From: ghunt@cv3.CV.NRAO.EDU (Gareth Hunt)
To: mglenden@aoc.nrao.edu (Marie Glendenning)
Cc: abridle@NRAO.EDU
Subject: Re: Netscape vs. Mosaic
Date: Wed, 9 Aug 1995 13:20:01 -0400

Marie,

> Ruth and I were discussing Netscape vs. Mosaic, and she told me you have
> been looking into this very thing. Specifically, I am interested in knowing
> which versions are freeware and what advantages one might have over the other.
>
> Could you please fill me in on any relevent information you have on this
> subject?

I am only looking into the licensing of netscape at present. This is free-ish;
if it is not, we will likely have to discontinue (networked) use of it. arena
and mosaic are free-ware.

My experience is limited. Almost all WWW pages have some illegal HTML.
Depending on what problems there are, one or other of the browsers may barf
and/or die. I can say that, to browse the WWW, I use all three products on the
Unix machines - arena, mosaic, and netscape. I use the latter two on my PC.
The most sophisticated user of these, as far as I know, is Alan Bridle, who is
providing HTML-based documentation for the AIPS++ project. He also uses all
three.

For the long term, mosaic is no longer under active development, I believe, so
it will become obsolete. Netscape went public yesterday ("the hottest offering
since Apple"), so I expect them to survive. But their main income is from
providing WWW servers; their browser is really an appetizer. Arena is from
CERN, which is heavily involved in the development of the new standard for
HTML3, so presumably it will be unter active development for a while yet. In
the long term (maybe even fairly soon - this year?), I expect MSWord and
WordPerfect, inter alia, to include browsers/editors as part of their products.

Cheers,
Gareth.

P.S. I'm sending this to Alan also, so that he can correct any errors, etc.

From: abridle (Alan Bridle)
To: ghunt, mglenden
Subject: Re: Netscape vs. Mosaic
Date: Wed, 9 Aug 1995 14:15:39 -0400

It's a long story. In terms of overall competency of the browser,
apparent speed, and ease of use, Netscape is considerably ahead of
NCSA Mosaic and is reputedly the browser of record for over 80%
of all accesses to large general-purpose or commercial WWW sites.
Netscape has a more convenient user interface in many details,
uses the cache more effectively in order to appear to have faster
response to the user, and (for example) can manage local file
reads from a directory with aips++ in the name (which Mosaic
cannot). The people now developing Netscape are the people who
developed Mosaic originally at the NCSA, now making multo-$$.

Mosaic is no longer a single entity. The free version is a
low-priority item basically being developed by student effort at the
NCSA, and is evolving more slowly than Netscape. The rights for
commercial development of Mosaic are held by Spry Mosaic.

Neither Netscape nor Mosaic implements the HTML 3.0 draft standard.
Their common ground is the HTML 2.0 standard. Both use bits of HTML
3.0 (not the same bits!) and both go beyond it to play proprietary
games that are attractive to commercial users. Mainly flashy
graphics. Unfortunately many HTML authors now think that Netscape's
extensions of HTML are part of the HTML standard, and are coding them.
There is a great deal of material on the WWW now that can now only be
read using Netscape. This is a deplorable step backwards from
inter-operability but we are stuck with it.

The only browser that now supports the whole HTML 3.0 draft standard
is Arena, but this is a bread-board demonstration that is not pleasant
to use for general work and is being supported only with low priority
from CERN. (Its priority may be even lower than before now that the
real WWW gurus have moved from CERN). Arena is free but I think
people who are used to Netscape, or either of the Mosaics, would curse
us roundly if that was all we gave them.

It is something of a horserace at the moment between the actual
settling onto the HTML 3,0 standard and the web becoming
overwhelmed by Netscapisms (which are becoming known as NHTML).

Although I have not seen it myself, not yet being on a Solaris
machine, I gather than Sun's HotJava browser is widely regarded
as an up-and-comer in terms of flexibility and ease of use. I
think Paul Shannon has used it here.

I have been encouraging everyone I talk to at the NRAO who writes or
otherwise generates HTML to stay within the HTML 2.0 standard, and I
believe that most of our own HTML can be read satisfactorily on any
browser. Mosaic is however much slower over a network when reading
documents that contain large graphics files or large numbers of small
graphics files (e.g. .GIFS representing non-Latin characters as in
mathematical equations). Because Mosaic is evolving more slowly than
Netscape, and because so many HTML originators are using the NHTML
rather than the standard, Netscape is dominating the scene.

The browser-writers are in the process of teaming up with the big players in Word-Processing to produce "World-Wide-Word" Processors. For example, Novell is now using Netscape under license as part of its Internet Publishing package.

I'm not sure which one Bill Gates got in bed with but whichever it is will be big-time in 1996.

Hope this helps,

A.

From: mglenden@aoc.nrao.edu (Marie Glendenning)
To: abridle@polaris.cv.nrao.edu (Alan Bridle)
Subject: Re: Netscape vs. Mosaic
Date: Wed, 9 Aug 1995 13:20:11 -0600

Alan,

Thanks much. This is extremely useful.

Marie