

No more EdgeHTML

Microsoft, at the end of 2018, announced their plan to rewrite the Windows 10 default browser using Chromium project...



Mike Geyser

“This situation”, explains Mike Geyser, a member of BBD’s R&D team and Google developer expert, “is interesting for a number of reasons.”

Aggregated from multiple sources, Edge currently has about 2% of the global market share, while Internet Explorer 11 has roughly 3%. Microsoft has been trying to change people’s perspective on moving from an old browser technology to a new one for a number of years. Microsoft has also written their own HTML rendering engine (EdgeHTML), and their own JavaScript engine (Chakra core).

Geyser says that while both were well received, “The reality of the situation is that the Edge team has been struggling to keep up with idiosyncratic bug fixes and have a limited ability to innovate.”

With the viability of running their own HTML rendering engine dwindling, the Microsoft team decided to rather use the Chromium project to power Edge. With this decision, Microsoft intends to simultaneously align the Edge web platform to web standard and other Chromium-based browsers. “This will deliver improved compatibility for everyone and create a simpler test-matrix for web developers” writes Joe Belfiore, corporate vice president for Windows.

Chromium is the open source core of Google Chrome and is already used by browsers such as Opera and Samsung Internet. The decision came under immediate scrutiny and criticism, primarily by the open web pundits such as Mozilla, because they feel there is a monopoly by Google on ‘critical web infrastructure’.

On one hand, the decision makes a lot of sense because it’s just not practical for everyone to be re-implementing the same features over and over, while on the other we want different ideas and voices questioning and driving browser standards. “This is the promise of open source - that we can all work together and push the web forward” says Geyser.

One last important point is that Edge has battled to take over from the aging Internet Explorer, in part because Edge only runs on the latest operating system (Windows 10). The move to Chromium as its core means that Edge can not only run on Windows 7 and 8, but on other operating systems such as MacOS. Geyser concludes that Edge ‘can meet its users where they are’ – a powerful idea for Microsoft as it transcends their Windows users.

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