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Why Firefox 3 matters



Opinion

By Christian Zibreg

Wednesday, June 04, 2008 14:57

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Bookmark management

All browsers suffer from old-school bookmark management based on an idea of separating bookmarks into categories. However, over past few years we've grown accustomed to tags, often used in many web sites. Firefox 3 finally introduces tags to allow you to associate bookmarks with keywords in order to sort content by topic. For example, you can tag the TG Daily site with "IT", "News" and "Technology" instead of setting a bookmark simply in the News category.

When you want to bookmark a site, you can click on a star icon placed on the right part of the address bar. One click adds a bookmark, another click opens a small menu where you can file the bookmark into a folder and apply one or more tags. It turns out to be a huge time-saver, which could make you actually want to use the bookmark feature, instead of resorting to an online bookmarking service.

The new smart bookmarks automatically organize sites according to certain criteria. The three default smart bookmarks offer one-click access to your recently bookmarked and tagged pages, as well as most visited sites. If you place the "Most Visited" smart bookmark on a bookmark bar, a click is all it takes to get a drop-down menu with an automatically updated list of the sites you visit most often.

The interface for organizing all your bookmarks, tags and browsing history (Places Organizer) has been revamped in Firefox 3. Besides a cleaner UI layout and improved speed, the new interface makes it easy to create and restore a full backup of all your bookmarks, tag and browsing history, with multiple view and sorting options. I particularly like the option to store the frequent searches I perform on Google which I can later access through the address bar. I found the Places Organizer to be a very convenient way to manage my bookmarks. I've actually started using it on an everyday basis, unlike bookmarking features in Firefox 2. which I've never used.

Other minor under-the-hood tweaks

Firefox 3 sports several minor tweaks and under the hood improvements that may not be apparent to everyone. The list of tweaks is too long to mention here, but here are the most important tweaks that we believe will make a difference.

First, you will notice that auto-complete in the address bar now works much better. You can type in part of the site's title, tag or URL to see list of matches from your browsing history or bookmarks. Each entry (site) in the list is presented with two lines, the first line showing a site icon and title and the other showing the URL, making it easier to quickly locate the destination you are looking for. Also, it appears that these entries are sorted in a much more relevant way than in Firefox 2.

All of your bookmarks, history, cookies and preference settings are stored in a transitionally secure database format that will prevent data loss even if your system crashes.

If you open lots of tabs, Firefox 3 shows a new tab scrolling feature and quickmenu options to help locating the tab you are looking for. Firefox 3 now will also ask you to save tabs before exiting. The "Open in Tabs" option, which opens a folder of bookmarks in tabs, will append new tabs rather than overwrite existing ones.

The Add-ons manager (Tools > Add-ons) offers a way to directly search, browse and install browser extensions, themes and plug-ins from within the Add-ons interface. You can also disable individual plug-ins from within Add-ons manager.

Improved protocol handlers (components that determine how to handle certain file and link types in a browser) make it possible to use, for example, web-based mail applications such as Gmail to handle email links on other sites. Web applications will have to first enable this feature by registering as handlers with Firefox. The new Applications tab in Firefox 3 preferences (Tools > Options) sports an enhanced UI for configuring handlers for file types and protocol schemes.

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