

About.com Web Browsers



Scott's Web Browsers Blog

By **Scott Orgera**, About.com Guide to Web Browsers

Web Browsers Newsletter - [Sign up!](#) [Email](#) [Print](#)

[Discuss](#) in My Forum

Have You Updated Your Browser Lately?

Wednesday July 2, 2008

A cooperative study conducted by [ETH Zurich](#), [Google](#), and [IBM Internet Security Systems](#) has produced some alarming numbers regarding browser safety. Nowadays, security dangers such as drive-by downloads, malware installation, and remote execution of malicious code are prevalent throughout the Web. According to the report [published yesterday](#), a large number of Internet users are putting themselves at risk on a daily basis simply because they aren't running the latest version of their browser. Using data accumulated by Google's search and Web application server logs between January 2007 and June 2008, the study determined that only 59.1% of global Internet users make use of the latest major version of their preferred Web browser. That left 576 million users surfing the Web with an older release.

A Breakdown by Browser Type

During the data collection period, it was discovered that at most 83.3% of [Firefox](#) users were using the latest, most secure version of their browser. This number was somewhat high compared to 65.3% for [Safari](#), 56.1% for [Opera](#), and 47.6% for [Internet Explorer](#). In the case of Microsoft's browser, all users still running IE6 were grouped into the "unsafe" category. Although Mozilla's browser boasted the best percentage, the study pointed out that it should be even higher. "Despite the single-click integrated auto-update functionality of Firefox, rather surprisingly, 16.7% of Firefox users (one out of six) continue to surf the Web with an outdated version of the Web browser."

How to Build a Brighter Future

Most built-in vulnerabilities are remedied with a minor upgrade or major release, hence the importance of running the latest version of your preferred browser. However, even fully patched browsers may find themselves at risk due to out-of-date and vulnerable plug-ins such as Flash Player and Shockwave. Many of these plug-ins have methods to notify the user when a new version is available. However, this is not always the case and is not the most ideal solution even for an advanced user. The study suggests [some interesting ways](#) that browser developers as well as those responsible for third-party plug-ins can do their part to ensure a user's overall safety while surfing the Web.

In the area of existing technology, the researchers who performed the study feel that other browser vendors can learn a lesson from Firefox's [auto-update](#) feature, stating the following: "Our measurement confirmed that Web browsers which implement an internal auto-update patching mechanism do much better in terms of faster update adoption rates than those without." I completely agree with this method and hope that others adopt a similar strategy going forward. In the realm of innovation, these same researchers presented the concept of a 'Best before' date where both browsers and websites would take a cue from the food industry by showing an expiration date (i.e., 145 days expired) whenever an update for their particular browser is available.

What Can I Do?

You, the user, must play an integral role in this fight. The unfortunate statistics brought to light by this study show that

Internet users are skating on thin ice each and every time their browser is launched. In order to protect yourself from evil-doers, you must remain vigilant by doing the following.

- Always ensure that your browser is updated to the latest version
- Keep up-to-date on [browser security news](#)
- Install recommended [privacy and security add-ons](#)



(Photo © [michaeldb](#) - #472149/stockxpert)

Comments

No comments yet. [Leave a Comment](#)

Explore Web Browsers

By Category

- [Internet Explorer](#)
- [Firefox](#)
- [Add-Ons & Plug-Ins](#)
- [All About Web Browsers](#)
- [Web Browser Security](#)
- [Tips & Tricks](#)
- [Toolbars](#)
- [Browser Based Games](#)
- [History Lesson](#)
- [Beta Testing & Development](#)
- [Web Browser Glossary](#)

Must Reads

- [The Ultimate Browser Security Resource](#)
- [How to Do Everything in IE 7](#)
- [Optimize Your Safari Browser](#)
- [How to Do Everything in Firefox](#)
- [How to Do Everything in Opera](#)

Most Popular

- [DragonFable](#)
- [How To Manage Add-ons In IE 7](#)
- [IE7Pro](#)
- [eBay Snipe at AuctionSniper](#)
- [Torrent Finder Toolbar](#)