

IMT Web Browser Standards - Recommendation Summary

Architecture Working Group – Fall 2005

APU's strategy of web based education relies on using a web browser as the primary delivery mechanism to access information. IMT is responsible to support applications and services that rely on web technology for faculty, students, staff and computer labs. IMT's current web browser standards do not reflect recent industry changes, especially concerning security and platform support.

1. **Netscape** - Netscape's market share continues to decline and previously supported features – built-in email and Mac platform support – are no longer part of Netscape's strategy and product development.
2. **Internet Explorer on the Mac platform** – Microsoft is discontinuing support of this product as of December 31, 2005, thus placing Apple Mac users at risk concerning security and support. The software will no longer be available for download, and no updates will be made available.

Two newer browsers, not currently on our supported list, represent an opportunity:

1. **Mozilla Firefox** - has become one of the most innovative browsers; its speed, features, and security have allowed it to reach 14% US market share in a short amount of time. Running the same way on both Windows and Mac OS X, it provides an excellent replacement for Netscape on both platforms.
2. **Apple Safari** - the most used browser on the Mac platform ships with every computer. It is fast, behaves in a way mac users expect, and supports web standards. It will be quite natural to formalize our support for this product.

IMT's Architecture Working Group (AWG) was asked to conduct a review and make a recommendation. In order to attempt a comprehensive and objective review, they developed standard [Browser Evaluation Criteria](#) which could be used for current and future evaluations. They then conducted [reviews and testing of all current and candidate browsers](#) in Fall 2005, and produced the following recommendation.

Recommendation

1. **Replace Netscape with Mozilla Firefox on the Windows and Mac Platforms**
2. **Replace Internet Explorer with Safari on the Mac Platform**

If approved, this would change IMT's Tier 1 supported browser application list as follows:

<i>Current</i>	<i>Proposed</i>
Windows XP:	Windows XP:
Internet Explorer	Internet Explorer
Netscape	Mozilla Firefox
Mac OS X:	Mac OS X:
Internet Explorer*	Apple Safari
Netscape*	Mozilla Firefox

* Microsoft and AOL, which owns Netscape, have both dropped support for their products on the Mac.

To see the full Fall 2005 Browser Evaluation visit: <http://groups.apu.edu/awg/BrowserEvaluationFall2005>

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why support two browsers on each platform?

Standards & Portfolio Approach

Though most of our research targets an objective comparison between browsers, it is also important to consider the strategic mix of supported browsers as a whole.

Embracing a mix of browsers which implement open standards, allows us a means to ensure access to the widest range of web sites and applications into the future. However, the practical truth is that many applications and web sites are currently written for specific browsers. Therefore our collective list of supported browsers strategically needs to consider our most important current applications.

Internet Explorer on Windows is essential for accessing some sites and applications. This means we need to inform users of such applications, and continue to work with application providers and web sites to move toward open standards ensuring that their applications will work on several browsers and with the Mac platform.

Some sites are not tested against Safari because of the relative market share or perhaps Mac platform availability in their organization. This makes the inclusion of Mozilla Firefox support on the Mac platform strategic, as it has now the second largest market share and runs on Windows the same way it does on the Mac platform.

By including Mozilla Firefox, we have a total supported browser count of 3, across both Mac and Windows platforms, and a fall back since we have no control over what is shipped with the platform operating system. If we were to adopt a non-cross platform alternate for the Windows or Mac platform, we would then need to support 4 different browsers, increasing the costs and knowledge needed to provide support.

2. What criteria did IMT use to perform the evaluation?

IMT's Architecture Working Group has established the following criteria deemed important going forward:

- *Adoption* – support those browsers which are widely used, and those with a significantly increasing adoption rate
- *Application Future* – application roadmap and health of the software company or developer community to achieve continued success
- *Security* - browser security is a result of excellent design, quick response, and user communication
- *Standards Compliance* - how well a web browser implements the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) published standards and guidelines is directly related to its ability to access current and future web resources
- *Supportability* – applications which score well in these categories are easier to support: ease of installation, ease of use, documentation availability, frequent bug fixes, support options, stability, performance, and extensibility

To see the full browser evaluation criteria visit:

<http://groups.apu.edu/awg/node/148>

To see the results of individual browser reviews visit:

<http://groups.apu.edu/awg/node/194>

3. What about major web-based applications which APU uses?

SunGard Bi-Tech IFAS Browser Support

By continuing to support Internet Explorer on Windows, and Safari on the Macintosh, we can maintain official supportability with IFAS *IE-Based* applications and *Web-Based* applications. We have tested Firefox to work with IFAS broad access true web-based solutions, such as campus online.

<i>IFAS Applications</i>	<i>Windows XP SBI Official Support</i>	<i>Windows XP also Works With</i>	<i>Mac OS X SBI Official Support</i>	<i>Mac OS X also Works With</i>
<i>Web-Based Applications:</i>				
Campus Online (APU Online)	IE, Netscape	Firefox	Safari, Netscape	Firefox
Degree Works	IE, Netscape	Firefox	Safari, Netscape	Firefox
<i>IE-Based Applications:*</i>				
7i Administrative	IE	*	*	*
EDI Link	IE	*	*	*

* *IFAS Internet Explorer Based Applications* - Because these web-delivered applications are based on Microsoft Windows proprietary technology, these will continue to only be usable with Internet Explorer on Windows. Mac users will continue to need to access these Windows applications using Citrix remote application display software.

Online APU (eCollege) - Learning Management System
IE, Netscape, Firefox, and Safari are supported. See
<http://online.apu.edu/index.real?action=Technical>

Apolis2 Library System – III Millennium and related services
Innovative Information Systems is committed to supporting all browsers compliant with web standards. Our internally written “Offcampus Online Library Resources” service, may have one reported bug with Safari. This service will be transitioning to a new product from our vendor which should behave properly in all browsers.

Web Based Email
Outlook Web Access, is an example of an application which works with all proposed browsers included in this report, but which has greater functionality when used with Internet Explorer. When used with Internet Explorer, non w3c standard windows-based controls are used to provide richer functionality. It is hoped that future versions of Outlook Web Access will provide the same functionality in all standard browsers.

Other Applications
An informal survey of IMT Support Desk, Student Services, and other IMT staff was taken to determine whether there are any other broadly used web applications which are limited to a particular browser. We did not determine any major applications which would not support our proposed list of browsers. If there are any reported, IMT should produce a list to inform users of which browsers to use, as well as request that vendors adopt web standards.