Chromium-based Edge screenshots might as well be Chrome

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Some early screenshots of Microsoft’s Chromium-based Edge browser have leaked to Neowin. Unsurprisingly, Microsoft seems to be working on a development cycle that’s similar to that of Chrome, with pictures of both a Canary channel, shipped daily, and a Dev channel, shipped weekly.

In many ways the browser is what one would expect of a Microsoft Chromium browser: in those places where Chrome would use a Google account for syncing or a Google store for extensions, Edge-on-Chromium uses a Microsoft account and a Microsoft store. Similarly, the homepage is similar to that of Edge, using Bing pictures and Microsoft News links. Perhaps the biggest change is the settings page, which adopts a similar look-and-feel to the Windows 10 settings app—section headings down the left, the actual settings on the right.

But the screenshots also show just what a challenge Microsoft

has to win people over to its browser. If you're going to get an experience that's 99 percent Chrome, why not just use the real thing, with its even more extensive data syncing and extension store?

This is particularly acute because, at least right now, Edge on Chromium has sacrificed Edge's pleasing appearance—its square tabs, its incipient use of Fluent Design—and desirable features such as the ability to show tab thumbnails when hovering over the tabs. Chrome doesn't look like a modern Windows app now, and it never has. Edge does, and more so with each new version; Chromium Edge is a big step back.

It might seem a little churlish to worry about such concerns before the browser is even released, but this underlying question—why use Edge-on-Chromium when you can just use Chrome—is going to be a recurring theme. With the current Edge, Microsoft has the ability to offer unique facilities, such as running Edge in a lightweight virtual machine to boost security. The company can prioritize the features that it thinks are most important both for the Web and for Progressive Web Apps. And it can ensure that the browser looks and feels like an integrated part of Windows, not some third-party app running on top.

Some of those things may make a return in the future, but until and unless they do, there seems to be little that's particularly compelling about Edge. Other Chromium-based browsers face similar issues, of course, but have arguably done more to assert their own niche. Brave, for example, has prioritized privacy and ad-blocking, while also promoting micropayments for content producers. Vivaldi strives to be feature-packed for the power user. But Edge? Microsoft hasn't really expressed much ambition beyond being Chrome with a search and replace to change every instance of Google to Microsoft.

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