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IE catching up to Navigator?

By [Alex Lash](#)

November 17, 1997, 11:40 a.m. PT

update The release of Internet Explorer 4.0 has pushed [Microsoft](#) closer to [Netscape Communications](#) in the Web browser market, according to a study released today, but Netscape is questioning the validity of the study's methodology.

The survey, from market research firm [Dataquest](#), says Netscape is still the leader in the Web browser category with a market share of 57.6 percent in the third quarter of 1997, but that Microsoft's share has roughly doubled in nine months to 39.4 percent. At that rate, Microsoft will catch up to its rival by mid-1998, the study projected.

Netscape countered that the study is flawed.

"We feel their technique in using a single search engine skews the data," said Netscape spokeswoman Maggie Young.

The Dataquest survey is based on information reflecting a seven-day period at the end of each quarter using about 60 million daily query points in data supplied by [Digital Equipment's Alta Vista](#) search engine.

Netscape's Young pointed out that Netscape's Web site, one of the most heavily trafficked on the Web, links to several search engines, but Alta Vista is not one of them. She then contested the survey's numbers, citing other studies that show the company's share remains around 70 percent.

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Browser market shares vary according to the market segments. For example, Netscape executives estimated in September that the company's share in corporations was 70 percent but conceded that the percentage of home users was lower. Yet another study released by Zona Research just before the launch of IE 4.0 put the corporate share at 62 percent for Netscape, 36 percent for Microsoft.

Microsoft's share of the market was just 20 percent at the end of the fourth quarter of 1996, when Netscape held 73 percent of the browser business, according to Dataquest.

"If Microsoft's growth in browser share continues, Dataquest projects Internet Explorer to reach parity with Netscape Navigator as early as the second quarter of 1998," said Kathryn Hale, principal analyst for Dataquest's Internet Strategies Worldwide program.

Hale noted that the figures were taken at the end of September when IE 4.0 had just begun shipping. "What will be really interesting is next quarter's data," she said.

The figures have been closely scrutinized by the industry, although browsers are quickly becoming a commodity given away as part of broader software package sales.

Three years ago Netscape pioneered the commercial market for Web browsers. But Microsoft has fought back, redirecting its efforts toward the Internet, improving Internet Explorer, and pledging to offer it for free while bundling it with the Windows operating system used on nine out of ten new PCs.

Microsoft's aggressive promotion of its own Internet software has sparked an intense investigation by the Justice Department, which last month charged Microsoft with breaching the conditions of a 1995 court order by forcing PC manufacturers to install the browser on the desktop of new computers.

Microsoft has dismissed the government's latest charges as lacking merit and has repeatedly

denied any illegal behavior. Last week the company filed a response to the government's case.

Reuters contributed to this report.

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Parity by Next Year

Microsoft Gains on Netscape

REUTERS

SAN JOSE, Calif., Nov. 17 — Software giant **Microsoft Corp.** has narrowed **Netscape Communications Corp.**'s lead in the Web browser market and is on track to match its rival by mid-1998.

Market research firm Dataquest said in a survey that Netscape still leads in the Web browser category with market share of 57.6 percent in the third quarter of 1997, but Microsoft's market share has roughly doubled in nine months to 39.4 percent.

*Quote delayed at
least 20 minutes*

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Hale noted the figures were taken at the end of September when Microsoft's latest version of its browser, Internet Explorer 4, had just begun shipping.

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The market share figures have been closely scrutinized by the industry, although browsers are quickly becoming a commodity given away as part of broader software package sales. The so-called "browser wars" between Microsoft and Netscape have become a high-stakes duel.

Three years ago Netscape pioneered the commercial market for Web browsers, which enable Internet users to surf through multimedia sites on the World Wide Web, making it the fastest growing software company to date.

But Microsoft has fought back, redirecting its efforts toward the Internet, improving its own Internet Explorer browser and pledging to offer it for free while bundling it with the Microsoft Windows operating system used on

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nine out of 10 new PCs.

Microsoft's aggressive promotion of its own Internet software has sparked an intensified investigation by the U.S. Justice Department, which last month brought suit against Microsoft, claiming it had breached the conditions of a 1995 court order, forcing PC manufacturers to install the browser on the main display of all new computers.

Microsoft has dismissed the government's latest charges as lacking merit and has repeatedly denied any illegal behavior. Last week, the company filed a response to the government case.

The Dataquest survey is based on data reflecting a seven-day period at the end of each quarter using about 60 million daily query points in data supplied by **Digital Equipment Corp.**'s Alta Vista search engine group. ■

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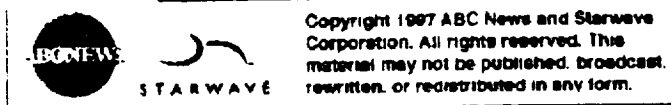
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PERSONAL TECHNOLOGY

By Walter Mossberg

Knowing the ABCs Of the Antitrust Case Against Microsoft

SO WHAT'S the latest anti-trust battle between Microsoft Corp. and the U.S. Justice Department really all about? The case is being waged with lots of legal and technical terminology, but it can be boiled down into practical terms.

The key issue in the case is whether Microsoft's Internet Explorer Web browser is an "integrated" feature of its Windows 95 operating system, as the company claims, or is a separate product that Microsoft is forcing on computer makers as a condition of selling them Windows 95. To me, it's pretty plain that Internet Explorer is a separate product that has been "bundled" with Windows 95 — that is, packaged together — but not integrated into a single, inextricable product.

I'm not saying that the Justice Department is correct in a legal sense. I'm no expert on the legal issues, and can't predict how a judge will interpret the wording of a 1995 court-approved consent decree that the government accuses Microsoft of violating. But in practical terms, I don't think Internet Explorer is an integrated feature of Windows 95.

To figure this out, you need to grasp a few basic terms. There are two main kinds of software. The most common are so-called application programs, which perform specific functions, like word processing or game playing or accessing the Internet. The other type are operating systems which control many of the computer's hardware functions and permit the application programs to interact with the computer.

Both types of programs typically include multiple computer files, unseen by the user, which act together to provide the promised functions. Some of these files can be shared by other programs. They typically have arcane names, but let's just call them "enabling files."

WINDOWS 95 is Microsoft's main operating system. It includes a desktop, or "shell," which is the face the computer presents to the user. It also includes numerous enabling files. In addition, Windows 95 comes with a number of small, very basic application programs, called "applets," designed to provide simple functionality out of the box. These include a calculator applet and a word-processing applet. They're not exactly integrated features, but nobody confuses them with full-fledged application programs and Microsoft doesn't sell them separately as application programs.

To my mind, Internet Explorer is an application program designed to let people browse the World Wide Web, just as Microsoft Money is a program that lets people manage their finances. Like other application programs, Internet Explorer includes enabling files.

Microsoft includes Internet Explorer with Windows 95, and calls it a "tightly integrated feature of Windows 95" and "a set of operating system services" which other programs can use to access the Internet. But Internet Explorer is not just a bunch of enabling files, as the com-

pany's description implies. It's also a program that can stand alone. And it's not some little applet. It's a large, complex, full-featured, state-of-the-art Web browser. In fact, I think it's the best browser on the market.

There's a lot of evidence that Microsoft itself treats Internet Explorer as a separate product. The company sells and distributes Internet Explorer separately. You can download it from the Web, order it on a CD-



John Segal

ROM from Microsoft, or get it in retail stores in a box called "Internet Explorer Starter Kit."

If you buy Windows 95 in a store, the box touts: "Internet Explorer Starter Kit Included FREE! A \$24.95 value." Inside are separate disks and manuals for Windows 95 and the Internet Explorer Starter Kit. No integrated feature of Windows, no applet, is treated that way. This is bundling, not integration. It's like

INTERNET EXPLORER'S status as a stand-alone product is evident even inside Windows 95. In Windows, there's a feature that lets you install and uninstall application programs, and another that lets you add and subtract some of the base components and applets of Windows. But Internet Explorer is on the application program list, not on the Windows component list.

It's true that the latest version of Internet Explorer, version 4.0, has an "integrated" mode in which it modifies the Windows 95 desktop to add some browser-type features. But this is optional, and can be reversed with a mouse click, leaving the browser as a stand-alone application.

Microsoft says the fact that Internet Explorer is sold separately "should not confuse anyone about the integration." It notes that some other things included with Windows, including America Online software, are sold separately. But AOL, like Internet Explorer, is merely bundled with Windows, not integrated into it or offered as a built-in applet.

I'm not accusing Microsoft of some evil scheme. I reject some of the wild claims I've seen on the Web that assert Internet Explorer somehow disables Netscape Navigator. I run both on four different computers without incident.

I also reject the argument that Microsoft shouldn't be able to integrate into the operating system functions that others sell as separate application programs. Such integration often helps consumers, if it can be done without adding too much complexity. So I'm not against adding integrated Web browsing to Windows, and eliminating the need to buy a browser program. Microsoft says it plans to do this in the next version of Windows, due next year. That's fine. I just don't think the company has done it yet.