

Battle of the best browsers: IE vs. Chrome vs. Firefox vs. Safari

By [Brandon Widder](#) — March 31, 2013



The time when one [Web](#) browser was vastly superior to another is drawing to close as today's popular browsers plateau on an ever-increasing level playing field. Internet Explorer 10 — once a [Windows 8](#) exclusive — has finally landed on [Windows 7](#) machines, Mozilla Firefox and Google Chrome continue to ramp up their version numbers, and Safari tenaciously scuttles along as the under-appreciated byproduct of Apple's quest for global domination. Whereas choosing a browser for all your Internet perusing needs used to be a no brainer, it has now become a something of a tough decision. Fortunately, you can't really go wrong with any of the popular browsers anymore, but there are a few things here and there that give each its own competitive edge of the others.

Read our hands-on impressions to find out which to find out which is right for you.

Installation and updates

Installation across the four browsers is inherently the same. Users can download them from their respective websites if they are in built into your operating system already (i.e. Safari comes preinstalled on Mac [OS X](#) and IE 10 on Windows 8), and each will typically download in under 30 seconds depending on your Internet connection. Unfortunately, IE will force you to fully reboot your machine, likely due to the increased hardware acceleration and several updated features. The rest of our lineup doesn't require a reboot, only a quick browser closure. Below is a list of browser compatibility.

[Google Chrome 25](#): Windows, Mac OS X and Linux

[Mozilla Firefox 19](#): Windows, Mac OS X and Linux

[Internet Explorer 10](#) (32 and 64-bit): Windows (7 & 8)

[Safari 6](#): Mac OS X

When it comes to updates, there isn't a clear victor. All of the browsers silently, quickly, and transparently download updates in the background — aside from Safari — and automatically apply the new software when you relaunch the programs. Users can also manually install updates on Firefox if they would like to have greater control over the browser or prefer to use an older version for whatever reason. Keep in mind that turning off automatic updates is more likely to put your computer at risk though, since each browser is continuously adding security fixes and other key stability updates.

Design & ease of use

If I didn't know better, I'd say that the current trend in browser design is for the browser to disappear entirely. IE, Firefox, Safari and Chrome all attempt to be as minimal as possible, offering next to no actual text and small, monochromatic buttons that blend right into the look of operating systems like Windows 8 and Mac OS X. Overall, all four browsers appear to achieve their goals fairly well, with different strengths and weaknesses. It's also great to see today's browsers have done away with the bulkiness of yesterday.

Google Chrome 25 offers the leanest and most bare-bones address bar configuration, stripping everything down into a simple tab layout and address bar configuration that also doubles as a search bar. Like most browsers, it the window can get incredibly cramped with a slew of tabs open, but it still does a fantastic job of delivering content whether you have the browser fully expanded or slightly minimized for the sake of space. The two-bar layout houses all of the standard navigational features (i.e. back, forward, refresh, home) by default, but you can easily slim down the window by customizing the toolbar and deleting any buttons you deem invaluable. Chrome's single-click bookmarking method, done by simply clicking the star located on the right side of the address bar, also makes bookmarking your favorite webpages a breeze and hassle-free experience.

Mozilla Firefox 19 features a similar, yet useful layout when compared to its competitors, placing the tab bar above the address bar. Despite reaching version 19 of the software (it skipped versions 11 through 16 and 18 apparently), it still slightly feels like the bulky predecessors of the software, refusing to unite the address and search bars in a single unified field like all of its peers. The browser offers the same kind of single-click bookmarking that Chrome does — all you have to do is click the star located in the address field — but there isn't much else that separates it from the rest of the pack. Instead of sporting a gear or similar icon button for its settings, Firefox opts for an orange "Firefox" button in the upper-left corner in Windows version of the browser, taking up a tiny bit of space that could otherwise be used by the tab bar.

Internet Explorer 10 is newest, and most elegant, edition to Microsoft's IE lineup. It's one of the most minimalistic and sleek designs offered in the browser realm, boasting a single bar that simultaneously functions as the browser's address and search bar. The single area at the top places your open tabs to the right of the address-search bar, making it somewhat more cluttered than some of our other picks given the amount of space the search field takes up, but it typically isn't worrisome unless you're really stacking up a high volume of tabs. Other notable design features include the single-click bookmarking star now widely adopted by almost all other prominent browsers.

Safari gets a good deal of flack for being a horrendous browser, which is rather sad because that is no longer the case. The newest version of Apple's innate software is fairly minimalistic in design, but retains enough familiarity for old users of the browser to feel at home. Safari offers the address-search bar hybrid as its peers, along with a bookmark-tab bar that tightly sits below the former for an approach that proves both user-friendly and attractive. The biggest downside of the browser would have to be the lack of a single-click bookmarking tool, forcing users to click through several hurdles for something that should be as easy as 1-2-3. Regardless, it's still a clean design that should dissuade you from giving it a go. Mac users running the most recent operating system can even launch the browser in full-screen mode, essentially expanding the window and for the ultimate viewing experience.

Speed & Compatibility

Most of the browsers are compatible with Web standards and handle speed with relative ease. A casual user probably won't notice a difference in the Web page rendering speed of Chrome 25, IE10, Safari 6 and Firefox 19. All four browsers are much faster and leaner than browsers even a few years ago and becoming even more so with every new software build. Below are our benchmark results for the four browsers, bold text indicates the winner for each category.

Browser	Acid3	Sunspider	HTML5 Vector	HTML5 Bitmap	V8	HTML5 Compliance
<i>Chrome 25</i>	100	199.8 ms	10.85 fps	56.07 fps	8621	468/500
<i>Internet Explorer 10</i>	100	133.8 ms	22.18 fps	59.94 fps	6076	320/500
<i>Mozilla Firefox 19</i>	100	237.0 ms	15.56 fps	58.77 fps	8621	393/500
<i>Safari 6</i>	100	280.4 ms	37.24 fps	55.89 fps	5377	378/500

Google Chrome blew everything out of the water when it came to HTML5 compliance, but fell short when it came to the HTML5 vector and bitmap tests. Safari, though ranking rather low in the JavaScript benchmark tests, managed to surpass IE10 — the runner-up — by more than 15 points in the HTML5 vector category while Firefox took the crown in the V8 JavaScript benchmark suite. Be mindful that test results always fluctuate at any given time, but all four browsers are worthy contenders when it comes to sheer speed and Web standard compatibility.

Extras

Features are what truly separate one browser from the next given that speed and compatibility are no longer really an issue. That being said, each browser does have its own slate of differentiating features, from expansive [app stores](#) and add-ons to various extensions and tools, that makes it shine in its own light.



Chrome differentiates itself through its constant updates, but also through its extensive Web Apps Store, which offers apps that blur the line between Web and local apps in some unique ways. Much of this philosophy comes from Chrome OS, Google's desktop operating system based on the Chrome browser. Still, we like the idea and Chrome remains the most integrated software for accessing anything Google related (i.e. Gmail, Google Drive, etc.). If Web apps and seamless dashboard features are important to you, check out what Google has to offer.

Check out the mobile versions for [Android](#) and [iOS](#) devices while you're at it.



Like Chrome, Firefox has a strong slate of extensions that back it up. Developers will have to retool many of these to support Firefox 19, but some users refuse to leave Firefox solely because it offers unique extensions that have become essential to their browsing experience. Most other browsers support add-ons, but Firefox may have a lead in mindshare here (for now). The built-in PDF viewer is incredibly handy, as is the browser's support for Macbook Retina displays and grouped tabs, and Firefox remains the most customizable in terms of interface and display out of the four on our list.

Currently, Firefox only offers a mobile version of its browser for [Android](#) devices.



Safari may not have the admirable extension catalog to rival its peers, but it does offer a good deal of extensions and utilities for productivity and organization. Unlike Firefox and Chrome though, the third-party extensions are rather bland and aren't as integrated into the software as they probably could be. The bulk of them also lack the "fun" factor found on other browsers, but hopefully Apple will take a cue from the current market and work more accessible and entertaining extensions into the Safari Extensions Gallery. Other awesome built-in extras include the ad-free Safari Reader, which lets you view solely text without all the unnecessary clutter, and comprehensive iCloud integration syncing pages across all devices.

Safari's mobile version comes preinstalled on iOS devices.

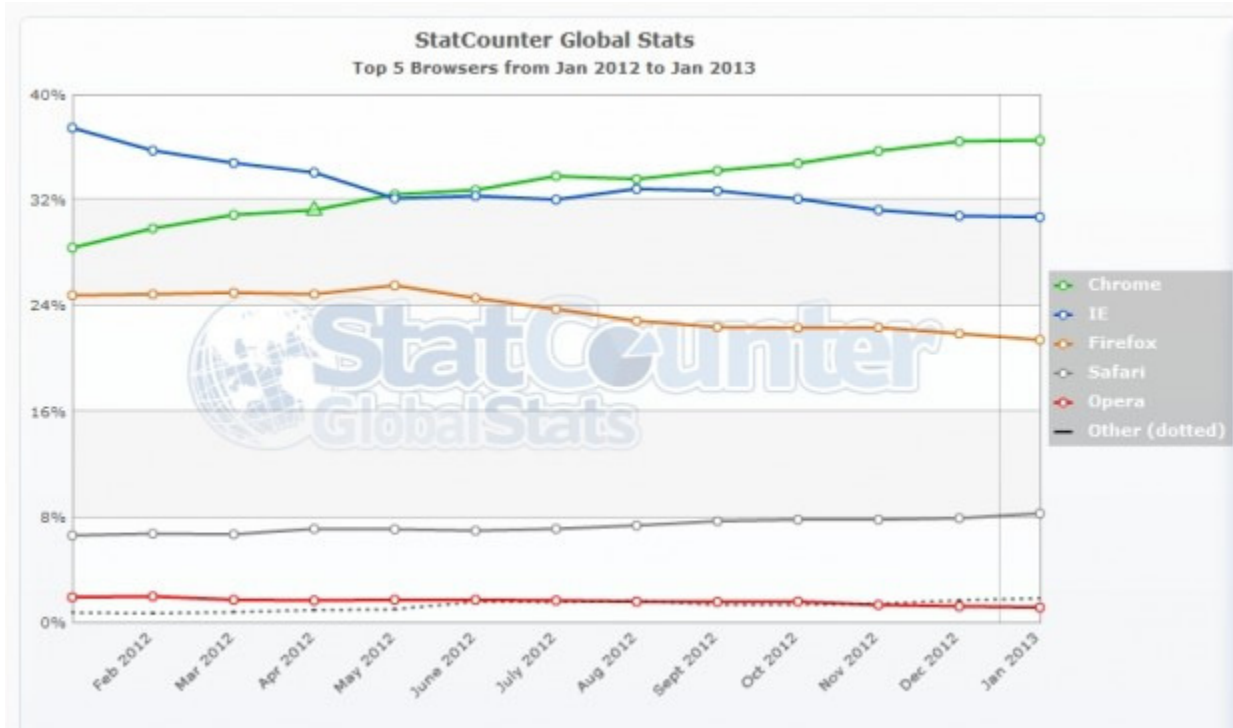


With IE10, we really like its heavy integration and optimization for [Windows 7](#) and 8. Many functions, like turning tabs into new windows are much easier with Microsoft's new browser. It retains some of the unique features introduced in IE9, like individual tab previewing from the task bar and a new feature called site pinning, which lets you 'pin' a Web site to the [Windows 7](#) task bar like you would a

normal application. However, unlike an ordinary taskbar shortcut, pinned Web sites can offer customized “right click” menus. For example, pinning the Facebook toolbar will let you right click and auto browse to different sections of the Facebook site like News, Messages, Events and Friends. In addition, when you open a pinned site, the IE10 browser customizes itself to resemble the site your viewing. Currently, this means an icon in the upper left and new colors for the back and forward buttons, but we like the idea.

IE’s mobile version comes preinstalled on Windows devices.

Popularity



According to the latest numbers from StatCounter, Chrome was the top browser for Jan. 2013, garnering just over 36 percent of the global browser market share and steadily solidifying its spot as top dog in the new year. IE and Firefox continue to decline in popularity, holding roughly 31 and 21 percent respectively, but seem to be leveling out as the IE hype tapers off. Safari remains the lowest in popularity, fixed at around 8 percent, but holds an impressive mobile browser market share.

Which browser is best?

Good question. It may come down to preference. Each browser has strengths and weaknesses. Most of us here at Digital Trends are Google Chrome users, mostly because, until Firefox 4 and IE9, it was undoubtedly the fastest browser of the bunch. Now, we don’t know what we’ll do. Chrome still probably offers the fastest and leanest overall browsing experience, but IE and Firefox have narrowed its lead significantly, each offering new features that many users will find helpful and time-saving. Still, for those who like the bleeding edge, Google’s fast and frequent browser updates are hard to pass up.

For the first time in a long time we can’t claim a strong victor here. All four major browsers offer a solid browsing experience with few downsides. Things are heating up in the browser world.

What do you think of our Web browser comparison? Which Web one revs your engine and caters to all your Internet surfing needs? Let us know in the comments below.

Read more: <http://www.digitaltrends.com/web/the-best-browser-internet-explorer-vs-chrome-vs-firefox-vs-safari/#ixzz2ZEuFtiz>

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