

ActiveX activation problem and solution

If you use Internet Explorer, you may recently have noticed some strange and mysterious rectangle outlines surrounding many Web browser components such as Flash, Quicktime, and Media Player movies. Upon attempting to interact with these components, a message appears saying that you must click to activate and use the control. When you do so, the outline disappears and the functionality of the component returns to normal. You probably noticed these outlines on some of your favorite Websites, but perhaps they even appeared on your own site. You may possibly still wonder why these outlines are there, what they are for, and if you can do anything about them.

The origin of these outlines can be traced back to a lawsuit filed by Eolas Technologies against Microsoft for automatically invoking some external applications in internet explorer. Eolas claimed that this constituted a patent infringement. In a nutshell, the lawsuit said that Microsoft was illegally using browser technology relating to plug-ins. Since Microsoft lost the lawsuit, it was forced to find a workaround the issue in order to continue using the plug-ins, but without infringing any patents. This workaround recently materialized, thanks to a windows update for internet explorer, and it prevents direct interaction with ActiveX controls loaded with the APPLET, EMBED or OBJECT elements. Thus, an extra step—clicking on the ActiveX control or a warning message—needs to be taken before you can fully interact with your favorite browser applications such as Flash and Quicktime.

Although Microsoft's solution does not prevent any Web applications from running smoothly, many people and companies view this additional step as a nuisance. After all, many Websites are composed of dozens of pages now requiring ActiveX activations—sometimes several per page—and this can add up to a lot of clicking. As a result, solutions to bypass these modifications have started to appear. For example, Microsoft has recommended several ways to modify the content of HTML pages to prevent having to first activate the interactive content, and Adobe offers manual suggestions and software updates which allow users to interact with their content instantly.