

How-To: Speed Up, Customize, and Secure Firefox, Chrome, IE8, and Opera

Posted 04/23/09 at 11:30:00 AM | by [Josh Kampschmidt](#)

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'http://www.maximumpc.com/article/howtos/howto_speed_up_customize_and_secure_firefox_chrome_ie8_and_opera';

The web browser is probably the most essential application on your PC; there is no better practical way of staying connected to news, your friends, and most importantly, the lulz. But whether you're using Internet Explorer or newly minted Chrome, [each of today's popular web browsers](#) has different strengths and weaknesses. Mozilla Firefox is feature-heavy and relatively fast, but can get terribly unwieldy when crammed with juicy add-ons. The newest version of the once dominant Internet Explorer is a quantum leap above previous buggy versions, but remains slow. And while both Opera and Google Chrome are blazingly fast, they currently lack customization.

No matter which browser you use, you want it to fit your personal needs and tastes. With this guide, we will show you the essential initial tweaks everyone should make to "awesomize" their browser. Whether it's accelerating browser page-load performance, boosting security, or just improving the look of the interface, we teach you the tweaks that we think should be implemented the first time you start up a browser after installation.

We cover comprehensive step-by-step instructions for Internet Explorer 8, Mozilla Firefox 3, Opera 9, and Google Chrome, starting off with general web optimization tips. So jump into the guide and start tweaking your web browser!



General Optimization Tips

Use OpenDNS

OpenDNS is a replacement DNS server for your computer or router. Generally, this DNS server is faster and more stable than the one provided by your ISP. Since it allows for faster web browsing, this is a good tweak to perform on your computer.

Depending on the operating system you are using, OpenDNS may have a different setup. For the purpose of this guide, we are going to assume that you are using Windows Vista. However, you can find the other setup guides [located here](#).

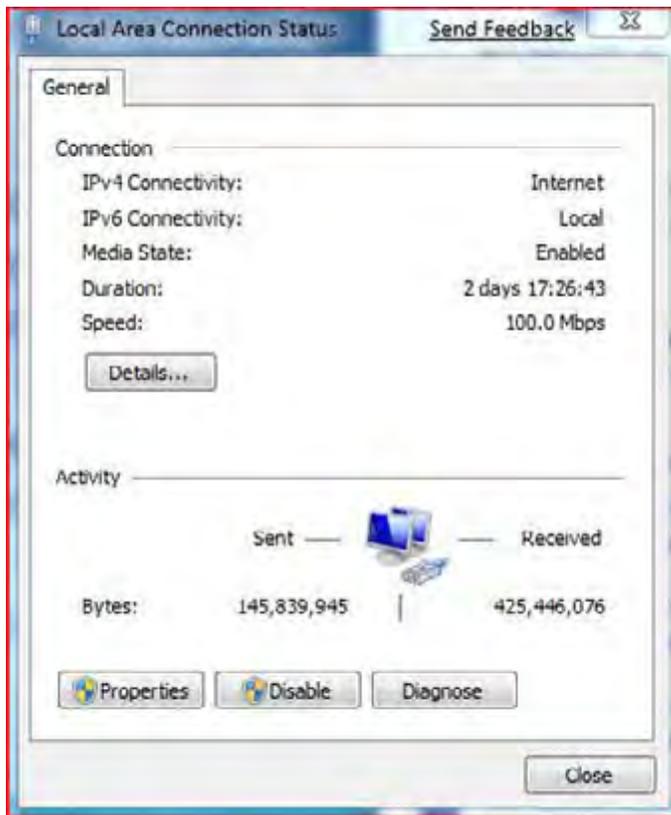
Click on the Start button, select Control Panel and click on View Network Status and Tasks.



Network and Internet

View network status and tasks

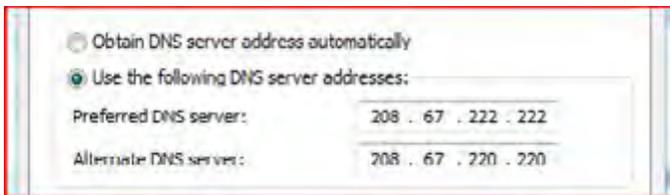
Choose homegroup and sharing options



Click on the View Status button next to your Local Area Network and click Properties. Select Internet Protocol Version 4 (TCP/IPv4) and click on Properties. Click on Use the following DNS server addresses and type in the following:

Preferred DNS Server: 208.67.222.222

Alternate DNS Server: 208.67.220.220



Click Ok and close the connection properties window. To see if you are using OpenDNS correctly, [click here](#). If you see a welcome message, then you are using OpenDNS and no further configuration is necessary.



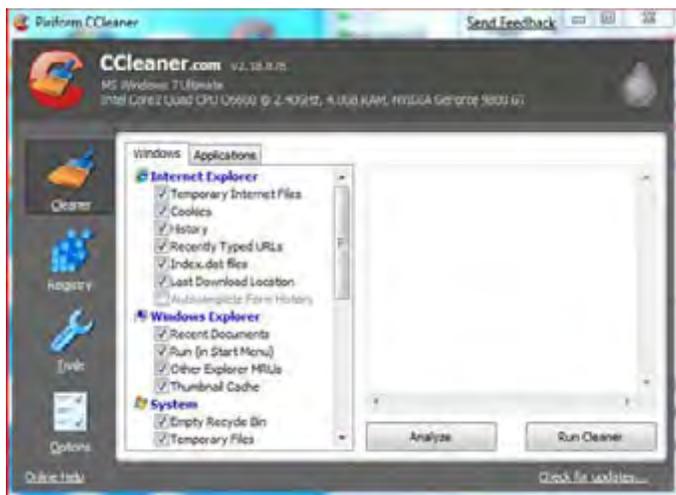
For more information on how to tweak your DNS settings, refer to our [full DNS guide here](#).

CCleaner

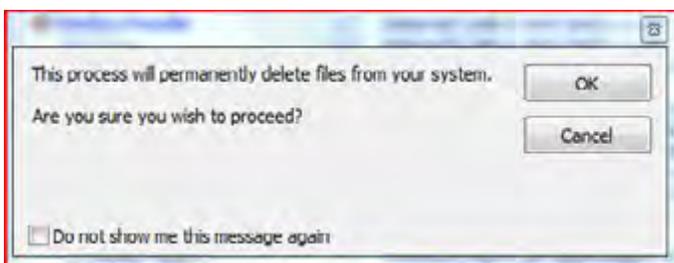
CCleaner is a simple, lightweight program that deletes temporary files, history, and other unused files from your computer. In addition to the file cleaners, it also has a registry cleaner.

Download CCleaner [from here](#). Download the latest version. CCleaner will try to add a Yahoo! Toolbar and make several other changes to your system. If you don't want it to do this, uncheck the options in the wizard. We recommend that you create a desktop shortcut for ease of access, though.

When you open CCleaner, the main window will display several options. We are going to clean the temporary files from all the browsers and Windows, so we don't need any of the other options.



Click on the Analyze button to start scanning for temporary files. You will need to close your browser to delete them, so do so now. After the program is done analyzing, click on Run Cleaner to delete the files. CCleaner will alert you it is going to delete the files, click OK to proceed and delete the files from your computer.



Optimize Internet Explorer 8

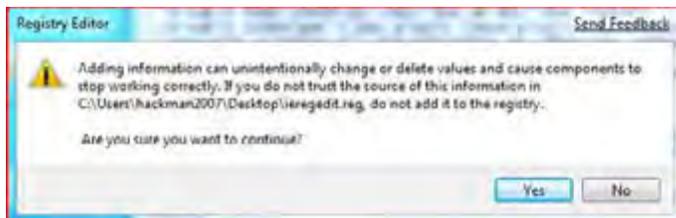
Internet Explorer 8 is the newest version of Microsoft's built-in browser and similar to previous iterations of IE it still has speed issues. Microsoft has improved the browser, but it still slightly lags behind Mozilla Firefox in terms of speed. Here's how to improve it.

1. Increase Internet Explorer 8's Connection Limit

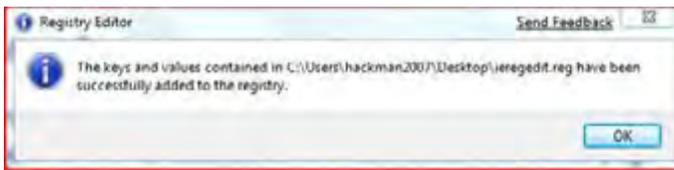
By default, Internet Explorer 8 establishes six simultaneous connections to a web page. Each of these connections downloads a certain part of the website, whether it be the main page itself or some of the pictures. Six connections may be enough for smaller websites that don't use much Flash, but for more complex pages like the ones on Facebook, Internet Explorer will be slow at rendering the page.

You can increase the connection limit by merging a registry file into your computer's registry.

Download the registry file [from here](#) and save it to your Desktop. Double-click on the file and click on Yes to merge it to the registry.



After the merge, you will receive a message stating the merge was successful, if you don't, try merging the file again.



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2. Turn Off SmartScreen Filter

If you have used Internet Explorer 7, you are no doubt familiar with the Phishing Filter. This filter was a very useful part of Internet Explorer 7, but slowed web browsing to a crawl since it constantly analyzed the websites.

Microsoft has redesigned the Phishing Filter to make it less intrusive and renamed it to SmartScreen Filter. Unfortunately, the SmartScreen Filter is still intrusive and still slows down web browsing.

Shutting off this filter will help speed up web browsing and since we are going to install another add-on later that will perform this task, it makes the SmartScreen Filter useless.



To turn off the filter, click on the Safety button and highlight the SmartScreen filter. Click on Turn off SmartScreen Filter and you get a pop-up that wants you to verify if you want to turn off the filter. Verify that the filter is actually going to be turned off and click Ok.



3. Turn off Feed Reading Features

RSS readers have revolutionized the news industry with their ease of use. Many browsers now have the capability to keep track of RSS feeds. Unfortunately, checking the feeds will slow down web browsing. If you really want a feed reader, you should use a dedicated application, such as FeedDemon or any of the other standalone programs.

Click on Tools, select Internet Options and click on the Content tab.



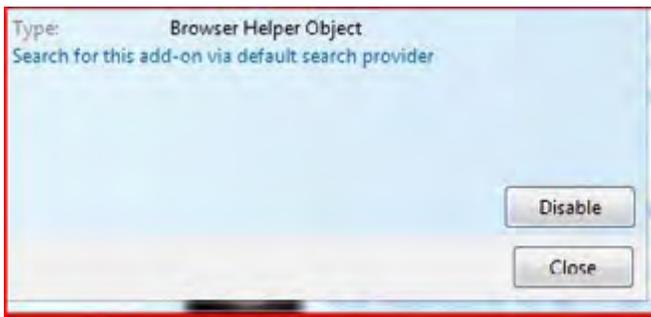
Click on the Settings button under Feed and Web Settings.

On the Feed settings window, uncheck the box next to Automatically check feeds and Web Slices for updates. Under the advanced section, uncheck Turn on feed reading view and Turn on in page Web Slice discovery. Click the OK button on the Feed settings window and on the Internet Options window.



4. Disable Java Plug-in 2 SSV Helper

The Java Plug-in 2 SSV Helper is an unnecessary add-on for Internet Explorer. The name makes it sound like it is required for Java to run properly when using web applets. However, the newer versions of Java don't require this add-on to be enabled. The more add-ons that are present on a system, the more likely the system is to slow down so it is a good idea to disable this add-on.



To turn off this add-on, click on Tools and select Manage Add-ons. Click on Java Plug-In 2 SSV Helper and click on the Disable button in the right hand corner of the window. Click on Close and restart Internet Explorer. The add-on is now disabled.

5. Reregister actxprxy.dll

actxprxy.dll is a very important dynamic link library file crucial to the stable running of your computer. This process belongs to the ActiveX program for Windows. It controls the way the various ActiveX controls run and communicate on your system. This tweak will re-register the dll file on your system and potentially speed up web browsing.

This tweak may not speed up Internet Explorer 8, but may help fix IE8 if it is sluggish, and how you perform this tweak depends on what version of Windows you are running.

If you are running Windows XP, press the Windows key and R. Then paste the following in the run box: **regsvr32 actxprxy.dll**

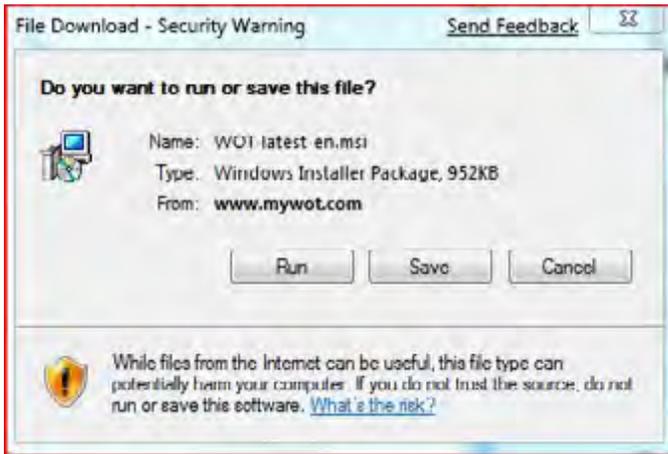
If you are running Windows Vista or higher, click on Start and type "cmd" in the search box. Right click on the cmd result that displays and click Run as administrator. Paste the following text in the run box: **regsvr32 actxprxy.dll**.

If it was successful, you will see a message stating that the DLLRegisterServer in actxprxy.dll succeeded. This means the re-registration of the file succeeded and the tweak ran as planned, click OK to close the window and then close the command prompt window.

6. Install WOT

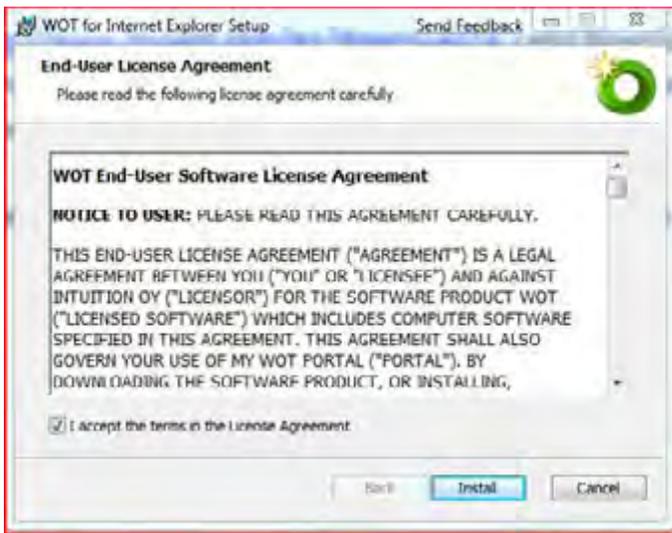
Web of Trust (WOT) is a very useful Internet Explorer 8 add-on that warns you of risky and potentially dangerous websites. It uses a red, yellow, green and grey color scheme. Red means the website is bad, yellow means the website is potentially bad, green means the website is good and grey means the website has not yet been rated or does not have enough ratings to mark it as a good or bad website.

WOT is dependent on how the other users of the program rate particular websites. Since it takes more than one user to rate a website as good or bad, it makes this add-on safe.

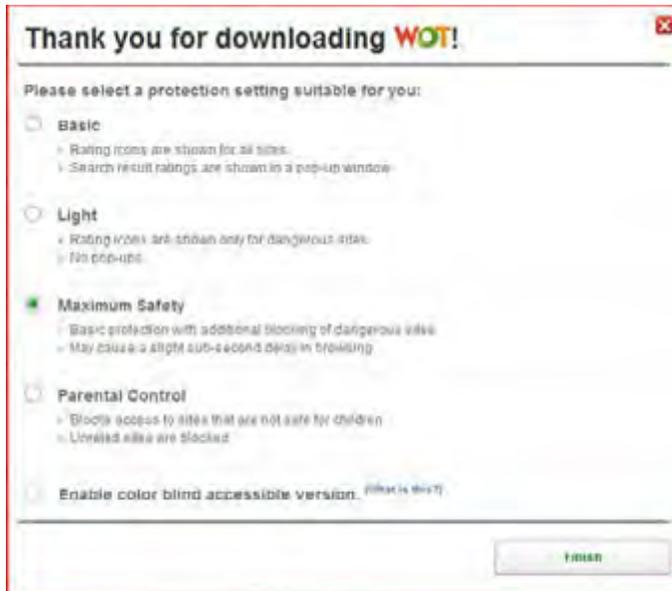


[Click here](#) and download the WOT add-on. When the download window displays, click on the Run button so the program automatically starts installing after it is downloaded.

When WOT is ready to install it will display the EULA and make you accept the agreement. Please read the agreement, put a checkmark in the appropriate checkbox, and click on Install.



After the program is installed, WOT will open to the configuration page and ask you what protection setting you want to use. We recommend that you choose Maximum Safety since it will protect you from the extremely dangerous sites. However, this may slightly slow down your web browsing speed by less than a second, but this is a small price to pay for the added protection. If you don't want this delay, select the Light protection setting and click Finish.



When you visit websites you will see a red, yellow, green or grey circle at the top left hand corner of the browser window.

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7. Disable Saving of Auto-Complete Information

Auto-Complete information makes it easy to fill out forms quickly and easily. Third parties can access the information saved though since the information is stored in plain text. In other words, anyone can read this information at any time if the person has direct or indirect access to your computer.

It is a good idea for security reasons to disable saving of auto-complete information, no matter how inconvenient this may be.

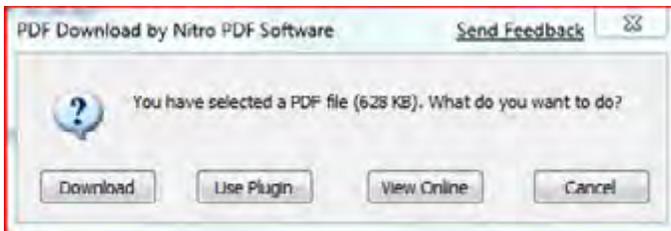
Click on Tools, select Internet Options and click on the Content tab. Under the AutoComplete section, click on Settings and uncheck all the checkboxes. By doing this, you ensure that no personal information is retained by the browser, making it safer.

8. Handle PDFs in the Browser

Why have a dedicated software program when your web browser can open the file you want. With PDF Download, you can view and print a PDF right from your browser. PDF Download also has the capability to save entire web pages as a PDF.

Download PDF Download from [this link](#). Click the Add to Internet Explorer button and install the add-on.

When you need to open a PDF file on the web, you will get a prompt asking what you want to do. Since you want to open the PDF, click on Use Plug-in. If you want to download the PDF to your hard drive, then click Download.



You can also save an entire webpage as a PDF, right click anywhere on the page and select Save Page as PDF.

Optimize Mozilla Firefox

Mozilla Firefox is the browser of choice for many people (including us). With its high customizability with myriad add-ons, Firefox can suit almost anyone's needs.

1. FireTune

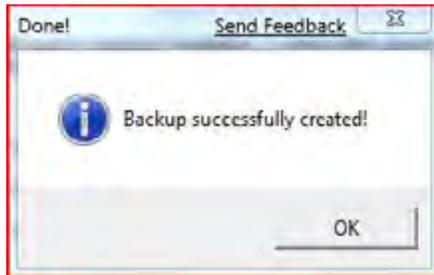
You might have heard of accessing Firefox's hidden preferences using the about:config command. There are tons of tweaks you can do to make Firefox load faster, browse faster, download faster, etc. How these tweaks work depends on the speed of your computer, your technical knowledge, and your connection speed.

FireTune takes this approach one-step farther. It gives you a simple graphical interface to get the most tweaking out of Firefox without spending all day trying to comprehend what the tweak is trying to do.

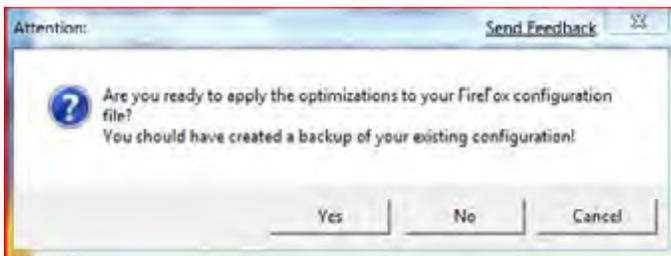
You can download FireTune from the author's homepage [here](#).



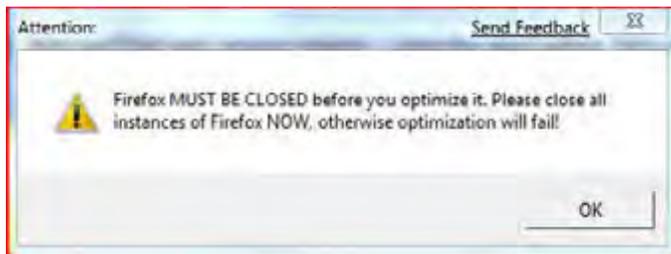
Unzip the FireTune ZIP directory and double-click on the FireTune application file. When FireTune opens, you will be presented with the main menu. Click on Create backup of configuration. This ensures that you will be able to restore your original configuration files if something goes wrong in the optimization. When backed up properly, you will get a Backup Successful message.



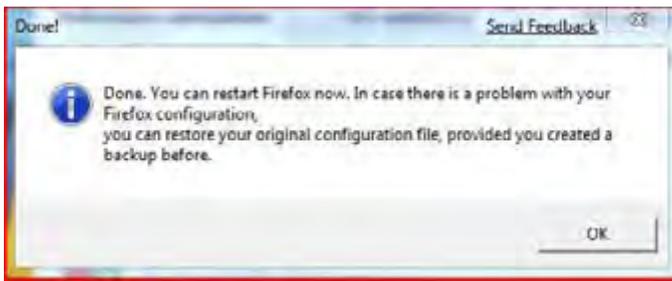
You are now ready to tweak Firefox. We are going to assume that you have a Fast Computer and a Fast Connection since this is Maximum PC, so select Fast Computer / Fast Connection. The program will alert you that you should have created a backup of your configuration files, if you have already click Yes.



You will get a second prompt alerting you that you need to close Firefox or the optimizations will fail. As the program suggests, close all running instances of Firefox and then click the OK button.



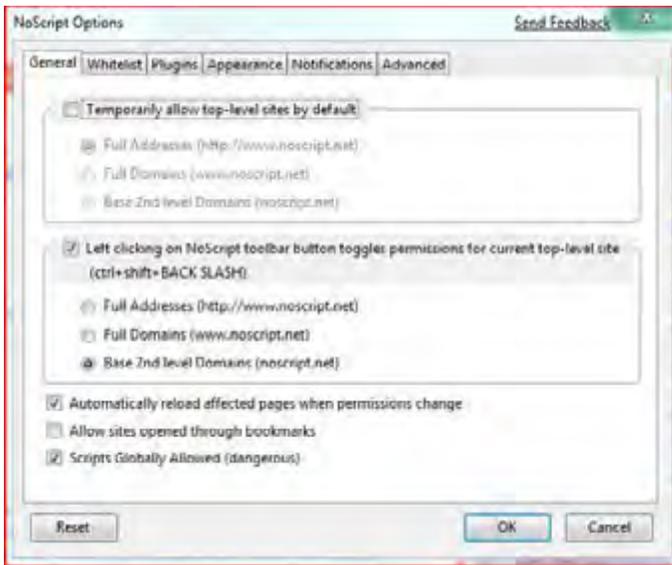
Close the program if the tweaks were successful. If they failed for whatever reason, click the Restore original configuration button on the main window. After restoring, perform the appropriate tweaks again.



2. NoScript

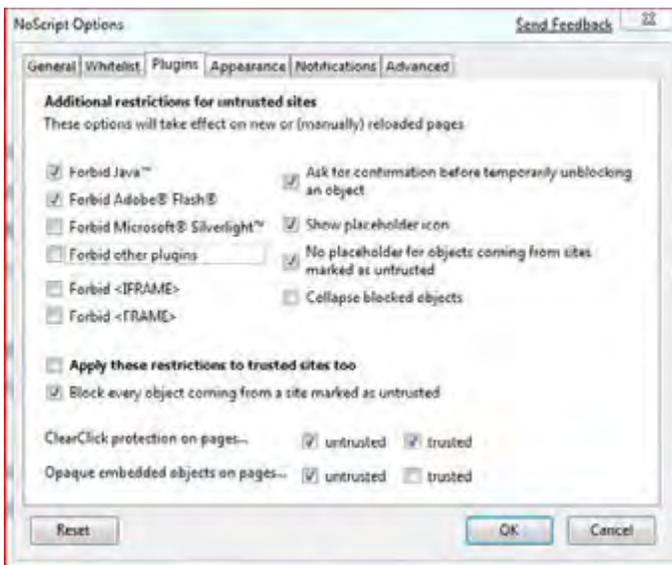
If you don't normally use Java or Flash, you can use NoScript to disable these scripts from running. It is a good idea to disable these since most malware comes in from exploits of one of these services. By using this tool, you can avoid getting malware from a Java or JavaScript exploit.

Download NoScript from [here](#). NoScript is a typical Mozilla Firefox extension so add to it Firefox like you would any other add-on and restart the browser.



Click on the NoScript button in the lower right hand corner of the browser window and select Options. Since we want to disable Java, JavaScript and Flash, we need to change some options.

On the General tab, uncheck Scripts Globally Allowed, which is dangerous. When this option is enabled, this means the program will allow any website to execute a script.



Now click on the Plugins tab and put checkmarks in the Forbid Java and Forbid Adobe Flash checkboxes. This will disable Java and Flash by default. You can always create an exception later in case you want to access Java or Flash on a particular website. Click on Ok to save the changes.

If a website doesn't work after enabling some of these options, click on the NoScript button again and allow the

scripts that you want to run. This gives you much more control over what is running on your computer, rather than letting any website run any script at any time.

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3. WOT

Web of Trust (WOT) is a very useful Mozilla Firefox add-on that warns you of risky and potentially dangerous websites. It uses a red, yellow, green and grey color scheme. Red means the website is bad, yellow means the website is potentially bad, green means the website is good and grey means the website has not been rated yet or does not have enough ratings to mark it as a good or bad website.

WOT is dependent on how the other users of the program rate particular websites. Since it takes more than one user to rate a website as good or bad, it makes this add-on safe.

Download WOT from [here](#). WOT is a typical Firefox add-on, so add it to Firefox and restart the browser.

When the browser restarts, you will receive the WOT EULA. Read and accept the EULA, otherwise, you won't be able to use the program



WOT will open a new tab and start the configuration process. We recommend that you choose the Maximum Safety since it will block all the bad sites, but if you can't stand the slight browser delay or the brief glimpse of the WOT screen, then choose the Light Protection. With Light Protection, you still receive all the ratings, but none of the sites will be blocked.



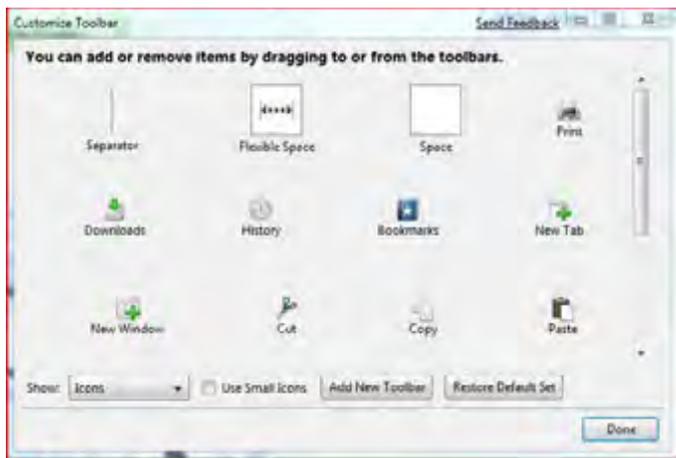
On the next screen, WOT will ask you to register to gain access to all the features of the add-on. You don't need access to any of the advanced controls since we configured the add-on for the highest security, so close out of the window. If at some point you do want to register, you can register by going to the WOT homepage and clicking the [register link](#).

4. Redirect Remover

If you browse many websites throughout the day, chances are you are redirected from site to site. Normally this type of redirection is harmless, but occasionally you may be redirected to a rogue website and end up infected with malware. With Redirect Remover, you control are allowed to redirect and which ones cannot.

Download Redirect Remover [from here](#). Redirect Remover is a normal Firefox add-on so add it to Firefox and restart your browser.

Right click anywhere by the address bar and select Customize. You want to customize the toolbar to make it easier to turn on or off Redirect Remover. In the Customize toolbar window, scroll down until you find the Switch RDR on/off button. Drag this button next to the WOT icon (or Home button if you didn't install WOT) and to the left of your address bar. Click on Done to close the window and return to the browser window.



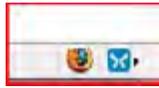
If you did the previous step correctly, you should now have a new button next to your address bar that will allow you to control Redirect Remover. When the button is grey, the add-on is turned off and when it is red, it is fully functioning.

5. IE Tab

Don't you hate those websites that refuse to work with any other browser besides Internet Explorer? IE Tab's mission is to remedy this annoying problem. It will emulate Internet Explorer and allow you to use most of the websites that require Internet Explorer.

Download the add-on from [here](#). IE Tab is a normal Firefox add-on, so just add it to Firefox and restart the browser.

In the bottom, right hand corner of the browser window you will see the Firefox logo or the Internet Explorer logo. When the Firefox logo appears, you are using the Firefox rendering engine. When the Internet Explorer logo appears, you are using the Internet Explorer rendering engine.



When you want to change to a different engine, just click the logo and the page will refresh loading the appropriate renderer.

6. AutoCopy

Manually copying and pasting can get monotonous since you have to click too many times to do what you want. As a power user, copying and pasting gets old very fast. In comes, AutoCopy, with this Firefox add-on you can automatically copy any text to your clipboard.

Download AutoCopy from [here](#). Add the add-on to Firefox and restart the browser. In the bottom, right hand corner of the screen you will have a new button stating AutoCopy is enabled.

When this add-on is enabled, highlight the text you want to copy and paste it wherever you want it.

7. Themes

If you didn't know, Mozilla Firefox offers hundreds of themes to change the default look of Firefox.

We recommend you go through the [list of themes](#) and find one that suits your personal taste. There are hundreds of themes that change the look and feel of Firefox, so make sure you look through them.



8. Speed Dial

If you hate typing in the URL of your favorite websites, this add-on is for you.

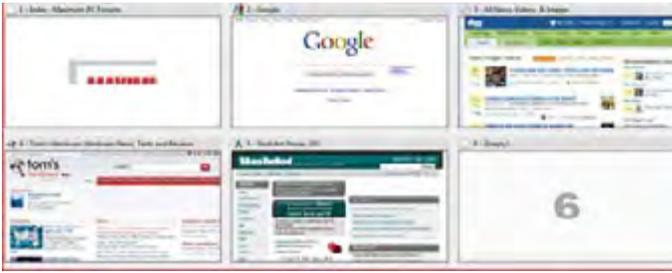
Download the add-on from [here](#). Add the add-on to Firefox and restart the browser.

When the browser re-opens, you will get the initial configuration window. Put a checkmark in the Add Speed Dial button to toolbar. By doing this, it makes it easier to access your Speed Dialed websites.



To add a new speed dial page, navigate to the page you want to speed dial, click on Bookmarks and select Set As Speed Dial. Highlight Group 1 to place it in the first group of speed dial pages and put assign it a number.

When you are done, click on the purple Speed Dial button and it will open the speed dial directory of websites that you bookmarked. Click on the website you want to visit and you will be taken there. You may create as many groups as you like, but we recommend you keep the number small since this should only be used for your favorite websites.



9. Quick Paste

If you frequently use instant messaging, you have encountered the text limit problem. Sometimes you just want to copy and paste the entire article or section instead of giving a link to the whole article. Maybe you are just pointing out a specific thing in the article that you want the other person to read. Regardless of your intent, Quick Paste is here to help. Quick Paste is similar to TinyURL since it gives a URL for the person to click on.

Download the Quick Paste from [here](#). Add the add-on to Firefox and restart the browser.



When you need to paste a lot of text, highlight the text you want to send, right click and select TinyPaste selected text. You will receive a pop-up telling you the URL of the text. Copy and paste the URL given and send it to the appropriate person.



When the person clicks the link, it will open the tinypaste.com website and show them the text you highlighted

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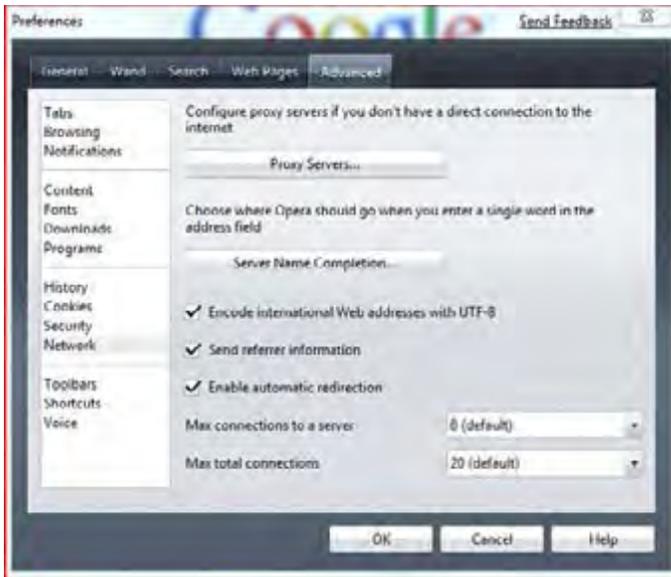
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Optimize Opera 9

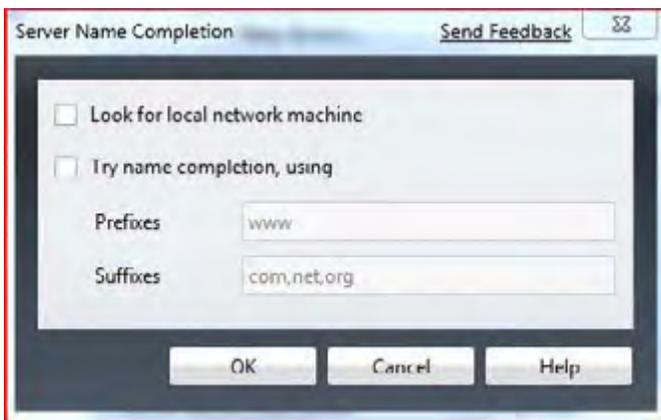
1. Disable Server Name Completion

Opera 9 does a great job of trying to figure out what website you are trying to get to based on your browsing history. To speed up the browser and have it take less of a toll on your system, it is a good idea to disable this feature.

Click on Tools, select Preferences, and click on the Advanced tab.



Click on Network in the left hand pane of the window and select Server Name Completion. Uncheck Look for Local Network Machine and Try name completion, using and click Ok.



2. Increase Cache Image Time and Other Cache Related Tweaks

By increasing the amount of time cached images are using, the web browser does not have to reload the images every time you go to the website. In the end, this will speed up web browsing.

Click on Tools, select Preferences and click on History on the left side of the window. Where it says Disk Cache, change the number to 100MB. This will increase the speed of the browser by letting Opera store 100MB worth of information on your hard drive so it doesn't have to start the rendering process again.

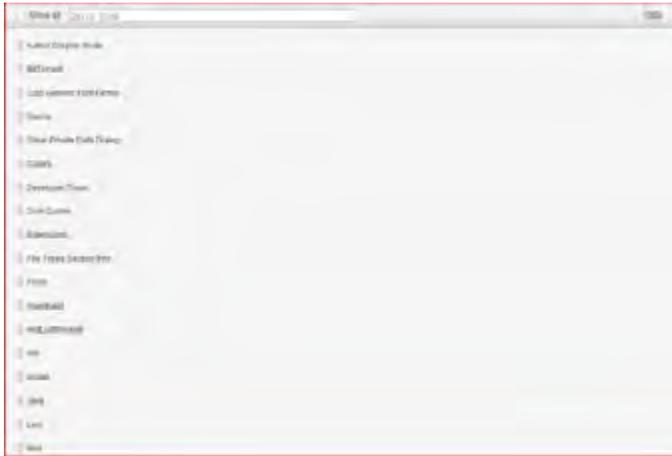
We also want to make Opera check for new images less. By default, Opera checks for new images every 5 hours. As you know images can take up an enormous amount of bandwidth, so limiting the reload frequency of images is ideal. We recommend you change the value to 24 hours so it will check daily for new images.

If you don't see the image you are supposed to on a website, press F5 while on the website to manually refresh the cache and load the correct image.

3. Increase Total Number of Connections

As with the previous browsers covered, Opera also has the ability to increase the total number of connections to a website. Having more connections to the website should make the page load faster.

In the Opera address bar type: **about:config**

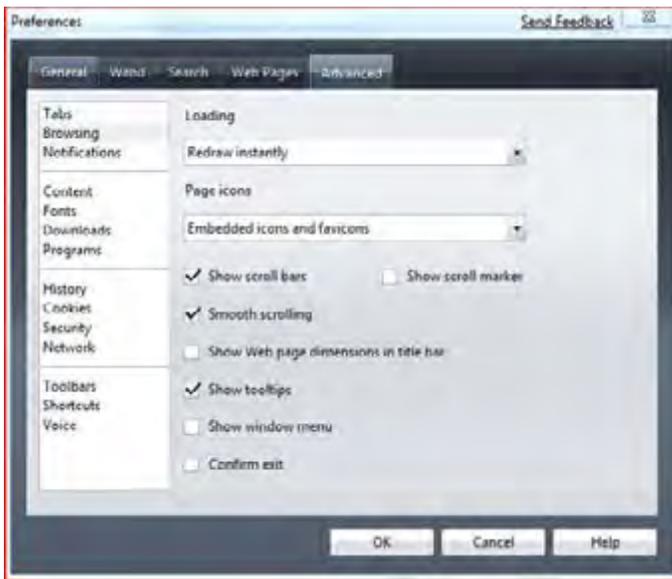


In the quick find text box, type connection. Change Max Connections Total to 32. This will tell Opera to make 32 connections to the website. Do not change any of the other preferences on this page, just click Save. If you change the Max Connections of the Server, you may increase the loading time instead of decreasing.



4. Redraw Web Pages Instantly

Opera by default redraws the website every second. While this may seem fast, when browsing multiple websites it can get annoying. Thankfully, there is an option in Opera to change the redraw time instantly. Instantly means as soon as Opera is done rendering the page behind the scenes it will display it.



Click on Tools, select Preferences and click on Browsing. Under Loading, change it to Redraw instantly and click Ok.

5. Change Browser Title

If you haven't noticed, every web browser includes its name at the top of the screen. While this may not affect the performance of the browser, it would be awesome to change the name of the browser to something you like.



To do this, open a new Opera browser window and paste into the address bar: **opera:config#UserPrefs|Title**

This will take you to the browser's configuration screen and you should see a text box with the word Title next to it. In that text box, type whatever you want to display at the top of the browser and then scroll down to the bottom and click on Save. Restart the browser and the name will now be whatever you typed in.



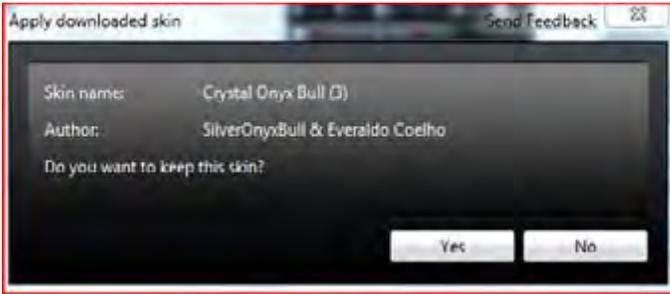
6. Change Skins

Like most other browsers, Opera has the ability to support different skins. No one should be forced to use the default skin of a web browser if there are better options available.

Opera's official skins can be downloaded [from here](#). It doesn't matter which skin you choose since they are all installed the same way. We are going to choose the Crystal Oynx Bull skin found [here](#).



To install the skin, click on the Download Skin button. Opera will apply the skin and ask if you want to keep it. If you like the way the skin looks, click Yes, otherwise click No and keep searching.



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Posted 04/23/09 at 11:30:00 AM | by [Josh Kampschmidt](#)

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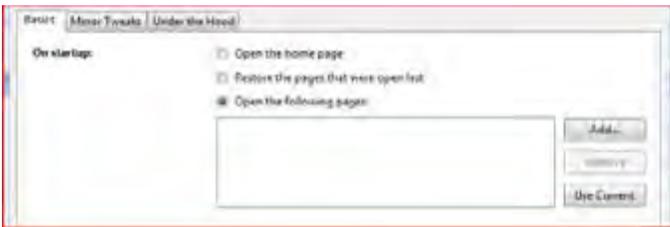
Optimize Google Chrome

Chrome is Google's new foray into the browser market. By design, Chrome is supposed to be small, efficient, and fast. Because of this design, there aren't any speed tweaks you can do to make Chrome run faster. However, there are things about Chrome that you can tweak, such as themes, having multiple homepages.

1. Open Multiple Homepages

When you open Google Chrome, you will notice that it opens your most visited sites. While this is awesome, we prefer to have our web browsers start a pre-determined page. While we could tell Chrome to open one page, why stop there when we can have it open several pages at once.

Click on the wrench button in the top, right hand corner of the browser and click Options. In the Startup section, click Open the following pages and then click the Add button.



In the URL text box, enter the first website you want to open and click on the Add button. Repeat this process as many times as you wish. For speed and loading purposes, we recommend that you limit the amount of websites opening at startup to three.

Close Google Chrome. When you re-open the browser, the websites you chose should open automatically in tabs.

2. Install Themes

As you may have noticed, Google Chrome lacks the ability to change themes. For some reason Google thought it would be a good idea not to give this capability. However, with the help of a small tweak, you can make your own theme or use a pre-made theme.

We recommend you use a pre-made theme from [here](#). Any one of these themes should work. If you want to create a theme yourself, click [here](#). It is a complicated procedure, so we recommend that you take some time to read the entire post before attempting.

After download the theme, extract the directory and replace the default.dll file inside of the Themes folder, located at **C:\Users\%username%\AppData\Local\Google\Chrome\Application\%version_number%** in Windows Vista and Windows 7 and **C:\Documents and Settings\%username%\Local Settings\Application Data\Google\Chrome\Application\%version_number%\Themes** in Windows XP. Make sure you close Google Chrome before attempting to replace the default.dll file.



If the tweak was done correctly, Google Chrome should have a different theme when you re-open the browser.

3. Scramble Your Unique ID

Every copy of Google Chrome has a unique id for the installation. It's highly unlikely that Google would want to do anything with your browsing history, but with Chrome Privacy Guard, it will scramble the unique id so no one will know what you are doing with Chrome.

Download Chrome Privacy Guard [from here](#). Unzip the directory and double-click on ChromePrivacyGuard.exe to run start Chrome.

No further tweaking is necessary, but if you want to keep scrambling the ID, you must click on the ChromePrivacyGuard.exe file instead of clicking on the regular Chrome file on your Desktop.

We recommend you paste the file on your Desktop for easy access.

4. Download YouTube videos

If you watch many YouTube videos, then you know there are some software programs that will allow you to download these videos to your computer.

With Google Chrome, you don't need to download any software. In fact, with a simple bookmarklet you can download all the flash videos you want:

```
javascript:window.location.href="http://youtube.com/get_video?video_id=" +
swfArgs['video_id']+ "&l=" + swfArgs['l'] + "&sk=" + swfArgs['sk'] + '&fmt_map' +
swfArgs['fmt_map'] + '&t=' + swfArgs['t'];
```

```
javascript:window.location.href="http://youtube.com/get_video?video_id=" +
swfArgs['video_id']+ "&fmt=18" + "&l=" + swfArgs['l'] + "&sk=" + swfArgs['sk'] + '&fmt_map' +
swfArgs['fmt_map'] + '&t=' + swfArgs['t'];
```

The first bookmarklet is for standard .flv and the second is the higher quality .mp4, if available.

Right click in your bookmarks bar and select Add Page. In the Name textbox, type YouTube FLV. In the URL text field, paste the first bookmarklet pasted above.

Repeat the process again, but name it YouTube MP4 and paste the second bookmarklet text to create it.



If you did it correctly, you should have two new bookmarks.

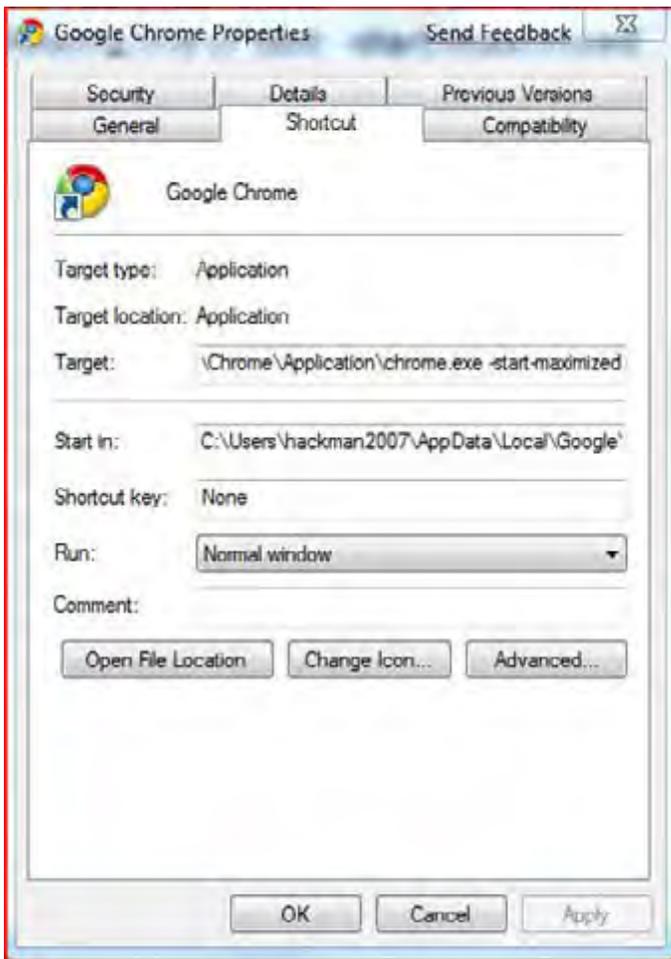
5. Automatically Start Maximized

If you hate resizing a browser window when someone resizes the window or a website does it automatically, then this feature is for you.

Google Chrome includes many startup switches, but most are only useful for developers.

The -start-maximized startup switch does exactly what it says, it opens the browser to the largest size possible, filling the screen (not to be confused with Full Screen).

To use this switch, right click on the Google Chrome icon on your desktop and select Properties. Click on the Shortcut tab and put your cursor in the Target text box. After it says chrome.exe, add a space and the following line of text: **-start-maximized**



Click Apply and then Ok. Now open the browser and it should start maximized. If you get an error, make sure you entered the text exactly as stated above.

Conclusion

Now you have seen our list of all the essential tips, tweaks and hacks you need to implement on your web browser. With these essential tweaks down, you are ready to go explore the various other tweaks that these browsers offer. If we missed any of your favorite essential awesomizing tweaks for any of the web browsers listed, please let us know in the comments section.