

Excerpt from

Internet Basics

By

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Author Acknowledgment

Jennie L. Phipps is an independent writer and editor. She writes frequently about the Internet and topics related to publishing both online and on paper. Ms. Phipps is a regular contributor to Editor & Publisher, MediaInfo.com, and Free Paper Publisher. She also writes a weekly column on newspapers for BridgeNews, a financial news service.

Preview

The following is a sample excerpt from a study unit converted into the Adobe Acrobat format. A sample online exam is available for this excerpt.

The study unit describes the basics in how to access and use the Internet. This excerpt, taken from the study unit, focuses primarily on how to use Web browsers, e-mail, and other online features of the World Wide Web.

After reading through the material in the excerpt, feel free to take the [sample exam](#) based on this material.

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Internet Basics

THE INTERNET

Introduction

Remember the movie, *The Wizard of Oz*? Just when Dorothy was desperate to go home to Kansas, she and her entourage found the Wizard operating a computer the size of a two-story building with flashing lights, grating voice, and sinister powers.

A half-century later, we laugh at the notion of a little man inside a big box, using rules of operation to give a lion courage, a scarecrow a brain, and the tin man a heart. However, if you think about it, computers for many of us are still magical and their methods of operation almost as mystifying as they were in the famous movie. These days we know that clicking our heels together won't get us anywhere. But as we sit in front of a blank computer screen, we still may not know what method to use.

Welcome to the World Wide Web, where a browser is the standard mode of transportation. If Dorothy were traveling today, she would put her feet on the floor and click her mouse on a browser link to travel to all sorts of World Wide Web sites.

Browsers

The World Wide Web, which makes up the Internet, links data through a language of binary arithmetic. The language pumps information lightning fast through a telephone wire and out into a desktop computer. The computer is the *hardware*; *software* makes the computer run. A *browser* is a type of software, a sort of translator. With Web browsers on our computers, we can see and understand digital data. The most popular browsers interpret the data, so we can see pictures and graphics as well as words. There are other kinds of browsers that interpret words only. These *nongraphical* browsers are best for computers that aren't very powerful or for simple images and large type. Nongraphical browsers can be especially useful for visually impaired people. You'll learn more about such browsers later.

For a browser to work, it must connect to the Internet through an Internet service provider or ISP. An Internet service provider is a

company that sets up Internet services for you, providing you with access to the Internet. You register with an ISP, pay them a monthly or yearly fee, and they'll hook you up to the Internet.

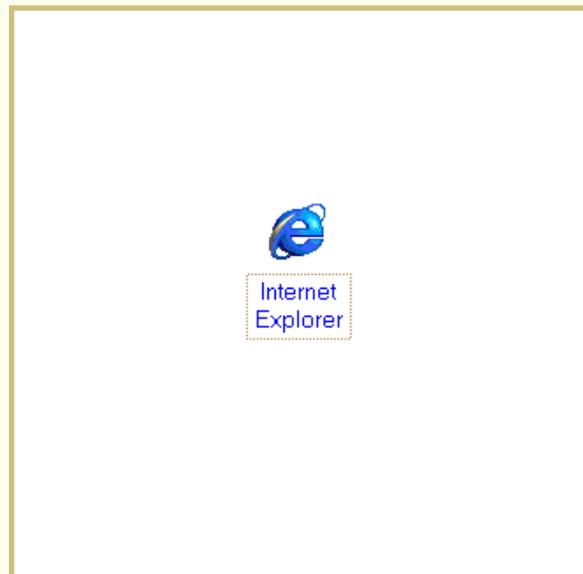
Most Internet connections are telephone connections, but some cable companies also offer Internet connections. If you get your television signals through a satellite dish, you may be able to get an Internet connection through the dish as well. Ask the company that services your dish. These connections are generally more expensive, but you'll receive and send information faster than through a phone connection.

When you become the customer of an ISP, usually the ISP will offer you a browser as part of the introduction and sign-up process. When you buy a new computer, a browser is frequently part of the software that comes with the computer. If you're using a computer at work and your company wants you to be able to access the Internet, they will provide you with a browser. In all likelihood, this browser will be either *Microsoft Explorer* or *Netscape Navigator*. These two big players in the browser market have been battling it out both in the business world and in court.

You don't have to use the browser supplied to you by your ISP. Both Netscape and Microsoft offer free copies of their browsers to anyone who would like to use them. It's often a good idea to have at least two different browsers. That's because neither of them is perfect. If you have trouble accessing a Web site with one of them, it sometimes works to try accessing the site with another.

Most computers come with Explorer already installed. If you bought your computer recently, this may be the case. You'll find the Explorer icon on your desktop, as shown in [Figure 1](#).

FIGURE 1—The Explorer Icon (Reprinted with permission from Microsoft, Inc.)



You can also get a free copy of Netscape or Explorer, by downloading it (copying it) from their Web sites. The process is very simple. You can use one browser to download another. For instance, if you use America Online (AOL) as your ISP, you probably already have a copy of Explorer. If you would like to have Navigator, you can go to the Netscape site with your AOL browser (or your copy of Explorer). Then follow the instructions there for downloading and installing your own copy of Netscape. If all you have is a computer and a modem, but no software, the easiest way to get started is to call America Online, the country's largest Internet service provider toll-free at (800) 827-6364. They'll mail you a copy of their software along with detailed instructions for installing it.

Some people are reluctant to try to install software because they're afraid that they'll somehow harm their computer. If you have such a fear, don't worry; it's not very difficult. Just follow the step-by-step instructions that you can find in a file called *Read-Me*, which will download to your computer along with the browser file (Figure 2).

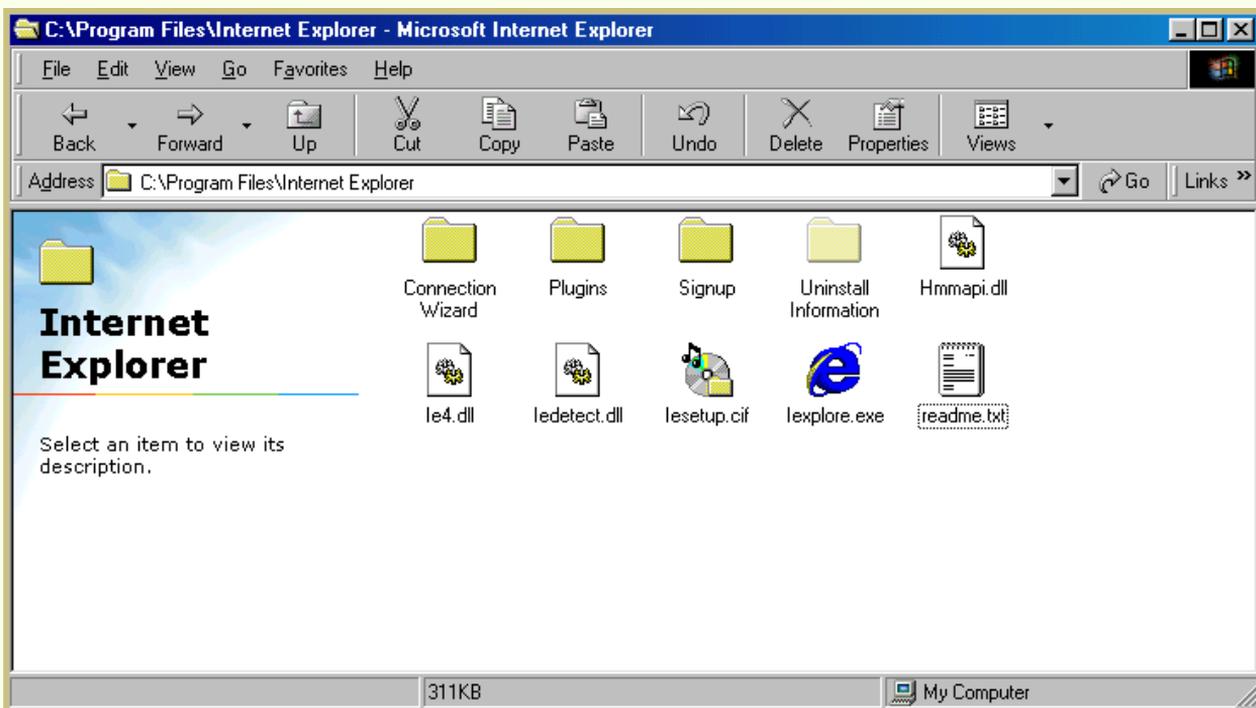


FIGURE 2—Here's the directory where you may find the "Read-Me" file.

A question that people often ask is, "Which browser is faster?" Both Netscape and Microsoft will tell you and show you documentation that their browser is faster. As you gain experience, you'll see which one works better for you. If speed is an issue for you, download both browsers and experiment to see how quickly they open the sites that you're likely to visit.

To download free browsers from the Web, go to the following Internet sites.

- <http://www.netscape.com>
- <http://www.microsoft.com>
- <http://www.operasoftware.com>
- [http://www.lynx.com](http://www lynx.com)

Types of Browsers

Netscape Navigator

Netscape Navigator is the older of the two key browsers (Figure 3). If you have a powerful computer, Navigator 4.5 has many useful tools, including one built-in to help you find places on the Web when you don't know the exact address—a sort of Internet Directory Assistance. The downside of the program is how much space it takes up on your computer. If you don't have a very powerful computer, running Navigator can make it impossible to open any other software program at the same time. Netscape promises that its next version will take up much less space. In the meantime, one way around using the portly version of Navigator is to download one of the earlier versions. They have fewer features, but they run smoothly on almost any computer.

FIGURE 3—Netscape Navigator Home Page
(Reprinted with permission from Netscape, Inc.)



Microsoft Internet Explorer

Microsoft entered the browser business much later than Netscape, and so in many ways Microsoft followed Netscape's lead rather than create something different (Figure 4). If you're an experienced user of Navigator, you'll notice that Explorer lets you retool the look of Explorer to mirror Netscape's. The latest version of Internet Explorer makes searching the Web and keeping track of where you've been much simpler than it has ever been before. However, this new version of Internet Explorer is also a "space hog." As with Netscape, if your computer isn't very powerful, you might consider using an earlier version.



FIGURE 4—Microsoft Internet Explorer Home Page (Reprinted with permission from Microsoft, Inc.)

America Online

AOL is an Internet Service Provider (ISP) that includes a branded, customized version of the IE browser. The custom browser's graphic interface and built-in search engine make AOL very easy to use for even those who find technology a little bit intimidating. The AOL Search feature (Figure 5) expands to provide several categories useful for narrowing down a search.

FIGURE 5—AOL Anywhere (Reprinted with permission from America Online, Inc.)



If you're looking for speed or sophistication, the AOL interface isn't the place to find it. But if you plan to use the Internet only now and then, AOL offers everything you'll probably ever need.

When the AOL interface and searching devices aren't good enough, the program allows you to use the stand-alone version of Internet Explorer for more advanced exploration. You can even use other browsers, like Netscape, while connected to the Internet with AOL as your ISP. Just minimize the AOL page (click the minus sign [-] in the upper right-hand corner) and double click on the browser that you want to use. It will open, and you'll be up and running.

Other Browsers

If you're not a serious and regular user of the Internet, you might think that there are no other browser choices besides those we've discussed. But that's not true. Some very good alternatives exist. Several of them are faster than the two industry standards. We'll talk about three of them here. There are others, but these are particularly reliable and useful in some special circumstances that you may encounter.

Opera. A small Norwegian company developed Opera, which had been attracting the most media attention recently. The Opera browser is fast and takes up a tiny amount of space in your computer. It will run briskly on a 386 computer with only 6 megs of RAM, which, put simply, is old and slow. Despite its small size, Opera lets you open multiple windows, which is very useful for those who use the Internet to do research or compile information. Unlike most browsers, you don't have to use a mouse. You can manipulate Opera using only key-strokes. Download the software at <http://www.operasoft.com>. You can use it for a month for free before you have to pay for it.



(©1999 Opera, Inc.)

Arachne. Arachne is a DOS-based Web browser that runs on all computers, even very old ones. Arachne uses toolbar icons for most common browsing chores. This browser doesn't require a mouse. It also lets you send and receive e-mail. Schools and hospitals get to use it for free; the rest of us have to pay \$30. You can find it on xChaos Software or on the Internet at <http://browser.arachne.cz/>.



(©1999 Arachne, Inc.)

Lynx. Lynx is probably the most widely used text mode browser on the Internet (Figure 6). It runs on a wide variety of platforms, including Unix, VMS, Macintosh, and Windows. Lynx is a full-featured browser, which means there's almost no content on the Web that Lynx can't retrieve and display. It's particularly good if you don't want to spend a lot for your Internet account. If you don't have a lot of computer experience, you may find Lynx difficult to use at first, but it's a tool you may want to consider in the future. Lynx, is available free of charge. You can obtain Lynx by going to <ftp://ftp2.cc.ukans.edu/pub/DosLynx/readme.htm>.

FIGURE 6—The Lynx

Browser (Courtesy Borland C/C++ and Turbo Vision; CERN, Geneva, SW; Erick Engelke; Dartmouth College; and David Koblas)

