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Browsing at Warp Speed: Your Guide to Chrome!

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Introducing Google Chrome

The Internet exploded in the mid-2000s.

No, I don't mean literally; that'd be messy. But the Internet did get a lot bigger extremely quickly. All sorts of interesting websites started popping up - YouTube, Facebook, Twitter - and all of a sudden using our computer shifted away from using applications installed on our computers towards using websites which allow us to share and collaborate. That's great, right?

There was just one problem. One big, slow, memory-guzzling problem: Internet Explorer 6, which as of 2006 had a market share of over 80%. To many it was "The Internet", because they simply didn't know any better. Mozilla Firefox had managed to get a significant foothold in the market, and was starting to show people that the Internet could be better, but it was a slow process.

Over the years, Internet Explorer's market share slowly fell, giving way to Mozilla Firefox. However, over time Mozilla Firefox itself started to slow down, focusing more on add-ons and extensions rather than uninterrupted web browsing. While it was still infinitely better than Internet Explorer, it was starting to lose its edge.

In 2008, Google released a comic book talking about something radically different: a new browser built from the ground up with new technologies to work with the web applications which were becoming commonplace. When it was first released, Chrome was a big deal. It was a different beast to the other browsers: it focused on browsing - it got out of your way and let you look at the webpage. If you didn't know what you were looking for, it made it really easy for you to explore while remaining as unobtrusive as possible.

We're four years on now, and Chrome is better than ever. Other browsers have improved too, but Chrome is still arguably the best web browser out there for… well… browsing!

What Is Google Chrome?

Google Chrome is a free, cross-platform Internet browser made by the search giant Google. It aims to be the best browser in terms of simplicity and speed.

Why Should I Use Google Chrome?

It's fast

Google Chrome is really fast. When it was first released back in 2008 it made big waves - instead of waiting for 5 seconds for your browser to start up, Chrome would do it in one and a half. That may not sound like a big deal, but that's still just one-third of the time. It wasn't just starting up, either; creating new tabs, shifting them around – everything was significantly snappier.

Nowadays, all of the latest browsers measure their startup performance in milliseconds, and according to the latest benchmarks (http://www.tomshardware.com/reviews/chrome-17-firefox-10-ubuntu,3129.html) from Tom's Hardware, it's not always the fastest any more. However, while it may not win in the lab, Chrome often still feels faster, especially when starting up with lots of tabs at once (such as when restoring the last browsing session, for example).

Of course, startup time isn't the only measure of performance - the speed at which a browser can load webpages is important too. Google Chrome excels here, too. It is still the fastest browser when it comes to JavaScript, which is used to make webpages interactive. The faster a web browser is at handling JavaScript, the smoother your browsing experience will feel; particularly on websites like Facebook or Gmail.

It's simple

Google Chrome is great because of its simplicity, particularly in the user interface. The design philosophy goes a little like this: "I want to look at websites, not a browser that loads websites. So, let's get the interface out of the way, making it really easy to look at those websites without taking up a lot of space and imposing on the content."

To that end, Chrome gives you quick access to the things you need - the address bar, search and tabs - and hides everything else in the menus. It's all still easily accessible, but out of sight and out of mind until you actually need to use it.

Google Chrome takes a different approach to the other browsers when it comes to looking at History, Downloads, Extensions, Bookmarks or Preferences. Instead of splitting them out into different windows, or shoving them in a sidebar, Google Chrome keeps them in their own, full-sized tab. It makes swapping between these functions and normal browsing much easier, and gives you full focus on whatever it is you want to look at. If you really want to have one displayed in its own window, there's nothing stopping you from simply dragging the tab out to separate it from the other tabs.

It's stable

While the interface is designed to be as simple as possible, there's still a very complex program behind it. Thankfully, Google Chrome is extremely stable, so a crashed browser is (mostly) a thing of the past.

Of course, things do still go wrong; Adobe Flash might decide to freeze up, or a poorly coded JavaScript program might encounter an error and break down. In most other browsers (particularly older ones), this would cause the entire application to freeze - you'd have to force the application to close and lose all your tabs. However, Chrome does things a little differently.

In other browsers, all the tabs are run under one process. If the contents of one tab stuffs up, it drags the other tabs with it and freezes the entire program. Chrome, on the other hand, splits the app up into a different process for each tab; plug-ins such as Adobe Flash each have their own process, too. This methodology, called sandboxing, keeps each tab separate, even if they're all in the same window. If one tab crashes for some reason, you don't have to re-start the entire browser as only that tab is compromised. If Flash is the culprit, only Flash will break, leaving the rest of the content on each page intact.

When it comes to memory usage, Chrome's approach has both pros and cons. By splitting Chrome tabs into individual tabs, the overall memory usage tends to be a bit higher than other browsers (as it takes a little more memory to handle each tab as an individual process). However, it also makes freeing up memory a bit easier; when all the tabs run under a single process, closing a tab doesn't necessarily mean that all the RAM used by that tab is properly freed up again. When a tab in Google Chrome is closed its entire process is shut down, so the memory is properly returned to the system.

It's shiny

Google Chrome is based on the WebKit rendering engine, which means that it is able to do justice to websites that use HTML 5 and CSS 3 to do some pretty awesome stuff. In fact, Google Chrome (along with Apple's browser, Safari) are among the top (if not the top) browsers for compliance with HTML 5's fanciness.

It also has support for Web GL, which is new technology which allows web applications to utilize the graphics card to render complex 3D models in a way which was impossible even a couple of years ago. Chrome is not the only browser with Web GL support, but it was the first to the table.

Chrome vs. Chromium

Now, to make things interesting, there are actually two different programs that sound and act very similarly: Google Chrome and Chromium. Their similarities are not coincidental — the two programs are based on the same code and started off in the same place.

When Google first announced Google Chrome, they also announced that they would be making its code open source — that is, anybody could see the code and integrate it into their own applications. For that to be possible, though, somebody would have to manage the code, so the Chromium team was founded.

To make it perfectly clear, the differences between Google Chrome and Chromium are very few; essentially, Google Chrome is free to use but owned and managed by Google, whereas Chromium is not run by Google, and is not only free to use but also free in the sense that you can view the code, run it however you like, modify it and distribute it however you choose.

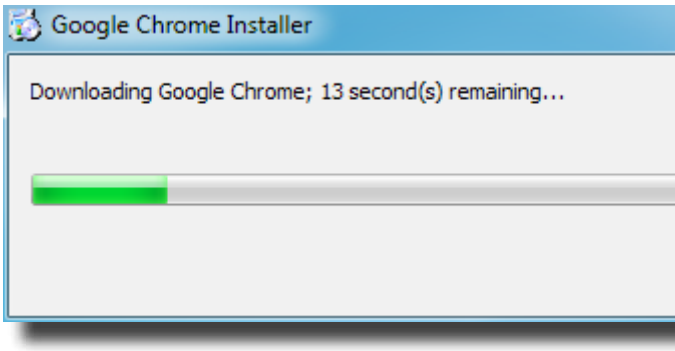
This guide focuses on Google Chrome rather than Chromium, but the overarching functionality should be the same - which one you choose to use is up to you!

1. Installing Google Chrome

Installing Google Chrome is really simple - if you've ever installed an application on your computer, you'll have no problem installing Google Chrome. Even so, we'll go through the installation procedure for each platform anyway.

Windows

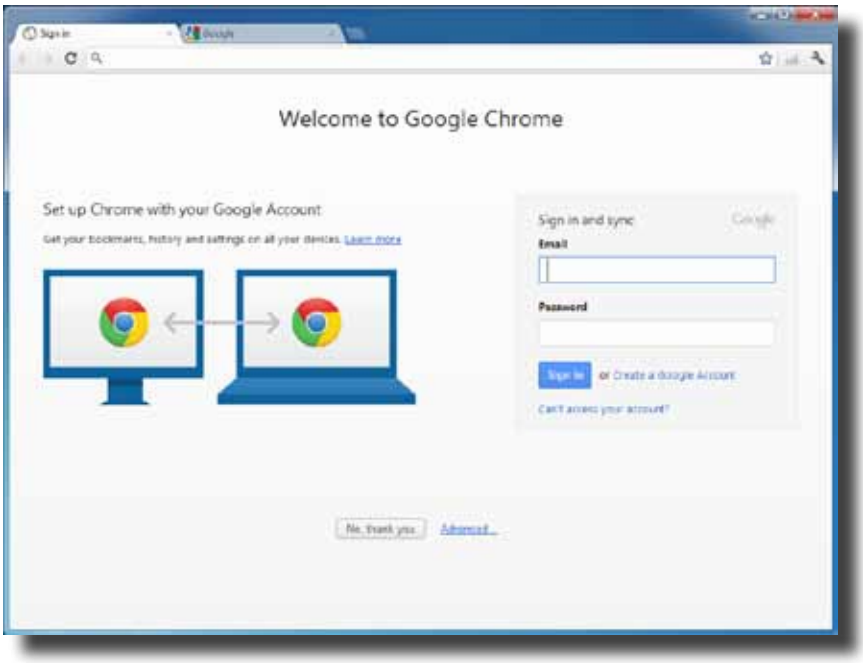
The first step to installing Google Chrome is opening up an existing browser (such as Internet Explorer or Mozilla Firefox) and visiting the Google Chrome website (https://www.google.com/chrome). On the right hand side of the page there's a big blue button to download Google Chrome - Google detects that you're using Windows and automatically selects the right version of the program for you.



When you click on the download button, you'll be shown the EULA (End User License Agreement). You'll need to accept this before you can download Chrome. At this point you're also able to set Google Chrome as your default browser (which I'd highly recommend).

Once you've accepted the EULA you'll see a page which thanks you for downloading Google Chrome. A window might pop up at this point asking if you want to run the program - if so, click "Yes". Then a window with the title "Google Chrome Installer" will appear - this downloads and installs Chrome for you automatically, so just wait for it to finish and before you know it you'll have Google Chrome fully installed!

Chrome should automatically start up, or you can start Chrome manually using the new shortcut on your desktop. As Chrome launches for the first time, it'll ask you which search engine you want to use as your default when searching. I personally recommend Google, but if you have your heart set on Yahoo, Bing or some other search engine you can use one of them instead.



The first tab you'll see when using Chrome for the first time asks you if you'd like to sign in using a Google account (if you use Google Mail or Google+ you'll have one of these) to sync bookmarks, extensions, web apps, themes (among other things). You can log in, create a new account if you don't have one already, or do it some other time by clicking on "No thanks…"

With that, you're all ready to go!

Mac

Installing Google Chrome is easy on the Mac too, although it's a tiny bit more involved than installing on Windows.

First, you'll need to use an existing browser (such as Safari or Mozilla Firefox) to visit the Google Chrome website (https://www.google.com/chrome). On the right hand side of the page is a big blue button to download Chrome for OS X - the correct version has already been selected for you. You'll then need to accept a EULA (End User License Agreement) before you can download the image file containing Google Chrome.

When you've accepted the EULA, you'll see a thank you page and the download should automatically start. You're downloading a DMG file that *contains* Google Chrome, and mounts on your computer just like a CD. When the DMG

file has finished downloading, just double click it and it will mount. You'll then see a window containing two icons; Google Chrome, and a shortcut to your Applications folder. Just click and drag the Google Chrome icon onto the Applications folder shortcut. That's it! Google Chrome is now installed on your computer and ready to use.

When you open Google Chrome for the first time, a dialog box will pop up saying that it is an application that you've downloaded from the Internet and asking if you're sure you want to open it. Click "Open" (after all, you wouldn't have downloaded it if you didn't plan to run it, right?).

The first time you open Chrome, two things will happen. First, a window will pop up asking which browser you want to use - again, I'd recommend Google but the choice is yours. Secondly, you're given the chance to log in to Chrome with a Google account so that you can sync bookmarks, extensions, web apps and themes between any other computers running Chrome that you might have.

That's it! You're now ready to start using Google Chrome.

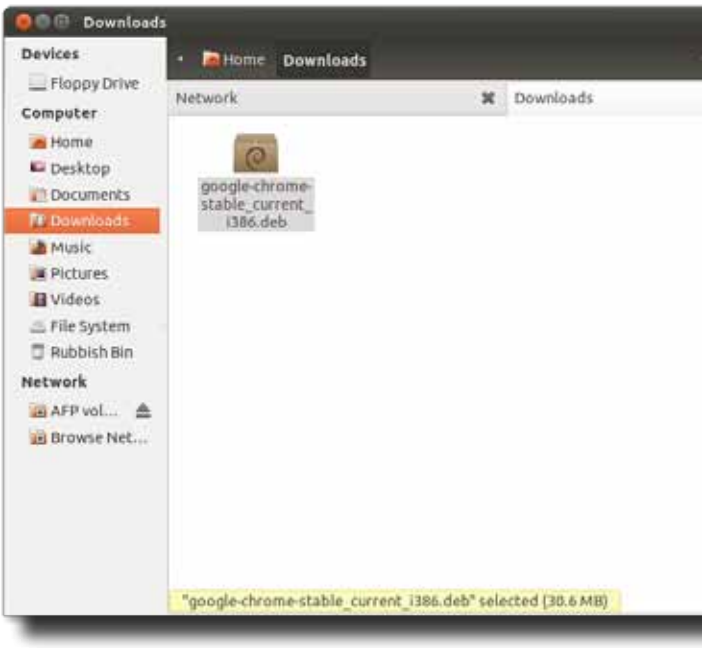
Ubuntu

Installing Chrome on Ubuntu is also simple. Chromium can be found, by default, in the Ubuntu Software Center.

Just like the other platforms, you'll want to use your current browser (most likely Mozilla Firefox) to browse to the Google Chrome website (https://www.google.com/chrome) and click on the big blue download button on the right hand side of the page. You'll then see the EULA (End User License Agreement) which you'll need to accept. Here you also need to choose the specific version of Chrome that you want to install. Unless you specifically know you need otherwise, you'll almost certainly want to choose the first option: "32 bit .deb (For Debian/Ubuntu)". When you're ready to proceed, click "Accept and Install".

Next you'll see a thank you page from Google, and your download should start automatically. By default it should be downloaded to the Downloads folder in your home folder, but if you chose to save it somewhere else you'll need to note down the location. If you're manually saving the file, you'll need to note the filename you choose, too.

Once the .deb file has finished downloading, open it. You'll be directed to the Ubuntu Software Center, where you'll be able to install it by clicking "Install" and entering your password.



Chrome is now installed! If you're using the Unity interface, you can search for Google Chrome in the dashboard and drag it into the sidebar, or if you're using the Classic interface you'll find it under "Applications > Internet > Google Chrome".

The first time you start Chrome up, you'll be asked to choose the search engine to use by default for searching with the Omnibar. You'll then have a window pop up entitled "Welcome to Google Chrome", where you have the option to make Chrome your default browser.

Finally, you'll see the main Chrome window. Here you're asked if you'd like to sign in to Chrome with a Google account to sync bookmarks, extensions, web apps and themes across computers.

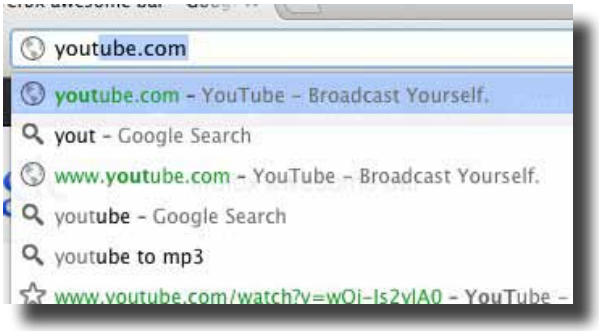
2. Using Google Chrome

Although it might look different (and despite having some different approaches to managing itself), Google Chrome is still fundamentally a web browser. There are still bookmarks and tabs. You still type in URLs or search. There's still a history of visited pages and a list of the files you've downloaded. They've just been rearranged a little, that's all!

The Omnibar

The Omnibar is where you'll usually start using Google Chrome. Unlike most other browsers, which have separate fields for URLs (Internet addresses) and searching, Google Chrome combines the two into one giant bar. Mozilla Firefox now has similar functionality with its Awesome Bar, but (in my opinion) Google Chrome's Omnibar is a bit more fluid and better to work with.

The Omnibar automatically detects what you're trying to do by what you've entered - if you enter a URL, it will treat it as you'd expect. If what you enter doesn't look like an address, the Omnibar assumes that you want to do a search - pressing "Enter" will then cause it to pass its contents to your default search engine. The Omnibar also keeps track of your history; it'll check if what you've entered matches up with any pages you've viewed recently.



The other nifty feature of the Omnibar is its search engine integration. When you visit a website that requires you to search for content (such as YouTube or Wikipedia), Google Chrome detects how it uses search strings (the long string of text you see after the main address in its URL after searching). Then, when you start to type "youtube" or "wikipedia", for example, the Omnibar allows you to press the "Tab" key on your keyboard and then search that website directly from the Omnibar. Once you get used to it, it's much faster than visiting the website and searching from there.

The star on the right hand side of the Omnibar is used to bookmark the current page - more on that a bit later.

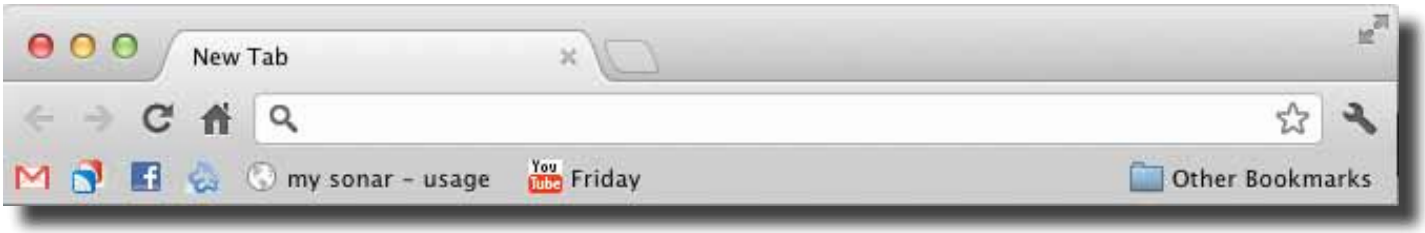
Tabs

There isn't a whole lot to say about tabs in a browser - they behave largely the same regardless of which browser you're in. You can create a new tab by clicking on the small icon on the right hand side of the last tab.

The first thing you'll notice about Chrome's tabs is that they're at the top of the window rather than beneath the address bar like in most other browsers. Part of the reasoning behind this is because the selected tab acts as the title for the window - there's no reason to have the title of the window displayed in two places at once.

The great thing about tabs is that they aren't static - you can move your tabs around to group them into sets that make sense. Clicking and dragging a tab to the left or right will change its place in the current window. If you move the tab up or down instead of left or right, it will "pull" the tab out of the group and create a new window with just that tab. You can then drag more from the first window into the second if you so desire.

The Bookmark Bar & Manager

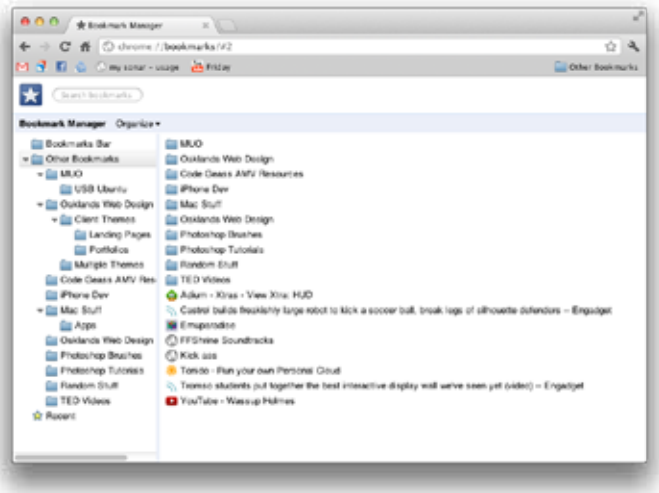


As you might have guessed, the bookmark bar is… well… a bar for bookmarks. It's the default location for storing your bookmarks and gives you quick and easy access to links that you want to get back to in a hurry (or that you access on a regular basis).

To add a link to the bookmark bar, click on the star on the right hand side of the Omnibar. This gives you a chance to rename the bookmark or change its location. If you have a lot of bookmarks, they will eventually be stored in the folder on the right hand side of the bookmark bar entitled "Other Bookmarks". You can click and drag these onto the bookmark bar, though this will push the last bookmark into the folder.

If you right-click on the bookmark bar you can manually add a new bookmark by clicking on "Add Page…", or create a folder by clicking on "Add Folder…". You can add bookmarks by clicking and dragging them on to the folder of choice.

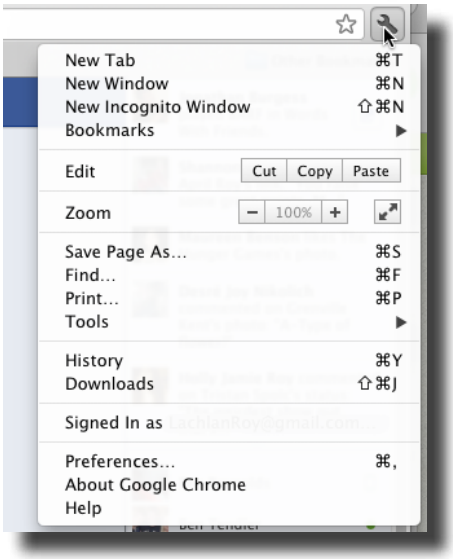
If you need to organize a lot of bookmarks quickly, you might be better off using the Bookmark Manager. You can access this by right clicking on the Bookmark Bar and then clicking on "Bookmark Manager".



The Bookmark Manager opens in a new tab and gives you an overview of all the bookmarks that you have saved in Google Chrome. Clicking on a folder will display all of its bookmarks and subfolders. You can select multiple separate items by holding down Ctrl (or ⌘ on a Mac), all the items between two points by clicking on one and holding down Shift as you click on the second, or all items by pressing Ctrl+A (or ⌘+A). You can then drag the selected item(s) to any folder in the sidebar on the left, any subfolder on the right, or reorder them by dragging them up or down.

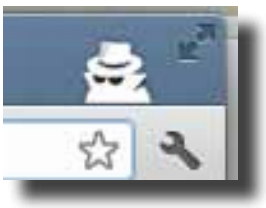
The Wrench Icon

The wrench icon in the top right hand corner of the Google Chrome window gives easy access to the rest of Google Chrome's features. Click on the wrench icon to access History, Downloads, Extensions (in the "Tools" menu) and Preferences. You can also use it to zoom in on the page and print the page, too.



Incognito Mode

I'm sure there are times when you wish the computer wasn't keeping a track of your browsing history. Buying someone's birthday present perhaps, or logging on to an Internet banking site. Maybe you don't want anybody to know that you secretly watch *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*. Whatever the case, in these situations you would usually have to go into your browsing history and delete any reference to the pages in question, remove those My Little Pony videos from the downloads list and pray nobody tried to search for birthday presents.



Thankfully, Google Chrome saves all that hassle with its Incognito mode. You can create a new Incognito window by clicking on the wrench icon and then “New Incognito Window”, or by using the corresponding keyboard shortcut (see below). This will open a new window which will either be blue or a darker shade of the window color (depending on your operating system and/or Chrome theme) and will have a shady-looking spy icon in the top right hand corner of the window.

So what does Incognito mode do? Essentially, Incognito mode lets you browse the Internet just like normal. However, unlike in a normal window, activity from the Incognito mode simply isn’t logged - no record is kept on your computer whatsoever. That goes for history, searches and downloads; of course, if you download something you’ll keep the file, but there’ll be no record of you downloading it in Google Chrome. Your My Little Pony addiction is safe… for now.

As a security measure, going Incognito doesn’t access your saved passwords or logins. This has the added benefit that Incognito mode works really well as a “guest browser”. The guest can use your computer to access Facebook or Google Mail or any other website without having to log you out of your account. They could even use it for sensitive information such as banking because there is no trace of it kept on your computer after they close the Incognito window.

Google Cloud Print

Sometimes, you want to be able to print something from a computer that isn’t set up to use your printer. Maybe you never got around to sharing your printer, or maybe you want to print from a computer that isn’t yours. Either way, wouldn’t it be great if you could print from any computer, even if it isn’t set up with your printer?

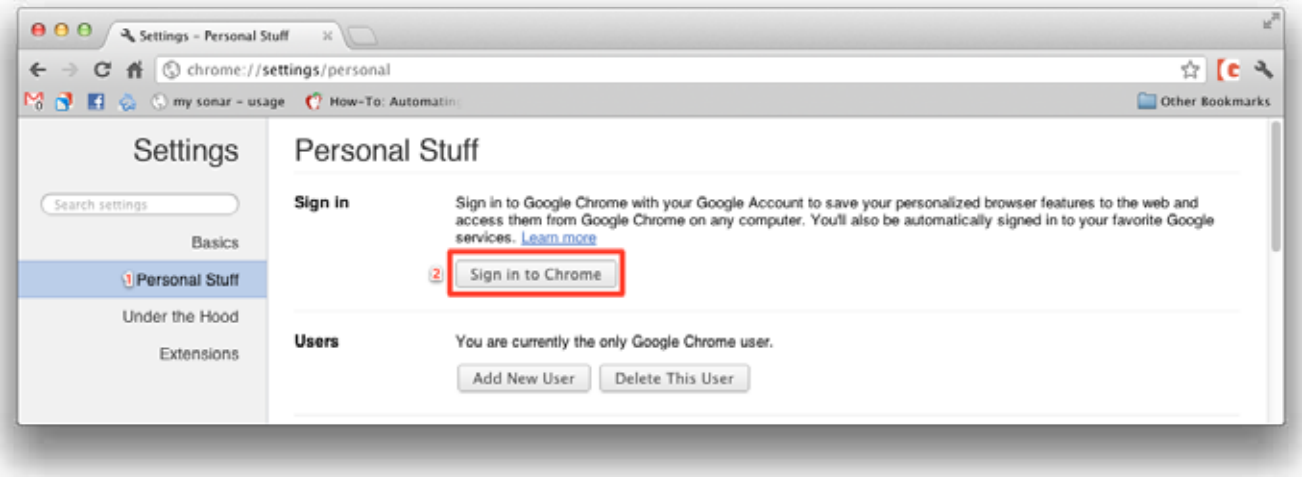
Google’s Cloud Print service (which is still in beta) aims to fix that problem. Not only can you use it to print from any computer with Chrome installed, but it also allows you to print from devices which usually have problems printing, such as your phone or tablet.

There are many new printers which have Google Cloud Print compatibility built in and ready to go out of the box (such as HP’s ePrint printers or Cloud Compatible printers from Kodak, Epson or Canon), but it’s possible to connect your older printer to the cloud, too.

To connect an older printer, you’ll need to have it set up to print to another computer, which will act as the host. The host will need to be on for you to print. You will also need to have Google Chrome installed on this host.

Once the printer is set up and you’ve installed Google Chrome on the host computer, go into Chrome’s preferences by clicking on the wrench icon and then “Settings”. If you haven’t done so yet, click on “Personal Stuff” in the sidebar and sign into your Google Account.

Then, click on “Under the Hood” in the sidebar and select “Enable Google Cloud Print” at the bottom of the window.



Then you'll be asked to finish registration of your printer with Google Cloud Print by clicking on a button. Once that's done, you should be good to go.

For a list of ways to print to your Google Cloud connected printer, you can visit the Google Cloud Print website (http://www.google.com/cloudprint/learn/apps.html).

3. Getting Around

Keyboard shortcuts

There are a bunch of keyboard shortcuts you can use to get around faster. They vary a little bit between the Mac and Windows/Ubuntu, so I'll list both.

Shortcut	Windows/Ubuntu	Mac .
New Window:	Ctrl+N	Apple+N
New Incognito Window:	Ctrl+Shift+N	Apple+Shift+N
New Tab:	Ctrl+T	Apple+T
Close Tab:	Ctrl+W	Apple+W
Close Window:	Ctrl+Shift+W	Apple+Shift+W
Add to Bookmarks:	Ctrl+D	Apple+D
Show/Hide Bookmarks Bar:	Ctrl+Shift+B	Apple+Shift+B
Bookmarks Manager:	(None)	Apple+Option+B
Downloads:	Ctrl+J	Apple+Shift+J
History:	Ctrl+H	Apple+Y
Open link in new tab:	Ctrl+Click	Apple+Click
Open last closed tab:	Ctrl+Shift+T	Apple+Shift+T

That's all of the major keyboard shortcuts. If you want a more complete list, you can visit the Google Chrome support website to see shortcuts for

- Windows *(https://support.google.com/chrome/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=157179&topic=25799&rd=1)*
- Mac *(https://support.google.com/chrome/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=165450&topic=25799&ctx=topic)*
- Linux *(https://support.google.com/chrome/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=171571&topic=25799&ctx=topic)*

Mouse Shortcuts

There are really only two mouse shortcuts, but they still have the potential to save you a lot of time. They will also work with a number of other browsers, so they're good to learn.

These shortcuts rely on your mouse's *middle button*; for most mice, this means clicking down on the scroll wheel. If you're using a track pad or (for Mac users) a Mighty/Magic Mouse, you're out of luck.

To open a link in a new tab, you can middle-click on the link. To close a tab quickly, you can middle-click on it. That's it. There's nothing more to it than that.

Trackpad Shortcuts

Mac users with a multitouch trackpad can use two fingers to swipe left or right in Chrome to go back and forwards through your browsing history - this works in the same way as the latest version of Safari.

4. Customizing Google Chrome

There are three ways to personalize Google Chrome to make it your own: extensions, web apps and themes. Each one works differently, so let's take a look at each one. You can find everything you need at the Chrome Web Store (https://chrome.google.com/webstore/)

Extensions

Extensions are utilities which you can add to Google Chrome to change or add to its functionality. They run alongside the browser and will often add buttons to the menu bar (either in or next to the Omnibar).

To see a list of the extensions that you've installed, you can click on the wrench icon, "Tools" and then "Extensions". Here you can temporarily disable extensions, choose whether they run in Incognito mode, or remove them completely.

There are plenty of great free extensions out there, so let's take a look at some of the best!

Diigo

We've covered Diigo many times before, but the popular bookmark manager with annotation abilities now has a fully fledged Chrome extension which makes it that much easier to highlight sections and save them into your collection.

You can read more about Diigo here (http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/diigo-write-college-essay-term-paper/)and you can install it from the Chrome Web Store (https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/oojbgadfejifecebmdnhhkbhdjaphole?utm_source=chrome-ntp-icon).

FlashBlock

FlashBlock is an extension you definitely want to install, especially if you're on a netbook or a laptop with limited battery life. As the name suggests, it stops Flash objects (such as videos, games and ads) from automatically loading with the rest of the site. You can manually start a flash object by clicking on it, or you can allow flash for an entire site if it heavily relies on it (like YouTube, for example).

You can install it from the Chrome Web Store (https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/gofhjkjmk-pinhpoiabjplobcaignabnl).

Goo.gl URL Shortener

If you tend to deal with long URLs on a regular basis, you'll probably want to think about using a URL shortener. While you can use services such as TinyURL or bit.ly, my personal favourite is Google's URL shortener, Goo.gl (http://goo.gl). With the extension installed, clicking on its button generates a short

URL for the page you're currently visiting and copies it to your clipboard, ready for you to paste elsewhere. You're also given the opportunity to generate a QR code or quickly share it via Gmail or Twitter. If you're signed into a Google account, Goo.gl will keep track of the URLs you've shortened and allow you to access them again by going to the main Goo.gl page.

You can read more about the Goo.gl URL shortener on the main site (http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/3-ways-quickly-shorten-urls-straight-browser/) and download it from the Chrome Web Store (https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/iblijlcdoidgdpfknkckljiocdbnlagk).

IE Tab (Windows Only)

While you might not want to use Internet Explorer, there are a few reasons why you might still need to use it; you might need to access a website that only supports IE, or you might be a web developer and need to make sure that your website is compatible with older versions of IE. Thankfully, you don't need to start up Internet Explorer just for one tab - you can use IE Tab. This extension creates a frame inside the Chrome tab and uses IE's rendering engine to load the page. You can then treat the tab like any other Chrome tab.

Of course, this extension requires Internet Explorer to be installed on your computer, so Mac and Linux users need not apply.

If you're running Windows, you can install IE Tab from the Chrome Web Store (https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/hehijbfgiekmjfkfjpbkbammjbdenadd).

Send From Gmail (by Google)

If you use Google Mail as your email service, chances are you've clicked on an email link at some point and been frustrated when it opens up a default mail client that you've never used before. It'd be so much better if clicking on the link would take you to a window to compose a new email with Gmail, wouldn't it?

That's where Send from Gmail comes in. Simply install the extension, and any mailto links clicked in Chrome send you to Gmail to compose a new message.

You can install Send from Gmail from the Chrome Web Store (https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/pgphcomnlaojlmmcjmiddhdapjpbgeoc)

YouTube Options

YouTube Options allows you to change how YouTube works. You can change all sorts of things, such as the default size and quality of videos on YouTube, what information is visible on the video page and turn auto-play and pre-buffering on and off. It also gives you links to download the video in a variety of formats and resolutions.

You can install YouTube Options from the Chrome Web Store (https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/bdokagampppgbnjfdlkfpphniapiiifn).

Awesome Screenshot

If you're a web designer looking for inspiration, or you see something you want to look at again later, you might consider taking a screenshot of the website in question. However, a built in system screenshot application might not be sufficient if you want to take a picture of a section of the website which is taller or wider than your screen, or if you want to make sure that you don't get any of the browser window in the screenshot.

Enter Awesome Screenshot. It allows you to capture a section of a webpage (or the whole webpage) and also allows you to make some modest annotations. You then have the option of saving the image locally or having it automatically uploaded to an image hosting website.

You can read more about Awesome Screenshot on the main MakeUseOf site (http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/3-google-chrome-extensions-great-screenshots/) and download it from the Chrome Web Store (https://chrome.google.

com/webstore/detail/alelhddbbhepgpmgidjdcjakblofbmce).

ViewThru

ViewThru is a URL "unshortener". It does the opposite to services like Goo.gl; it takes a shortened URL, such as http://goo.gl/aUdwM, and replaces it with the full link that it points to. While it is an extremely simple extension, it's extremely useful as you can very easily see if a link is pointing to what it claims to be (making it that much harder to accidentally download malware to your computer, for example).

You can download ViewThru from the Chrome Web Store (https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/jkncfnbcgbclefkbknfdbngiegdppgdd).

Ookong

If you shop with Amazon much, you'll definitely want to pick up Ookong. It allows you to view a graph showing the price history of an item on Amazon. If you're not currently on Amazon, you can also use it to search for an item on Amazon; great for comparing prices elsewhere on the web with what Amazon has to offer.

You can read more about Ookong on the main MakeUseOf site (http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/3-google-chrome-extensions-save-money-shopping-online/) and download it from the Chrome Web Store (https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/gjhnlaeccbboacjkdlopcndknlkjmapp).

Imgur

Imgur is an online image host. Their extension makes it extremely easy to upload new images to their service in a variety of ways: by copying and pasting, by dragging onto the extension page, and even uploading another image from the web from within the browser itself. You can also use the Imgur extension to take basic web page screenshots.

You can download the Imgur extension from the Chrome Web Store (https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/ehoopddfhgaehhmphfcooacjdpmbjlao).

TooManyTabs

All too often it happens; you're browsing the Internet and you come across a bunch of links which look interesting, so you open them in new tabs so that you can get to them later. You repeat this a few times and suddenly you have 20 or so tabs open. The size of the Chrome tabs get smaller and smaller, and before you know it you can't tell which tabs are which.

Thankfully, TooManyTabs is here to save the day. It gives you an easy way to see all of your tabs in one place, search for a specific tab, and suspend tabs which are chewing up a lot of memory.

You can read more about TooManyTabs on the main MakeUseOf site (http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/10-extensions-chrome-tab-management/) and download it from the Chrome Web Store (https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/amigcgbheognjmfkaieeeadojiibgbdp).

There are plenty of other great extensions out there. We have a great list over on the main MakeUseOf site (http://www.makeuseof.com/pages/best-chrome-extensions).

Web Apps

Web apps, unlike extensions, are not actually installed on your computer. Web apps are simply websites that act like applications - think Google Mail or Reader, a planetarium or a banking website. "Installing" a web application simply adds an icon on your homepage which links to the website in such a way that you can start using the web app as quickly as possible.

Some apps use fancy web technology like HTML 5 to save data offline (such as Gmail or Angry Birds), but for the most part these apps live online, so you'll need an Internet connection to use them.

Adding a web app to Google Chrome is exactly the same as adding an extension. Simply go to the Chrome web store,

find the web app that you want to install, move your mouse over it and then click “Add to Chrome”. If you decide that you don’t want a web app any more, just right click it on the “Apps” tab of your home page and click “Remove from Chrome”.

Here are some great web apps you can try out. Remember, though, that there are plenty more to be found in the Chrome Web Store!

Angry Birds

Angry Birds

I don’t think Angry Birds needs any introduction. One of the most popular games of the last few years is available to play in your browser for free. There are plenty of levels to play, so what are you waiting for?

You can add the Angry Birds web app from the Chrome Web Store (https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/aknpkdffaafgjchaibgeefbgmgeghloj).

Offline Google Mail

Offline Google Mail

Again, the clue is in the name. Offline Google Mail lets you view your Google Mail… well… offline! It uses HTML5 to store information locally, so you can still browse your email and compose drafts even without an internet connection.

The only downside to this web app is that it uses the iPad web app (lots of big buttons everywhere!), so the UI is not particularly well suited to a large screen. It’s far from unusable, though, and might still suit you better than using a dedicated mail application.

You can add the Offline Google Mail web app from the Chrome Web Store (https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/ejidjjhkpiempkbhmpbfngldlkglhimk).

Numerics Calculator and Converter

If you’re often reaching for your calculator, wondering how much something costs in a different currency or converting imperial to metric and back, you might want to install the Numerics Calculator and Converter web app. It gives you a powerful calculator as well as the ability to convert currency, force, length, area, speed, time, information, temperature and mass (among other things!). Even better, it uses the latest HTML5 technology and so is able to be used even when you don’t have access to an Internet connection.

You can add the Numerics web app from the Chrome Web Store (https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/iiglcienpnkhdajdfmnpbgmpjglonipe).

Aviary Advanced Suite

Aviary Image Editor

Aviary’s advanced suite has been around for a while, allowing you to create music, design colour swatches, generate vectors and make complex edits to photos all within your web browser. While Aviary has since focused on its photo editing application and shifted to HTML5, the old tools, while Flash based, are still extremely powerful and are available as web apps from the Chrome Web Store

Check out these apps at the Chrome Web Store ((https://chrome.google.com/webstore/search/Aviary).

SoundCloud

SoundCloud

SoundCloud is a great place to find new music by people all over the world. You can find pretty much every kind of music on SoundCloud, and for the most part it’s freely available to listen to for free.

You can read more about the SoundCloud web app on the main MakeUseOf site (http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/music-in-the-soundcloud/) and download it from the Chrome Web Store (https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/ipebkipbeggmmkjjljenoblnfaenambp).

Quick Note

The name gives this one away, too. It allows you to take notes… well… quickly! There isn’t a whole lot more to say

about it, other than it gives you a virtual notebook which is synced with your Google Account. It's pretty nifty if you like to take notes which can be accessed from other computers.

Quick Note

You can download the Quick Note web app from the Chrome Web Store (https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/mijlebbfndhelmdpmllgcfadlkankhok).

Graphic.ly

I've covered Graphic.ly in the past in a comic book manual (http://www.makeuseof.com/pages/download-bam-your-guide-to-cool-online-comic-books). For the uninitiated, Graphic.ly is an online comic book distribution system which allows you to purchase and read comics in your browser. There are quite a few free samples available, so it's definitely worth checking out if you're a fan of comic books.

Graphicly Comics

You can read more about Graphic.ly on the main MakeUseOf site (http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/graphicly-beautiful-multiplatform-comic-reader-social-twist/) and download the web app from the Chrome Web Store (https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/bfahkchgjncmgadmplfkeancoeljcmhp).

3DTin

3DTin is a nifty little web app which allows you to create 3D models from preset shapes. It mainly relies on WebGL for a smooth user experience, although it can still be used on computers that don't support WebGL. You can save the 3D models in the cloud or export them to standard 3D formats such as OBJ files.

3DTin

You can read more about 3DTin on the main MakeUseOf site (http://www.makeuseof.com/dir/3dtin-pixel-drawing-program/) or download the web app from the Chrome Web Store (https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/algoakekcdmbbikdjgjdahbfihboglmi).

imo Instant Messenger

imo Instant Messenger is one of the better multi platform instant message clients available on the web. It has the distinct advantage of providing support for some protocols (such as Steam or Skype) that are not readily available on some of the other IM clients such as eBuddy.

It has some other nifty features such as linking accounts (so logging into one service logs into all of the services you have previously authenticated) and games and video support from right in the browser.

You can read more about imo on the main MakeUseOf site (http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/imoim-possibly-multinetwork-instant-messenger-dreams/) or download the web app from the Chrome Web Store (https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/ocaebkdojpikfmhmnekiflipcicedobi).

Todo.ly

Todo.ly is a great online task manager. While it may not have some of the more complex features you might find in a fully fledged "Getting Things Done" app, it still supports pretty much everything you might need for a successful task management system; multiple projects with multiple folders and due dates per task.

Todo.ly

You can download the web app from the Chrome Web Store (https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/obhefmbclkekanpjjpkbciloojcmpkap).

Themes

As you might have gathered, themes simply change the appearance of Google Chrome by "skinning" it, without changing functionality at all. There are plenty of themes to choose from in the Chrome web store. Just select a theme that you like the look of, put your mouse over it then click "Choose theme".

If you install a theme and want to get rid of it, go to Preferences (by clicking on the wrench icon and then "Preferences"), click on "Personal Stuff" in the sidebar, then under Themes click "Reset To Default Theme".

5. Google Chrome Hacks

There are other ways that you can further tweak Google Chrome, but they usually involve doing things which aren't exactly easily accessible. For this reason they are referred to as **hacks** and are for the slightly more adventurous.

Starting Google Chrome In Incognito Mode

If you tend to use Chrome primarily for banking, or you tend to lend your computer to other people a fair bit, you might want to make it possible to open Google Chrome straight into Incognito mode.

For Windows, this is fairly straightforward: Right click on a shortcut to the application (either in the Start menu or on your desktop) and right click "Properties…". Then, in the field labelled "Target", enter this after the path enclosed in quote marks: **`--incognito`**

You'll need to make sure that there's a space between the closing quote mark and the incognito flag; it won't work otherwise!

Now you can rename the icon to "Private Chrome" or something similar. When you open Chrome using that shortcut it will open an Incognito window. It is important to note, however, that this will only affect the edited shortcut - other shortcuts (and the application itself) are not affected and will not start Chrome in Incognito mode.

Ubuntu users can use the same process to open Chrome in Incognito mode from a shortcut on the desktop or in a launch bar.

The process is a little more involved for Mac users. To make Chrome open in Incognito mode, we need to create an Apple Script. Start up the AppleScript Editor (found in /Applications/Utilities), and paste in the following code:

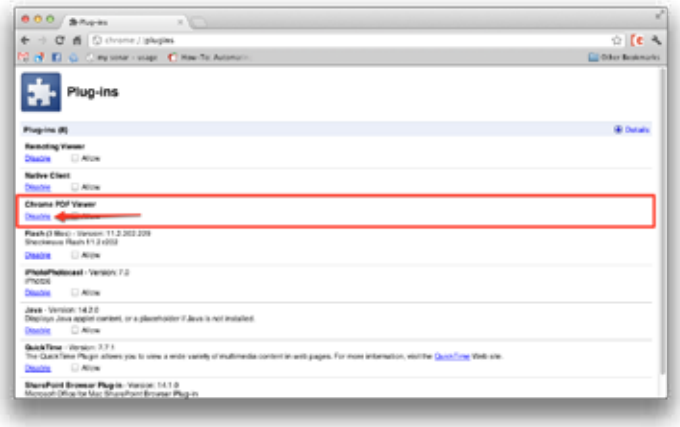
```
tell application "Google Chrome"
	if it is running then
		tell application "System Events" to set frontmost of process "Google Chrome" to true -- brings application to front
		set theIncognitoWindow to null
		repeat with theCurrentWindow in windows
			if mode of theCurrentWindow is "incognito" then
				set theIncognitoWindow to theCurrentWindow
				exit repeat
			end if
		end repeat
		if theIncognitoWindow is null then
			make new window with properties {mode:"incognito"}
		else
			make new tab at end of tabs of theIncognitoWindow
			set visible of theIncognitoWindow to true
		end if
	else
		activate application "Google Chrome"
		close every window
		make new window with properties {mode:"incognito"}
	end if
end tell
```

Next, test the application by clicking on the "Run" button. Chrome should open an Incognito window (or create one if Chrome is already running). If it works, you're ready to go. Press Apple+S to bring up the Save dialog. You'll want to give it a name such as "Incognito Chrome" and give it the File Format "Application". Save

it in your Applications folder. Now you can add the application to your Dock and click it any time to open an Incognito window, regardless of whether Chrome is already running or not.

Browse PDF Documents With A Different PDF Reader

Chrome has a built in PDF reader which for most intents and purposes works really well. However, you may find that it doesn't suit your needs; it may not display a particularly complex PDF file correctly, or it may stop working properly for some reason. In this case, it's possible to bypass the built in PDF reader and make Chrome open the PDF file in your default PDF reader (such as Adobe Reader, Foxit Reader or Preview).



To do this, type chrome://plugins into the address bar in a Chrome window. This will take you to Chrome's plugin manager. Here you can disable Chrome's PDF reader by clicking on "Disable" under "Chrome PDF Viewer".

Accessing Experimental Features

You don't have to be running a non-stable version of Google Chrome (such as Canary or the Beta or Developer versions) to try out some of the newer features of Chrome. Even the standard version of Google Chrome has some features available that aren't enabled by default, such as advanced hardware acceleration or new Downloads and settings UIs.

You can check these out by typing chrome://flags into the Omnibar. This will take you to the Experimental Features settings page, where you can turn things on and off as you please. You'll need to restart Chrome after making changes each time, though. Also, bear in mind that these features are called experimental and disabled by default for a reason. Some features are pretty cool, but they could potentially make Chrome unstable or unsecured.

Alternatives to Google Chrome

Of course, Google Chrome isn't the only browser out there. There are plenty of others; some worth using, some not. Here's a quick rundown on some others that you might like to try if Google Chrome is not for you.

Mozilla Firefox

If you've used the Internet at all in the last 5 years or so, you've probably heard of Mozilla Firefox. It was the first browser to really break the tyranny of Internet Explorer, proving that it was possible to build a browser that worked better without consuming silly amounts of system resources.

Today, Firefox's main selling point is its expandability: what Chrome does with extensions, Firefox takes to extremes with add-ons. It also uses hardware acceleration in some cases to speed up your browsing experience (particularly when viewing complex 3D models used in Web GL). If you don't like Chrome for any reason, Firefox is the next best choice.

Internet Explorer 9

While previous versions of Internet Explorer are truly terrible for browsing the web (and jokingly referred to as the #1 browser for downloading other browsers), Internet Explorer 9 shows that when Microsoft makes an effort it can actually make half-decent software - it was the first browser to really make use of a computer's graphics card for hardware acceleration. While it's still playing catch-up to Firefox and Chrome, Internet Explorer 9 is a definite improvement that you might like to try out. Just bear in mind that it only runs on Windows Vista and 7.

Safari

Apple's built in browser has also come a long way in the last couple of years, making it a viable option in its own right. Safari uses Webkit, the same rendering engine as Chrome, so it's equally snappy when it comes to loading webpages and showing off fancy HTML 5 websites. Add that to tight integration into OS X Lion and iOS devices via iCloud, and Safari definitely has its advantages that make it worth using.

Opera

Opera has always had a relatively small but extremely devoted following. Its claim to fame is by providing an extremely customizable browser (just like Firefox) and doing so with an extremely small resource footprint. Opera's interface is much closer to the classic browsers of old while still supporting new technologies, so if that design appeals to you, give Opera a go.

Conclusion

Google Chrome made massive waves back in 2008, but it's just as relevant now. The fastest, simplest browser around has improved over the years; adding extensions, web apps and themes, but it has ultimately remained true to its roots and focused on what it was designed to do: provide fast, unobtrusive web browsing.

Further Reading

- Control other computers remotely for free with Chrome Remote Desktop *(http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/control-computers-remotely-free-chrome-remote-desktop-crossplatform/)*
- Use Internet Explorer in Google Chrome with IE Tab *(http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/internet-explorer-google-chrome-tab/)*
- How to trick website by changing your user agent *(http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/trick-websites-changing-user-agent-chrome/)*
- 10 really cool games from the Google Chrome Store *(http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/10-really-cool-games-from-google-chrome-store/)*
- Opt out of Facebook app permissions with fPrivacy *(http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/concerned-privacy-opt-facebook-app-permissions-fprivacy-chrome/)*
- Enhance your browsing experience with FastestWeb *(http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/enhance-browsing-experience-fastestweb-chrome/)*
- 5 Chrome extensions that are going to make your browsing life easier *(http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/5-chrome-extensions-browsing-life-easier/)*
- Sync your Google Chrome bookmarks with your Android device using ChromeMarks Lite *(http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/sync-google-chrome-bookmarks-android-device-chromemarks-lite/)*
- Google Chrome can now sync multiple browsing profiles *(http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/google-chrome-sync-multiple-browsing-profiles-news/)*
- Cloud Save: save files directly to the cloud *(http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/cloud-save-save-files-cloud-chrome/)*
- 8 new Chrome extensions added to our Best Chrome Extensions page *(http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/8-chrome-extensions-added-chrome-extensions-page/)*

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