

Opera Software upgrades hacker defenses

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Better security and the automatic scaling of Web pages to fit screens of any width are among the features included with a new browser released by Opera Software ASA on Tuesday.

In version 8 of Opera, a security information field automatically starts when a user visits a secure Web site, indicating the level of security on a scale of one to three and showing who owns the security certificate.

This way, surfers can evaluate the trustworthiness of banking and shopping Web sites and minimize the risk of phishing attacks, in which scammers send e-mail tricking recipients into revealing credit card numbers and other sensitive personal information.

The new browser version can be downloaded for free with advertising for the Windows and Linux operating systems. An ad-free version costs \$39. Opera also released a test version, or "beta," for Mac OS computers.

Opera 8 rearranges Web pages as necessary so Web surfers can view them within narrower windows without having to slide a horizontal tab. This feature is particularly useful for the small screens of mobile phones; Opera sees such devices as a growth potential.

The browser also allows voice commands to the computer and having the machine read pages aloud, though the feature is only available in English and for the Windows 2000 and XP operating systems.

Opera commands less than 0.2 percent of the Windows market, behind the industry leading Internet Explorer from Microsoft Corp. and various browsers based on the Mozilla Foundation's open-source code, according to tracking by WebSideStory.

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