Why Does Your Website Look Different In Different Browsers?

This is a fairly common issue that many webmasters and marketers run into from time to time. It's sort of counter-intuitive – you'd think that once you have a website up and running, it should look the same on any computer and from any browser, no matter what.

Unfortunately, this isn't always the case. Different browsers often interpret or display website source code like HTML and CSS in slightly different ways, resulting in the same website looking and feeling different accordingly.

If these differences don't affect the site's functionality, you don't necessarily need to be concerned.

That being said, here are a few of the most common reasons why your website may look different in different browsers, and what you can do to minimize these discrepancies.

Browsers display common "default" website elements differently

This might be the most widespread cause of browser-to-browser variance when displaying your website, and it's usually nothing to worry about.

When a browser reads the code behind your website, it translates the information in the default settings. For instance, Safari and Chrome have different default fonts, which means the font on your site changes when viewed in these browsers. For example, Safari defaults to the Helvetica family and Microsoft's Internet Explorer defaults to the Arial font family.

Default issues are likely the most common reason for variance between browsers. The look and feel of a site may change, but functionality and the user experience remain intact.

Subtle stylistic differences are a function of each individual browser, and won't cause any functionality issues on your website. If you do feel the need to standardize everything anyway, you'll likely need to manually style these elements via CSS or HTML instead of using the "browser default" styles.

Different browsers may not support certain HTML/CSS

Web code is constantly evolving and browsers may lag behind when making any necessary changes. An older version of a browser may not support the latest standards. So, a modern website may speak a language that is not fully understood by the browser.

Every time there's a new addition to HTML or CSS, a new iteration of the language is released, or something is removed from one of them, browsers need to play catch-up and make sure they add support, change support, or drop support in order to accommodate these changes.

For example, Microsoft's Internet Explorer (IE) 11 is the last version Microsoft is maintaining. In fact in January of 2016, Microsoft stopped providing security updates for any older versions of IE. Since they are no longer maintaining this code, the way the HTML and CSS render can potentially be compromised.

Hardware or "computer setting" differences

If your website looks different in different browsers but you're also using two different computers, it might not be a browser issue at all.

605.360.2259
info@completemediainc.com
completemediainc.com   927 East 8th Street, Sioux Falls, South Dakota 57103

When you go from computer to computer, everything changes. Maybe the second computer has a different screen resolution than the first, or maybe the color balancing is different. If you're viewing your website using two different operating systems, it's almost guaranteed that something will look different between the two.

These sorts of computer-level changes usually manifest as sizing differences, color balance discrepancies, and so on. Most of these differences are out of your control other than screen resolution issues.

Differences are ok

It's important to remember that you'll never be able to make one website display uniformly across all of the many browser, computer, and setting combinations your visitors use. Your main focus should be ensuring functionality on as many configurations as possible.

Even if your site doesn't look quite the same on certain browsers, users should at least be able to interact with it in the same way no matter what browser they're using.

Again, the best way of achieving this is to initially design and test your website using whatever browser the majority of your users use. Then, when you're happy with how everything looks and functions, you can start troubleshooting issues that might crop up on other browsers.

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