Seven essential browser tricks every computer user needs to know

By Justin Ferris, Komando.com, April 12, 2016

The Web browser is a funny thing. Thanks to the Internet it's become one of the most-used programs on our computers, but many people don't really understand it. That's why in the past we've tackled common browser myths and misconceptions that many people believe but shouldn't.

Today, though, we're helping you get the most out of your browser with a few simple tricks that you really need to know. We'll cover Chrome, Firefox, Internet Explorer, Safari and the new Microsoft Edge. Don't forget to share this Tip with friends and family so they can improve their browsing as well.

1. Choose your home page

What's the first thing you see when your browser starts up? If you're using Internet Explorer, it's probably MSN's website. Chrome loads up a modified Google page and Firefox and Microsoft Edge have their own start pages.

But if the first thing you always do after the browser starts is go to Facebook or your email, why not have your browser start there? It saves you an extra step and it's easy to do.

Need a suggestion for a home page? Try www.komando.com. It's your one-stop site for the best in tech news, tips, tricks, reviews, downloads, videos and so much more. And it's updated all day long.

Chrome - In Chrome, click the icon in the upper right with the three horizontal bars and choose "Settings." In the left column, choose "Settings" and then to the right look under "On Startup."
Set it to "Open a specific page or set of pages" and then click the "Set pages" link. Type in one or more Web addresses and click OK. The page or pages will load up when Chrome starts.

Microsoft Edge - In Microsoft Edge, click the icon in the upper-right corner with the three horizontal dots and select "Settings." Under "Open with," select "A specific page or pages" and then select "Custom."
Type in a Web address and click the plus sign to the right. You can do this multiple times to add multiple pages, or click "X" next to a page to remove it. When you're done, click the icon with the three horizontal dots again to close the settings area.

Firefox - In Firefox, click the icon in the upper right with the three horizontal bars and choose "Options." On the General page, set "When Firefox starts" to "Show my homepage." Then under that, type in the address you want for your home page. Click OK.
If you want to load multiple pages on startup, load them up in tabs first and then click the "Use Current Page" button. Or you can click "Use Bookmark..." and select a folder of bookmarks.

Internet Explorer - In Internet Explorer, click the gear icon in the upper-right corner and select "Internet Options." Go to the General tab and under "Home page" enter the Web address or addresses you want to see on startup.

Opera - Click on Menu at top left corner of screen, then Settings. In "On Startup", click on bullet "Open a specific page" then on "Set Pages"

Safari - In Safari on Apple (no longer supported for Windows), go to Safari>>Preferences. On the General tab, go to "Homepage" and type in an address or addresses.

2. Pin tabs

This one is for Chrome, Firefox, Opera and Safari 9 users who have favorite sites they leave open all day. Load up the site, then right-click on the browser tab and choose "Pin Tab." Your tab will move to a smaller tab on the left side of the tab bar.

No matter how many tabs you have open, pinned tabs will always be visible on the left. They'll also open automatically when your browser starts. To unpin a tab, just right-click on it and choose "Unpin Tab."

3. Middle-click to open tabs

If you're using a mouse that was made after the mid-2000s, then it probably has a scroll wheel. Did you know that if you press down on the scroll wheel it acts as a middle mouse button? Learn more cool mouse tricks that will improve your life.

OK, so what does the middle mouse button do? It can do many things, but the most exciting is that clicking on a link with the middle mouse button opens that link in a new browser tab.

Go ahead and give it a try. It will change your life - or at least your browsing. There's no need to right-click a link and select "Open in new tab," or whatever you were doing until now.

For laptop users, sometimes pressing both trackpad buttons at once works as a middle click. Or you can left-click a link while holding the CTRL key.

4. Zoom text

Have you ever visited a page with text that was too small to read comfortably? If you've ever found yourself leaning to close to a computer monitor, you need to know this.

To zoom text - and images - in any browser, just hold CTRL and press the plus key to zoom in. Hit plus a few time to zoom in even further. Too far? Hold CTRL and press the minus key to zoom back out. CTRL and the zero key resets the zoom level.

Hint: Use the plus, minus and zero keys over on the far right of the keyboard. The ones near the Backspace key work for most browsers, but not for all of them.

If you don't want to take your hand off the mouse, you can hold down the CTRL key and spin your mouse scroll wheel. That will zoom text and images in and out as well.

5. Browse privately

Don't want your significant other knowing what his or her birthday present is? Want to keep sites from storing cookies on your computer? Just fire up your browser's privacy mode and nothing you do will be recorded.

To fire up private browsing, just hit CTRL+SHIFT+P (CTRL+OPTION+P on Macs). This works in every browser except Chrome. In Chrome, the shortcut is CTRL+SHIFT+N (OPTION+SHIFT+N on Macs). You can also enable private browsing mode from your browser's main menu. When your browser is in private browsing mode, it will show a special icon. If you don't see the mask in Firefox, the spy in Chrome or the "InPrivate" in IE and Edge, then you aren't secure.

Private browsing will keep your browsing safe from casual snoopers. Someone who jumps on your computer won't see where you've been.

6. Change the default search site

At the top of your browser next to the address bar, you might have a search bar. It makes it faster to search for things because you don't need to load a search site first; just start typing.

Don't have a search bar? In many browsers just typing a word or phrase in the address bar automatically opens a search for that word or phrase. But how does your browser know what search site to use?

Each browser has a default it uses. In Chrome, searches naturally open in Google, Firefox opens in Yahoo search, and Internet Explorer and Edge open in Microsoft's Bing. Those are fine, but maybe you would rather have your searches open in something else.

It's possible to set the default search site for your browser. Three more private search sites you may not have heard about are DUCKDUCKGO, YIPPY and IXQUICK. Here is how to set your default search site:

Chrome - In the upper-right corner, click the icon with the three horizontal lines and choose "Settings." Select the "Settings" area on the left, and to the right, scroll down to the "Search" heading.

Where it says "Google," click to select Yahoo, Bing, Ask or AOL. If you want to install, or uninstall, another search site, click the "Manage Search Engines" button.

Microsoft Edge - In the upper-right corner, click the icon with the horizontal dots, then on Settings and then click "Advanced Settings." Scroll down to find "Search in the address bar with" and click where it says "Bing." You can select DuckDuckGo or add a new option. Note that not every search site is compatible with Edge.

Firefox - In the upper-right corner, click the icon with the three horizontal dots and choose "Options." In the left column, click "Search" and on the right select the default search site. Firefox has a number of them, including some options you might not have considered like Amazon, eBay and Twitter.

Internet Explorer - In the upper-right corner, click the gear icon and select "Manage Add-ons." In the left column, click "Search Providers." Select the search provider you want as default and click the "Set as default" button in the lower-right corner.
What if you only see Bing as an option? To add more search sites, click the "Find more search providers" link at the very bottom. Then select a search site you want to use, click the "Add to Internet Explorer" button and you'll see it appear in the list.

Opera - Click on Menu at top left corner of screen, then Settings, then Browser. Scroll to Search and the choose a Search Engine or Mange Search Engines.

Safari - In Safari on Apple, go to Safari>>Preferences. On the Search tab, click next to "Search engine" and select from Google, Yahoo, Bing or DuckDuckGo (Safari 8 only). Then close the preferences window.

7. See your online accounts and passwords (includes info from a 12/29/14 Komando column)
Do you remember every online account you've ever made? Over the years you might have created dozens or hundreds that you don't use anymore. That's actually very dangerous. It means your information is floating around on dozens or hundreds of websites that may or may not be secure. Here is how to find passwords stored by your browser:

Firefox - To see your login information in Firefox, go to the Firefox menu - it's the icon on the right with three horizontal lines - and click Options. Then Click on Security. Then click the "Saved Passwords" button.

Chrome - In Chrome, click the icon with three horizontal lines in the upper right and choose "Settings."

Choose "Settings" on the left (if not already there), and then click the "Show advanced settings" link at the bottom of the screen. Scroll down to "Passwords and forms" and click the "Manage saved passwords" link.

If you want to log back into your old account, but don't remember the password, then you can click on a password and click the Show button next to it. To see the password, you will have to enter your Windows account password, which does make it harder for casual snoops to get in.

Internet Explorer - Internet Explorer does save usernames and passwords, but you can't view them directly in IE. You'll need a third-party program like IE PassView. (http://nirsoft.net/utils/internet_explorer_password.html)

Safari - In Safari, go to Safari>>Preferences>>Auto-fill. Click the Edit button to view the saved passwords.