

Firefox 4 has simpler design, more privacy control

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(AP) -- The next version of the Firefox browser, set for release by the end of the year, will pare down the software's menus and certain user options while giving Web surfers more control over privacy.

Firefox 4 promises to let users better control relationships with websites by describing more simply what information is gathered by cookies, which are files that store data on website visits.

In Firefox's current version, determining which websites are peering into users' Internet habits is a complex process involving many menus and submenus. With the change, users will be able to see from a single menu

what information websites are gathering. Users will then have the option of deciding which cookies to allow and which to disable.

But Mozilla, the browser's creator, will also take away some user controls to make Firefox sleeker. That means taking out buttons and menus that Mozilla says few people use anyway. Mozilla says the change won't just make websites load faster, it will make them feel faster.

"The simpler an interface looks, the faster it will seem," Mike Beltzner, Firefox director of development, said in a video presentation posted to its website this week.

Firefox said the browser will be made more stable, by requiring fewer add-on programs for additional functionality. The program will use the new Web programming language, HTML5, which will allow videos and other multimedia content to play in the browser without needing companion software such as Adobe System Inc.'s Flash.

Firefox is second to Microsoft Corp.'s market-dominant Internet Explorer browser in usage. Microsoft is also working on an update. Internet Explorer 9, Microsoft's latest browser offering, will also support HTML5. An early version is already out for testing.

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