I'm a war buff and loved to hear my dad talk about his experiences in the Army Air Corps in England during World War II. I'm also fond of old war movies like "The Longest Day" and "The Sands of Iwo Jima." Seems the whole country pulled together to defeat an enemy who had attacked us on our own land. As exciting and difficult as that period in our history must have been, the current conflict with web browsers certainly can't compare. In fact, when you talk about web browsers, don't be surprised if you get some yawns.

Yet, the web browser is probably one of the most used applications on our system — especially with the proliferation of web services and hosted software. Regardless, there is a second war going on between the web browser makers, and I'm referring to this as World War II because I still remember the first conflict. Remember when a browser called Netscape pretty much owned the market? Microsoft introduced Internet Explorer, and the first war was on. Well, we all know how that one came out, and it wasn't good for Netscape. After the first browser war, Microsoft enjoyed a decade of dominance, but now Firefox has almost 20 percent of the market, and Google Chrome is entering the fray with Safari still a player.

The second browser war is really heating up with the recent release of Google Chrome and the Beta 2 release of Internet Explorer 8. Mozilla released version 3 back in June, and by the time you read this you may very well be using Internet Explorer version 8 and/or Firefox 3.1.

As of this writing, Mozilla is scrambling to add functionality already in Google's browser or announced for Internet Explorer 8, namely private browsing (more on this later). The fourth player worth mentioning is Apple's Safari,

which is at version 4 and is being pushed to both Windows and Mac platforms

1. Accelerators — Accelerators are activated by highlighting text within the browser window and allow quick access to web services. An example would be mapping a highlighted address or blogging highlighted text.

2. Web Slices — Web slices allows for the tracking of information that changes on regularly visited sites. An example might be tracking changes in the local weather forecast or an item you're bidding on at eBay. Currently, there are only a few from which to choose because the site owner has to enable the functionality.

3. Security and Privacy — This is the one Mozilla is scrambling to add with the announcement of a 'privacy mode' for version 3.1 to be released in October of 2008. It includes functionality that highlights the domain you're visiting to help distinguish for lookalike phishing sites, query to a database of unsafe sites with appropriate warnings, and the ability to hide browsing history (called InPrivate browsing), cookies and temporary files.

The Good & The Bad
In my opinion, Mozilla's Firefox has the others beat when it comes to add-ons, and Google's new Chrome seems to win the speed wars. But Internet Explorer 8 is looking pretty good and will be a huge improvement over IE 7. I've used Safari, and I'm just not a big fan. However, I absolutely love my iPod classic, nano, touch and iPhone.

Unlike Internet Explorer and Firefox, Google Chrome isolates each tab within

For actual Web surfing, Firefox's interface is familiar enough to IE
users. There's hardly anything to say about it, which is a compliment.
Some interactive features designed exclusively for Internet Explorer won't
appear, however. A few sites don't display properly, but they're
pretty rare. More common are those that stupidly turn non-Explorer browsers
away by claiming they're "unsupported." And trusted and useful
ActiveX-powered sites such as Windows Update don't load at all, but that's
by design. Firefox prohibits the use of ActiveX sites to mostly protect users
from themselves. Most of the security holes found in IE use the ActiveX door
to compromise the system.
The great thing about these browser wars is that maybe one of them will ultimately
drop out like Netscape did in the first war. But as the various developers compete
for our affection, we are the ultimate winners. Better speed, more stability
and cool features.

Let's Recap
Regardless of what you like and don't like about these various browsers,
the great thing for end users is the choice we maintain. You can standardize
on one or have all four loaded on the same machine. Most users have a favorite
browser and standardize on it while all the time keeping one or more of the
other choices installed in the event that an important site requires one browser
or another. Whatever choice you make, keep in mind that your favorite may not
be around a year from now. But with the companies behind the Big 4, the chances
of that happening are small.

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