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Netscape Communicator 4.01 for the Mac

good things come to those who wait

By Sean Timberlake
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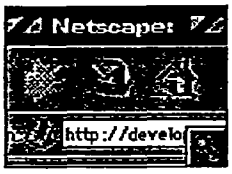
Mac users bemoan the delays that often occur between the release of software on Windows and its eventual arrival for Macintosh. In the case of Netscape's new browser, however, the wait was relatively brief--and worth it.



Dynamic HTML.

Communicator 4.01 for the Mac solves many of the problems we found in the PC release. Netscape even corrected the infamous privacy bug before Mac Communicator shipped, hence the skip to version 4.01.

But there's further cause for celebration. For instance, Communicator 4.01 consumes about 3MB of RAM less than Navigator 3.0. We also found that Java applets and plug-ins performed better and with fewer memory problems. And the progressive page display, which begins with text content, makes load times seem faster, as well.

The Mac version retains almost all the interface features available on the Windows model. For example, Mac users can now take advantage of enhanced navigation tools, such as the drop-down site lists on the Back and Forward buttons. Mac Communicator still isn't at full parity with its Windows eqivalent, however. For one thing, you won't find the Personal Toolbar, into which you drag frequently visited sites for quick access.

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Netscape has also delivered most of the tools in the Communicator suite, although their Netcaster push technology for the Mac isn't even in beta yet. The Message Center, which houses the Messenger email client and Collabra discussion group newsreader, is a single, clear interface for receiving and composing all correspondence. Composer, the Wysiwyg page editor, remains an adequate tool, though somewhat slow and lacking in features (such as frame composition) that are found in more sophisticated tools.

On the plus side, Mac Communicator seems to be free of the problems we encountered with the Windows version. For instance, we didn't run into any jumbled layouts or crash our systems when visiting sites that use style sheets or complex tables. The browser also handles dynamic HTML well, but we did find a few instances of extremely complex code that crashed the software. Otherwise, the browser appears remarkably stable.

Netscape seems to have done it right this time. With its combination of great new features and stability, we found it easy to make Communicator 4.01 for the Mac our primary browser. It clearly outperforms either 3.0 browser and will certainly tide us over until the release of IE 4.0 for the Mac, due some time this fall.

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Netscape Communicator 4.01 for the Mac
Direct price: free for 68K or PowerPC Macs, $59 to register, $49 to upgrade
Netscape Communications Corp., 415/937-3777

Standard Edition: 68030 or PowerPC Macintosh, 12MB RAM (16MB recommended), System 7.5, TCP/IP network connection, Internet email account for Messenger, Collabra Server for full functionality in Collabra

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