

# Ops Briefing: #HTTP2 Adoption



Lori MacVittie, 2015-03-12

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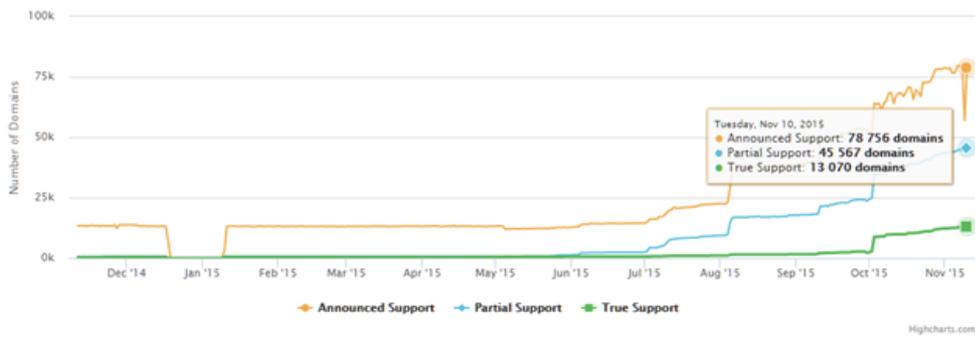
It's been just over a year since the HTTP/2 standard was made the "official" HTTP standard. When we're talking about an entrenched – like dug in and with enough rations to outlast a multi-year siege entrenched – technology, however, it takes a lot more than just a stamp of approval on a standard to get it propagating. Consider, for example, the lackluster adoption of IPv6. Oh sure, we've got a lot of dual stacks running out there but no one has, despite all the cries of "we must or else", gone all in and dropped IPv4. Yet. And IPv6 was ratified *before* the turn of the century, back in 1998. Nearly 20 years and we're still struggling to go all in.

So it wouldn't be all that surprising to find out HTTP/2 isn't really doing much out there in the wild. Which is why it was surprising to see it is doing pretty well for a fledgling standard just out of its nest. W3C reports pretty good growth just this year, in fact, jumping from less than 1% in July to just over 2% in November. Compared to SPDY – which is still growing, by the way – that's a pretty strong growth rate.

Given our existing deep reliance on HTTP, one does not expect the web to flick a switch and become HTTP/2 overnight. Nor is it realistic to expect any web site to go all in at once; there's too many factors in the migration equation, including the need for consumers to upgrade to platforms that have adopted an "HTTP/2 first" mentality, with HTTP/1 remaining the standard fall back position. That problem is handily solved by major browser support, but getting users to upgrade to those browsers always remains problematic. On the backend (server) side, we have the fairly traditional issues of upgrades; testing, certification, and of course, roll out. It takes time and, given budgets and an increasingly overwhelmed dev and ops staff, may not be given priority for some time. So we'll see some apps moving to HTTP/2 while others in the same domain remain HTTP/1.

I'd be remiss, of course, if I didn't point out that an [HTTP/2 gateway](#) can ease that transition and enable support immediately without requiring a specific backend upgrade cycle.

That "mix and match" environment is exactly what we're seeing according to the HTTP/2 Dashboard maintained at [is.thewebhttp2yet.com](#) – a mix of partial and true support for the emerging standard.



We should expect to continue to see a mix of HTTP/1 and HTTP/2 across the web for the foreseeable future. Where we're likely to see greater (and faster) adoption of HTTP/2 is in mobile applications and their backend apps. That's because mobile apps are likely to benefit the most from the performance enhancements around which HTTP/2 was designed and because clients can be "forced" to upgrade with minimal (if any) disruption. An app update can easily include the transition from HTTP/1 to HTTP/2 along with an HTTP/2 based upgrade for its server-side API components. Voila.

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