Mozilla and Google Cry Foul Over Browsers in Windows 8

If you thought you'd be happily browsing the web in either Google Chrome [1] or Mozilla Firefox [2] on that Windows 8 [3] tablet you're planning on buying, think again. According to Mozilla, Microsoft [4] is planning to restrict the capabilities of third-party browsers on the tablet version of Windows 8, called Windows RT [5].

In a blog post [6], Mozilla expresses great concern over the possibility that Microsoft might restrict browsers other than Internet Explorer from working as a full-featured browser on a Windows tablet. While a third-party browser such as Firefox would still run in the touch-friendly Metro [7] environment, it wouldn't have access to the Windows "classic" desktop. Consequently, the browser would be cut off from the "speed, stability and security" of a modern web browser, Mozilla says.

Google echoed Mozilla's worries in a statement.

"We share the concerns Mozilla has raised regarding the Windows 8 environment restricting user choice and innovation," Google said. "We've always welcomed innovation in the browser space across all platforms and strongly believe that having great competitors makes us all work harder."

Answering a query from *Mashable*, a Microsoft spokesperson directed us to the company's official blog post [8] about Windows on ARM (since renamed Windows RT), which has a lot of information about Internet Explorer but does not mention third-party browsers at all. The spokesperson wouldn't say whether or not the final build of the software would restrict the capabilities of third-party browsers.

For the desktop version of Windows 8, full-featured browsers from third parties will be supported, and both Mozilla [9] and Google [10] have publicly said they're working on versions of Firefox and Chrome that will be designed for Metro.

If Microsoft does end up restricting third-party browsers on Windows 8 tablets, they would be in good company. Apple does not allow any other browser than Safari [11] to run on iOS [12] devices — the iPhone, iPad and iPod Touch. Although other browser apps such as Opera [13] and Atomic [14] exist, they are all essentially skins for mobile Safari, or are simple clients that use cloud computing to do all the "heavy lifting" of web browsing (see update below).

Android [15] is much more open. Many third-party browsers (including Firefox) are available for Android phones and tablets, but with many different versions of Android running on different devices, their performance and capabilities can vary widely.

What's your take? Should Microsoft open up Windows tablets to other browsers, or is it simply following standard practices, established by Apple?

www.mashable.com [16]

Posted by Janine E. Mooney, Editor

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