Subject: Re: Opera now Free
Posted by YSLMuffins on Thu, 22 Sep 2005 02:48:12 GMT

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Opera has a TON of features. I'd love to type them all myself, but someone on Slashdot has already kindly done that.

cgenman, on /.As an avid Opera user, and a fan of Firefox, they can similar to a light or average user. I'll assume here that you're familiar with both.

I like to think of Opera as a highly configurable tool for heavy users who like to get their hands dirty with their tools, and Firefox for everyone else. Opera is highly configurable, has nice data semi-permanence features, and there are a million advanced options that speed up use for people willing to learn about what it can do.

If you don't like where the menu bar is, you can move it to the bottom of the screen, or to the sides, or you can move the buttons to a different bar, or move the buttons from other bars to that one. You can liberally re-arrange everything about the interface to suit your particular tastes, and can add and remove buttons and functionality as you please. I've seen people who have all of the functionality of the browser on a single pop-up address bar on the side of the window, and others that spread everything around onto dozens of little areas.

And there are quick and easy buttons available in the interface for everything: from zooming to above 100% to changing your "identify as" to toggling javascript. Basically all of these behave intelligently. If you hold the zoom drop-down button you get a standard drop-down menu to select the zoom resolution you want, and if you click on it, it automatically resets to 100%. And you move buttons by simply grabbing and moving them, which is very easy and convienient.

If you're comfortable editing a simple menu.ini file, you can add or subtract menu options. As a real-world example, you can add menu options for "open in I.E." "Validate HTML" "Validate Links" and "Spell Check" pretty easily to the right-click menu. While these can't be completely new code, you can pipe existing functions together in new ways to create things that do new behaviors.

Unlike Firefox's extensions you can't add extensive code that doesn't already exist. You can, however, run external applications which seems to cover the extreme cases. But if I needed to code an HTML editor in an extension, for example, I would recommend Firefox as a base over Opera. But for nearly all other personal customization, I'd go with Opera.

Data permanence is also a big issue in Opera. If you go backwards and forwards in Firefox, you lose any text you may have typed into a comment box. If you go backwards and forwards in Opera, your comment stays right where it was. On Slashdot this lets you go a couple of links back, launch a new window with the story in it, and go back forwards to what you were writing. It also caches the rendered page, so that going forwards and backwards is instantaneous.

You can also undo closing tabs. I can't tell you the number of times this has come in handy. Unfortunately, comment fields are not permanent across tab or application closures, something I wish they would fix. However, you do keep your history on that tab, which is nice. You also have windows open across sessions. If the application crashes or is accidentally closed, you can

re-open it with all of your tabs still in place, and can still go back and forwards through their histories. Basically, Opera crashing is a 3 second fix, while Firefox crashing requires tediously going back through the history figuring out where all of your tabs were.

You can also save all of your open tabs or windows as a session, and can re-open sessions as bookmarks, on startup, etc.

There is also basic psuedo command line functionality, in that you can convert any *.[space]TEXT into http://www.yoursearchengine.com/search?q=TEXT [yoursearchengine.com]. "g footloose" will search google for the term "footloose". "z firefly" will search amaZon for "firefly." I personally have searches setup for ebay, friend's bulletin boards, language translators, and a whole lot else.

The mail client was the first mail client that I know of to use freestanding searches as virtual folders, but that has since been copied into every mail client out there.

There are keyboard shortcuts for everything. Everything. This is a point of pride at Opera. No matter how good with a browser you may be, you could still be faster by learning a *few more* keyboard shortcuts. This will be true for the entire time you use Opera.

Opera was first with mousegestures, but everybody has that now (firefox with a plug-in).

There is a "fast forward" option, which tries to intelligently figure out which is the next page in a series and goes to that one. Surprisingly, it seems to work 99% of the time, and saves a fraction of a second each time.

There is a quickdownloads pane, which is nice. Select a hundred links, choose "quick download," and all of your files will download to a single place with a single click. Opera was the first with "open in background" functionality for windows, but now firefox has that too.

The built-in notes manager, basically a yellow sticky pad, is (suprisingly) useful. I thought it would be bloat when the feature was added, but I jot things down all of the time there.

There is an RSS feed, chat client, Usenet client, etc. "suite stuff." But they really don't take up much space, and can be turned off.

Spell checking was recently integrated, though it could be more integrated. I'm sure as hell not using it enuogh.

You can set a page to automatically reload at specific intervals. It's a cute feature occasionally used to stay abreast of changes to a page, and usually used to try and annoy webmasters or drive up poorly-written voting scripts.

You can create a second window that is hard linked to a first window, though why you would do that is beyond me.

Opera has some nice features for disabled people, like letting you control the browser with voice, and doing a basic screen reader.

You can press CTRL-Backspace to go up an HTTP directory. If you're in www.myspace.com/~seishino/videos/counterstrike.vid , it will take you to www.myspace.com/~seishino/videos . Just a little timesaving shortcut also likely to annoy webmasters.

You can use one of any number of pre-made CSS files on a web page, including ones you have made yourself.

Some features of Opera are specific for mobile phones, kiosks, and web developers. You can maximize opera to take up the entire screen, for example, or make customized versions of opera that are then locked to that look / feel. You can change the virtual screen resolution to see how your site would look on a small screen. The "info" pane will tell you the page MIME type, main page and inline element size, and where the local cache is located. These are nice developer features.

You can also mouse around without a mouse, using the arrow keys to hotspot jump. This combined with extensive keyboard shortcuts, and Opera is entirely usable without a mouse. Again, a phone feature.

The whole phone thing is nice, as it would be nice to have a single browser across multiple platforms. But as my phone provider still looks at net traffic like some form of diamonds flowing through the air available only to businesses with gobs of money, I wouldn't know.

The bookmark manager is solid. It's easy to move things between pages and the color changes based on if it has updated since you last visited. I think that's why the color changes, anyway. You can give bookmark shortcut names to use in the address bar. slashdot.org could be shortened to sla, for example. Bookmarks can be dragged around and added to any panel you want just like buttons.

Some of these you can get in firefox through extensions, some you can't. Opera's extensions community, while nice, can't compare with FireFox's. But again, you can do more of the customization yourself. Also, a lot of the most popular FireFox extensions like mousegestures are there to implement Opera features... The Opera community doesn't need to be as active, because the Opera developers are very active.

Again, there are a lot of nice features of Opera hidden in there. I use it both at home and at work, and have made a few converts out of people. The question is if a person really wants to try out the advanced features and learn to use them, or if they just want to use a straightforward browser with an un-cluttered interface. Firefox seems to be better at the latter, while Opera has a lot more advanced features that can help make the web developer or the heavy surfer's life a little easier.

That can answer your features question even if you don't read it. But to sum things up, if you like customizing and starting out with the bare minimum, you'll obviously like FF. But for those that want everything in one convenient and small package, like me, you'll like Opera.

I paid for Opera, but now that it's free as in beer, I don't mind. They make a damn good browser!