What is a browser?

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A browser is a piece of software installed onto a Computer which allows you to view the internet. In works much the same way as a television set enables you to watch TV.

Every webpages on the internet is created in computer code. This code is simply a set of instructions which describes how a page should look and function. As code cannot easily be read, it needs to be translated before the page can be displayed to the user. It is the browsers job to read the code, translate it and display the page according to the instructions. Every time a button on a page is clicked a new set of coded instructions needs to be interpreted. The browser does this at lightning speed so the user is unaware of what is happening.

Current Browsers

There are many browsers available to choose from, although the top 5 account for around 98% of the market. The most common is Microsoft's Internet Explorer, primarily because it comes already installed on most new PC's. The second largest is Firefox, which has rapidly grown since it was launched in 2004. Due to its speed and added features, it's become a firm favourite with developers and frequent internet users.
In addition to Internet Explorer and Firefox there are three other mainstream browsers. Apple's Safari was initially created for the Apple Mac and accounts for around 2.4% of the market. Google's Chrome the newest member of the browser community was launched in December 2008 and now holds around 5% of the market. The final player is Opera one of the founding browsers, which hangs

onto a 1.68% share.

Although browsers have come a long way since they were first created they do have one disadvantage for website designers. At present there is no industry standard for how a browser interprets the code. As a result how a page is displayed will vary depending upon the browser the viewer uses. Therefore to ensure every users experience is the same, all new websites need to be tested in all the main browsers.

The future

Who knows what the future will hold for the humble browser. With some of the internet's biggest companies behind them and a user base reliant on them. The browser in one format or another is here to stay. But with a new browser war raging and millions being ploughed into their development. The browser of the future could be very different from what we see today.