

Opera plans transition to WebKit engine

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(Phys.org)—Opera will ditch its web browser rendering engine called

Presto and instead will switch over to WebKit in a planned 2013 phase-out. The decision was announced this week. WebKit is the rendering engine used in Apple's Safari and Google's Chrome. According to the announcement, "Opera will make a gradual transition to the WebKit engine, as well as Chromium, for most of its upcoming versions of browsers for smartphones and computers."

Writing in the Opera developer blog, Bruce Lawson, Web evangelist for Opera, said consumers would see the difference. "Consumers will initially notice better site compatibility, especially with mobile-facing sites, many of which have only been tested in WebKit browsers." Opera will preview its first [Chromium](#)-based [smartphone](#) browser for Android later this month at the [Mobile World](#) Congress in Barcelona.

Why switch now? In its announcement, Opera said its goal was "to provide a leading browser on Android and iOS." [Android](#) and iOS both use WebKit-powered browsers. Opera's CTO, Håkon Wium Lie, said that WebKit "supports the standards we care about, and it has the performance we need." He said, "It makes more sense to have our experts working with the open source communities to further improve WebKit and Chromium, rather than developing our own rendering engine further." Also elaborating on the decision, Lawson went back to 1995, when Opera rolled its own rendering engine, competing against [Internet Explorer](#) and [Netscape](#), and hoping to drive web standards forward. He said that goal was a specification to enhance web interoperability. "The WebKit project now has the kind of standards support that we could only dream of when our work began."

Reactions outside Opera did not indicate a unanimous thumbs-up. Several blogs suggested the move will make it easier for developers in terms of testing. Mozilla developer Robert O'Callahan expressed disappointment with Opera's decision, however, saying that [Google](#) and Apple's WebKit may end up being a good one for the company, but

unlikely to be good for the web at large. "More and more developers don't write websites or web apps based on standards but based on what works in WebKit."

Opera, meanwhile, said that it has already made its first contribution to WebKit, a set of patches to make WebKit's handling of CSS columns as capable as Presto's. "Opera will contribute to the WebKit and Chromium projects, and we have already submitted our first set of patches: to improve multi-column layout," according to the company.

Opera will use WebKit as its rendering engine and also V8 as its JavaScript engine. According to Opera, 300 million people use Opera web browsers for computers, mobile phones, TVs and other connected devices.

More information: www.opera.com/press/releases/2013/02/13/

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