of the preconference sessions at the KRWA conference, Tuesday, March 25. "Building Blocks for Creating or Improving a Web Site" will provide training on Web page planning and design, how to organize and select content and site maintenance. Whether your goal is to create a Web site from scratch or improve an existing site, this session will provide concrete advice and practice. If you can, bring your laptop and development software. We'll have a great session.

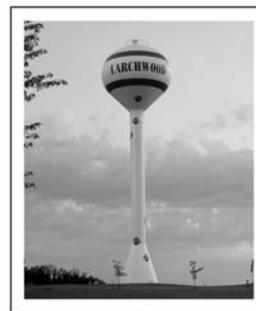
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