How Firefox Got Its Groove Back

Sunday November 19, 2017

Mozilla Firefox was my browser of choice for years. It was the fresh and clean alternative to Internet Explorer. It just *worked*. But then, something happened: Google Chrome.

I didn't put much stock in Google Chrome when it appeared. It was very basic, spartan in an ugly way, lacking in features, not many extensions, and so on. But, oh boy, when Google decides it wants something to stick... Chrome grew by leaps and bounds, and quickly outpaced Firefox in performance, usability, extension support, and, most importantly, user base. Firefox got slower and slower, and I finally abandoned it a couple of years ago.

I was afraid I'd never return to my old friend Firefox again. But, meanwhile, Mozilla was toiling away on a very special effort, something called Project Quantum. The fruits of this effort first appeared in the Firefox Developer Edition a couple of months ago, and I decided to check it out. I'm glad I did! I soon began using Firefox on a daily basis again.

Project Quantum was (and is) a multi-pronged effort:

First, a UI refresh called Photon. It does away with the curvy, Chrome-like interface, and returns to a much more conventional look. Everything is arranged more logically. There's a new "library" button that consolidates your bookmarks, history, downloads, synced tabs, and screenshots into one place. The hamburger menu has everything spelled out and easier to find. Much better all around.

The performance enhancements are legion. There's a new CSS engine (Stylo), rendering manager (Compositor), enhanced DOM for JavaScript (Quantum DOM), and additional bug fixes and enhancements under an umbrella called Quantum Flow. (These enhancements all come from the Servo project.) It adds up to much snappier rendering. I see a few sites where Chrome still edges it out slightly, but the gap has *really* narrowed.

It's not over yet! Mozilla is continuing this optimization effort, and will integrate additional pieces over the next few versions. This will include a new rendering engine, called WebRender, scheduled to appear in Firefox version 59. **(Update**: *WebRender is not enabled by default in Firefox 59. Not quite ready for prime-time.)*

Firefox version 57 (released on November 14th) now includes the Project Quantum enhancements. If

you loved Firefox, but gave it up, you should probably give it another chance.

Here are a couple of articles with more details:

Firefox takes a Quantum leap forward with new developer edition

Entering the Quantum Era—How Firefox got fast again and where it's going to get faster

From:
https://blog.devtoprd.com/ - **Jim's Blog**

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https://blog.devtoprd.com/doku.php?id=posts:2017:2017.11.19_-_how_firefox_got_its_groove_back

Last update: **2025/03/31 16:33**