

# Have you checked your browser compatibility lately?

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Even if only 5% of your visitors use a certain browser, those 5% are still potential customers.

Making sure your website is compatible with the major browsers is important especially if you are someone that continually tries to improve your website with new functionality.

This is particularly the case if you use DHTML and/or CSS stylesheets to format or position content on your web pages, however it is also worth checking your site in the major browsers even if you don't, the most common cause of differences being the way that Netscape and IE treat tables.

The best way to know which browsers to design your pages for is to look at your website logs and find out which are the most commonly used browser versions. If you don't have access to your website logs, as a general rule, you need to test your website for the following.

Netscape 4.7  
Netscape 6.2  
Internet Explorer 5.0 and above.  
Opera v 5.0

It is high time to forget about the version 3 browsers. The users of these are going to be able to read the content on your pages 99% of the time, even if the layout is not what you would want.

What about Netscape ? It was estimated that about 35% of web users used Netscape when version 4.79 was released, but this has decreased as Internet Explorer released browsers that outperformed Netscape and as AOL adopted IE.

AOL has distributed a variety of browsers to their clients. Their most recent software however is based on Internet Explorer - it utilises the IE browser the user usually already has installed on their system therefore for modern AOL clients, browser compatibility is mostly independent of any specific AOL version.

Netscape is however still going to be used by a large number of people, and if your Netscape users are potential buyers, you cannot neglect them.

You are going to have your work cut out to optimise for Netscape 4.7, IE 5 and Netscape 6 especially if you use DHTML and CSS. These two web technologies are becoming increasingly used as CSS allows you to separate the content of your webpages from the format and layout of the site, and DHTML allows you to create more dynamic and interactive content.

Netscape 4.x supports DHTML and CSS but differently from Internet Explorer. Navigator 4.x does not support styles on inline tags very well for example on A or SPAN especially when using CSS to position these elements (padding, margin). Although styles work better on block elements, eg: TABLE, P, DIV, you will also often get different results than when using IE.

IE 5.5 supports XML and second generation DHTML, which includes DHTML behaviours (allowing web developers to use re-usable scripts that a webpage can reference for use without reloading the page) Internet Explorer 5.x still offers a number of features that aren't supported in Netscape 6.0. such as windowless frames and borderless tables. Netscape 6 however fully supports XML, Cascading Style Sheets Level 1 (CSS1), W3C DOM Level 1, and JavaScript 1.5 and does have more strict adherence to web standards.

Opera is becoming quite a popular browser as Version 5 is a freeware release supported by banner-ads. It is a good browser in terms of speed and performance, and complies with all the main web standards including XML, Javascript 1.3, WML, CSS2 and HTML 4.0.

What about XML?

XML is definitely the web language of the future. Many websites already use XML and use stylesheets to transform the pages into HTML that is viewable in your browser. By using different stylesheets, a web page can be displayed in HTML if requested by a web browser or in WML for example if requested by a WAP (wireless - usually on mobile phones) browser, or indeed in any format that there is a requirement for.

Netscape 6 and Internet Explorer 5.0 can both view XML pages directly (i.e: pages with a .xml extension) but it is going to

be another few years before webmasters decide to give up HTML in favour of XML to display the content.

However this gradual move towards XML is going to mean increased use of stylesheets, to separate the content of a site from the layout and format.

How to test your site in the different browsers?

The best way to do this is to install these browsers on the computer you use to create your websites. You can download older versions of Internet Explorer 5 from <http://www.microsoft.com/windows/ie/downloads/archive/default.asp> (IE 4.x is no longer available for download and is not supported by Microsoft) and older versions of Netscape from <http://home.netscape.com/download/archive/index.html> .

There is also a site called Anybrowser.com - <http://www.anybrowser.com/siteviewer.html> - which will allow you to preview your live website in different browsers if you cannot view them on your own PC. Although this option is not as good as downloading the browsers yourself, it is still very useful tool if you cannot download browsers to your PC, or you want to make a quick check on a web page's compliance with various HTML standards.

For more information on which web technologies the different browsers support, visit <http://www.TheWebsEye.com/browsers.htm>

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