Published on *Tux Machines* (http://www.tuxmachines.org)

Swift, convenient Web navigation hits a high note

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Created *16/07/2005 - 3:08pm*
Submitted by srlinuxx on Saturday 16th of July 2005 03:08:12 PM Filed under Software [1]

The Opera Web browser enjoys a reputation for being the fastest software for accessing Internet pages, and it should appeal particularly to hard-core fans of blogs and people wary of Microsoft Internet Explorer.

Sit down with the free version of the latest Opera update and point it at a few Web pages you know well. Likely, you will be stunned at how fast the pages appear.

Afterward, the company behind the software hopes you will be willing to pay $39 for an ad-free version that activates a few extras, including excellent e-mail and newsgroup modules.

Beyond speed, the next thing that separates Opera from the pack is its use of what are called tabs. They amount to simulated folder tabs that build up on the top or side of the screen as a Web session continues. This makes recalling a past page ultraeasy compared with IE, where going back to past pages displays one at a time with no idea of knowing what the next will be.

Opera gets particularly slick with tabs because of features that will display tabbed pages as cascading windows or will tile them with small representations of each site laid out checkerboard style. This is a great tool for power users, which include shoppers as well as researchers. The tabs also can be saved using a "save session" tool that lets users return to pages discovered in the past.

Also standing out is the RSS (rich site summary) newsreader module that lets one collect a list of Web sites that will send out messages with new content every time the selected site is changed. Bloggers particularly relish knowing when changes occur in a long list of fellow blogs.

Under the hood, Opera's programming does not use Microsoft's ActiveX tools for page elements, which have created many of IE's problems with hackers. Also available is a pop-up manager that outdoes others by letting users specify which pop-ups are blocked and how.

For Windows, Mac and Linux

By James Coates
Chicago Tribune [2]

Software

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