By Michael Muchmore

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Maxthon Cloud Browser

●●●● ○ EDITOR RATING: EXCELLENT   1 COMMENT

REVIEW	COMMENTS	SPECS	COMPARE

MSRP
$0.00

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PROS

Loads of nifty browsing helper features. Speedy performance. Two page-rendering engines (Webkit and Trident) for compatibility. Leading support for new Web standards. Cloud syncing of tabs, passwords, and more. Do Not Track enabled by default.

CONS

Tabs not as flexible as other browsers'. No appreciable graphics hardware acceleration.

BOTTOM LINE

If you think a browser can't make a difference in your use of the Web, Maxthon will make you think again, with a raft of neat helpers, super standards support, and fast performance.

BY MICHAEL MUCHMORE

Tabs

Maxthon's tab implementation is actually a weak spot: I couldn't rip a tab out to create a new browser window, as I could with every other major browser. And forget about Opera 12's tab previews or IE, Chrome, and Firefox's tab-pinning. Another minor inconvenience is that you can't close a tab unless it's the active one. But the browser does offer a unique split-screen view that shows two tab contents side by side. A button dropdown lets you close or refresh all tabs at once.
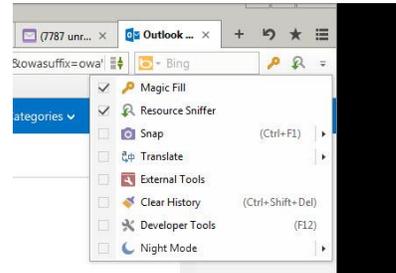
Maxthon Cloud Browser - First Look
No, this isn't a cut-off screenshot, Maxthon has re-thunk the standard window buttons, cleverly, I think. You can hide the left sidebar for an even less interface in the way.
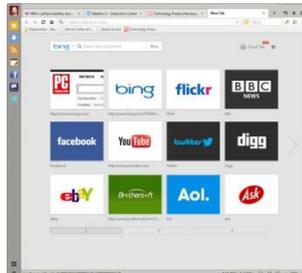
Maxthon Cloud Browser - New Tab
Maxthon's new-tab page offers links to top sites, search, and access to Cloud Tabs from your other devices running the browser.

Maxthon Cloud Browser - Goodies
This dropdown button shows several of Maxthon's unique tools, including Night Mode, Resource Sniffer, and screenshot grabber.
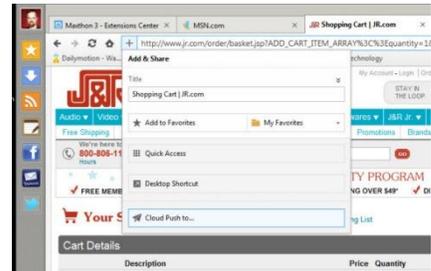

Maxthon Cloud Browser - Night Mode
Sometimes your eyes just grow weary of those bright white webpages. Maxthon's Night mode is just the ticket.
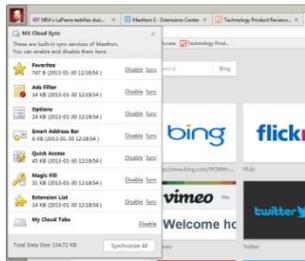

Maxthon Cloud Browser - Screenshot
Maxthon is the only browser with a built-in, and quite capable, screenshot grab utility.
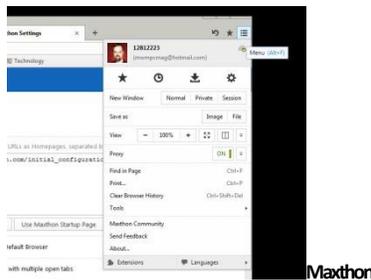

Maxthon Cloud Browser - Share and Push
Only Maxthon offers a way to send a page to your friend's smart phone via SMS.
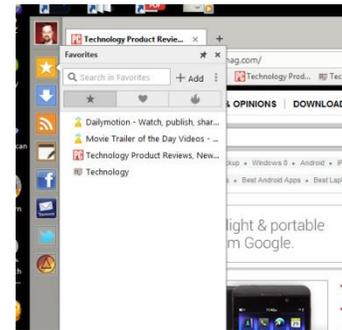

Maxthon Cloud Browser - Sync Settings
A lot of browsers can sync lots of things-- passwords, tabs, favorites, history--but Maxthon takes syncing to the Max.

Cloud Browser - Menu
The menu in the previous version of Maxthon was a huge panel that hung down from the user pic on the left. This one on the right is more manageable.

The Favorites button drops down three classes of favorites: All, Most Favored, and Most Visited.

Maxthon Cloud Browser - Translate and Telestrate
One of Maxthon's tools is a translator. Here's PCMag in Chinese. The browser also lets you "telestrate" by holding down the right mouse button.

Maxthon Cloud Browser - Split Screen Tabs
You can show two tabs in split window view.

Maxthon Cloud Browser - GetUserMedia
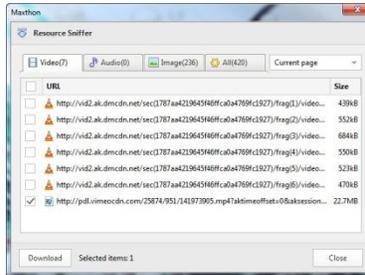The draft HTML5 GetUserMedia spec will let browsers directly access the computer's webcam and mic. Maxthon is one of only three browsers to implement support for it to date.
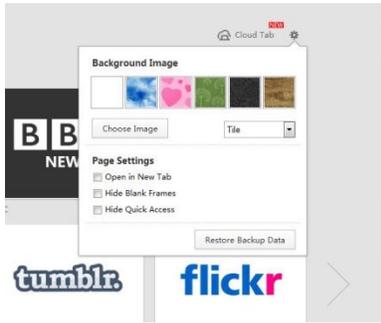
Maxthon Cloud Browser - Backgrounds
You can change the background for your default new tab page.

Maxthon Cloud Browser - Resource Sniffer
One of Maxthon's cooler built-in abilties is its ability to download any videos, photos, or sound from a webpage.
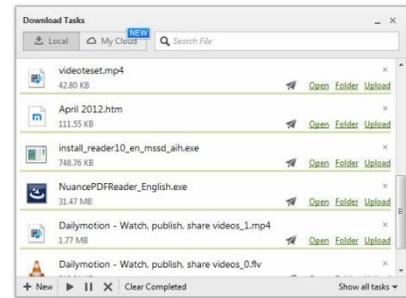
Maxthon Cloud Browser - Downloads
Note you can "download" to your Maxthon cloud storage as well as to your local machine.

Maxthon Cloud Browser - Passport Login
Logging into a Maxthon account lets you sync and shows your user pic in the upper-left corner of the browser.
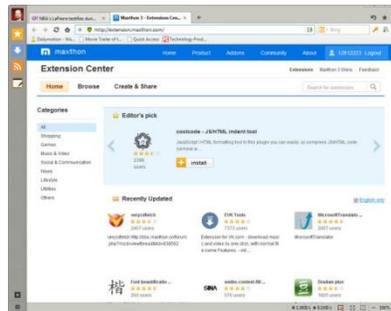
Maxthon Cloud Browser - Extension Center
Just like any self-respecting browser of the 21st century, Maxthon offers an easy to use add-on ecosystem.
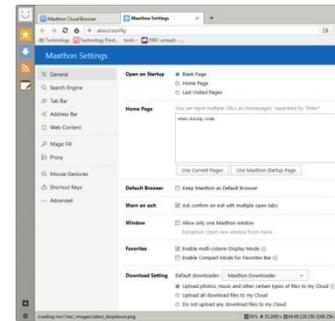
Maxthon Cloud Browser - Settings
Note the settings at the bottom which tell the browser to upload whatever you download to Maxthon's cloud storage.
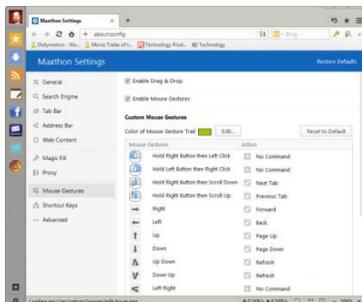
Maxthon Cloud Browser - Mouse Gestures
Like Opera, Maxthon offers a rich assortment of mouse gestures for alternative input.

Maxthon's new-tab page is every bit as useful as that of any other browser, save possibly Opera's, which offers live updated mini apps. In Maxthon, you can move the link tiles around on the grid to taste, and add any sites you want (Chrome only puts your most-visited sites on the tiles.) Maxthon also lets you choose a background either from stock art you're your own images. And you can sync the tiles with your other Maxthon installations or hide them for a blank white page. When I tried syncing, however, each tile on the second PC showed my present above the default tile, and didn't link to my choice.

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Extras

Now for the fun stuff: As I mentioned at the outset, Maxthon comes more stocked with goodies than any browser you're likely to encounter. Traversing around the edges of the browser window reveals these. I already mentioned the Extensions bar on the left, but some of the cooler features lurk in the toolbar button at top right and in the lower-right border.

A highlight among these perks is the Resource Sniffer, accessible from the toolbar. Go to any page that contains video, music, or photos, and the Resource Sniffer can download it all for you. But when you're on a page with video with Sniffer enabled, the movie plays in a separate Maxthon video window, which can be annoying and hard to dismiss. And on a page that offered MP3 downloads, the Sniffer didn't show any audio files available. I was however able to download videos from all the major video sharing sites.

Other nifty options in the toolbar include Magic Fill—pretty much a multi-account password manager; Snap, which grabs a screen capture of either the whole browser or an area you select with a cross-hairs; Feed Reader, which can display RSS and Atom feeds nicely; and SkyNote, which lets you jot down text that will be available from other devices running Maxthon. The toolbar also gives access to frequently needed Windows items like My Computer, Paint, Calc, and you can even add any program to run from the External Tools button.

A favorite Maxthon trick of mine is Night Mode, which darkens bright interfaces—it even lets you choose text and background colors—for any site. Akin to this is the Mute button at the bottom in the status bar, which makes sure you won't be disturbed by noisy auto-playing sites. You can also set the status bar to display your upload or download speeds, CPU usage, and IP address.

Like Safari, Maxthon offers a "reading view" for text-heavy webpages. This eliminates distracting ads and images. When you arrive at a suitable page, a book icon appears in the address bar, and clicking this presents a clean white page of text. Another cool visual tool is the "telestrator.":Holding down the right mouse button, you can highlight an area on any Web page.

One extra you don't get in Maxthon (but do in Opera) is a built-in BitTorrent client. Nor, for that matter, will you get Opera's Turbo Mode, mail client, or Speed Dial apps. Like Opera, Maxthon allows mouse-gesture input, for example, letting you navigate back by holding the right button and clicking on the left one. Use Maxthon for a while, and you'll likely find even more hidden treasures.

Extensions

Even this less-famous browser has a thriving extension selection—well over 300. A gear icon at the bottom of the left sidebar takes you to the Extension Manager, where you can search through yours and turn them on and off. A link in the Manager takes you to the Extension Gallery, which offers all the expected top rated and category views. Installation is a one-click operationThe Facebook extension is okay, but I prefer Firefox's Social API-based one. Many of the options are for a Chinese audience, unsurprisingly, considering the browser's provenance, but there are plenty for Western users.

Performance

Maxthon users need have no worries when it comes to speed. Not only does the browser just feel fast, it's neck and neck with the top performers on the more thorough of the JavaScript benchmarks—Google's Octane and Mozilla's Kraken. But it trails on the oft-cited SunSpider benchmark from WebKit. Here are the results from my test machine, a 2.53GHz Core 2 Duo PC with 3GB of RAM running 32-bit Windows 7 Professional:

Browser	Google Octane Score (higher is better)
Chrome 24	10042
Maxthon 3.4	9913
Maxthon 4 Cloud Browser	9703
Firefox 18	6611
Opera 12	3840

Note: IE9 doesn't support the HTML5 feature needed to run the above benchmark.

Browser	Mozilla Kraken 1.1 Score in ms (lower is better)
Firefox 18	3153
Maxthon 4 Cloud Browser	3156
Maxthon 3.4	3299
Chrome 24	3361
Opera 12	12336
Internet Explorer 9	16794

Browser	SunSpider 0.9.1 Score in ms (lower is better)
Chrome 24	239
Internet Explorer 9	260
Firefox 18	273
Maxthon 3.4	296
Opera 12	302
Maxthon 4 Cloud Browser	328

To test whether and how well Maxthon implements graphics hardware acceleration, a performance booster pioneered by Microsoft's IE team, I ran a couple of hardware acceleration tests: from Microsoft's IETestdrive site, Psychedelic Browsing, and Mozilla's hardware acceleration stress test. Here were my results on a 3.4GHz quad core PC with 4GB RAM and an ATI Radeon HD 4290 graphics card, running Windows 7 Ultimate.

Browser with ATI Radeon HD 4290/3.4GHz quad core	Psychedelic Browsing RPM (higher is better)
Internet Explorer 9	4414 (correct sound)
Google Chrome 24	3574 (correct sound)
Firefox 18	2967 (no sound)
Opera 12	1012 (no sound)
Maxthon 3.4	72 (correct sound)
Maxthon 4 Cloud Browser	62 (correct sound)

Browser with ATI Radeon HD 4290/3.4GHz quad core	Mozilla Hardware Acceleration Stress Test FPS (higher is better)
Firefox 18	60+
Internet Explorer 9	60+
Google Chrome 24	60+
Opera 12	45
Maxthon 3.4	20
Maxthon 4 Cloud Browser	18

On these tests, Maxthon falls down a bit. It does appear to have some modicum of hardware acceleration implemented, but it's not even close to IE, Chrome, or Firefox. It did, however perform somewhat better on a PC with an Nvidia GeForce GT 240 graphics card, with 291 RPM on Psychedelic Browsing and 26 FPS on the Mozilla hardware stress test.

Startup Time

How long do you have to wait before a browser is usable? That's another key performance question, and as with other measures, browsers have tightened up their differences on this measure. On my 2.53GHz dual-core Windows 7 laptop with 3GB RAM, after a reboot, at 7 seconds Maxthon was noticeably slower to get going than IE and Chrome. None of the browsers is likely to annoy you with warm restart time, including Maxthon, as you can see in the second column of this table:

Browser	Cold Startup Time (seconds)	Warm Startup Time (seconds)
Internet Explorer 9	3.0	1.3
Chrome 24	3.3	1.1
Firefox 18	4.0	1.6
Maxthon 3.4	6.3	1.3
Maxthon 4 Cloud Browser	7.0	1.3
Opera 12	10.1	1.9

Compatibility

Maxthon has one of the best compatibility stories you could imagine: It includes *both* the page-rendering engine that underlies Internet Explorer, and that of Chrome. In all my browsing with it, I haven't run into a single page that displayed a "browser not supported" message.

In HTML5 support, Maxthon has retaken the lead from Chrome on the HTML5Test.com measure of HTML5 support. The test is out of a maximum of 500 points, each awarded for supporting features of the standard, and "Bonus Points" for features that aren't technically part of HTML5 but are nice to have, such as additional video codecs. Maxthon also wins for these bonuses—not surprising for the browser that's all about extra perks.

Browser	HTML5Test.com Score (higher is better)	Bonus Points
Maxthon 4 (Cloud Browser)	464	15
Google Chrome 24	448	13
Maxthon 3.4	422	15
Opera 12	419	9
Firefox 18	389	10
Internet Explorer 9	141	5

Maxthon now even implements the HTML5 getUserMedia function of the WebRTC (realtime communication) spec, which lets the browser access the computer's webcam and microphone without the need for a plugin like Adobe Flash or Microsoft Silverlight. Opera was the first to support this, and Chrome quickly followed suit, while Firefox only has a proprietary, disabled-by-default version of getUserMedia support. Maxthon's implementation is a tad less elegant than the others, though, with a simple message box to okay use of your camera, rather than the more integrated-looking interfaces for this in Chrome and Opera.

Security and Privacy

Maxthon includes a safe URL checker, but there was no download protection like that you get in Internet Explorer. I was able to download and run an executable program without any warning from the browser. On Browserscope's security tests, Maxthon comes out slightly ahead of Firefox and IE9, with a score of 14 out of 17, compared with 13 for IE9, 12 for Firefox, and 16 for Chrome. Maxthon uses separate processes for tabs, and uses Chrome -like sandboxing to isolate page code from affecting your system.

For privacy, like all the other browsers Maxthon offers Private Browsing, accessible from the main menu. Any history or downloaded files from surfing done in a private session won't be saved. Like all other browsers besides Chrome, Maxthon implements the Do Not Track standard, and it's the only browser I've tested that has this protection turned on by default! Another unique feature is the ability to lock the browser, so others can't use it till you log in again.

All is not perfection, however. A couple of times, I encountered a message box telling me the browser had encountered a fatal error. But the program does save open tabs in case of a crash.

Browsing Through the Clouds

I love how innovative Maxthon's developers are, in a world of copycat browser features. It makes sense for a browser to take advantage of the cloud, and while most have done this to some extent or another through syncing, none offers as many cloud storage, syncing and sharing options a Maxthon Cloud Browser. But its benefits don't stop there: The little-known Web software is also fast, and leads in new standards support. It only falls short of the competition in tab features and hardware acceleration. For a superfast browser with maybe not quite so many bells and whistles, check out our Editors' Choice, Google Chrome.

http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2408060,00.asp