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Internet Explorer  
Microsoft

## [Internet Explorer 8 - The Good, the Bad and the Ugly](#)

### [Get ready for Beta 2](#)

Now that Opera 9.5 and Firefox 3.0 are available to end users, the focus is bound to shift on Microsoft. The Redmond company has been cooking Internet Explorer 8 for over a year now, and is approximately one month away from releasing the second Beta build to the public. Since [Beta 1](#) was set up to give web developers and designers a taste of what's coming mainly in terms of standards support, Beta 2 is built to wow end users and, in this context, will deliver features beyond what is available in the first public development milestone, WebSlices and Activities. Internet Explorer 8 Beta 2 is scheduled to hit sometime in August, but although the IE team is still hammering at the release, the fact is that as early as mid June 2008, features were no longer added to the milestone. On June 19, Chris Wilson, the Platform Architect for IE revealed that: "we're still improving quality by fixing bugs in Beta 2, but we're not implementing new features at this point for the Beta 2 release". For over half a month, Microsoft has been dogfooding and testing feature complete Beta 2 builds of IE8. Now, when I say feature complete, I mean only in terms of the second development milestone of Internet Explorer 8. The Redmond company could still perfect the feature-set for the final version of the browser, as no RTM deadline or specifics have been shared with the public. Because it owns over 70% of the operating system market, IE8 will have a consistent impact when it is released. This is even an understatement, since Internet Explorer 8 has the potential to break the web, something that rivals from Opera and even Firefox cannot yet claim. It all comes down to standards support, and the advances introduced in comparison to IE7. **The Good** Even with Internet Explorer 8 Beta 1, Microsoft passes the Acid2 Test, indicating that the browser is now on par with rivals Opera and Firefox when it comes down to standards support. The Redmond giant has already confirmed that IE8's default rendering mode would be standards-compliant. Thus, developers have a guarantee that their content would perform in the same manner in all main browsers, and no longer have to optimize various versions in accordance with IE, Firefox and Opera. So far, this is the best aspect of Internet Explorer 8. Sure enough, the IE team has been highlighting features such as WebSlices, Activities and the extra security mitigations being added into Beta 2. Still, the next testing release of IE8 will have to deliver something more palpable than what is already available. **The Bad** Microsoft touted a user-oriented release and it needs to deliver on that promise with features that will take IE8 over Firefox and Opera. If security features and web standards support are the exclusive focus of the IE team, IE8 will do nothing to curb the continuous drop in audience of Internet Explorer which is down from 79.26% in July 2007 to 73.01% at the end of the past month. Microsoft simply needs to learn the lessons of Windows Vista which failed to play well with hardware and software solutions, and which introduced security that users found restrictive and overzealous. IE8 is successfully heading in the same direction. The company has already paraded a plethora of security features planned for Beta 2, that look good on paper, but that will only look good in real life if the user experience is impacted only superficially. Still, in terms of support, IE8 Beta 2, and the final version of the browser will automatically hurt content which was developed with the faulty IE6 and IE7 in mind. "Browsing with the default new settings in IE8 may cause content written for previous versions of Internet Explorer to display differently than intended. This creates a call to action for site owners to ensure their content will continue to display seamlessly in Internet Explorer 8. As such, we have provided a meta-tag usable on a per-page or per-site level to maintain backwards compatibility with Internet Explorer 7. Adding this tag instructs Internet Explorer 8 to render content like it did in Internet Explorer 7, without requiring any additional changes," stated

Microsoft's [Jeff Barnes](#). **The Ugly** Compatibility is essentially just [a meta tag away](#), but for the introduction of that item into websites, Microsoft is at the mercy of developers. The hardest hit in this regard will be unmanaged websites which play nice with IE6, or IE7, but will fail to do the same with IE8. Speculations regarding this issue pointed out that Microsoft might lose additional users to Opera and Firefox because of incompatibility problems with legacy content. But this is not exactly true. While Microsoft will undoubtedly take all the blame, websites that will break in IE8 will also break in Opera 9.5 or Firefox 3.0, providing no comfort to end users. And Microsoft will only go just so far with standards support. Case in point: the Acid3 Test, nothing more than Acid2 on steroids, which for now displays a "Fail" message for all browsers. The IE team has no plans to pass Acid3 test with IE8. "ACID3 is not an important target for us," Wilson added pointing out that Mozilla is also not passing the test with Firefox 3.0. But Mozilla is already building Firefox 3.1, the successor of [version 3.0](#), currently planned for the end of this year, but no later than the first quarter of 2009. And passing the Acid3 Test is high on the list of priorities for Firefox 3.1, which is about half a year away. The next version of Internet Explorer, however, could hit as late as the end of 2010 or 2011, two years after the release of IE8, and at that time, Microsoft will continue to appear like it is playing catch-up with its rivals. **The Truth** Microsoft needs to realize that the dynamics of the browser market have changed dramatically since Internet Explorer 7 almost shipped two years ago in October 2006. And the main architect of that change is Mozilla. According to Net Applications, Firefox is on the verge of going over the 20% market share milestone having hit 19.03% as of June 2008 and even though Opera is still under 1%, the "beautifully engineered" browser cannot be counted out of the game just yet, especially the way that IE has been seeing its market share slip. It's the dawn of a new browser war, one that will throw Internet Explorer 8, Firefox 3.0 and [Opera 9.5](#) against each other. The general impression continues to be that IE has been losing ground and that there is an ever widening gap between Microsoft's proprietary browsers and what rivals have to offer. Wilson does not necessarily agree: "I think we all have different 'shapes' of our feature sets. I think there are areas we're ahead (security, editing), and areas that others are leading today (e.g. graphics). I think we're carefully choosing areas and catching up, and surpassing in some areas (e.g. CSS2.1) that we've been behind in previously." The bottom line is simple, if IE8 is to be the reinvention of Internet Explorer, it has to blow not only IE7 away, but also Firefox 3.0 and Opera 9.5. And Microsoft needs to start with Internet Explorer 8 Beta 2, because anything beyond that might be just a tad too late.