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Web Browser



Margaret Rouse
Technology Expert

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What Does Web Browser Mean?

A web browser is a software program that allows a user to locate, access, and display web pages. In common usage, a web browser is usually shortened to “browser.”

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Web browsers are used primarily for displaying and accessing websites on the internet, as well as other content created using languages such as Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) and Extensible Markup Language (XML).

Browsers translate web pages and websites delivered using Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) into human-readable content. They also have the ability to display other protocols and prefixes, such as secure HTTP (HTTPS), File Transfer Protocol (FTP), email handling (mailto:), and files (file:).

In addition, most browsers also support external plug-ins required to display active content, such as in-page video, audio and game content.

Techopedia Explains Web Browser

Early Beginnings of the Web Browser

Early web browsers started prior to the beginning of the 21st century, with a text-only browser called Lynx and another browser called Mosaic.

Later, Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer emerged as the two main choices, until the launch of Mozilla Firefox in 2004.

Meanwhile, Apple's Safari products launched in 2003, and became the standard operating system for the company's iPhones in 2007.

Since then, Google Chrome has also become a contender in the browser wars – the competition to power the bulk of end user activity.

What Does a Web Browser Do?

Essentially, a web browser handles HTTP activity between a client and a server that is the backbone of World Wide Web use. URLs are traffic directions for the web browser, and the browser uses IP addresses and other tools to establish these connections.

Along with facilitating web surfing, new types of web browsers have additional functionality through a range of plug-ins that can add features after the fact. Some of these have to do with security and accessibility, while others have to do with end user conveniences or data aggregation.

Ongoing Web Browser Development

Some of the biggest new developments in web browsers have to do with cybersecurity. For instance, Google Chrome has been a pioneer in hardening its systems against sites that do not have a valid SSL certificate, which prevents various kinds of hacking and vulnerabilities.

Web browsers can also be made to handle newer protocols like some of those created by the Internet Engineering Task Force to augment web security.

Firefox and Others Are Following Suit

Other new technologies include the idea of browser isolation, where companies direct activity in a segmented way, separating internal network activity from web browser activity.

When the browser activity can be placed outside of a firewall, and monitored while incoming, the internal network can enjoy greater protections.

Meanwhile, the underlying web coding languages that are used have also evolved. HTML has become HTML 5, and cascading style sheets or CSS have revolutionized the ways that consistent site design is maintained.

The web browser is a much-used favorite technology on the taskbar of the average user, but is still being evolved and developed to suit our modern Internet needs.

It's interesting to note that as the Internet of Things (IoT) phenomenon emerges, where more diverse appliances access the Internet, only traditional devices like mobile phones and laptops actually use a web browser design.

Other devices may only send and receive data without end user driven events, although things like smart refrigerators and other smart home devices may have web browsers installed.

These may be fundamentally different from the web browser designs that we are familiar with to date.

For example, early implementations of web browsers for smart refrigerators show how they promote specific kinds of visual interfaces built into the front of the appliance, and how easily some of these web browsers can be hacked with malware that infects the fridge.

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Margaret Rouse

Margaret Rouse is an award-winning technical writer and teacher known for her ability to explain complex technical subjects to a non-technical, business audience. Over the past twenty years her explanations have appeared on TechTarget websites and she's been cited as an authority in articles by the New York Times, Time Magazine, USA Today, ZDNet, PC Magazine and Discovery Magazine. Margaret's idea of a fun day is helping IT and business professionals learn to speak each other's highly specialized languages. If you have a suggestion for a new definition or how to improve a technical explanation, please email Margaret or contact her...

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