

Browser Wars : Battles of Standards



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Battles of Standards, Microsoft versus Netscape

Topic :

One standard that appears to have been effectively **monopolized by a single company** is the Microsoft PC system software. The class could discuss **why this is the case** and whether **it is likely to continue in the future**. It could **also ask whether such a monopoly is a good thing** (for society as a whole, not just Microsoft) for what it considers, as **unfair competition against Netscape**. An excellent analysis of the various sides of the debate can be found in The Economist ('At war with Microsoft' and 'Play nicely, or not at all', May 23, 1998; 'Bill Gates replies: compete, don't delete', June 13, 1998; Microsoft - letters, p.10, June 27, 1998).

Context :

The following case study has been submitted for the course of Innovation and Knowledge Management at the university of Léon within the European Master in Business Studies.

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Introduction :

Internet explorer versus Netscape Navigator is a classic of case study and this is not the information which are lacking on the subject.

As an example the two books I chose to study within the course of Innovation and Knowledge Management untitled "Winners Losers & Microsoft" and "Information rules: a strategic guide to network economy" are both refering to the battle between Internet Explorer and Netscape web browsers.

This story and analysis has then already been written more than once and it can then be very easy for me to make a good copy of those works based on the analysis of analysis.

I am personnaly more interested in writing something new and original. I suggest then to take into account new elements such as the current web browser market (2009), the fact that we are analyzing the situation 10 years after the battle and trying to predict the future of the web browser market.

Those changes will brought an original work to the teacher and an exclusive paper to its readers.

I hope you will appreciate it.

Ronan CHARDONNEAU

Personal experience about the study case :

I have been introduced to Netscape Navigator in 1999, my elder brother studying computer sciences he came back one day with a pc including Internet Explorer and Netscape. I personnaly grew up and be trained with Internet Explorer (as it was by default installed on all computers of my junior High School).

I never used Netscape Navigator to go on Internet and I am an experienced user of Mozilla Firefox and Google Chrome. I also use sometimes the textual web browser Lynx.

Why the web browser standard has been monopolized by Microsoft PC system software ?

First of all let's define what is a standard :

« *A technology is recognized as a standard when it gets **more than 50% of the market shares*** »

Let's now define a web browser :

« *A browser is **a software application** that is used to locate and display Web pages.* »

www.asu.edu/copp/resources/glossary.html

Here is a definition of Microsoft :

« *Microsoft Corporation is an American multinational computer technology corporation, **which rose to dominate the home computer operating system*** »

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Microsoft

And to finish a definition of an operating system :

« *The most important program run on a computer because it manages all the other programs.* »

www.iscfr21.it/21cfr_glossary.html

So **Microsoft owns the Operating System market which is managing web browsers** and Microsoft is producing its own web browser : Internet Explorer. Here we can then understand the problematic.

On Microsoft side we can understand the following question « Why should I include a competitor web browser within my own Operating System ? » and obviously **understand why they are still not doing it.**

In 1999 in order to install Netscape on your PC **you needed to take it from the outside** (Download on Internet, take it from a CD etc...) and **here is the heart of the winning battle.**

In order to win and be recognized as a better product people have to know that you exist. We can then understand why at that time computer users did not

have Netscape on their computer (today the world Internet penetration rate is at 23,8% in 2000 only 7% of the world population had Internet connection, <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>). Netscape was then for elites or computer educated people, for example my brother had it and I never heard about it.

So to sum up this first part :

- The web browser market has been monopolized by Microsoft because MS owns the software which manage web browsers ;
- Microsoft has no interest of letting entering competitors into his own market ;
- Users cannot know that other web browsers exist if they are not informed about their existence and of course cannot install them if they do not know how to ;

Is it likely to continue in the future ?

Actually a good question one should ask is « **Is the situation of web browsers has changed during the last ten years ?** »

As a standard user I can say no but the next decade is going to be very interesting for the web browsers market and this for many reasons.

Raising up of a new competitor: Google



The first good reason for changes is the raising up of Google on the market of operating systems. Google already started on cell phones with a software called « Android ». Google is the most famous brand in the world and has a better reputation than Microsoft which is a good reason for

customers to switch or at least give a try to a new operating system. Moreover Google already owns its proper web browser : Google Chrome.

It is not that popular but has however the fourth position in the market of web browser, taking in account that the third one is more or less targeting another kind of computers (Mac) one can say that Google Chrome has an interesting outsider position (cf. page 11).

I would emphasize as well that Google may have the solution for the operating system of tomorrow which could bring a tremendous revolution in the world of operating system.

It is going to be the first time that Microsoft will face a competitor which is as famous and successful as him.



A computer population who is more and more educated

The case of Mozilla Firefox web browser is also a very interesting part of this case study . Mozilla Firefox is a free, open-source, web browser for Windows, Linux and Mac OS X. Firefox is knowing exactly the same story as Netscape (in fact the those two products are more or less the same

<http://browser.netscape.com/history>). « *At the time of the acquisition, the Netscape team had begun working on converting their flagship product - the Netscape Communicator web suite - into open source software, under a new name: Mozilla. »*

Netscape as Mozilla Firefox both have the reputation to best

<http://www.consumersearch.com/web-browser-reviews> . It is so called better than Internet Explorer but is not yet recognized as the standard. The success of Mozilla is due to the fact that it is a product which is according to me more convenient

than Internet Explorer. It is not first in the market because in order to have it on your computer you need to download it and of course to know its existence. The best example I can find about the recognition of its strengths is its presence at the university.

It is nowadays very hard to find in European universities a computer which does not have Mozilla Firefox on the desktop.

I guess that the presence of Mozilla is due to the fact that higher education recognize its quality.

Let's know think about the future when the current students which are studying right now at the university will be on the market place.

Well good chances that it will install a wave of Mozilla Firefox within businesses and that it will be a trend which will not be reversed until universities recognize the value of another web browser.

So I would attribute the success of Mozilla Firefox and in a certain way Netscape to the fact that people get more and more computer educated. However this education is not sufficient enough in order to jeopardize Microsoft Internet Explorer on the short term.

A new sanction for Microsoft ?

Microsoft has been at the center of many polemics since the story of Netscape versus Microsoft, however justice never sanctioned firmly Microsoft for obvious reasons (if Microsoft is seriously condemned what will happen to Microsoft users ?).

Microsoft trial is still a day to day topic in the

news : <http://www.zdnet.fr/actualites/informatique/0,39040745,39393157,00.htm>

[m](http://www.zdnet.fr/actualites/informatique/0,39040745,39393157,00.htm). Microsoft is under a condemnation by the european commission

<http://rcpmag.com/news/article.aspx?editorialid=10780> to let an option on its operating system allowing to remove Internet Explorer and include competitors web browsers.

The answer of the verdict is fixed at April the 28th 2009 : <http://www.generation->

Is such a monopoly a good thing ?

As in all monopoly you have pros and cons :

Good point :

I worked for almost one year in computer companies or at least worked in the field of computers and here are some benefits I have seen.

If everybody use the same web browsers then it is less work for website computer programmers because you are sure that all the information you will display will be displayed properly. Exactly like a language if everybody speaks the same language then everybody understand and understand each other

Bad point :

On the other hand when people are using different web browsers some information are sometimes missing, computer programmers have to test the applications on different web browsers and then tasks come to be more and more complicated.

Here are some mere explanations. Some web browsers recognized some parts of codes whereas other don't. One of the most famous one is the HTML tag called `<blink></blink>` which means that a word included between those two tags will blink automatically. Some web browsers are not reading those codes and of course will not display this information properly whereas other will.

So here was for the main basic idea.

Another idea we can develop is the different use of web browser for different tasks.

For example Mozilla Firefox is very popular because of all the functions you can add to this browser : applications which will allow you to download videos from the website you are looking at or even thousands of other functionalities to customize your web browser.

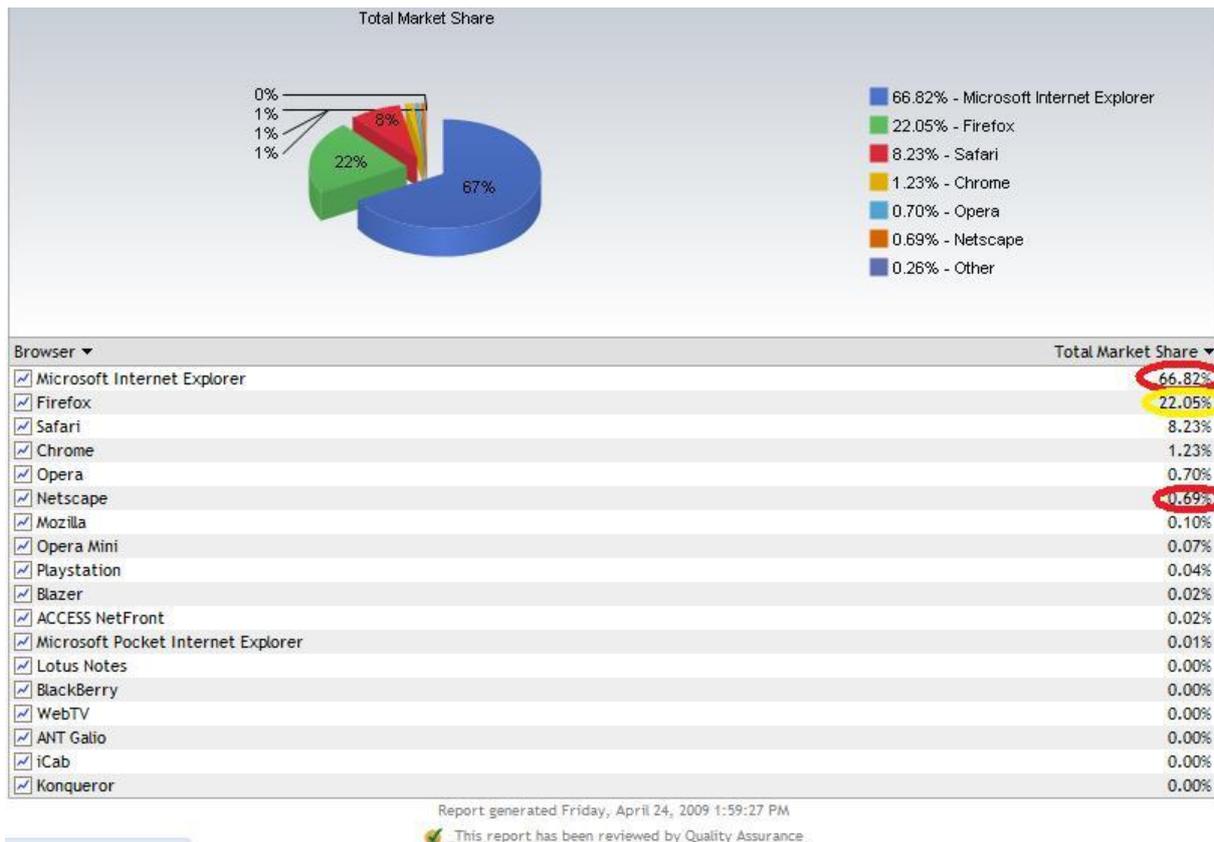
Google Chrome is very convenient because it is quickly launched.

Lynx is very popular to protect your data and your confidentiality.

So to each web browser correspond a certain list of characteristics but of course you have to know that they exist and what are their characteristics.

According to the book "Winners, losers and Microsoft" the products which win the battle are always the best. I strongly disagree with this statement. The product which wins is the best advertised and at this game Microsoft is leading the game.

A quick look at the recent figures of the web browsers market shares show us that Internet Explorer is still the leader and the standard in terms of web browser.



Conclusion :

From this analysis we can then understand why Netscape did not win (if your success is in the end of your competitor...well it is hard to win) but also why it is still living under the name of Firefox (when you have strenght that competitors do not have you are still on the race).

We can also see that people are not entirely benefiting from this monopoly because Internet Explorer is not the best product.

For consumers they can take the best part of web browsers only by using each of them for specific purposes but should at least know that they exist.

Microsoft could lose its monopolistic position on the short term but only if a strong event happened such as the presence of Google on the desktop operating system market or a severe condemnation from the European Commission.

What is really strange to see is that the Web Browser market clearly show how computer education is moving and market imperfection, how is it still possible that Microsoft is taking the monopole of web browser since such a long time ?