



To Make Websites Load Faster, Browse the Web Like a European



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Photo: Justin Sullivan (Getty Images)

We now live in a GDPR world. GDPR, in case you didn't know, stands for the European Union's "General Data Protection Regulation" privacy law, which kicked into effect May 25 and caused every service you've ever used to blow up your inbox over the last month.

Annoying as these privacy emails have been, the law has forced a number of big companies to make fairly dramatic changes to how they collect and store your data, including affording you more opportunities to see what they know about you and delete data you don't want them to have.



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Curiously enough, GDPR might also improve your browsing speeds—at least, according to a few sources who have performed some hands-on testing across a number of sites. As Marketing Dive's Erica Sweeney describes:

“For example, the U.S. version of USA Today’s site had an average webpage load time of 9.86 seconds following GDPR’s implementation. By comparison, the U.K. version of the site loaded in 0.42 seconds, 0.75 seconds in France and 0.51 in Germany. The quicker load times can be attributed to the removal of most external third-party features such as ad servers, Google services and analytics, social media plug-ins and more.”

Web Developer Marcel Freinbichler found similar results—not only did USA Today’s site load faster, but pulling up the “EU” version of the site also reduced the amount of data requested from a whopping 5.2MB to 500KB, a decrease of approximately 90 percent.

While the web-savvy among you might be thinking that you can just replicate this “EU experience” by installing an ad-blocker in your browser, Freinbichler notes that the faster speeds you might experience still won’t be as good as a site’s stripped-down “European version,” if it offers one.

While I strongly suggest planning a lovely European vacation to bask in better browsing speeds (and a lovely countryside), there are still a few tricks you can use to browse the web “European-style” from your non-EU home. One caveat, though; some companies are blocking visitors from the EU entirely, either because they need a bit more time to make their sites compliant with the GDPR, or because they have absolutely no intention of doing so.

Simple. Easy. Clean. Don't you miss when websites used to look like this?

Screenshot: David Murphy

For the sites you *can* access, here are a few ways to browse like a European:

- **Use a VPN:** With a VPN, you're basically connecting to a server somewhere else, and that server is routing your requests and making it *look* like you're actually located wherever the VPN server is located. If you have a speedy VPN and can get a great connection to a European server, this can be a great way to "pretend" you're from somewhere you aren't to browse the special (faster) sites companies configure to stay GDPR-compliant.

Resist the urge to use a free VPN or web-based proxy, as you never know what they're doing with whatever data they might capture during your browsing session. (Also true for paid VPNs, I suppose, but free VPNs have even more of an incentive to find ways to profit from you, since you aren't paying them.)

- **Use Opera:** Even though I just warned about free VPNs, it's worth noting that the Opera web browser comes with a built-in, free VPN that makes it incredibly easy to switch to a European server if you just want to quickly scan your favorite news sites a lot faster. To activate it, click on Opera's Menu ("O" icon in the upper-left corner), Settings, Privacy &

security, and select “Enable VPN.” When you go to load a webpage, and see the little VPN icon to the left of the browser’s address bar, click on it and select “Europe” as your virtual location.

Pack your browser full of privacy extensions: Well, really, you probably just need a combination of uBlock Origin and an extension like NoScript, uMatrix, ScriptSafe, or JavaScript Switcher (Firefox, Chrome). Your goal is to prevent as much crap as possible from loading on the websites you visit, including Javascript, unless it’s absolutely necessary for the site to function.

While this still might not get you *as* good of an experience as when a site specifically creates a lean version for a particular audience, as noted above, it’s the best you’ll be able to do unless you go the VPN route—or, if you can find one, a text-based version of your favorite site. Ah, sweet simplicity.

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