Firefox Developer Edition

Ben Everard gets a new web browser, but will it make him a better web developer?

Firefox is best known as a web browser, but it also has an integrated set of development tools. These have been in place to help web developers see what's going on on their pages. The include tools to inspect particular elements, understand styles, interact with the JavaScript and more. In short, *Firefox* has become one of the most powerful desktop development environments available. All this power is included in the normal desktop version of the browser under Tools > Web Developer menu.
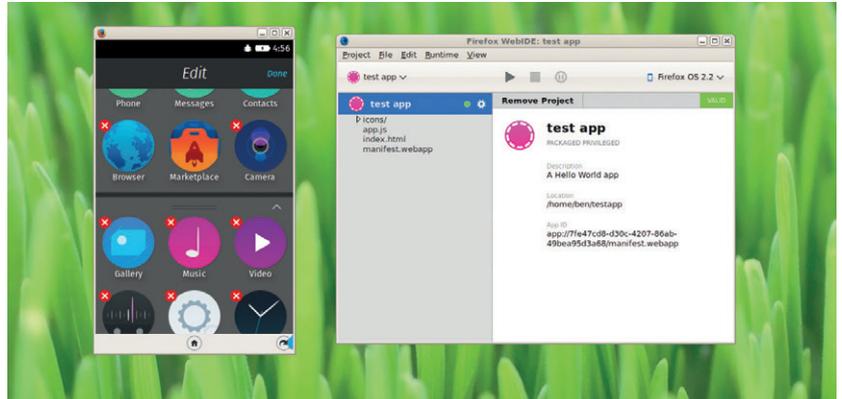
This is useful for anyone creating websites, but now the same web technologies (HTML, CSS and JavaScript) are being used in far more environments than just regular web pages. Thanks to Cordova and PhoneGap, many mobile apps are built in this way, and Firefox OS is an entire ecosystem based around these technologies. *Firefox Developer Edition* (*FDE*) is a new version of *Firefox* designed to make it easier for people developing on web technologies outside of the browser to get the full advantage of the *Firefox* developer's toolkit.

Most of this is done through the *WebIDE,* which enables you to connect to mobile devices (and simulators), and control them from your desktop. This gives developers a unified interface for all classes of device, and even other browsers on other devices (for example, you can control *Chrome* on Android through *Firefox* on your desktop).

There is a second area of advantage to *Firefox Developer Edition*: it includes features that haven't yet made it to the main stable build of *Firefox*. In Mozilla parlance, *FDE* takes the place of Aurora, which is the stage before Beta. In simple terms, it will get features 12 weeks before they're released in the main version of *Firefox*. Whether or not this is a good thing remains to be seen. After all, not everyone wants their development environment to include features not yet considered fully stable.

The dark blue theme is, presumably, designed to make the interface more leet, and make us developers stand out from the crowd.

The *WebIDE* controlling a FirefoxOS simulator is a great for any developers who haven't been able to get hold of the real hardware.

In fact, the *WebIDE* environment is one of these advanced features. It is coming to mainline *Firefox* (though perhaps not installed by default), but FDE includes the very latest build, and will continue to be ahead of mainline *Firefox* even after it's released. Additionally, *FDE* comes with a different theme than regular *Firefox*, which also gives easier access to the developer tools (for anyone who doesn't use Ctrl+Shift+I to bring them up anyway). In reality, this doesn't add much though.

Developers: the ball's in your court

Overall, *FDE* definitely shows some promise. *Firefox* is moving at a pace that can make it hard for developers to keep up. This gives a three-month head start on the main edition for anyone working on cutting-edge web software. The developers' tools are also advancing, so having the latest build can make your life easier. However, we'd be a little concerned about basing our development environment on software that's not yet considered stable enough for general use.

Although there are certainly some developers who will appreciate *FDE*, it may appeal more to early adopters who like to always have the latest technology. In recent years, the performance of JavaScript engines – particularly *Firefox*'s – have been increasing rapidly. Although *Firefox Developer Edition* isn't designed specifically for speed, it does have more recent optimisations. When we tested the latest *FDE* against the latest stable version of *Firefox*, we found the former to be about 10% faster on JavaScript benchmarks. ᴸⱽ

LINUX VOICE VERDICT

New developer tools, but these come with some concerns over stability.

★★★★☆