

Harness the Full Power of Internet Explorer

Internet Explorer

IE is Microsoft's integrated Web browser for surfing the Internet, viewing Web sites, and running custom Web-server-based applications. Improper usage of a Web browser can leave a computer open to attack by hackers, expose personal and company information, and cause system errors and slowdowns. Here are some tips to getting the most out of Internet Explorer.

✚ What's Internet Explorer?

- Microsoft integrates Internet Explorer with all versions of Windows to allow users to surf the Web and run Web-based applications. Microsoft purchased rights to Spyglass Mosaic in the early 1990s and used it as the basis for Internet Explorer. Mosaic was one of the first Web browsers available for the Internet. Microsoft made modifications to Internet Explorer through the years and integrated it first into Windows 95. Subsequent versions of Windows also included Internet Explorer, right up to Windows XP.
- The most current version of Internet Explorer is version 6.0 Service Pack 1. This version runs on all versions of Windows, including Windows 98. Windows XP Service Pack 2 included an updated version of Internet Explorer that includes a pop-up blocker and other features. This version of IE will not run on any other version of Windows.

✚ What Internet Explorer Does

- At the most basic level, Internet Explorer allows you to view Web pages on the Internet. Additionally, you can use IE to run custom Web applications. These applications reside on a Web server, and IE, using custom ActiveX controls, acts as an operating environment. Microsoft uses Internet Explorer's capabilities in Outlook Web Access to create a remote client almost as powerful as the full Outlook program. Additionally, you can remotely run Terminal Services and Remote Access sessions inside of IE.
- You can use IE to view content on your hard drive by simply entering a drive letter in the Address bar. Windows will change IE's look and feel to make it easy to cut, copy, and paste files and do most anything on your computer. You can even launch regular Windows programs such as Word or Excel.

✚ IE Market Share

- Internet Explorer holds an almost 89% share of the market for Web browsers.
- IE's nearest competitor is Firefox, with 6.75%.
- Because it's the most popular, it's also a very large target for hackers. IE is constantly under attack by people wanting to make a name for themselves. As such, new exploits and holes are constantly being discovered, leading to the impression that IE isn't a good Web browser.

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- Web Side Story keeps track of browser market share. You can see IE's current ranking at <http://www.websidestory.com/products/web-analytics/datainsights/spotlight/05-10-2005.html>

✚ What about Firefox?

- Firefox has recently gotten a lot of attention due to perceived problems with Internet Explorer. Firefox is maintained by a non-profit organization in an open-source environment like Linux. Programmers volunteer their time to the project, deriving no direct income from the software.
- Firefox was based on code from the old Netscape browser, the most popular browser in the early 90s when the Internet boom first began. AOL had purchased Netscape and released the source code to the public after Netscape's market share disappeared in the face of Internet Explorer.
- Unlike IE, Firefox runs on operating systems other than Windows, including Mac OS, Linux, and even OS/2.
- Since being released in late 2004, Firefox claims to have been downloaded over 50 million times. Its popularity stemmed from features lacking in IE along with a perceived security problem with IE. In early 2005, as Firefox gained popularity, it also became a target. Within two months, Mozilla.org was forced to release four updates to Firefox to patch security problems that were discovered.

✚ Basic Navigation

- Microsoft designed IE to be very easy to use. Across the top, you'll find a toolbar with commonly used commands. The icons are reasonably intuitive, but if you don't know what something does, you can just hold the mouse over it for a second, and IE will pop up a quick box to describe it. You can turn off the pictures and only have text labeling for the navigation buttons. You can also add captions to the buttons.
- To make changes, click View | Toolbars | Customize. When the Customize window appears, make your selection in the Text Options drop-down list box. You can also change icon size in the Icon Options drop-down list box.

✚ Special Key Combinations

- You don't have to always use the mouse to get around inside of IE. You can save a lot of time by using simple keyboard combinations. Common keyboard commands include:
 - [Alt][P]—Print
 - [Backspace]—Previous Page
 - [Ctrl][A]—Select all items on the current Web page
 - [Ctrl][C]—Copy the selected items to the Clipboard
 - [Ctrl][D]—Add Web page to Favorites

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- [Ctrl][E]—Open the Search bar
- [Ctrl][F] Find an item on the page
- [Ctrl][H]—Open the History bar
- [Ctrl][I]—Open the Favorites bar
- [Ctrl][N]—Open new browser window
- [Ctrl][P]—Print the current page or active frame
- [Ctrl][S]—Save the current page
- [Ctrl][V]—Insert the contents of the Clipboard at the selected location
- [Ctrl][W]—Close the current window
- [Ctrl][X]—Remove the selected items and copy them to the Clipboard
- [Esc]—Stop loading page
- [F1]—Help
- [F11]—Make browser full screen
- [F4]—Display list of typed addresses
- [F5]—Reload a page
- [Shift][Tab]—Move back through the items on a Web page

IE Favorites

- You can store frequently visited sites in Favorites. This will prevent you from retyping addresses over and over. Other browsers refer to Favorites as Bookmarks, but the feature is essentially the same.
- You can view your favorites by clicking the Favorites or Star icon in the toolbar. This will display a pane in the left part of your browser with all of your favorites located there. You can also view them by selecting the Favorites menu option. This will display a drop-down menu with your favorites. The menu disappears when you select a site whereas the left pane does not.

Working with Favorites

- You can add a favorite two ways. First, just press [Ctrl][D]. This will place the favorite at the bottom of your Favorites list automatically.
- You can also click Favorites | Add To Favorites. If you click OK, it will appear at the bottom of your list. You can place a favorite in a folder by clicking the Create In button. You'll see a list of folders appear. Select a folder and click OK.
- Folders are a good way of keeping your Favorites list organized and helping you rapidly find sites you want to visit.

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Organizing Favorites

- You can organize folders two ways. Either press [Ctrl][B] to organize Favorites or use the Organize Favorites option from the Favorites menu. When the Organize Favorites window appears, click the Create Folder to make a folder to put the Web site into. Create folder names that are logical and easy to understand. Scroll the list box to find folders and previously marked favorites.
- To move a favorite to a folder, drag and drop it in the list box. You can also select a favorite and then click the Move To Folder button.
- The Organize Folder screen also allows you to rename and delete folders.

Printing Web Pages

- IE allows you to print Web pages to view offline.
- To do so, click File | Print.
- Unfortunately, often Web pages printed on paper don't look like they do onsite. Web pages will frequently exceed pages margins, causing information to be cut off. Many Web sites have a Printer Friendly link that displays content in a separate window that's properly formatted for printing. If you want to print information from the Web, use this link if it's offered.
- If there is no Printer Friendly link, you can sometimes print information directly from a pane in a Web site with frames and get it to appear properly.
- Orienting a page to Landscape may also help to make wide Web sites print on one page.

Dealing with Pop-ups

- Pop-ups are separate Web pages that some Web sites use to make advertisements appear on your screen when you visit the site. Sometimes the ads show up on top of what you're doing. Other times, they appear underneath your browser so you see the ad when you close the browser. You can stop most pop-ups by using a pop-up blocker. These can stop about 90% of most pop-ups. Marketers are coming up with new ways to display ads that may bypass blockers.
- With Service Pack 2 for Windows XP, Microsoft included a pop-up blocker as part of IE. You can enable it by selecting Tools | Pop-up Blocker. You can block all pop-ups from appearing or allow pop-ups from certain Web sites that may require them.

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- Earlier versions of IE don't include any pop-up blockers at all. You can block pop-ups only by adding a third-party blocker. One of the most popular comes with the Google toolbar.
- Usually pop-ups are generated on a Web page, but often spyware programs will generate their own pop-ups. Pop-up blockers won't stop most spyware-generated pop-ups.

IE Extensions and Add-ons

- Many manufacturers add to IE's usefulness by creating add-on products for it. These add-ons can do just about anything, from blocking pop-ups to RSS readers to controlling access to restricted Web sites. Most add-ons are free, but many require you to pay for them.
- To get a list of most popular add-ons, you can visit Microsoft's Web site (<http://www.microsoft.com/windows/ie/downloads/addon/default.mspx>).
- Google's search bar is among the most popular. It allows you to do Web searches without ever going to Google's site. Just type in the search term in the Search field. It will also block most pop-ups.
- You can manage add-ons in Internet Explorer by clicking Tools | Manage Add-ons. When the Manage Add-ons window appears, you can disable any add-ons that seem to be acting funny. You can't remove an add-on here, but you can turn it off by selecting the add-on and then clicking Disable.
- Third-party add-ons include:
 - Google Toolbar
 - Yahoo! Companion
 - FeedDemon
 - NetNanny

Internet Explorer Security Settings

- IE may have a reputation for being insecure, but you can modify security settings by clicking Tools | Internet Options | Security. On this page, you have a lot of control over what Internet Explorer can do and what it can't. You can restrict it from visiting sites, block cookies, and other things.
- The various zones listed quickly allow you to change security settings. For most things, the Internet option should be OK. If you want to view only internal resources, select Local Intranet.
- By selecting Custom Level, you can adjust default levels for each zone. Therefore if you want to allow a certain zone to run ActiveX, you can select Custom Level and then scroll through the Settings box until you find ActiveX. Then enable it.

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Controlling Privacy Options

- IE maintains a list of recently visited Web sites and content. This allows you to quickly revisit a site, but it can also cause problems. Cookies can reveal personal information. History files and caches can also expose ID and password information as well as reveal sites visited you might not want revealed.
- To clear information, select Tools | Internet Options | General. To clear cookies, click Delete Cookies. Remove cache files by clicking Delete Files. You can also clear the list of recently visited sites, by clicking Clear History. You can lengthen or shorten the amount of days IE remembers the sites you've visited by clicking the Days To Keep spin box.
- The XP SP2 version of IE also allows you to control how the browser accepts cookies. Usually, IE will either accept or reject all cookies. Click Tools | Internet Options | Privacy. On this screen, you can customize cookies' acceptance by site, allowing cookies from certain sites while completely ignoring them from others.

Controlling IE's Cache

- Internet Explorer keeps a copy of Web sites in its cache, including text and graphics. When you revisit a Web site, IE will first check its cache to see if there's a copy of the site currently there. If so, rather than pulling information over a slow Web connection, it will load it locally from your PC.
- If you have a high-speed connection, IE's cache is relatively useless. It's better just to pull directly from the Internet.
- Cached files are usually very small but can quickly consume a lot of space on your workstation's hard drive. If the cache is set too large, you can waste space. Space can also be wasted due to the small size of the files and the way Windows stores files on a hard drive. Small files can create "slack space," where a one-byte file can take up to 1,000 bytes of space—wasting 999 bytes. Too many small files can also slow down Windows because of fragmentation and memory caching issues.
- You can reduce cache size using Tools | Internet Options | Temporary Internet Files | Settings | Amount Of Disk Space. Here you can choose how IE will cache files. You can also change the amount of space Windows will take for its cache size. Adjust accordingly.

Understanding ActiveX

- Internet Explorer can run programs by the use of ActiveX controls. These are small programs that run inside of your browser. Non-IE browsers can't run ActiveX controls.
- Most ActiveX programs are legitimate, but some rogue Web sites can use Active X to hijack IE. They can install in your browser and cause pop-ups to occur or send browsing information, including user IDs and passwords, back to a central server.

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- IE will normally warn you before installing an ActiveX control unless your security settings are set too low. If you get a warning about an ActiveX control wanting to install, contact IT. Don't automatically install Active X controls. Sometimes spyware can lower IE's security settings behind your back, allowing ActiveX controls to automatically install from a Web site. If your computer starts acting funny, contact IT.

Avoiding Online Tricks

- When surfing the Web, be careful. Unscrupulous Web sites might try to trick you into installing programs on your computer or revealing personal information. Watch out for pop-up windows that claim you have spyware or viruses on your computer and tell you to install software. These are usually companies trying to trick you into installing spyware. Often the errors will look like legitimate Windows programs. Close the error Window immediately, or contact IT if you're not sure whether it's legitimate.
- Don't install ActiveX controls unless IT tells you to. Often rogue controls use names similar to real ones, such as Microsoft or something like that. Dialog boxes may use double negatives or contrary instructions such as "To not install this program, click Yes." Ordinarily you'd click No to not install a program. By clicking No in this case, you'd INSTALL the rogue program.
- Also, often the OK or Yes buttons are on the left and Cancel or No buttons on the right. Sometimes programmers will reverse the button locations, so if you click out of habit without closely reading the button, the program will install.
- Finally, you may get stuck on a Web site. The site will prompt you to install a program. When you close the installation box, it will instantly reappear, preventing you from closing the Web browser and leaving the site. In Windows XP, press [Ctrl][Alt][Del] and bring up Task Manager. You should then kill the Internet Explorer application. This will usually break the cycle.

Viewing HTML Source Code

- In addition to viewing Web content, you can also view the HTML code beneath a Web site.
- To do so, click View | Source. The code will load in Notepad.
- This can be useful to learn HTML or debug problems with a Web site.
- You can make changes to the code and save it locally, but there's no way to upload that code back to the Web site unless you have rights to do so. The debugging is only useful to see what's potentially going wrong.
- Viewing the source code is also a good way to learn how different Web designers set up sites and the tricks they use to make certain effects occur.

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Future Versions of Internet Explorer

- Microsoft first shipped Internet Explorer at version 2.0 with Windows 95B. With every subsequent version of Windows, it has released a new version, often allowing that version to be installable on older operating systems.
- Microsoft is trying to avoid releasing IE as a separate program and is planning on only releasing new versions with new operating systems.
- IE 7.0 was planned to be a part of Longhorn, the next version of Windows. After many complaints from users and with pressure from Firefox, Microsoft announced that IE 7.0 will be available for Windows XP SP2 users. Users of older versions of Windows are out of luck. IE 7.0 will feature new security features as well as some features currently in existence in Firefox. IE 7.0 will also more closely support certain Web standards.

Top Ten Tips When Using Internet Explorer

- Organize frequently visited Web sites into folders under Favorites.
- Use IE's pop-up blocker or a third-party blocker, such as the one in Google's Toolbar.
- Be careful about accepting cookies.
- Check with IT before running ActiveX Controls.
- Check with IT when error messages or warning windows pop up.
- Don't install software from Web sites without IT's approval.
- Keep Internet Explorer up to date with all security updates.
- For best printing results, print from a Web site's Printer Friendly version.
- Clear history, cache, and cookies regularly to protect personal information.
- Reduce the size of IE's cache to optimize hard drive usage.