

Timothy Perrin



# Web Browsing *Just Got Better*

**I just bought a new Web browser. That's right. I said, "I just bought a new Web browser."**

But don't they give those things away for free? I hear you wondering. Yes, they—Microsoft and Netscape—do give them away for free and both Internet Explorer and Netscape Navigator are fine products. I have both installed on my system and, until recently, Navigator 7.1 was my preferred browser. But I've been seduced into spending US\$30 on a marvellous browser called iRider that has, in my opinion, taken Web browsing to the next level.

Even with a high-speed Internet link—cable or ADSL—we still spend *too much time* sitting around waiting for Web pages to download. Build a faster Internet and Web designers will build more complex Web pages. That's just the way life works.

But the folks at Wymea Bay Software thought they could do better and have come up with two major and several minor enhancements to the Web browser.

The first of these is a visual page list. When you visit the page, its name and a small image of it stay visible in a bar on the left side of the screen. The page itself stays open in your computer's memory.

If you want to revisit that page, you don't need to use the forward and back buttons. You just click on the page image and voila!—it instantly pops up. In fact, if

you hold the button down on your mouse and pull it down the page list, the pages will pop-pop-pop-pop up, one after the other.

What's even better is that they don't even have to be pages you've already visited. iRider allows you to surf-ahead, opening pages you're going to want to visit while you read the current page. So, for example, say you run a search on Google. As you scan down the results page, you simply right-click on all the likely hits as you go.

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By the time you get to the end of the page, the first likely hit will be ready to go. And you don't even have to have paid attention to which of the pages on the page list it is because iRider has added a new navigation button, the Next Page button, which will automatically take you right where you want to go.

Another way that I find myself using surf-ahead is when I see a group of links that I know I'm going to want to read. I can highlight the entire group, right-click on any one of them, and the entire group of them will open in the background while I continue to read the page I'm working on.

Other useful features include an iRider search page, which will feed your search terms to a variety of search engines, depending on what you're searching for. It normally starts with three of the best search engines: Google, AltaVista, and WebCrawler. You can add in any of 10 more general-purpose search engines if you wish.

If you are looking for images—video, audio, or music—it has already preselected the best search engines for each of those. It has dictionary and encyclopedia sites picked out, the best news sites, and even the best shopping sites. I find I use it several times a day.

Have you ever wished you could have more than one homepage? With iRider you can. A feature called pinning allows you to designate a page to open every time you open iRider. I've added three pages so far to my list of "pinned" pages.

You can also work with groups of bookmarks together, saving them as books. So, for example, if you have a favourite group of news sites where you like to catch up with the world every morning, you'll be able to work with them as a group all the time.

Finally, the developers have found a suitable compromise in the battle over pop-up ads. These are the annoying windows that open up to sell you free dating services. For better or worse, these ads are the way many Websites stay in business; pop-up blocking software prevents the Webmasters from making the money they need to keep working.

iRider deals with the problem elegantly by opening the pop-ups, but at the very bottom of the list *underneath* everything you're working on. The Webmaster gets paid and you can look at them if you wish, without being bothered by intrusive ads.

I don't buy a lot of software. One of the perks of writing this column is that I usually review most of what's of interest and, if I like it, hang onto it. But for 30 bucks, I didn't even think twice.

This is a *great* product. There's a free 21-day trial. Give it a try and I'm sure you'll be hooked, too. <http://www.iRider.com>

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When you do give iRider the three-week trial, one of the "pinned" pages that you'll find already installed is there to demonstrate the surf-ahead capabilities of the program. Called "Great Rides," it links to some sites with phenomenal photography.

I particularly recommend the *National Geographic* and NASA Photo of the Day sites. (If you see a photo you like, you can turn it into your desktop—the background you see when you first start your computer—by right-clicking *and holding*, then choosing "Set as Background.")

One of the other sites, however, really caught my eye. It's MavSurfer.com.

About 100 miles off San Diego, California, an underwater mountain pushes the transpacific swells skyward into unbelievable surf. These waves are incredibly high—I'm talking higher than a six-story building.

A group of insane surfers called the Mavericks waits until the weather forecast is just right, then motors out for a day of—well, you can hardly call this just "surfing." In some of the photos, the people and their boards are specks on the surfaces of 20-metre waves.

I first saw these waves and the men and women who challenge them in a marvellous documentary called *Step into Liquid*, directed by Dana Brown. For those of us old enough to remember, it was Dana Brown's father, Bruce Brown, who created the quintessential '60s surfing movie *Endless Summer*. Well, Dana has gone a lot farther than his father ever did, travelling around the world with some of the best surfers out there. Heck, he even has them surfing not far from where my grandfather grew up in Donegal, Ireland.

If you get a chance to catch the film, I recommend it. If not, catch the stills on MavSurfer.com.

I was never a surfer when I was growing up in Southern California. They were a cult all their own. And after seeing those waves, I think I'm glad. ▲

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