

Freeware Friday

Microsoft Internet Explorer 3.0

by Scott Holstad

Have you noticed the hoopla surrounding Microsoft's Internet Explorer 3.0? Yeah, I have too. It's almost as bad as the hype surrounding Windows 95 (I mean, come on, it's only an operating system...). So, what's up? Why is Internet Explorer 3.0 (hereafter called "IE3") getting so much publicity? Seems the word in a number of Web-focused publications is that IE3's as good as (if not better than) Netscape Navigator(TM), and may even be the best browser on the market.

Well, we here at EarthLink decided to look it over and give you a run-down on IE3's merits. Before going on, I think it only fair to admit, I'm a PC user (he said, while writing this piece on a Mac), and by default, a Microsoft user. Nonetheless, I'm a BIG Netscape fan, and not overly enthused about having IE3 forced upon me. Hopefully, this piece won't reflect toooo much bias.

So, what about IE3?

- **Cost.** Free. Need I say more?
- **Speed.** If you read last Friday's Netscape 3.0 review, you may recall I wrote that Netscape is significantly faster when it comes to loading basic HTML pages. I continue to assert this. However, benchmark tests indicate that IE3 is the fastest browser out there when it comes to browser start-up time and loading Java applets.
- **User Interface.** IE3's a big improvement over version 2.0. Fewer annoying tool bar buttons, more intuitive. You can modify buttons and add icons. Furthermore, executing a search using Microsoft's search page is really easy, and the search site is comprehensive.
- **Mail and News.** IE3's mail and news clients aren't integrated as tightly into the browser as Netscape's, but both are easily configured and Microsoft has provided some nifty features. IE3 supports multiple news servers, auto-highlights URLs and email addresses (for both mail and news), and supports HTML-based email composition.
- **ActiveX(TM).** ActiveX is a linking and embedding technology, replacing former OLE controls, which allows for architecture extensibility. ActiveX components can be compared to Netscape's plug-ins, but aren't limited to pre-specified programming languages, such as Java. ActiveX technology is language/application-independent, and is portable to non-browser environments. Microsoft is betting a bundle on ActiveX, and Microsoft usually wins when it makes those kinds of bets.
- **Code.** IE3 supports HTML 3.2 (including style sheets), Java (using a superior JIT compiler), and most instances of JavaScript. Microsoft is also advancing its own scripting language, VBScript, based on the popular Visual Basic programming language.

Now that we've discussed some of the IE3 advancements, it's time (I just can't help it) to whine. At this point,

IE3 only exists for Windows-based worlds. A UNIX version is due out later this year, as is a Mac version. Microsoft asserts that the Mac IE 2.1 is better than Netscape 3.0, but -- sorry, Bill -- there's just no way (in fact, I think its interface is ugly)! Since I spend **at least** half of my online time on a Mac, I'm bummed. Furthermore, IE3 is **BIG!** I don't want to spend hours downloading the program on my meager home 28.8! Microsoft counters by arguing by the time you gather equivalent plug-ins for Netscape, both browsers are about the same size, but I still don't want to download the darn thing! Moreover, it's been reported there's a serious security problem with IE3. In fact, not only do you have to download the browser itself, but then you have to download a patch, which allegedly repairs the security problem.

Well, what more can I say? IE 4.0 (code-named Nashville) is already scheduled for October, as is Netscape Navigator 4.0 (code-named Galileo), so maybe it's a moot point. Here's a suggestion: snag IE3, try it out for yourself, and let us know what you think. After all, it is free.



Daily Home



The Vault



Contest



bLink Home

Copyright 1996. EarthLink Network, Inc.