

Freeware Friday

Netscape Navigator 3.0: A Step Up

by Scott Holstad

By now, everyone knows that Netscape Navigator(TM) 3.0 has been released -- the final version (as opposed to the bajillion betas floating around). And by now, I'm sure everyone also knows that Microsoft has released Internet Explorer(TM) 3.0, and the competition seems fairly fierce. We'll do a piece on Internet Explorer sometime in the near future, but for now, our spotlight is focused on the new version of Netscape's browser.

So what's the big deal, eh? Netscape Navigator 3.0's interface may look the same, but there are some definite improvements to the browser which makes it worth the download.

- **Mail and News**

One of the pleasant features about Netscape Navigator's integration of its mail and news applications is consistency. Their windows share many common browser menu items, and new header options allow for additional resizing possibilities. Mail improvements support line wrapping, and the ability to send and receive HTML documents. News improvements includes easier-to-use newsgroup-browsing windows and offline reading.

- **HTML Advancements**

Netscape Navigator 3.0 supports new HTML tags, including ones for spacing and multiple-columns. Net surfers will appreciate greater Web page variety, while developers will have additional design possibilities with which to work. However, it does not yet support style sheets -- that is promised in the 4.0 release (called "Galileo").

- **Plug-ins**

Netscape Navigator 2.0 introduced plug-ins (which made many otherwise insignificant software companies VERY happy). Many of the plug-ins have been useful, extending the functionality of the browser, and with 3.0, Netscape bundles several cool ones into the package. LiveAudio and LiveVideo allow the playing of embedded sounds and movies. CoolTalk -- unfortunately, this is currently a PC-only option. Sorry, Mac users! -- is an Internet phone (you can typically find its icon next to the browser icon in your Netscape Navigator folder) which allows you to talk with your pals over the Net! Furthermore, Netscape Navigator now supports QuickTime, providing a (built-in) console for playing embedded .MOV files.

- **VRML**

You can now use Netscape's browser for wandering through 3-D worlds! Netscape Navigator 3.0 includes a VRML browser called Live3D (supporting VRML 2.0) which allows easy navigation through many 3-D environments. This means no more lengthy downloads of hard-to-understand-and-configure VRML browsers.

- **Enhanced Security**

Some of Netscape Navigator's enhanced security features include support for the SSL 3.0 (Secure Sockets Layer) protocol, allowing site certification and encryption management. Their digital signatures, as an authentication mechanism, hold promise for greater security. Moreover, they now

support 128-bit encryption keys, a HUGE improvement over 2.0's 40-bit keys. (Translation: Instead of it taking 24 monkeys on 24 mainframes three days to crack your email, it will now take 100 mainframes and 100 years!)

- **Multi-platform Support**

Unlike many of its competitors, Netscape Navigator provides versions of its browser for numerous platforms. At last count, sixteen platforms could enjoy Netscape's new browser: there are versions for three Windows(R) environments (Win 3.1, NT, and 95), two Mac (68k and PowerPC), and various UNIX flavors.

- **Speed**

Okay, I don't honestly know how much faster Netscape Navigator 3.0 is than 2.0 when it comes to loading Web pages. I have seen many comparisons, however, between Netscape's browser and Microsoft's. Both companies are claiming superior speed, and I've seen reviews supporting both. Netscape Navigator 3.0 claims to be 39% faster than Internet Explorer. C/NET supports this assertion, testing Netscape Navigator 3.0 at 35% faster in basic situations. I guess it comes down to one's own experience. All I can say is this: I've used both browsers on PCs and Macs, and I've found Netscape's browser to be much faster.

There are many reasons to obtain Netscape Navigator 3.0, and I encourage everyone to do so. In all candor, Netscape now charges for its browser, so, for you honest folks out there, don't forget to pay the \$49 fee; remember, you're downloading an evaluation copy on the honor system. So, go visit Netscape, download your version, and use it -- extensively.



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