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Ready or Not, It's Coming to a Computer Near You: Internet Explorer Version 7

According to multiple reliable sources, starting on November 1, Microsoft will begin to push out a high priority update that will include Internet Explorer 7 (IE7) along with approximately 11 other patches. Users of Windows XP Service Pack 2 will automatically receive a Windows Update notice that IE7 is available and can be downloaded and installed free of charge. If Service Pack 2 is not installed on the workstation, or if the workstation is running an operating system other than Windows XP, IE7 cannot be installed.

IE7 Installation

Any user who is familiar with installation of computer applications should have no problems. Installation of IE7 is rather straightforward, with two somewhat unusual requests. First, before the installation begins, users will be instructed to temporarily disable anti-

virus and anti-spyware protection. There are multiple reports of installation problems that have occurred when users failed to disable anti-virus and anti-spyware protection. Speculation is that the install process for IE7 has its own personal form of virus protection and it could clash with the anti-virus and anti-spyware software installed by the user. It would be best to comply with the request to temporarily disable both products.

Second, after IE7 is installed, the user will be asked to reboot the computer. Again,



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the official reason given for this step is related to anti-virus software installed on the machine. During the reboot, the installing code is checking the system for malicious code. Any operating anti-virus application could clash with the installation process.

Our installation experience...

We installed IE7 on several of our office computers

with no issues. The download of approximately 15MB took several minutes. We followed the advice to disable the anti-spyware and anti-virus software and began the update which mostly

involved sitting quietly and waiting for the software to install. The only message that required a response was the request to restart the computer.

After rebooting, Internet Explorer was started up. The first time IE7 is started, a special "run once" screen is displayed. There is a one or two minute delay while IE7 loaded the screen from a Microsoft server. The screen has only a few questions to be answered:

- The user must decide whether to keep the current default search provider or to select from a list of other search providers. We opted to select from the list, since we were unsure of what product was the "current default search provider".
- We chose to turn on the phishing filter



- We clicked "Save Settings"
- The next screen to be displayed allowed us to choose from a list of known search providers. We selected one from

the list and indicated in the displayed dialog box that it should be the default search provider. We clicked "Add provider", then clicked the "homepage" icon (that is now moved to the right side of the screen). IE7 found and displayed the correct web page. That was easy.

But did it work???

Yes. As we put IE7 through its paces, it did what we expected it to do. The biggest problem that we faced was remembering where to find the push



button or drop-down list that performed the desired feature. We found ourselves muttering “Where the heck is it?” quite a bit in the beginning, but after a few hours of use, we became more familiar with the new layout and most of our annoyance dissipated.

When using IE7 for the first time, users should expect that this will happen. They should free up some time to familiarize themselves with IE7.

Mixed reviews...

While IE7 has not been blasted by most reviewers, it hasn't gotten rave reviews. Generally, most articles are favorable about the new features such as redesigned user interface that includes tabbed browsing, a built-in RSS feed reader, a new “Favorites Center”, and phishing filters. Most of the changes to existing functions get at best lukewarm responses from the reviewers. One of the most common complaints is the placement of the “Refresh” button which is located immediately after the address bar on the screen. The reviews can be summed up

this way: The first time IE7 is used, some users will like it, some will hate it. After using it a while, some will still like it, most will tolerate it.

Why no rave reviews?

One big complaint of the reviewers is that Microsoft, after almost two and a half years of development, still cannot match or exceed the features found in other web browsers. Of the 3 most-used web browsers (Internet Explorer, Firefox, Opera), IE7 is not fully compliant with the standards set by the Web Standards

Project. (Today, only Opera is compliant, but Firefox is expected to comply very soon.) As web sites begin building pages with features that use the latest standards, IE7 could fail.

Another complaint from reviewers focuses on the design of IE7 itself: It hasn't

really been redesigned, despite Microsoft's claims to the contrary. Some reviewers claim that it is fundamentally IE4 with lots of modifications. If this is true, the fundamental flaws may remain.





One reviewer took aim at IE7's antiphishing technology intended to stop users from divulging personal data to fraudulent web sites. While IE7 could identify a phishing site after it had been in existence for more than 1 hour, it had trouble with sites that were less than 1 hour old. Faster is always better, but 1 hour is pretty good. Some people are a little too picky.

And then there are the bugs...

No sooner than IE7 was released when a notice of an IE7 "security vulnerability" was posted on a security web site. Microsoft, through Christopher Budd, Security Program Manager for the Microsoft Security Response Center, disputed the claim. According to Mr. Budd, the problem was not with IE7, but with a Windows component used by Outlook Express (that could be used by IE7). Microsoft is working to solve this problem.

Some web sites that use technology from AutoDesk do not work with the new browser and cause errors.

Some web pages have failed. Usually only minor corrections were needed to allow them to work.

Opting out of IE7...

For those people who are running Windows XP SP2 and absolutely positively do not wish to allow IE7 to set foot on their computer, there is a way to prevent the automatic installation of IE7. Microsoft has kindly provided a registry key to control it. For those among us who have the knowledge and training to

modify the registry, adding the key DoNotAllowIE70 will control the automatic installation of IE7. Users who are squeamish about messing around in the registry can use the freeware program IntelliAdmin IE7 Blocking Tool from IntelliNavigator, Inc. This program can be used on standalone workstations or over a network to control the update to IE7.

We don't feel that opting out of the IE7 update in the short term is a bad idea, but permanently banning IE7 is. Internet Explorer is tightly bound to the Windows XP operating system. If, for example, an HTML document is viewed from within Word, it uses the Internet Explorer modules. The computer could be exposed to IE-related security problems in the future. IE7 should be installed even if there are no plans to use it.

Alternatives to IE7...

As mentioned earlier in this article, there are 2 viable alternatives to Internet Explorer: Firefox and Opera. As we were assembling the table that compared the features of these products, one fact became clear to us: No single web browser has all of the features of its competitors. Choosing any of the 3 most commonly used web browsers to gain a desired feature will result in the loss of other features. The best web browser is the one that provides a user with the most features that they need to use. It will vary from user to user.

Are you unsure as to whether IE7 is the best product for what you need to do?



Listed in the table below are the major features of the top 3 web browsers:

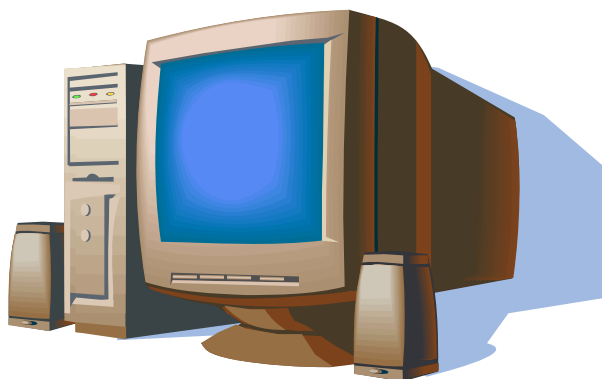
Feature	IE7	Firefox	Opera
Tabbed browsing	Yes	Yes	Yes
Add-ins	Yes – Add-ons	Yes - Extensions	Wid-gets
Themes	No	Yes	Yes - Skins
Multiple Search engine choice	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pop-up blocker	Yes	Yes	Yes
Anti-phishing	Yes	Yes	No
Single-click to add favorites	Yes	No	No
RSS reader	Yes	Yes	Yes
Download manager	No	Yes	Yes
Download pause	No	Yes	Yes
Remember open tabs for next session	Yes	No	Yes
Save group of tabs as bookmark	Yes	Yes	Yes
Thumbnail for tabs	Yes – Quick tabs	No	Yes
Mac/Linux version	No/No	Yes/ Yes	Yes
BitTorrent client	No	No	Yes
Spell-checker for text boxes	No	Yes	No

Conclusions...

It is easy to criticize Microsoft for not adding more features to the initial release and/or changing things to work the way we want them to. While it is too soon to determine if IE7 is as good as Microsoft hyped it to be, as of right now, our experience leads us to the conclusion that it is no worse than IE6. When we verify that the new features perform as advertised, our opinion will become more favorable, maybe even positive.

Microsoft has a track record of releasing new products that initially underwhelm its user community. It is only after the dust settles from the initial deployment that they begin to implement the really meaningful changes.

It is way too soon to rush to any final opinions. Let's give IE7 a chance to show us what it can do.





WNYLC Web Statistics For September, 2006

Total Hits.....332,852
 Total User Sessions.....63,188
 Average Hits/Day (Mon-Fri)13,918
 Average user Sessions/Weekday.....2,406
 Number of Pages Viewed.....119,038
 Avg Number of Pages /Day.....3,839
 Number of Documents Viewed.....70,698
 Accessed Using Internet Explorer.....89%
 Accessed Using Netscape.....5%

Operating Systems Used:
 Windows XP.....58%
 Windows 2000.....14%
 Windows 98.....7%
 Windows ME.....<1%
 Windows 95.....<1%
 Windows NT.....<1%
 Macintosh.....<1%
 Linux/Unix.....<1%



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