

Re: Web vs. Desktop based systems

Source: <http://coding.derkeiler.com/Archive/General/comp.programming/2007-05/msg00582.html>

- *From:* rem642b@xxxxxxxxxx (Robert Maas, see <http://tinyurl.com/uh3t>)
 - *Date:* Sun, 27 May 2007 10:19:24 -0700
-

From: "sjdevn...@xxxxxxxxxx" <sjdevn...@xxxxxxxxxx>
In real life, it's not at all uncommon to hit sites that say "Please install Internet Explorer to see our site" and provide a helpful link to a Microsoft download page that doesn't have a usable version for my system. It's also not uncommon to find sites that require Flash, Java, or other plugins—and even want you to upgrade versions over the one you have installed.

Those sites should be listed as non-compliant with the basic idea of the Web of making clients of all vendors and servers of all vendors inter-operate according to a well-documented protocol, as well as the basic dream of providing easy access to all online sources of information/data via a simple UI accessible to everyone.

Those add-ons (plug-ins) should be used only where needed to convey the information. For example, a Java applet may be used to provide a live animation under dynamic user control (unlike an animated GIF which can convey only a canned visual display), or to provide a live demo of some GUI being advertised/marketted.

And in practice a lot of common sites manage to render incorrectly or hang the browser completely based on arcane .

Again, this is caused by violation of the protocol. By the way, lynx complains about illegal HTML for just about any Web site I visit. Does anyone know what's wrong? I'm afraid to turn on trace output and spend a week trying to decode the resultant spew, especially since I'm on a VT100 dialup with no flow control, requiring 'more' as an output throttle whenever I output more than about two screens full of text at a time.

The flip side is that your data is kept on your machine with desktop apps, which can be particularly important for data that you want to keep private.

Re: Web vs. Desktop based systems

The physical security on your ISP is probably better than the physical security at your home, unless you are a millionaire who can afford to hire multiple armed guards 24/7. Although one of my previous ISPs (the one I had in early 1999) did suffer a physical break-in which resulted in both theft of the hard disk and unreadability of the primary backup, causing a 3-week downtime followed by a rollback of all files to the next-to-last backup, whereby all the e-mail I had exchanged with Heather Thompson was *gone*, and all but the very first test message from Janet <JackieChanFan@WebTV> was also *gone*.

If encryption is used on all seriously confidential files, and on all communication between user's local machine and remote server where the encryption key might be passed, and if all machines are protected from trojans that might eavesdrop on encryption keys either by reading protected memory or by installing a man-in-middle, then this is all safe. But if you can't stop trojans from infecting your local machine, then it doesn't matter whether the confidential files are on the local machine or a remote server, they're effectively public-view any time the trojan-master wants. So the only difference in effect is whether you trust your ISP to be free of trojans. I think that's a pretty safe bet if your ISP (where remote archive is maintained) is running Unix or Linux rather than MS-Windows. There might even be ISPs that provide a contractual guarantee of security. (Not good enough for military data, but good enough for *your* e-mail unless you're in the military and trying to take shortcuts with the well-thought-out rules of military security, which is surely grounds for a court-marshal even if nobody *actually* steals some of your military confidential data. MILNET exists for a *reason*, you know.)

And with, say, local email you can easily switch from one email program to another (assuming they use the same storage format, which is pretty common in my experience) and have all your messages just show up properly in the new system

True, but Google already provides XML interface for some of their services (haven't checked if they have it yet for gmail, because their policy of eavesdropping on "private" e-mail to better advertise to you is IMO abhorrent). As soon as some web-mail provider with better privacy policy (perhaps Yahoo) also provides XML interface, it will become feasible for you to have more than one XML client for browsing your remote mailboxes, and switch between them at a moment's whim.

if you switch webmail providers, you often lose all your messages or have to somewhat painfully forward everything to the new account.

Re: Web vs. Desktop based systems

With XML interface, it becomes relatively trivial to automate the process of copying all your e-mail to a new place. In fact, to guard against various disasters (Yahoo makes a mistake and thinks you have abused your account and deletes your account and expunges your archive; That actually happened to the very first Yahoo! Mail account I had, and the telephone support person refused to give me the slightest idea what violation of their AUP was alleged), you probably want to keep a "mirror" of your e-mail archive on some other ISP anyway, not waiting for a disaster to happen. And if you can establish one "mirror", you can establish more than one, and then have a smooth transition toward closing out the one you like least.

... new versions often introduce new showstopper bugs when the old version worked perfectly well;

That's a good point. I've suffered that myself with both Yahoo! Mail and Google Groups, where suddenly it all stops working for a few minutes, or a few hours, or a few days. And of course Yahoo! Mail three years ago changed their service to require JavaScript for virtually all functions, such as sending e-mail or moving file to other folder or reporting spam or changing the filter recipes. About the only thing I can do with Yahoo! Mail in the past three years is log in, see list of folders, see message list within folder, go to additional 200-message sections, and view individual message. And just a couple months ago I discovered I could **also** run the advanced search without JavaScript, and within the search-result page the ability to move message to other folder does **not** require JavaScript so it actually works for me. So there **is** a (very painful) way to move a file that I see in my InBox to another folder:

- Copy some text from the message, and past in local edit buffer
- Go to Advanced Search page
- Paste in the text you want to search for, that you copied above
- Submit the search
- Find the message amongst the search results page
- Click the checkbox for it
- Choose new folder from menu and click MOVE button.
- Retrace your way back to where you left off browsing your InBox.
- Repeat that entire process for each message you want to move to other folder.

Yahoo! Mail provides no way for me to use the version of their server which allowed me, more than three years ago, to do the other functions. Most painfully, when I get a new penpal, there's no way to set up a filter recipe to effectively white-list that person, except by making a trip to a public computer lab where JavaScript is available.

With a desktop application, it would have been possible to roll

Re: Web vs. Desktop based systems

back to the old version when I discovered the new version was unusable for most common functions. But on MS-Windows, the only way to roll back is to reformat the hard disk and re-install the operating system and re-install all applications and restore all data files, so is that really any better than simply switching to a more lynx-friendly webmail provider? (Fortunately I have a Mac, so the above reformat+reinstall hassle doesn't apply to me.)

with desktop apps, you're not forced to upgrade if what you have is working well to your tastes.

But how do you **really** know the important upgrade that keeps popping up an alert-window you every time you run your computer is an attempt to break what ain't broken, rather than an important security upgrade to prevent trojans from getting in your computer? The alert-window doesn't exactly say **why** you need to install this upgrade to Mozilla Firefox as soon as convenient, several times per week it seems from my experience in our apartment complex's semi-public computer lab. How can you decide whether to upgrade or not? And it'll keep alerting you repeatedly until you finally give in and let it download the upgrade, so what good is it to refuse and consequently suffer repeated harassment like that? And if you do make a mistake and download a upgrade that breaks everything, what's best, wait a few days for the next upgrade and hope it fixes the problem, or reformat your hard disk etc.?

With web apps, you're at the mercy of the people on the other end as to when you upgrade.

True. But see caveats above. Desktop apps are equally bad in different ways.

Even if there aren't killer bugs, you can often run into an update at an inconvenient time—you *_really_* need to get something done today, and the interface has all changed.

Not to mention that I have more than one Yahoo! Mail account, and some have been forced into the Beta version while others were allowed to stay the older version after a bit of hassle about whether I really don't want to try the Beta version today. (I answered yes on one account, hated the Beta, totally broken, but there was absolutely no way to revert to the previous version. I never made that mistake again, but some of them got auto-Betafied anyway, and some still haven't gotten Betafied months later, I have no idea why the difference.)

Re: Web vs. Desktop based systems

Whereas with desktop apps you can time the upgrades to be much less intrusive.

Yeah, every time you re-start the computer you simply minimize the alert-dialog about how it's really urgent to upgrade to fix an important bug that affects security of your computer, then the tab occupies real-estate at the bottom of your screen, making all future UI operations require you to consciously skip that tab when searching for the tab you really want. Still, I agree that's an advantage to desktop apps. On the other hand, if you have fifty different desktop apps, and each one of them is requesting you authorize an upgrade once or twice a week, the combined number of alert-dialogs can really bog down your UI time.

The main disadvantage of Web-based serverside software is that you can't get live animated action that way.

You can do some primitive stuff with AJAX

AJAX is not generally available in Web browsers AFAIK. I've never seen any Web site that offered AJAX content, whereby the Web browser (in public computer lab) either opened a new window with a title containing the word AJAX, or the browser complained that AJAX wasn't available and offered to download and install it. I *have* seen that sort of stuff with PDF and Flash/MacroMedia and WAV etc. etc. (New window for PDF, all the others we don't have in computer lab and aren't allowed to install so we get the alert-dialog instead.)

that's really a question of taste.

Yes, that's why I pointed out a few of the differences (mostly biased in favor of Web-based serverside apps), and why I'm glad you pointed out some more differences (mostly biased toward desktop apps; so-far nobody said much about clientside apps such as JavaScript or applets), so that the reader of this thread can make an intelligent decision based on ample information/ideas and personal preference/taste.

—

Your IP number shows that you're a customer of a spam-friendly ISP. Nobody in their right mind likes spammers, nor their automated assistants. To gain access to this site, you must demonstrate you're not one of them. Please spend a few seconds to jot down the text that you see in this box:

Re: Web vs. Desktop based systems

<img src="<http://www.auneo.net/de/biologische/Bilder/scheiss.jpg>>

Then crumple that paper and stuff it where the sun don't shine.

±