



The magic of `createObjectURL()`



ESPEN HOVLANDSDAL

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The web platform is maturing faster and faster, and we're seeing the work normally done by native desktop applications now often shifting towards web-based applications instead. Features that may appear to have little importance can be really powerful when combined together.

A good example of this is `URL.createObjectURL()`. On it's own, it really doesn't do much. Paired with the HTML5 video and audio element, or even the good old image element, it gets to be really powerful.

`URL.createObjectURL()` is part of the [URL-interface](#), which can be used to construct and parse URLs. `URL.createObjectURL()` specifically, can be used to create a reference to a `File` or a `Blob`. As opposed to a base64-encoded data URL, it doesn't contain the actual data of the object – instead it holds a reference.

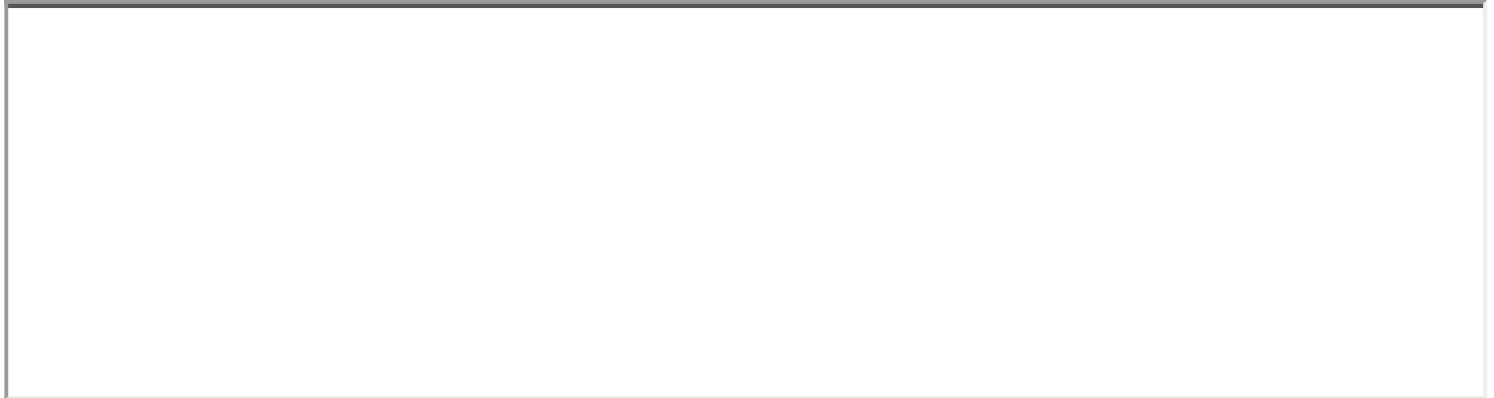
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```
3 var preview = document.getElementById( 'preview' );  
4  
5 fileInput.addEventListener('change', function(e) {  
6     var url = URL.createObjectURL(e.target.files[0]);  
7     preview.setAttribute('src', url);  
8 });  
9 [/code]
```

Simple, right? This produces something like the following:



The nice thing about this is that it's really fast. Previously, we've had to instantiate a **FileReader** instance and read the whole file as a base64 data URL, which takes time and a lot of memory. With **createObjectURL()**, the result is available straight away, allowing us to do things like reading image data to a canvas or the length of an audio file. Great, right?

One thing to keep in mind is that once you're done with the generated object URL, you should revoke it. This frees up memory, which is usually handled automatically when you close the page or navigate away from it, but it's generally a good idea anyway. Revoking the URL is a simple process – just call **URL.revokeObjectURL(<objectUrl>)** from the **onLoad**-handler of the element you are using it for.

Read more about createObjectUrl on the [Mozilla Developer Network](#).



TORHEL BJØRNSON-LANGEN

February 19, 2015 at 2:50 am

Sweet! Thank you for the tip – I will probably use this my self.

Just one note: If the input[type=file] allows multiple selections then this code will only preview the first. Is it possible to rewrite the querySelector() query to omit elements with the 'multiple' attribute?

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