

[Print](#)

## Will the browser wars begin anew?

By:

ComputerWorld Canada (03 Sep 2004)

Just when many of us thought that the browser wars were over for good, the phoenix has started to rise. No, Microsoft's Internet Explorer (IE) isn't going to disappear tomorrow, but its dominance over the browser space is being challenged, and that's great news for everyone.

We are all too familiar with how IE has been plagued by a slew of security problems — resulting in regular and countless security warnings issued by the U.S. Computer Emergency Readiness Team, or CERT ([www.us-cert.gov](http://www.us-cert.gov)), and more patches issued by Microsoft than most people can remember. These problems have sent Internet-savvy users and network administrators on a hunt for a secure alternative browser. Additionally, Microsoft's support for the Macintosh version of IE has waned and Mac users are slowly shifting to other browsers. Yet with only 2.5 per cent of market share, according to Web tutorial provider W3schools ([www.w3schools.com](http://www.w3schools.com)), alternative Mac browsers are hardly a threat to IE.

So where is the threat coming from? Is it Netscape or something else? While all of us should be familiar with the attempts at resurrecting Netscape with the release of version 6 a couple of years back — which failed miserably — and the subsequent release of Netscape 7, it's not Netscape that threatens IE's dominance. Others may look at Opera ([www.opera.com](http://www.opera.com)) as a potential threat. True, Opera is a powerful and fast browser, but it's not free (unless you're willing to put up with ads). The threat comes from the browser engine utilized by Netscape known as Mozilla.

Mozilla has evolved over the years through the benefits of the open source movement from an almost novelty browser to a full-fledged, just-about-ready-for-prime-time browser. Mozilla is being marketed (if you can call it that) under the current brand name of FireFox.

FireFox version 0.93 was recently released in a final push for its first true production version, 1.0. This browser has already captured an estimated 12.2 per cent of the browser market and with every IE security warning, it's sure to gain more market share.

Many people may have already discounted Mozilla by merely looking at Netscape 7. While it's true that Netscape uses Mozilla as its engine, the people at Netscape loaded their browser with so much overhead that it essentially chokes Mozilla and forces it to a walk instead of allowing it to zoom around the World Wide Web. Think of Mozilla as a race car engine; now stick that engine into a very practical minivan with a cargo area fully loaded with a half ton of bricks (Netscape 7). FireFox, on the other hand, places that same engine into a sports sedan or even your favourite sports car. You can zoom around with ease and manoeuvrability like never before. From a security standpoint (at least so far), it is rock solid.

Another selling point for FireFox is an ever growing number of easy-to-install extensions, making it even more customizable without compromising its performance. Standard features include a built in pop-up blocker, text zooming and a Google search box. While these features are available for IE, they usually require a plug-in like the Google Tool bar. And just like Netscape 7, FireFox is fully W3 standards compliant, something that IE can't claim.

So if you're ready to take a look at something other than IE for yourself or your organization, download FireFox ([www.mozilla.org/products/firefox/](http://www.mozilla.org/products/firefox/)). It's a small download at a mere 4.7MB for the Windows versions (another plus) and it's also available for Unix and Mac OS X.

If you're a developer, don't forget to download the "Web Developer" Extension (<http://update.mozilla.org/extensions/?application=firefox>). This powerful add-on allows you to edit style sheets on fly to see what effect they have on the Web page, validate the CSS and HTML of the page you're viewing, resize your window to a variety of dimensions and much, much more.

While this new browser war may not be gathering the headlines in the technology press as the battle between Netscape and IE once did, it's a war nonetheless, and this time it's being led by the open source movement which is out to build a better browser.

K'necht is a regular speaker at Internet conferences and president of K'nechtology Inc., a technology strategy, search engine optimization and Web design company. He can be reached at [www.knechtology.com](http://www.knechtology.com).

Copyright © 2004  
ITworldcanada.com