Notes From an IT Service Shop

Every Hotel Computer Should Have at Least
2 INTERNET BROWSERS

It is estimated that more than half of all Web browsing is done using Internet Explorer (IE), which comes with all new systems. IE is the industry standard, commanding the largest market share since it is bundled with Windows. Some hospitality applications, such as the widely used MICROS OPERA PMS, will only work with Internet Explorer.

However, there are alternatives to IE that may work better with certain applications or may be faster and more user friendly when surfing the Web.

While IE commands the largest market share now, it was not always that way. The first Web browser was called WorldWideWeb, which was introduced in 1992. This browser was later to be known as Nexus to avoid confusion with the Web itself.

In 1993, the Mosaic Web browser was introduced. This browser offered a graphical user interface, and was partly responsible for an explosion of Web use.

In 1994, Marc Andreessen, the leader of the Mosaic team, left and started Netscape. Netscape Navigator, which had many of Mosaic's features, was released and soon became the most popular browser, at one time commanding over 90 percent of the market.

Not to be outdone by smaller rivals, Microsoft introduced Internet Explorer in 1995. IE also had many Mosaic features and, because it was bundled with Windows, it achieved a significant market share quickly. This touched off the browser wars, which included antitrust litigation by the federal government against Microsoft.

Originally, in 1991, the Federal Trade Commission opened an inquiry to determine if Microsoft was abusing its power as a monopoly in the PC operating systems market. Nothing came of this investigation, but in August of 1993 the Justice Department opened its own investigation. This was settled by Microsoft agreeing not to tie other products to the sale of Windows, such as Microsoft Office. Microsoft could continue to enhance their operating systems by adding new features. This lead to Microsoft contending that Internet Explorer was not a product in itself, but an enhancement to Windows.

This position on Internet Explorer was unacceptable to the Department of Justice and a trial began in May of 1998. After almost two years, a federal judge ruled that Microsoft had to be divided into two units: one that produced operating systems and one that made other software programs. This decision was overturned on appeal and a settlement proposal was drafted between Microsoft and the Department of Justice.

The approximate market share of each of the major Web browsers:

Internet Explorer	**50%**
Firefox	**25%**
Chrome	**17%**
Safari	**6%**
Opera	**2%**

As an interesting result of the browser wars developers tended to focus on new features for users at the expense of other important areas, including security. Security issues still exist in today's versions of Web browsers. Other results of the wars were programming bugs going unfixed because emphasis was now placed on new features, and a lack of adherence to established standards, thus creating interaction difficulties with the Web.

The Web browser market did not stand still during all the years of litigation with Microsoft. Opera (not related to the Micros PMS), primarily a Web browser and email client was introduced in 1996. Although it was never widely used in the United States, it has gained acceptance in other countries as somewhat of a standard.

Netscape started the Mozilla Foundation in 1998 that eventually produced the Firefox browser in 2004. Netscape was sold to AOL and development of its browser was discontinued in 2008. Firefox now has a significant share of the browser market.

Apple released its own browser, Safari, in 2003. While dominant in the Apple-based market, its overall market share is relatively small.

The newest browser on the market, Chrome was introduced by Internet giant Google in 2008. Its market share has increased significantly in less than three years.

All of these browsers can be downloaded, free of charge from the Web.

It is recommended that users have at least one additional browser loaded on their computers for the following reasons. It is fairly common for some applications to work in one browser but not in another. This is not always the fault of the browser itself but can be an add-on to the browser. Adobe, for example, has two of the most common add-ons with their PDF reader and Flash video software.

A second reason for a backup browser is because system files can become corrupt for one browser, but another one will still work fine. Also, there are some websites that will only work with certain browsers. Some browser-based applications only work with one browser, usually Internet Explorer.

Lastly, security can also be an issue. A virus can infect Internet Explorer without affecting another browser, so the uninfected backup browser can be used until the virus is removed.

In a pinch, the email program Microsoft Outlook can be used as a browser by entering the website in the address bar.

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