Browser Wars

The first web browser, World Wide Web was created by Tim Berners-Lee who also invented the World wide web. Further, next year many other browsers for different platforms came out. These browsers were only simple HTML-Viewers software. In 1993, the Mosaic web browser was developed at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications (NCSA) at the University of Illinois. Despite many web browsers coming at that time, Mosaic was the most influential because its features were better. It was based on the libwww library.

A picture containing person, boxing, sport, person

Description automatically generatedThe popularity of the Mosaic was at the peak, but one of its developers, Marc Andreessen met with Jim Clark of silicon graphics. After his graduation from the University of Illinois, Andreessen and Jim Clark founded Mosaic Communications Corporation in 1994. Because of the conflicts with the University of Illinois, they changed the name to Netscape and thus released the Netscape navigator 0.9, a web browser. Andreessen was one of the co-developers of the Mosaic browser, and he knew what was needed in the new browser they were working on. Thus, the Mosaic war started between the Mosaic browser and the Netscape navigator. By the end of 1995, the web boom set by the mosaic was overtaken by the Netscape navigator. The web was receiving a great amount of attention from the public and media, which led Microsoft in the competition. Thus, leading to the first browser war.

The Netscape navigator was the sole dominant at that time after winning the mosaic war. Having the monopoly at the time, Netscape offered its browser free for non-commercial users but demanded money for a license. The IPO was extremely successful for Netscape and newly added features such as frames, image maps, and JavaScript iterations were immensely influential.

For years, Microsoft had ignored the web and focused much on their platform. But soon bill gates realized how the web is going to make a big impact on the future. Microsoft was already dominating the operating system usage share with 90 percent, but Netscape was the one that dominated the web browsers usage share with 80 percent. That means, if you are buying Microsoft windows, you need to a web browser separately. First, Microsoft sent its engineers to Netscape for discussing the future of Microsoft and the web. Things did not go well between Microsoft and Netscape, and after some time, the two companies rarely spoke. The Netscape’s popularity was increasing and then, just after 15 days of that IPO launch, Microsoft had their own browser ready, the Internet Explorer. The first version was not that impressive in the front of Netscape. However, in 1995, Microsoft launched second version. After that it seem like full fledged war between these two. The third version of Internet Explorer gave massive fight to Netscape but the market share for Netscape was too high to get a dent from Microsoft.

Then comes a turning point in this war when Microsoft launched Internet Explorer 4.0, when Bill Gates provided the browser free of cost along with the Microsoft Windows. Since Microsoft had major share of operating system market, it seriously damaged Netscape. The popularity of Internet Explorer kept on rising and Netscape could not recover from there.

A picture containing indoor, device, scale

Description automatically generatedThe Federal Trade Commission (FTC) launched an investigation in the early 1990s to determine whether Microsoft was trying to create a monopoly. Although that investigation was closed, the Department of Justice (DoJ) picked it up. On May 18, 1998, the DoJ and the attorneys general of 20 different states filed antitrust charges against Microsoft to determine whether the company's bundling of additional programs into its operating system constituted monopolistic actions. The suit was brought following the browser wars that led to the collapse of Microsoft's top competitor, Netscape, which occurred when Microsoft began giving away its browser software for free. The government case accused Microsoft of making it difficult for consumers to install competing software on computers operated by Windows. If Microsoft were found to have made it unreasonably difficult for consumers to uninstall Internet Explorer and use a competing browser, the company's practices would be deemed anti-competitive. The case meandered along with accusations of misleading statements and a variety of courtroom distractions.

Despite the manipulated evidence in form of videos, facts and emails, Microsoft lost the case and it was ordered to divide the company in half; one part as the operating system company and the one as the software company. But Microsoft did not hold back and appealed the decision. Here the appeal court overturned the earlier ruling and settled with Microsoft. This whole incident has left very dark impact since it is seen as the favoritism to the big fish.