Edge-on-Chromium approaches; build leaks, extensions page already live

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The Edge Insider extension.

Microsoft’s first public release of a Chromium-based version of its Edge browser is fast approaching. Microsoft has published an early version of its extension market for the new browser, and the Windows Store includes a new extension for Edge-on-Chromium. On top of all this, a build of the browser has leaked.

The new build confirms much of what we've seen before: the browser is a minimally changed rebranded version of Chrome, replacing integration with Google's accounts with integration with Microsoft's accounts. This integration is still at an early stage; bookmarks can be synced between systems, but history, passwords, open tabs, autocomplete information, and open tabs don't yet sync.

Google has multiple release channels for Chrome; beyond the Stable channel, there's a Beta channel previewing the next release, the Dev channel previewing the release after that, and the Canary channel, which provides nightly builds. Microsoft's new extension for Edge Insider appears to offer easy switching between channels, announcements, known issues, and asking users for focused testing on particular areas.

In addition to this Microsoft-provided extension, we can also get a look at a selection of (presumably) vetted extensions for Edge Insider.

This makes clear that Microsoft doesn't seem to be offering any particular Edge-on-Chromium branding. The preview release will be called Edge Insider because Insider is how the company is branding all its previews (Windows, Xbox, and Office already use that terminology, for example). The preview will also take a big leap in version numbers (Edge is somewhere in the mid-40s, whereas Chrome is now in the mid-70s), but it appears that Microsoft's goal is that the new browser will just be "Edge." One day it will be the current Edge, the next day you'll install a Windows update and it'll be the new Edge.

Microsoft is also attempting to engage more with the Chromium development process, producing a set of documents explaining the features that the company wants to work on and the approach it intends to take. As the company has previously communicated, the initial focus is strongly on accessibility features to enable much greater integration and co-operation with software such as screen-readers; caret browsing,

integration with the Windows accessibility APIs, and high-contrast visual modes are all on the list of priorities.

Redmond’s developers have also described how they want to improve Chrome’s scrolling performance in a bid to make it as smooth and consistent as it is in Edge.

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