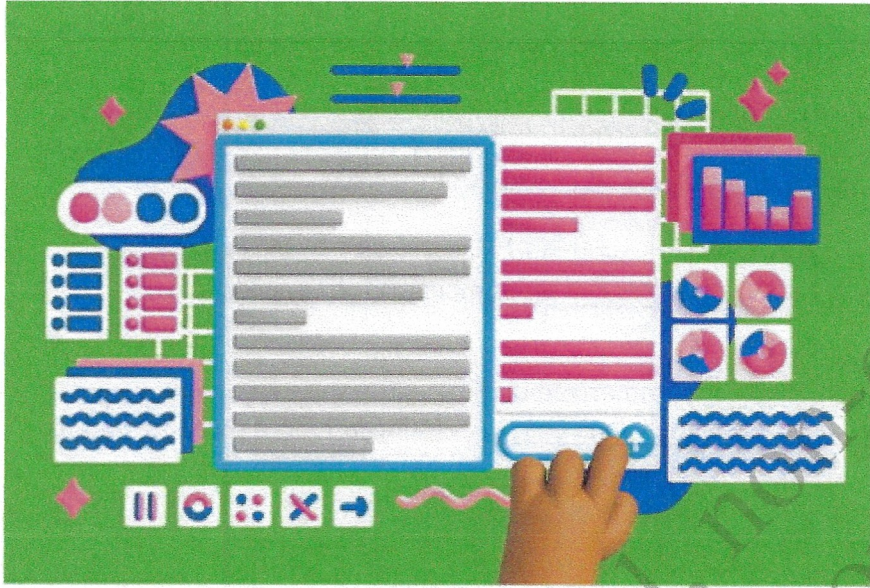




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PERSONAL TECHNOLOGY

Why I Converted To AI Web Browsers

Chatbots and agents can take over your tabs, but watch for mistakes

I've been using several AI web browsers lately. I'm never going back to the boring old kind. An AI browser has a builtin chatbot that can see what's open in your tabs. As you surf, you can type requests like: "Explain *this*." "Is *this* the best price?" "Make *it* vegetarian." Your artificial- intelligence browsing assistant instantly understands the context.

Browsers with advanced taskperforming "agents" can click and type in your tab to complete tasks like filling a shopping cart.

You probably haven't changed your web browser in a decade, because there was no reason to switch unless you had to. Now, there's a dizzying number of new— better—options. This week alone, OpenAI announced the ChatGPT Atlas browser and Microsoft Edge added an agent to Copilot Mode. Gemini in Chrome, Comet from Perplexity and Dia from the Browser Company also all became free to a wider audience recently.

I tested the two main flavors—the assistants and the agents—and found benefits and risks in each. As with all AI interactions, anything you prompt will be sent to a company for processing, and the bot can make mistakes.

Assistants

AI browsers save you time, especially if you already use a chatbot. Gemini in Chrome offers an easy introduction for Google Chrome users who don't want to download a new app. A new sparkle icon in your browser bar opens Gemini in a floating window.

I asked Gemini to give away the ending to the 10-minute YouTube video, “Your Microwave’s Most Underrated Button.” And when I was cooking an egg dish from an Instagram video recipe, the “Live” voice mode showed me how to make it without a steamer basket, no typing necessary.

Willing to venture beyond Chrome? You don’t have to take a big leap. The following AI browsers are built with Chrome’s underlying technology, which means you can move all of the same extensions and bookmarks over.

Dia, available for Mac users only, has a similar AI sidepanel powered by a mix of different models and impressed me with its programmable “skills.” Budget Buddy found cheaper alternatives to an expensive espresso machine, and Color Analysis helped me pick out a new watchband based on my hair, eye and skin color.

The Daily Wrap skill scanned my browsing history to recap yesterday’s work and today’s tasks. It was unnervingly accurate. While handy, it’s a stark reminder of the privacy trade-offs. For Dia to be most useful, it needs to see everything.

When the Memory function is turned on, your browsing activity is summarized on the company’s servers, then sent back to your computer for local storage. The Browser Company, which runs Dia, says it doesn’t store the data, and its AI partners wipe queries after processing.

Agents

AI browsers with agents can handle general chatbot stuff—and go further, tackling complex requests in the background. But at first, it’s hard *not* to watch them work.

I asked Agent Mode in ChatGPT Atlas, available on Macs, to find flights for a coming trip. As the tab window glowed orange, the bot searched for the right dates and identified the best options.

At times, Atlas struggled with clicking the correct button; it was like watching my toddler feed himself— inefficient but ultimately successful. The whole process took 16 minutes. Painfully slow, sure, but if I actually let the agent work while I did other stuff, would the duration matter? Atlas also has a few clever privacy-protecting settings: a blocklist for sites the agent can’t go to and a toggle in the URL bar to prevent ChatGPT from seeing the page while you prompt. For now, only paid ChatGPT accounts can use Agent Mode.

Perplexity’s Comet can perform similar actions for users without a paid plan. I tasked Comet and ChatGPT Atlas with filling a Whole Foods cart with healthy groceries for new parents. Both came up with good ideas but they added items to my Whole Foods *and* Amazon carts, complicating delivery.

Comet is limited to desktops for now, though Perplexity Chief Executive Aravind Srinivas told me a mobile app will be ready in less than two months. (Last year, The Wall Street Journal publisher Dow Jones sued Perplexity for copyright infringement.)

Microsoft Edge’s Copilot Mode now performs agentic “actions,” albeit more limited than the others. You can set the agent’s restrictions from light (no permissions needed) to strict (always request permissions before acting). While the AI couldn’t add items to my Amazon cart, it scoured Wayfair for my perfect standing desk, searched Airbnb for rental properties and found Halloween costumes on Facebook Marketplace.

Gemini can’t perform agentic tasks yet, though Anthropic’s Claude extension adds agentic capabilities to Chrome for its top-paying Max subscribers (\$100 a month).

Privacy and security

With an AI browser, you’re sharing more than you usually would with an AI chatbot. Parts of the webpage are sent to a server for processing. While the companies attempt to redact personal data, it isn’t perfect. As a rule, avoid sharing medical, financial or proprietary corporate information while prompting. When possible, opt to store browsing activity locally, so it isn’t sent to company servers, and use incognito mode for sensitive queries.

It's scary, having a bot bop around the web for me, and there are real risks. But I was quickly hooked on delegating tedious, lowstakes tasks like booking restaurant reservations and finding furniture with precise dimensions.

Use agents judiciously, and only on trusted sites. They are vulnerable to prompt injection attacks, where hackers hide malicious instructions for AIs to carry out.

The winner is...

The app with the *slightest* edge....isn't Edge (sorry). It's Comet. The citation-driven chatbot, capable agent and especially the smart tab management won me over. ChatGPT Atlas, with its granular privacy controls, is a close second. And I'll still use Dia's shopping skills.

A caveat: This recommendation could change in the coming months as the landscape continues to evolve. The AI browser race is on.

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