

Browsers Battle for Second Place

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In the Internet-browser game, the idea of beating No. 1 Microsoft, whose Internet Explorer comes automatically bundled on most Windows computers, is so far out of reach that other players try for the next best thing: second place.

Opera, the Norway-based company that has created an alternative browser for computers and mobile devices, has visions of unseating Mozilla Corp., maker of the Firefox browser, for that second-place position.

To do that, Opera started doing last week what Microsoft and Mozilla (<http://www.mozilla.org/>) have been doing for some time: giving away the flagship product. Previously, Opera (<http://www.opera.com/>) had offered two versions of its desktop browser -- a free one supported by ads placed in the browser and a \$39 ad-free version.

Giving away the product doesn't automatically mean the company will come into hard financial times. The browser has a built-in search function that allows users to consult Google without opening up another window. Every time a user searches through the Google tool, the search engine pays Opera.

In its early days, Microsoft's Internet Explorer played second to Netscape Navigator -- until the software giant started bundling its browser on computers running Windows 95. But since then, other browsers have held only cult status among consumers.

That seems to be changing.

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