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The 2018 Web Browser Comparison

The right web browser can make a huge difference to your everyday browsing – whether your priority is faster performance, better security or compatibility with core company websites. However, it can be tricky to break out of your comfort zone. The browser you're currently using might not be the best, but you've probably become use to its idiosyncrasies over the years without realizing there are better options around that will make your life so much easier (Important to note, always check with your IT support to verify if there is a business need to utilize a specific browser for your business). *The following is a breakdown of the biggest browsers put through their paces and some of the pros and cons each has to offer.*

1. Google Chrome
If your system has the resources, Chrome is 2018's top browser

- Pro - Fast performance
- Pro - Infinitely expandable
- Con - Resource-hungry

With Chrome, Google has built an extendable, efficient browser that deserves its place at the top of the browser rankings. According to w3schools' browser trend analysis its user base is only rising, even as Microsoft Edge's install numbers are presumably growing. Why? Well, it's cross-platform, incredibly stable, brilliantly presented to take up the minimum of screen space, and just about the nicest browser there is to use. Its wide range of easily-obtained and installed extensions mean you can really make it your own, and there's support for parental controls and a huge range of tweaks and settings to ensure maximum efficiency.

However, Chrome isn't without its downsides. It's one of the heaviest browsers in terms of resource use, so it's not brilliant on machines with limited RAM, and its performance doesn't quite match up to others as far as benchmarking is concerned. And, with Google's tentacles running through it, you may be uncomfortable with how your browsing data is used. That said, Google is making some moves towards security, and is pushing HTTPS particularly hard. Future versions of the browser will make it very clear when sites aren't using HTTPS encryption, aiming to make it standard throughout the web. Chrome and Firefox now also support password-free logins via WebAuthn – either to replace traditional passwords completely, or work as a form of two-factor authentication. The browser also offers more features for web app developers, including more consistent experiences across different VR headsets, and the ability to use input from sensors (such as your device's ambient light sensor and accelerometer).

2. Mozilla Firefox
Firefox is back after a total overhaul, and looks very solid

- Pro - Very fast
- Pro - Light on system resources

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- Pro - Strong privacy tools

Firefox recently received its biggest update in 13 years, and it's impressive. Firefox has always been known for its flexibility and support for extensions, but in recent years it had started to lag behind the competition in terms of speed. Firefox Quantum, first released last year, represented a total overhaul of the browser's code base, with speeds now comparable with Google Chrome. That's not just on top-end computers,.either – the new Firefox makes frugal use of RAM, even with masses of tabs open. Firefox also scores serious points when it comes to privacy. Mozilla is non-profit, which means it doesn't have the same impetus to sell your data as some other browser developers. The organization also makes regular updates to help protect its users' privacy as internet companies come under increasing scrutiny over the way they treat people's data. Quantum also introduced a new system for extensions that prevents rogue developers making malicious changes to the browser's internal code. It's not always the absolute fastest – for some pages Chrome still has the edge, but the new Firefox has come out swinging.

3. Opera
An underrated browser that's a great choice for slow connections

- Pro - Excellent Turbo mode
- Pro - Integrated ad-blocker
- Con - Fewer plugins than rivals

It's sad that Opera makes up only around 1% of the browser market, because it really is a quality browser. It launches fast, the UI is brilliantly clean, and it does everything its rivals can do with a couple of extras thrown in for good measure. One very cool feature is Opera's Turbo feature. This compresses your web traffic, routing it through Opera's servers, which makes a huge difference to browsing speed if you're stuck on rural dial-up or your broadband connection is having a moment. It reduces the amount of data transferred too, handy if you're using a mobile connection, and this re-routing also dodges any content restrictions your ISP might place on your browsing, which can be mighty handy. Opera automatically ducks out of the way if you're using secure sites like banks, so your traffic is free and clear of any potential privacy violation. There's also an integrated ad-blocker – which can be switched off if you're morally inclined in that direction – and a battery-saving mode which promises to keep your laptop going for longer.
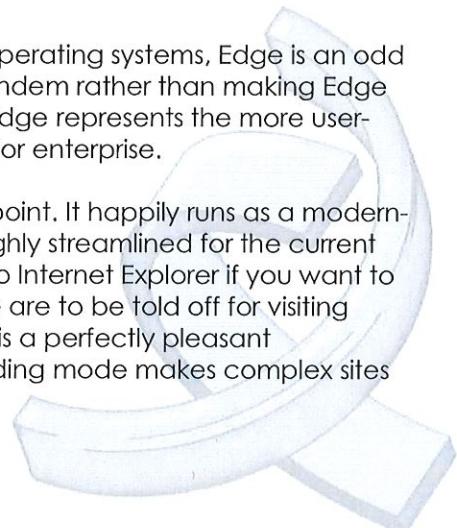
4. Microsoft Edge
Microsoft's new browser offers full integration with Windows 10

- Pro - Very fast
- Pro - Built-in reading mode
- Con - Not backwards compatible

The default 'browsing experience' on Windows 10, and unavailable for older operating systems, Edge is an odd one. Quite why Microsoft needs to be running a pair of browser products in tandem rather than making Edge backwards compatible is beyond us. The company's reason, it seems, is that Edge represents the more user-friendly end of Redmond's offering while Internet Explorer scales a little better for enterprise.

Integration with Windows 10's core gimmicks seems to be Edge's main strong point. It happily runs as a modern-skinned app on Windows 10's tablet mode and works with Cortana. It's also highly streamlined for the current web age, doing away with insecure protocols like ActiveX and forcing you into Internet Explorer if you want to use them. We're more used to browsers failing to render newer pages than we are to be told off for visiting older corners of the web. Curmudgeonly grumbles aside, actually using Edge is a perfectly pleasant experience. It's super-quick, hammers through benchmarks, its integrated reading mode makes complex sites

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more palatable, and by sandboxing it away from the rest of the operating system Microsoft has ensured that Edge won't suffer the security breaches of its older brother.

5. Microsoft Internet Explorer
Fast and efficient, but less expandable than Firefox and Chrome

- Pro - Make frugal use of resources
- Pro - Clean design
- Con - Poor plugin support

Microsoft Internet Explorer has seen some ups and downs in its long tenure, from dominating the browser charts to languishing behind its main two competitors. This is partly an issue of choice – particularly the browser choice that Microsoft was forced to give customers after a court ruling – and partially because older versions fell behind the rendering and compatibility curve. There are no such issues with Internet Explorer 11. It's clean, powerful, highly compatible, and it demands less of your RAM and CPU than equivalent pages would on Chrome or Firefox. That's not to say this browser is perfect. Google's V8 benchmark sees it struggling, and IE isn't quite as able to handle add-ons and extensions as many of its competitors. So, while there's no reason to avoid IE like there might once have been, if you're looking for a more customized browsing experience this might not be your top choice.