

Web Browser Cache Information[©]

What is a browser cache?

Many Internet users may not be aware that their web browser software (Windows Explorer, Firefox, Safari, Opera, etc.) is capable of caching (saving copies of) pages that they have browsed — or that:

1. Their browsers may have been installed with caching active by default,
2. When they browse a page that they have previously browsed, their browser may in fact display the cached page rather than the actual page that is currently available on the Internet.

How does it work?

Caching is a sleight of hand procedure to create the illusion of speed. When caching is active, the browser creates a storage (cache) file on the user's computer. The cache contains a copy of recently visited web pages and then automatically displays its *stored pages* whenever the same web pages are revisited. In other words, the browser displays pages *as published at the time of previous visits*.

Pros and cons...

Caching may be advantageous for those who have a slow-speed (dial-up) network connections, since it causes the browser to *appear* to draw a page more quickly when revisiting a site. Simply stated, it takes less time to access a cached file than it does to download the page again from the Internet.

The down side is that a page may have been updated since the browser last cached it — and if so, it will be displayed *as it was*, not necessarily *as it currently is* available on the Internet. Users with high-speed (cable or DSL) network connections do not require the illusion of fast speed that caching offers because live pages download quickly anyway.

To cache or not to cache?

If you have a slow-speed (dial-up) network connection, you may find caching useful. You can quickly override a cached page with the “live” page by *refreshing* it. To do this, press “control r” (Windows) or “command r” (Macintosh). *It may be necessary to do this several times in succession before it will take effect.*

However, if you have a fast (cable or DSL) network connection, caching is not necessary to achieve speed and you will probably want to disable it so that you will always view live web pages. You may also reclaim a few megabytes of valuable disk storage space by deleting the existing cache.

Deleting and disabling the browser cache...

Run your browser application and open its “Internet Options” (Windows) or “Preferences” (Macintosh) panel to:

1. Delete (empty) the existing browser cache file,
2. Set your browser *never* to cache pages.