

Browsers

SEEING INTO THE FUTURE

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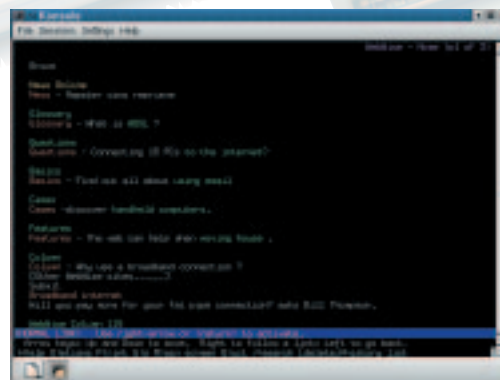
Browser development is moving on a great speed, with something new coming out weekly. The choices here were made to show the type of range that is available, that there is more than the default browser on your desktop. To give you the chance to experiment.

The World Wide Web is all around us and you can't underestimate the value of using the right tool for the job you have. In a world where information is sovereign, getting to that information is vital.

More and more of how we see the world develop will be through web browsers, how we see ourselves managing our lives, paying our bills or buying our food will all be reflected in our choice of browser. It is not just down to the functional aspects of browsers, its almost more political, certainly has more to do with esthetics, and of the opinions of those who have developed your chosen browser.

Lynx

For the purely minimal. When speed and size are an issue to you, just remember that all the glitz has to go. Maybe everyone, once in a while should fire up a text only web browser, just to soak up the nostalgia. The important key bindings will soon be picked up as will the appreciation for getting more information out of the text, and being more likely to read it looking for links.



Remember what
life was like
before colour



Netscape slipped on a banana.

Netscape

So how does Netscape, once considered a saviour for providing an alternative graphical web browser, shape up these day in face of the competition.

Version 6 didn't quite hold the promise that we were all expecting of it, it wasn't as robust as it should have been, and the advance in bloatware and extra commercial baggage must have put many off. I know I stayed with 4.7.

The standard layout is much more modern looking, all very corporate, and when you look deeper you can see it's created around commercial design factors. Most obvious to this is the Activation screen, which can take an age to complete, leaving you in the lurch while you've got urgent things to research, and for what? Is Netscape still a browser or is it now just a front end to a Web portal with pop-up advertising. Instead, what would it have been like had they invested all that time and money into innovation, developing ideas like the full and proper use of the sidebar space to greatly assist with web searches – using a wide range of search

Beonex

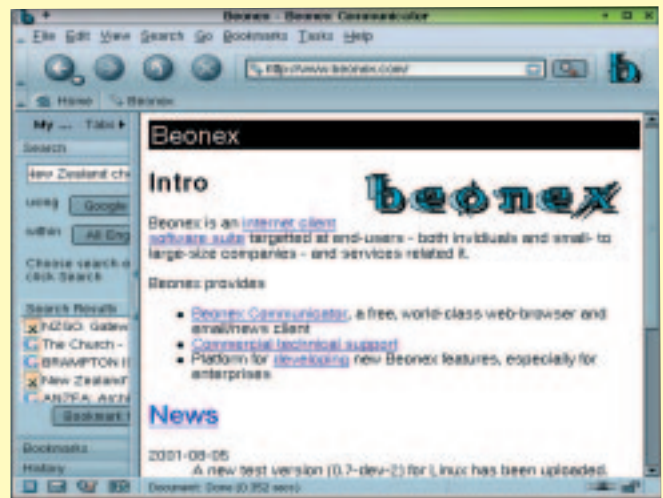
Beonex is very definitely a work still in progress but it is already in a useable form. The project calls to anyone willing to get involved with its continued development, this is not a bad thing. The browser and the web site have an enthusiastic air to them, all caught up with the freedom that open source code development allows. It is based very heavily on Mozilla and calls on the Gecko layout engine for rendering.

The install procedure is unusual but did work first time on a Mandrake 8 system with no complaints about dependencies. Beonex is only supplied as a tarball which, it must be said, doesn't contain a README file, which left me searching their website for clues. It's suspiciously easy to install, which is what caught me out, basically unpacking the the tarball and calling the script Beonex-comm. Two version available, for Intel Pentium 2/3/4 or AMD Athlon/Duron or for Intel Pentium or AMD K6.

It is fast and has all the features you would expect from a browser plus some . It uses the same Modern Chrome theme of Mozilla, so regular users will feel straight at home. Apart from the browser Communicator, Beonex also come complete with a Mail/News client, a HTML editor similar to Netscape Composer, and an integrated IRC client, not the proprietary AIM instant messenger, which is shunned by the developers.

One of the most outstanding features is the Beonex Search. Utilising the Side Bar, this feature will call upon all of the selected search engines and post your query to them, the responses are

grouped together and laid out in one list. The search tool needs to have some idea in advance of the layout of the search engine, so that it can separate all the useful replies from all the other chaff, but Beonex already has support for all the major search engines so this should not be a problem. The advantage with this is that you don't have to keep returning to the search engine page to select the next link, which speeds the process up considerably. This is definitely one to keep an eye on.



Beonex with their unique search feature in the side bar.

engines – as Beonex have.

It does function well as a browser, with all the tools you would expect, but with a lot of bulk as well, with the inclusion of extra, non browser related features like WebMail and instant messenger utilities . Yes, and you can even waste space by getting themes to take your mind of it all, the example shown here is Toy Factory.

6.1 does seem to be much more solid, but it still has the same failing, it's size. It is a very profession product, very slick, but then that's no more than we really should expect. It was a while in coming, which is the problem, I suspect Netscape have lost much of the ground to Mozilla, and what ground is left will slip even quicker to all the other open source browser developments, like Beonex or Galeon. Those that have some need to pay to use the software then there now is Opera.

Star Office.

Well, yes, Star Office does have a web browser built in, so it is only right that it does get a mention. Star Office might very well be sitting on peoples desktop, if not taking over the desktop completely, so, for some very basic browsing it will do what's necessary.

The Web browser in Star Office is there, I'm sure, just to facilitate the HTML editor, so you should not expect anything in the way of features. There are no Bookmark facility, though there is nothing to stop you developing a StarOffice database of bookmarks, seeing as you have some excellent



Two Star office windows open open the same desktop.

database software sitting in the same package.

Star Office opens up its own desktop and all of its windows must fall on that desktop. There is an advantage here, if you do have the need for multiple browsers to be opened, as in the example here, then having them all fall onto the same desktop can be a neat option.

Star Office ships with it own Java runtimes and it has proved to be much more reliable than other browsers when Java support is called for. As shown in the screenshot, the supermarket web page called on some Java, which, unfortunately, would always leave Netscape 4.77 thrashing about, but here the Star Office browser has no problem.

Even though the Star Office browser is light on browsing features, it still has its place, if you are a regular Star Office user. The lack of usual browsing tool make it less comfortable to use and would soon be intolerable after a while, but if you happen

Amaya, the future

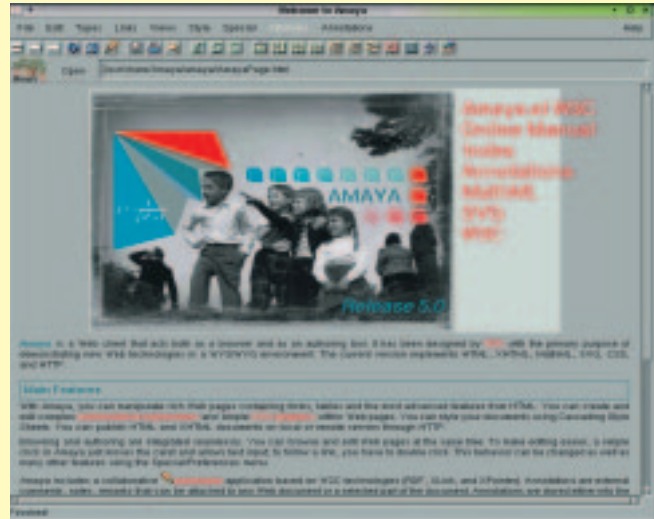
The W3C, the World Wide Web Consortium have the important task of shaping and developing the way we use the internet today and tomorrow, they decide on the standards that next years browsers will have to adopt. Amaya is next years browser. Amaya is the test tool used by W3C to test the very latest standards and to try out features so new to the internet that the acronyms used to describe them have yet to be pulled from the Scrabble bag.

Amaya comes in both RPM and tarball form and doesn't require very much in the way of extra libraries if you are using a fairly recent system. For your effort you get a very simple web authoring tool and web browser. It's fast enough, but it does lack many of the bells and whistles that most people have become attached to for their daily browsing, you won't even find a Bookmark feature, and its user interface is basic, so you won't be chucking out Mozilla or whatever just yet. But you do get the chance to play with some of the very latest developments in the World Wide Web. There is lots of detailed help and information pages included, as well as information on the older functions and usage, should you need to be reminded of how to use them effectively.

These exciting new developments range from the latest in XHTML and the use of HTTP/1.1 with its advantages of built in security and pipelining to save that precious resource of bandwidth. Then there is methyl and Scalable Vector Graphics protocols coming to assist in the presentation of technical subjects but treated with the ease of plain text. I look forward to the release of the annotation protocols,

a system where you can highlight text on a remote web page, anyone's page, and pass comments on what you have selected, all transparently.

So, Amaya isn't so much a Web Browser, it's much more a browser into what the Web will be. Great fun for tinkerers and web designers who want to be on the bleeding edge of developments. You will find Amaya at <http://www.w3.org/Amaya/>



The future of browsers

to have Star Office running then it is still a valuable option to choose from. And should you find that one site that causes your favourite browser to fail you, Star Office may be able to help.

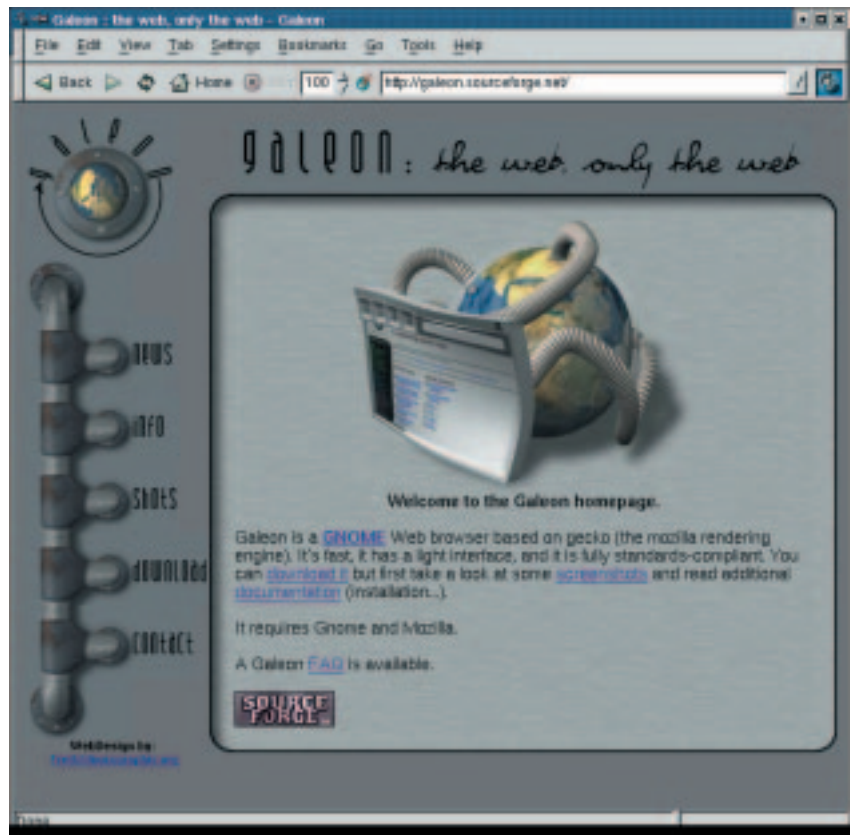
Galeon

Galeon is ideally run as a Gnome application, so you will need the GTK+ libraries, probably the latest, and access to the Gecko rendering engine as used by Mozilla 0.9.1.

They admit in their README that this is very much a work in progress. As part of its install, Galeon looks to import previous saved Netscape and Mozilla bookmarks and will even try and load a Netscape preference file. This could save you a lot of time and effort. It also sets up Smart bookmarks for easy web searching, offering you some preset choices ranging from the obvious, like Google, to the less than obvious like RPMfind and Debian Package. The next option is hauntingly familiar to a Windows feature of automatically setting Galeon up as your default Web Browser for use with other Gnome applications, but now you get to select if Galeon will also look after services like ftp downloads and local file browsing.

The Galeon developers say "A web browser is more than an application, it is a way of thinking", and their thoughts are that a browser should follow principles of simplicity and standards compliance.

Galeon's user interface is reminiscent of Netscape 4.7, less cluttered and crowded than that of Mozilla. Galeon uses a simple browser interface,



Galeons' browser battle banner - "The web, only the web."

balancing what is a sensible minimum amount of functionality, sensible Bookmark options and alike, against unnecessary features and bloat. Galeon addresses this call for simplicity with a small browser designed for the web, with functions like

mail, newsgroups, file management and instant messaging deliberately not included. The Galeon web site confirms their philosophy of a modular based system and their desire to implement external applications. Integration will be achieved with CORBA, Bonobo, and the ever popular command line.

Standards compliance is in the forefront of the developers minds, so you can rely on the browser working as the W3C says it should.

Opera 5 for Linux.

Opera is another cross platform browser, along with Netscape 6, but it makes an extra effort in helping those who prefer an alternative OS. Their Web page proudly boasts support for BeOS, Linux, Mac, OS/2, QNX, Symbian OS and last, probably least, Windows. It has a comprehensive hypertext help document, installed locally, which means you can get answers to your Opera query connected or not. Opera sits very comfortably on a KDE desktop, calling on similar widget sets to those supplied by the Qt GUI toolkit libraries. Opera has a multi panelled display similar to many other modern browsers, allowing you a configurable menu of shortcuts.

The Opera developers obviously have a good understanding of the needs of a Linux user, so, even if your not a natural KDE user, you don't need to worry about installing extra libraries, Opera provide versions with statically compiled libraries as well as dynamically compiled. Available as a TAR ball or as a DEB or RPM package – at 2.73MB, the largest package – they seem to have all bases covered.

Opera is a commercial product, so the source code is locked and there is some cost to you using it, but not necessarily monetary. Opera ships with a Banner advert section, so some of your browser

screen is given over to the display of adverts. On hearing about this, I was certain I would find would find the adverts intrusive, but on use it didn't bother me at all. If it bothers you, then there is still the option of paying up to US\$39 online, obtaining a registration code and doing away with the banner ads, which would also give you a larger area to view web pages in. The area that these adverts take up is fixed, so the proportion of browser used up depends very much on what screen resolution you are running at. The screen shots were taken on a display set to 1280x1024. Unless you are viewing on a desktop of 800x600 or less then I doubt you would loose too much screen estate. And if you are it doesn't really matter because you will discover that hitting F11 puts you into full screen display mode, so Opera takes over your entire screen, no buttons, no bars, no advert, just web page. This is further aided by Opera's positive encouragement to use keyboard shortcuts, which all browsers have to some degree, but here it has been taken to heart.

Opera has a spoofing feature so you can redefine the 'user agent' perimeter so some web pages servers can be fooled into thinking they are talking to a different breed of browser, most likely MS Internet Explorer. This will then allow you access some sites that have explicitly requirement for viewing access.

You also have so much to configure in Opera, if you want to. You can define which email client will start up when you hit that 'mail me' button, to specifying the type and range of appeal of banner adverts you would prefer to see, and really usefully, describing the type of css style sheet you would like to use, which could make some unreadable web pages useful again.

Other features include indicators to display the speed and size of download and time counter that show you how long you have been waiting for a page and its graphics to arrive.

Opera for Linux is fast and robust and easy to use. Opera have concentrated on being a web browser and not some ubiquitous internet tool, so no email clients or composers using up space here.

They have managed the balancing act of being feature rich but without the bloat. Though it is worrying to note that their Windows version does seem to be shipping with an integrated ICQ client, we can but hope they resist temptation to take their Linux version down the same route.

