

Personal Computing: Browser / Viewer / Plug-Ins

Definition(s):

A browser is a client program that uses HTTP to locate, display, and navigate between hypertext documents on the World Wide Web.

A viewer is a client program that allows a user to view “published” documents, regardless of the application or platform on which it was created.

Plug-ins extend the range of Web content available to a browser. Plug-ins make it possible to enjoy audio, video, and Web content in proprietary file formats.

Rationale:

Use of a common, industry-standard browser provides:

- a common, predictable feature set
- integration with other standard products, along with a common look and feel
- reliability and ready technical support
- reduced user support and reduced training requirements
- consistent design criteria for in-house developed web applications that are used by the public

Due to the variety of products used to publish documents that are served via the web, the selected browser must support a reader utility that will allow the user to view and use these files without having access to the original software used to create it, while preserving the original high-quality published look-and-feel.

Browser security should be established at a level that provides full application functionality, while providing prudent levels of security as defined by the security committee. Should lower levels of security be required for specific applications, exceptions can be assessed and applied by authorized IT professionals or administrators.

Plug-ins may be necessary for training purposes when video and sound are used to enhance the learning experience. However, it is important to note that common plug-ins may interfere with the operating system and other standard programs, creating problems for support staff. Hence, plug-ins should be carefully tested, used only as needed, and installed by an IT professional.

Approved Standards:

- Browser standards, as developed by the [World Wide Web Consortium](#) and recognized by the [Internet Engineering Task Force](#), include Extensible Markup Language (XML), Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), Java/JavaScript, digital certificates, and industry-standard plug-ins to support multi-media and business critical applications.
- Plug-Ins are established as standard according to the requirements of doing business in the e-commerce/government arena.

Approved Products:

- Microsoft Internet Explorer
- Adobe Acrobat Reader
- Macromedia Shockwave
- Macromedia Flash
- Microsoft Media Player
- RealNetworks RealPlayer

Guidelines/Technical Considerations:

Enterprises building e-business applications today are being forced to make a choice between using least-common-denominator technologies that are shared across the major browsers, or exploiting the proprietary technology of one specific browser at the expense of a broader base of users. In cases where a business has chosen to develop for one browser, clients wishing to access that business application may be required to choose one browser product over another.

Browser clients should run the most current version of the browser software and required plug-ins that are available, after they have been sufficiently tested and customized for the operating environment. Browser patches are released frequently and should be reviewed and deployed in a timely manner to reduce network vulnerability.

Developers should be encouraged to keep browser processing to a minimum and use least-common-denominator technology when there is no clear business benefit otherwise. Server processing is preferred to browser.

Review Cycle:

As needed.

Timeline:

Issued: July, 2002

Office of Information Technology Standard

Transition:

The transition period will be dictated by Department/Agency transition plans and should begin upon publication of standards and acceptance of the department/agency transition plan.

Procurement:

Agencies are responsible for applicable license compliance.

Date: _____

Approved by: _____