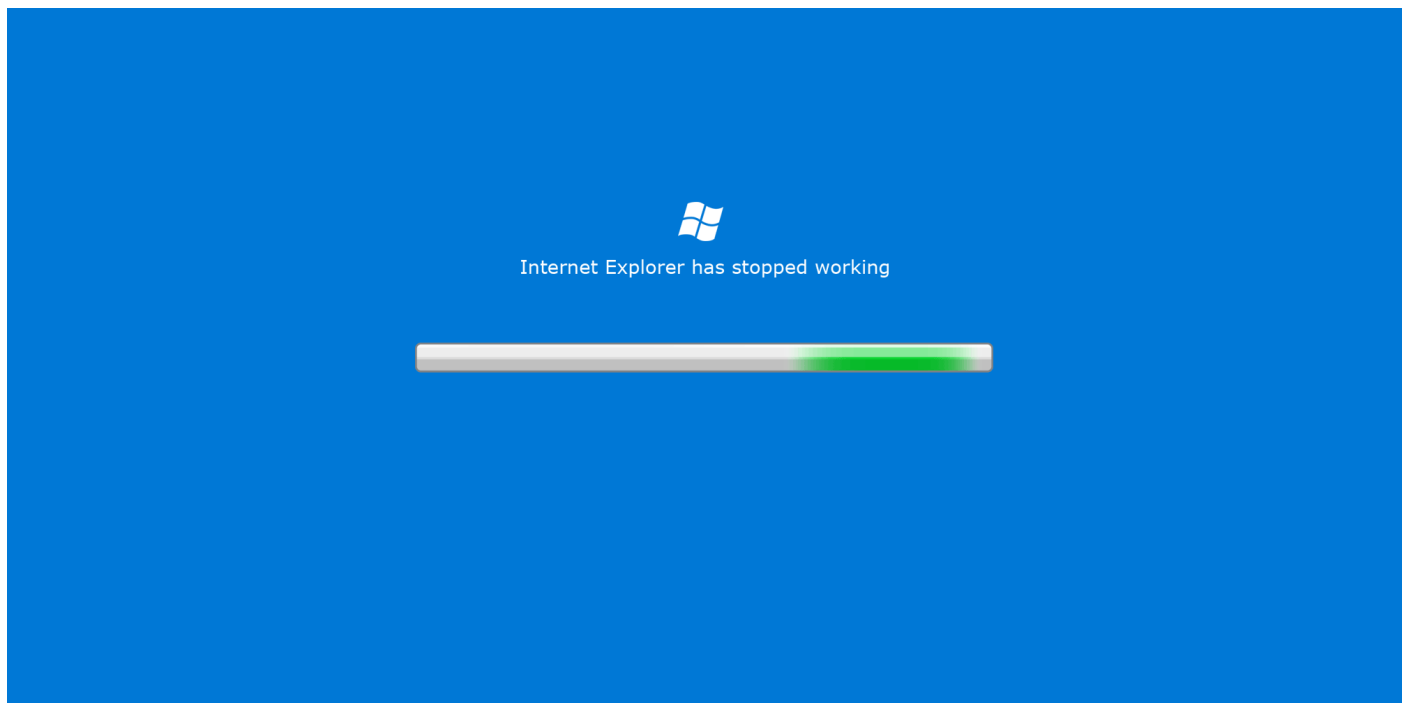




KLINT FINLEY BUSINESS 01.12.16 8:00 AM

THE SORRY LEGACY OF INTERNET EXPLORER



THEN ONE/WIRED

INTERNET EXPLORER SOON will be a thing of the past. Starting today, Microsoft will stop supporting Internet Explorer versions 7, 8, 9 and 10 on most operating systems, its biggest step yet toward phasing out one of the

most contentious pieces of software ever written.

Microsoft has been distancing itself from the Internet Explorer brand since March, when it launched the Microsoft Edge browser, but it isn't quite dead. Edge runs only on Windows 10, so Redmond will continue backing a few versions of Internet Explorer on older operating systems it still supports. But it's still a big departure. Historically, Microsoft has kept several versions of Internet Explorer current each supported version of Windows. Starting today, it will support only the latest version of IE that an operating system can run. It will not create new security patches for the older versions, leaving anyone who doesn't upgrade vulnerable to new hacks or attacks.

That could be a huge hassle for organizations that use custom-built applications that run correctly only on older browsers. But it could be a boon to web developers and designers still trying to find ways to make websites good on older browsers. Newer web browser still have their quirks, and sites might look different from one browser to the next. But these differences are small compared to how Internet Explorer mangled web pages in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

By insisting on following its own path with IE rather than follow generally accepted standards, Microsoft dictated web design by years. That probably drove many aspiring web developers careers that didn't require trying to figure out why the margins between images looked different from one browser to another. Keeping too many old browsers in circulation contributed to that mess. Thankfully, the time has come to move on.

The Bad Old Days

Because Internet Explorer didn't stick to the guidelines established by World Wide Web Consortium the organization that establishes standards for web technologies, it often would display web pages in ways that made

them look entirely different from other browsers, such as Netscape, Opera or, later, Firefox. Desperate designers cobbled together ways of making sites work across multiple browsers, but a complex layout sometimes required numerous workarounds. And Internet Explorer 6 was notorious for security vulnerabilities that Microsoft was sometimes slow to patch.

But if it was so bad, why was it so widely used? Most people blame Microsoft's practice of pre-installing Internet Explorer with Windows starting in 1997, which contributed to a lengthy antitrust suit. Since many users didn't know other browsers existed and PC vendors had bulk licensing agreements that prevented them from selling computers with alternates pre-installed, Microsoft effectively muscled out the competition.

But that's not the whole story. Microsoft still bundles Internet Explorer with Windows, yet by most measures it has fallen behind Google Chrome as the world's most widely used browser. That's in part because designers and developers have spent years encouraging users to download alternative browsers. But in the late 1990s, countless sites proudly displayed "best viewed on Internet Explorer" banners.

"People don't remember this, particularly web developers, but there was a time when Microsoft made the best web browser in the world," JavaScript expert and frequent Internet Explorer critic Douglas Crockford told InfoQ in 2010. "IE 6 was by far the best and continued to be the best browser in the world for many years after, but the other browser makers have all gotten ahead of them."

That's an exaggeration. Netscape 6 and Opera 5, both of which were excellent, arrived before Internet Explorer 6. But it's true that Internet Explorer was ahead of the curve for a few years. Netscape users had to wait three years between the release of Netscape Navigator 4 in 1997 and Netscape Navigator 6 in 2000 (the company ended up skipping Navigator 5 in order to completely rewrite the software). Meanwhile, though

Internet Explorer wasn't very standards compliant, it was quick to add new features in the late 1990s. Developers who wanted to take advantage of cutting edge design and interactivity features had little choice but to use Internet Explorer and encourage their users to do so as well.

But by the time Mozilla, an organization started by former Netscape employees, released the first version of Firefox in 2004, it was Internet Explorer's turn to seem hopelessly outdated.

Long Hard Road Out of Hell

When Internet Explorer 7 finally arrived in 2006, it was better than its predecessor, but still not standards compliant, so designers kept jumping through hoops to have pages render correctly. Not until Internet Explorer 8 landed in 2009 did Microsoft offer a browser that passed standards test Acid2, a widely used measure of how well browsers complied with the standards of the day, and the company lagged in adopting other standards, such as the 3D graphics technology WebGL. By the time Microsoft caught up to the rest of the browser market, the damage to Internet Explorer's reputation had already been done.

Do you know this guy? | Internet Explorer



But the biggest problem for Microsoft was that Internet Explorer 6 refused to die. Large organizations that spent vast sums building custom applications that worked only on older versions of Internet Explorer refused to upgrade. Many consumers didn't know any better, or ran pirated copies of Windows and couldn't download updates. As a result, Microsoft continued supporting Internet Explorer 6 until April 8, 2014, more than a decade after its release.

To keep that from happening again, Microsoft won't update anything older than Internet Explorer 9 on Windows Vista and Windows Server 2008, Internet Explorer 10 on Windows Server 2012, and Internet Explorer 11 on Windows 7, Windows 8, and those versions of Windows Server that can run it. The move likely will expose outdated browsers to more security risks. But in the long run it will drive adoption of newer, better browsers.

With most of the old versions of Internet Explorer dead and buried, Microsoft hopes it can finally move beyond the sorry legacy of its early versions. Edge is a fresh start, with a new name, a new code base and a new boss. Microsoft can't undo the the damage it did, but it can end the madness.

#INTERNET EXPLORER #MICROSOFT #WEB DESIGN

[VIEW COMMENTS](#)

SPONSORED STORIES



OPENSKY

The 8 Best Wearable Tech Products [Slideshow]



INSTANT CHECKMATE

Ever look yourself up? This new site is addicting. If you enter your name on this site, the results will surprise you.



NEXT CITY

Powerful Nature Benefits that Soothe the Soul



THE TCREON BLOG

Comparing ASP.NET And PHP In A Head To Head Matchup



MYFINANCE

Two Savings Accounts That Pay 10 Times What Your Bank Pays

POWERED BY OUTBRAIN

MORE BUSINESS



ANALYSIS

Snapchat's Missing Out on Millions Because It Sucks to Find Stuff on Its App

4 HOURS



ELECTION 2016

Tech Is Finally Disrupting the Archaic Iowa Caucuses

1 DAY



SPORTS

Inside the NFL's Quest to Build a Truly Global League

01.06.16



LEGAL

US Marshals Raid CES Booth Over One-Wheeled Hoverboard

01.08.16



MOVIES

How Star Wars Is Trying to Rule China's Tough Box Office

01.08.16

WE RECOMMEND



KLINT FINLEY

I Turned Off JavaScript in My Web Browser for a Whole Week and It Was Glorious



JORDAN CRUCCHIOLA

The New \$3B USS Zumwalt Is a Stealthy Oddity That May Already Be a Relic



ISSIE LAPOWSKY

Anonymous Launches #OpTrump to Teach the Donald a Lesson



ANDY GREENBERG

The Father of Online Anonymity Has a Plan to End the Crypto War



FAST COMPANY

The Anti-Aging Pill from an MIT scientist

POWERED BY OUTBRAIN

FOLLOW US ON YOUTUBE

Don't miss out on WIRED's latest videos.

FOLLOW

SUBSCRIBE

ADVERTISE

SITE MAP

PRESS CENTER

FAQ

CUSTOMER CARE

CONTACT US

NEWSLETTER

WIRED STAFF

JOBS

RSS

Use of this site constitutes acceptance of our [user agreement](#) (effective 3/21/12) and [privacy policy](#) (effective 3/21/12). [Affiliate link policy](#). [Your California privacy rights](#). The material on this site may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, cached or otherwise used, except with the prior written [permission of Condé Nast](#).