Is Web Browser "Discrimination" Okay?

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Is it acceptable to add "special," but unnecessary, content based on a user's web browser? For example, is it okay to display this:

******.com works better with modern browsers like Firefox.

at the top of my webpage for all IE users?

browser

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edited Feb 8, 2017 at 14:09

Community Bot
1 • 1

asked Dec 28, 2008 at 22:39

stalepretzel
15.9k • 23 • 78 • 92

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1   +1 Not sure why on downvote but this is a valid topic imho.
    – cletus Dec 28, 2008 at 22:46

@cletus, I don't think the question is programming related. I didn't -1 though. – strager Dec 29, 2008 at 0:15

I considered that, but I figured that many SO users deal with Web Development, and this is related to that, so I let 'er loose. – stalepretzel Dec 29, 2008 at 0:21

A note: make sure you don't say that "**.com works better with modern browsers like Firefox" to a user with a compliant browser! You may want to suggest Safari for Mac users, if that browser is supported. – strager Dec 29, 2008 at 0:27

2   Anybody who outright puts a disclaimer on their page starting with "Works best with..." is a jackarse. Considering that 85% of web users use IE, learn to support it, and Firefox.
– TravisO Dec 31, 2008 at 18:43

18 Answers

Sorted by: Highest score (default)   ⇕

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19

Acceptable to whom? I personally think it's a sign of a rather lame site -- it's up there with that little construction guy sign from 1998 (remember that one?).

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You sure can, if you want, but it's better to make your site as compliant as possible, and to use tools like YUI and jQuery to make your site more browser-agnostic.

✓

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answered Dec 28, 2008 at 22:42

Dave Markle
97.6k ● 20 ● 151 ● 171

I had the construction sign guy for so long on my geocities home page that he went into retirement. Now instead of a shovel he has a stick. – Stefano Borini Aug 17, 2009 at 21:14

11   Let me post a caveat: A large glowing throbbing hot pink sign that pops up and detects whether you are using IE6, and

then redirects to the IE8 download site is, IMO, perfectly acceptable. IE6 must die at all costs. – Dave Markle Dec 18, 2009 at 12:07

These are two different things. Almost every professional web application is somewhat aware of the users's browser, and accommodates them so the experience is pretty much the same. Displaying "works better" disclaimers is a kind of confession that you were not able to make your site work with most browsers.

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edited Dec 28, 2008 at 23:42

Jonathan Leffler
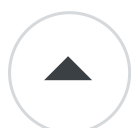**752k** ● 145 ● 946 ● 1.3k

answered Dec 28, 2008 at 22:42

Otávio Décio
74.2k ● 18 ● 165 ● 228

17

10

In terms of adding 'special content' for certain browsers I'd recommend using an approach known as progressive enhancement (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Progressive_Enhancement). The basic principle is that it's fine to build particular features for more modern web browsers as long as the core content is available to other users on older or less capable browsers.

Yahoo have coined a browser support philosophy know as Grade Browser Support

(http://developer.yahoo.com/yui/articles/gbs/) which is derived from the principles of progressive enhancement.

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It will certainly irritate visitors. And they probably won't understand what Firefox is and how to use it.

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> That's what I figure. On the other hand, it's not a professional site, mostly for my friends. I have included a link to the FF website, and I'll probably link to some snippet on my own site as well. – stalepretzel Dec 29, 2008 at 0:10

7

It depends on the type of "discrimination" and the reason for doing so.

Paypal blocks old browsers as a security measure. This, to me, is entirely valid--particularly when dealing with financial transactions.

At the other end of the spectrum I have visited sites with IE only to have a constant invasive popup saying "We

think you should upgrade to Firefox, it's a much better browser". No reason for it. Just snobbery. That site got closed real fast.

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answered Dec 28, 2008 at 22:45

cletus
625k ● 169 ● 917 ● 945

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4   But you really should give up on that lame browser you are using. :) – PEZ Dec 29, 2008 at 0:38

No. It's inappropriate, presumptive and arrogant. What especially ticks me off are websites that display a holier-than-thou ad for Firefox when I visit it with IE, extolling the wonders of the free software movement while vilifying anyone who dares to release proprietary software. It drives me nuts. I do not continue to visit such websites.

6

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answered Dec 29, 2008 at 0:03

Rob
26.3k ● 32 ● 113 ● 157

I understand where you're coming from. I would really like to encourage the browser, but I don't want to seem like a snob. Maybe what I'll do is to provide a "hide this alert" link to hide it for the rest of the session. – stalepretzel Dec 29, 2008 at 0:12

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1   There is no need to have an alert period. – Gene Roberts Dec 29, 2008 at 5:25

1 And I don't revisit web sites that don't work in Firefox and extol "thou shalt use MSIE". – Jonathan Leffler Dec 29, 2008 at 7:05

Niether do I, Johnathan - it bothers me both ways. – Rob Dec 29, 2008 at 19:54

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Suggesting your user to download an alternative browser is a bad idea, they are on your site to read about the subject of the site, not to get commanded to get an alternative browser. When they get bad experience with that browser, it will be the fault of your site suggesting that and you might lose those customers. (Also, each external link draws visitors from your site away)

As an example: I hate to see "Get a better browser! Download Firefox." messages, wether I be using IE8 Partner Build, Firefox 3.1 Beta 2 or another browser like Opera, Safari. Those browsers are all fine and there is no reason to switch between them. You end up irritating people, sending them away with the link to something they have totally no experience with.

Please note that there are computer-savy people out their, that will have completely no benefit by downloading Firefox/Linux/... ;-)

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answered Dec 29, 2008 at 0:25

Tamara Wijsman
12.3k 🟡 8 ⚪ 55 🟤 82

That depends on what the site is, and who the target audience is.

If it's for a business then I'd definitely say no, that looks amateurish. It's also pretty poor for a professional site not to function properly regardless of the capabilities of the user's browser, particularly when some of those users might be using screen readers to help visually-impaired users.

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answered Dec 28, 2008 at 22:43

Alnitak
339k ● 71 ● 418 ● 502

It depends what your site is designed for and why you are doing the targetting of certain browsers.

If you're building something like an internal web application then it's likely that users will have a restricted browser anyway so designing for a particular browser isn't a real problem.

But if you're doing a public website it's not a good idea. FireFox still doesn't have a large enough market share to be the *targeted* browser.

It's not realistic that your site is 100% perfect in every browser, but targetting the big ones should always be done:

- IE6+

- Firefox 2+

- Safari 3

Any good JavaScript library should work (or at least degrade nicely) over the three major browsers.

As an Opera user I find there is nothing more annoying that going to a website and finding it fails completely and I have to bring out another one. Generally I wont and that site looses my traffic.

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answered Dec 28, 2008 at 22:46

Aaron Powell
25.1k ● 18 ● 101 ● 150

I'm an Opera user myself, and I have come across some sites (e.g. Amazon) which hate me. Gmail used to be "unsupported" (but (almost) fully working) in Opera, but luckily back then I had the option to view the "advanced" version anyway (with cookies, yay!). – strager Dec 29, 2008 at 0:19

Discriminating against the major browsers is unnecessary and completely unacceptable. I'm not even sure how this is a question, unless you *want* to annoy users. People may visit your site that do not use your choice browser. This is something you will have to live with. Unless you're website is The Greatest Website in the World(tm) people will not change browsers to accommodate you.

2

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answered Dec 29, 2008 at 5:29

Gene Roberts
2,232 ● 4 ● 18 ● 16

It's not necessarily wrong. But things like that are an artifact of an older world, where browsers were day and night between each other.

1

There is no excuse to not strive for perfect compliance with IE6 and above.

If you want a message like that, be kind in your word. Introduce the user to Firefox instead of telling him that his method of browsing is inferior.

answered Dec 28, 2008 at 22:45

Ólafur Waage
69.9k ● 22 ● 145 ● 199

> There is no excuse to not strive for perfect compliance with (X)HTML and CSS standards. =] – strager Dec 29, 2008 at 0:25

While I'm an avid user of Firefox (or Chrome) and sympathize with the underlying sentiment, I think you should be careful about how you describe the problem. The 'modern browser' term is loaded. I would consider using a phrase such as

1

> Some features of this web site are not available because of the web browser you are using. Click here for more information.
>
> Some features of this web site do not work with your web browser. Click here for more information.

It is crucial to give them somewhere to go to get more information. That page can give them information about where to download alternative browsers, and so on. It is important not to be derogatory about their browser. Many people are not allowed to change their browser. (I'm lucky: I don't have to run MSIE more than once, maybe twice, in a month. The rest of the time, I use Firefox - or Chrome at SO.)

Ideally, the web site works the same for everyone. If there are bits that simply cannot be made to work for archaic versions of MSIE or Netscape Navigator or whatever it is, then go with a carefully neutral wording and a source of explanation.

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First of all, user discrimination should be handled VERY carefully. You may prefer Firefox/Opera/Safari because it's safer, technologically superior or whatever, but you may lose several users that way(remember Firefox has only recently reached 20% of usage share).

But assuming you are aware of this, it depends on the kind of user discrimination you're considering. "**.com works better with modern browsers like Firefox" should be just fine(but provide a download link for Firefox), if the page worked for Internet Explorer users anyway.

Also, you may want to consider restricting users to the latest versions. Since you don't want to support IE, you could add support only for IE7, and then have support only for IE8 once it's released, forcing users to either update their browser version or switch to Firefox. This may also be the less dangerous model for Internet Explorer discrimination.

It all comes to this:

1. How many users would be discriminated?

2. Would that discrimination prevent them from using your service?

Try to discriminate as few users as possible, and try to provide an alternative service for those users, so they'd use your site anyway. After all, YOU want users to use your site, right? In that case, web browser discrimination is as acceptable as the loss of users it'd cause. If no

users are lost, that's fine. If not, just see if the number is big enough to harm you.

edited Dec 29, 2008 at 0:23

strager
89.9k ● 27 ● 138 ● 179

answered Dec 28, 2008 at 23:14

{ } luiscubal
25.1k ● 9 ● 59 ● 84

Forcing upgrades is the WORSE idea, in my opinion. Allow them to retrieve the content regardless of their browser, but operate as best as possible with any browser (version). When I use Firefox, I still use Firefox 2. Are you saying I *have* to upgrade just for *your* site? *Back button.* – strager Dec 29, 2008 at 0:22

Would you prefer not being able to use Firefox at all? Also, it's easier to develop sites by dropping compatibility for Internet Explorer 6 while keeping Internet Explorer 7 compatibility. – luiscubal Dec 29, 2008 at 0:42

imho - yes, but be careful how you word it, say so only when it's true, and do your best to make sure it *isn't* true first i.e. your site should be x-browser safe

And you probably can't say choose to do this on anything professionally written.

0

answered Dec 28, 2008 at 22:43

annakata
75.7k ● 18 ● 115 ● 180

Of course it is. It is your web site. If people don't like it they won't come back.

You may want them to come back or use your site properly so you might want to think about how to support that.

answered Dec 29, 2008 at 5:19

Brody
2,074 ● 1 ● 18 ● 23

I think that anyone who's going to get Firefox has already. Sadly, due to so many factory-made computers running Windows, with IE renamed to "Internet", many people who aren't running Firefox, Chrome, Safari (or any other modern browsers I've neglected to mention) don't understand what a browser *is*. Therefore putting "runs better in firefox" is going to tick them off, as they don't know what Firefox is. I think the open source movement has become a bit religious, preaching about different browsers and the like.

answered Aug 17, 2009 at 21:07

tom
507 ● 1 ● 7 ● 16

Browser discrimination, IMO is bonkers, appropriate handling of the browser **version**, esp. if the user is on a really old version of their browser, might be useful / constructive.

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answered Mar 3, 2013 at 16:54

DM   **lazarus**
383 ● 2 ● 11

I'm looking at discrimination in another way. I have an online banking account, and they've recently discriminated against me, on ANY browser, by checking my IP-address, and if it isn't the same as the last time, they claim they don't "recognize my computer" and force me through a complex scheme to get an Identification Code to enter in order to proceed. I have Dynamic IP-address assignment, which changes daily. This bank could check the first two bytes of the IP-address to see that it's always the same "signature" defining my ISP. But NO, they check the entire IP-address, so I'm being "discriminated" against BECAUSE I use DHCP with Dynamic IP-addresses. To me, this is another form of discrimination.

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answered Jan 15, 2015 at 15:53

Dick Guertin
769 ● 8 ● 9