

Review: Firefox 1.5

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Who says free software is worthless? Last year the developers at Mozilla took on the aging Internet standard, Microsoft's Internet Explorer, and had an instant hit on their hands with Firefox 1.0. A large reason for this success was their implementation of tabbed browsing.

While the release of Firefox 1.5 doesn't set any new standards or implement groundbreaking new features -- like last year's tabbed browsing -- what you do notice with 1.5 is how amazingly fast it is. Pages load at a blazing speed. Speed was always one of the major drawbacks to using Firefox over Internet Explorer; now it feels like it's on par, if not faster than Internet Explorer. You barely get your mouse away from a browser click before the page comes up. Other new

features included are ho-hum at best and provide cause for concern at worst.

The new Automatic Update feature will, supposedly, make it easy to get the latest security and feature updates to Firefox. The browser automatically downloads these small updates in the background and prompts you when they are ready to be installed. If you are new to the Web this feature will make keeping your browser up to date easy, but like Microsoft's own "Windows Live Update" this could get out of control and eventually become an irritant to the point where you'll want to deactivate it. Since the browser is so new, we don't know how often the browser will update itself or what types of prompts will be provided.

Firefox 1.5 makes it easier to clear your Internet tracks with the new Clear Private Data tool. With a single click you can delete all personal data, including browsing history, cookies, Web form entries and passwords. There's a new addition called Live Bookmark that I'm not quite sure what the point of is.

With Live Bookmark your bookmarks are automatically updated whenever new content is made available. So theoretically if you visit a news site like Google News, if you use Live Bookmark, your bookmark will automatically update itself whenever the bookmarked pages are updated. But by its very nature, when you click to view a Web site, doesn't the Web site automatically load the latest version, anyway? Live Bookmark sounds more like something added for marketing lingo than being a truly useful feature. To further help organize your bookmarks, there's a new "group all" button that allows you to group all your open tabs into a single bookmarked folder. Again, I'm not quite sure what the point of this is. It'll save you a step or two, from the manual way of adding bookmarks to your folders.

The developers focused a lot of their efforts on "under the hood"

improvements -- beyond making the browser super fast, it features much stronger security, a tweaked built-in pop-up blocker to recognize even more sites and controls and several new search sites including Creative Commons, eBay, Amazon.com and Answer.com built into the search bar, and it now supports DHTML.

Firefox 1.5 is available for free download at getfirefox.com and mozilla.com.

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