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Safari, Opera Users Lag Behind in Security Updates

Users of the **Google Chrome** and **Mozilla Firefox** Web browsers are far more likely to be cruising the Web with the latest, most secure versions of the browsers than users of either **Opera** or **Safari**, a study released today found.

The analysis, from researchers at **Google Switzerland** and the **Swiss Federal Institute of Technology**, pored through anonymized logs from Google's Web servers. The results were somewhat unsurprising, but still interesting: 97 percent of Chrome users were browsing with the latest version within 21 days of that version's release date.

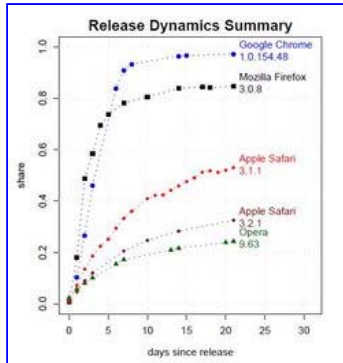
By comparison, 85 percent of Firefox users were surfing with the latest version within three weeks of a major new release (this is a marginal improvement over the results from a [similar study released last summer](#), which showed roughly 83 percent of Firefox users browsing with the latest version).

The study's conclusion extols the virtues of auto-update features, functionality that is built into both Chrome and Firefox, albeit in different ways. Chrome's auto-update feature can't be disabled; the browser checks for updates every five hours; and any available updates are automatically and silently installed. Firefox checks for new updates whenever the browser is started; installs updates automatically; and requires a restart for the fixes to take effect.

The study found just 53 percent of Apple Safari 3.x users had the latest version installed 21 days after its release. Apple releases patches for Safari through the Software Update feature in OS X, which checks for updates daily, weekly, or monthly, depending on the setting chosen by the user.

Only 24 percent of Opera users were browsing with the latest version three weeks after a new release, the researchers found. Opera's update mechanism has long been the most laborious of the browsers, requiring users to download a new installer program from the Opera Web site with each new version.

The study didn't attempt to measure the update frequency of Microsoft Internet Explorer users. But, a new report from **Forrester Research** indicates that among corporate users, IE6 is the browser of choice. Forrester found that 78 percent of businesses still use IE as the default browser, with a whopping 60 percent still using IE6.



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Google may have the most protected browser users, but the company still only has about a 2 percent market share among business users, Forrester found (that number is almost certainly higher among end users).

Finally, if Chrome silently auto-updates itself, why aren't 100 percent of Chrome users browsing with the latest version? The study notes that Chrome updates only kick in after the user has restarted the browser, and there is no prompt that reminds the user to restart the program.

"Apparently, a significant population share does not restart their browser within three weeks of a new release." Read-only installs of Chrome -- such as those installed in Internet cafes or libraries -- could also explain why some Chrome users don't update, the researchers speculated.

A copy of the study is available [at this link here](#).

By Brian Krebs | May 5, 2009; 4:31 PM ET

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