

Time to tidy up the old browser toolbars

Guess which computer program you utilize the most on your home PC?

Odds are it is either MS Internet Explorer (IE) or Mozilla Firefox, which are both Web browsers. Hopefully that is not the same application used the most at work unless your company's primary business program is browser-based.

Yes, there are the times when we do word processing using Microsoft Word or manage our family finances with MS Excel, but if you add up all the screen time across most home computers, Web browsers like IE, Firefox and Safari, performing Web surfing is still the our number one digital activity.

Over the years the Web browser of choice has been migrating from Microsoft's Internet Explorer (IE) to Mozilla's Firefox. As of November 2009, the combined total of IE6, IE7 and IE8 is around 56 percent of worldwide users. That number is broken down further with the older IE6 at 14 percent, the newer IE7 at 21 percent and the latest and most secure IE8 also with 21 percent usage.

The older 2.0 version of Firefox has just 1 percent usage while version 3 has 9 percent and the latest 3.5 update of



John Deans

Firefox holds a commanding 22 percent of all Internet users from around the world. That makes Firefox 3.5 the most popular specific browser version currently in use.

If you all up all the IE users and compare them to the population of Firefox Web surfers you will see a 56 percent to 32 percent ratio with others like Safari, Opera and

sorted others filling in the remainder percentages.

In other words, IE is slowing but surely losing its dominance going from a 66 percent to a 55 percent market share in just one year. This was done by the free enterprise system rather than any government action like the one ten years ago against Microsoft Windows 98 imbedded Web browser. This shows how capitalism works while government intrusion, federal mandates, and overbearing regulation simply hurts everyone.

Surfing has been safer for years now using Firefox since it has been less vulnerable to spyware compared to IE7 and especially IE6. Microsoft did better with the latest version 8 of Internet Explorer (IE8), but they have been trailing Firefox for almost a decade now.

Since we are starting a new year it

is time to clean up a few things. I am planning to get a good sized dumpster from Budget Roll-offs dropped off at our place so I can do some heavy duty spring cleaning in the winter — less sweating that way.

Web browsers also need to be cleaned up to keep them running smoothly and clear your viewing areas of online junk. Since we use IE and Firefox so often throughout the day, we should not neglect their upkeep and maintenance.

The visual real estate of the browser application window can get cluttered over the months and years with all the new add-ons, plug-ins and toolbars that get installed over time. These tack-on entities can take up more and more screen area whether they are downloaded and installed on purpose or automatically inserted from another installation like Adobe Acrobat or Java updates.

There have been times I have sat down at a client's PC, started up IE to download a fix, and saw three or even more toolbars like AOL, BING, GOOGLE, Yahoo or MSN taking up 3/8s of an inch of vertical screen each. One guy had five toolbars installed which took up 1/3 of his IE application window.

With those unnecessary and mostly unused toolbars taking up room along

with the standard Menu and Favorites bars, almost half the monitor area was unusable to display content.

One of the first things I do to clean up the browser is deactivate or even uninstall all those stupid toolbars from IE or Firefox. All you really need is the small default search box with the Google default set along with the Menu option enabled and you are ready to go because less is better.

Under IE you can just right-click in the blank area next to a toolbar on the upper half of the IE window and then un-check which toolbar you wish to disable. Another way to cleanup these toolbars under IE is to click on Tools then Manage Add-Ons and from there they can be disabled. Under FireFox you would click on Tools, Options and then on Manage Add-Ons.

If you are experiencing strange or problematic browser behaviors you can always completely reset the personal and customized settings you or other installed apps have made over the years which will put things back to original installation date defaults. This cleans up numerous problems and should be done once a year.

The other things to clean up in Web browsers are all the temporary internet files, cookies, and miscellaneous Web images that accumulate in the browser

cache. This can add up to ten of thousands of files and hundreds of megabytes of junk. This digital trash pile can slow down your IE or Firefox along with making it act funny on numerous sites.

A good thing to do once in a while is to clean up all the temporary files within IE by clicking on Tools, Internet Options, and then under the Browsing History section click on the "Delete..." button. Take the default checked options and let IE clean up all those junk files that take up space and slow you down.

This can also be done on FireFox by clicking on Tools and then Clear Recent History. Just before you hit the Clear Now button, use the drop down just above it and change it from Last Hour to Everything. That will clear out all the stuff that has been cluttering up your computer since it the Dow was at 14,000 — don't hold your breath for that one to return anytime soon.

Bottom line: Remember when you mom fussed out your to clean up your room, well this is Deans reminding you to tend your computer. Happy New Year!

Next week's column: Security DVR settings.

John Deans of DeansConsulting.com is a Brenham area computer networking consultant who can be reached at 289-2233 or John@DeansConsulting.com for questions and comments.