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FIREFOX WEB BROWSER – The Mozilla Foundation has released Firefox 1.0, the first non-beta version of the open-source web browser that traces its roots back to pre-AOL Netscape. Firefox is available for Windows, Linux and Mac OSX (although most OSX users will probably opt for Apple's Safari browser). Firefox is available as a free download from http://www.mozilla.org/products/firefox.

One of the most popular features of Firefox (and Safari) is tabbed browsing. You can open a link or a new webpage as a tab in the current browser window, and quickly switch between webpages by clicking on the tabs.

Many experts consider Firefox more secure than Internet Explorer (IE). Open source code is subject to the scrutiny of the entire software community, and so far Firefox seems to have fewer vulnerabilities than IE. It also runs as regular application software, unlike IE which Microsoft has chosen to integrate tightly into the Windows operating system.

Firefox has more compact code, a cleaner interface, and significantly faster performance than IE. The layout and menus will be very familiar to IE users, and the installer offers to import your IE settings and bookmarks to make the transition easy. The menus for security related settings are well organized and easy to use, in contrast to the corresponding menus in IE which are so daunting that most people never touch them.

Firefox includes a configurable popup blocker, and Google search from the toolbar. Searching for text in a webpage is very simple, in fact you can turn on a feature that searches for text as soon as you start typing a word or phrase. Additional features are available via third-party extensions.

Some websites that have been coded specifically for IE rather than following web coding standards may not display properly in Firefox, although we didn't run across any problems in our testing. Microsoft's Windows Update site only works with Internet Explorer, so you probably don't want to uninstall IE.

Firefox pros:

- Tabbed browsing
- Doesn't share the security vulnerabilities of IE
- Fast performance
- Clean interface
- Easy to understand menus for security settings
- Popup blocker
- Easy to search for text in web pages
- Simple transition for IE users
- Open source code
- Third party extensions
- Good choice for people who use multiple platforms (Windows, Linux, Mac OSX)

Firefox cons:

- Still need IE for Windows Update
- Some websites coded specifically for IE may not display properly
- No Mac OS9 version (consider Mozilla 1.7 as an alternative)
- Companion email client (Thunderbird) still in beta

You can have multiple web browsers on your computer and switch back and forth between them, so go ahead and download Firefox if you want to try it out. If you are a web designer, we recommend that you add Firefox to the list of browsers that you use to preview your sites for compatibility.

WEBMAIL WARS – Even though Google's GMail is still in beta, their essentially unlimited 1GB storage limit has prompted competitors Yahoo! and Hotmail to drastically increase their storage limits in response. Some form of virus protection and spam blocking is also now standard in the free webmail offerings.

Why are these guys in an all-out war to give away email storage and other features for free? Because the advertising revenues are huge. Unlike standard POP3 mail which is downloaded to your computer

and read with an email program like Outlook Express, webmail is stored on the provider's server and viewed as a webpage. (POP3 stands for "Post Office Protocol Version 3") The webpage format allows advertising, and GMail has upped the ante by scanning your email and then showing you targeted ads based on the content of the email.

Yahoo! charges $20/year to allow access to ISP POP3 accounts via webmail, and to eliminate the text ads they normally insert into sent mail. GMail's free service includes POP3 access and does not insert ads into sent mail. GMail however is still in beta "by invitation only". Some people are concerned about the privacy implications of GMail, but Google claims they don't disclose the information to third parties.

KWOM provides standard POP3 mail for the majority of users who download their mail to their computer and view it with standard email software (Outlook Express, Outlook, Netscape, Apple Mail, etc.). We also provide a webmail interface at http://webmail.kwom.com as a convenience for checking and responding to your new mail from any computer with web access. Our webmail server is set up as a viewer to your regular POP3 account, and it does not have separate storage for saving mail or organizing it into folders. For those who want spam and virus filtering, we offer the optional Postini email filtering service.

With Yahoo!, Hotmail and now GMail competing to offer the most storage, the most features, and the coolest web interface – all for free in return for viewing some advertising – it doesn't make sense for KWOM to keep up with the webmail competition since we have a no-advertising policy. If you occasionally check your mail via the web on another computer, go to http://webmail.kwom.com. If on the other hand you prefer to always get your mail via webmail even on your primary computer, and don't mind seeing some ads, then consider signing up for Yahoo! Mail (or GMail once it is out of beta).

Free webmail pros:

- Access email from any computer
- Portable email addresses not tied to your ISP (e.g. jsmith48259@yahoo.com)
- Storage limits recently increased to 100MB or more
- Spam and virus blocking
- Store old mail and sent mail on server and organize into folders
- Keep address book on server

Free webmail cons:

- Ads when viewing mail (and possibly in sent mail)
- Possible privacy concerns about ads targeted to email content
- Limit on maximum message size (e.g. 10MB)
- Slow performance viewing email as webpage, especially on a dialup modem link
- Regular POP3 mail is better for sending/receiving attachments
- Some commercial email with graphics linked to website may not display properly via webmail
- Free model depends on advertising revenues staying high

Once GMail becomes available to everyone, another option is to use GMail to collect email from your KWOM POP3 account, assuming Google continues to offer this feature at no extra cost.

VOICE OVER IP – VoIP is a new type of telephone service that uses a broadband Internet connection (DSL, cable modem, wireless broadband, T1, etc.) instead of a phoneline. Of course, you can't get rid of all your phonelines if you have DSL which is typically lineshared on a phoneline. Advantages of VoIP include lower phone bills, unlimited local and long distance calling, portability to any location with a broadband connection, area code not tied to geographic location, and voicemail via web or email.

Most residential VoIP users have an Analog Telephone Adapter (ATA), sometimes called a VoIP modem, so they can use regular analog phones. Businesses often opt for digital IP-phones which connect directly to their Local Area Network and provide advanced features (extension dialing, autoattendant, call forwarding and conferencing, multiple call appearances, etc.) An added benefit of IP-phones is that they typically require only 20 kbps of upstream bandwidth per call, while an ATA typically requires 90 kbps.

If you have a broadband connection and are interested in VoIP, we offer both ATA and IP-phone based phone service powered by Nuvio. Residential ATA service costs $15/month for 500 outbound minutes or $30/month for unlimited. Business ATA service costs $40/month for 1500 outbound minutes or $50/month for unlimited. The feature-rich "Nuvio Centrex" service with IP-phones and unlimited outbound calling costs $60/month per phone with a 2 year commitment. Contact us for details.