

Nifty Firefox extensions

ONE-TRICK PONIES

We look at a few extensions that can make your daily work with Firefox more enjoyable and efficient by removing tiny annoyances and adding nifty features. **BY DMITRI POPOV**

What do the Word Count Plus, FoxClocks, and QuickNote Firefox extensions have in common? They all belong to a category of tools that make a virtue of doing a limited range of tasks well. In this article, I'll cover a few such extensions that you might find useful.

FoxClocks

If you work with people or companies in other countries or on other continents, a world clock tool can help you better plan your day. The FoxClocks [1] extension can help you not only keep track of time in multiple geographical locations, but also do it with consummate ease. Once

installed, the extension adds a couple of default clocks to the Status bar. To replace them with clocks that show the time in cities you want, use the Ctrl + Shift + Q keyboard shortcut. This opens the FoxClocks dialog window containing a long list of continents and cities to choose from. However, you don't have to scroll up and down the list to find the location you need: Just enter the name of the city you need in the *Search* field, and the *Zone Picker* window shows the matching results as you type (Figure 1). Select then the found city and press the *Add* button to add the selected city to the *Watchlist* window. If the city you want is not on the list, you can add a custom location by selecting a city in the same time zone and pressing the *Add as* button. To tweak FoxClocks' settings, right-click on a clock icon in the Status bar and select *Options*. Here you can

specify a custom time format, change FoxClocks' position, and adjust the way the extension displays the clocks.

dragdropupload

Attaching multiple files to an email message in Gmail can be cumbersome: Click on the *Attach a file* link, locate the file you want, press OK, then repeat for other files. It might not sound too bad, but if you have to send emails with attachments every day, this procedure can become a nuisance quickly. The dragdropupload extension [2] provides a fix to

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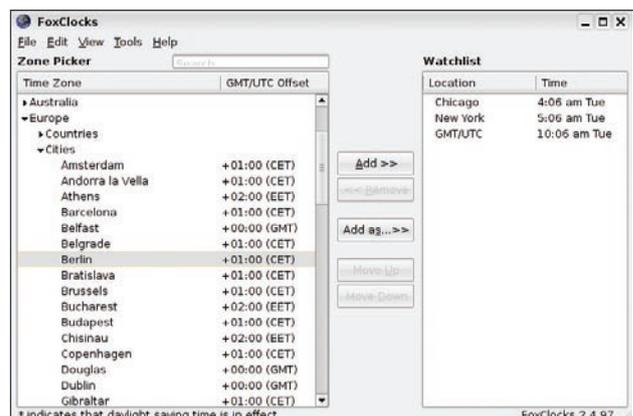


Figure 1: FoxClocks puts world clocks in the Status bar.

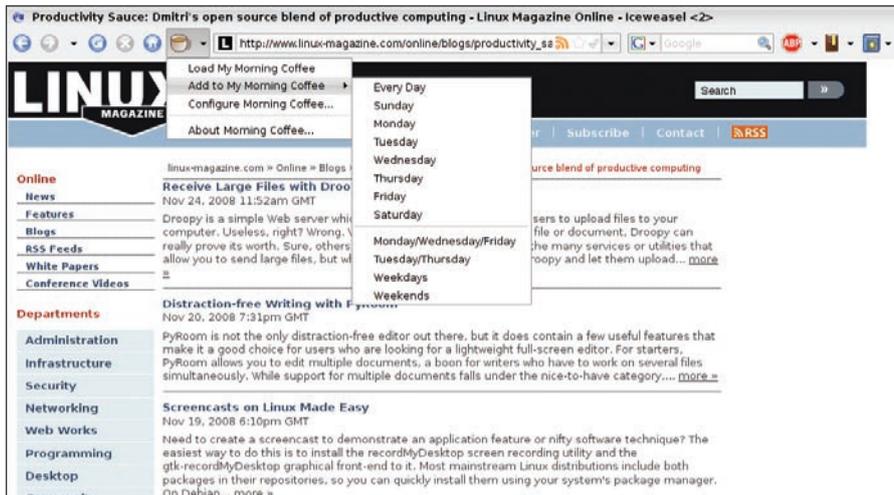


Figure 2: Read your favorite websites with Morning Coffee.

the problem. After you install it, you can drag a file onto the *Attach a file* link to add it to the email. Better yet, you can drag and drop several files at once and use the extension with other websites and services such as Flickr and Facebook. The extension also adds the Drag Drop Sidebar, so you don't have to switch to your file manager to locate the files you want to attach. In Firefox, when you choose *View | Drag Drop Sidebar*, you can pick the file you need without leaving the convenience of your favorite browser.

Morning Coffee

If you had to choose only one extension to take with you on a desert island (provided you have an Internet connection and are allowed to take your computer with you), Morning Coffee [3] should be it. The basic idea is pretty simple: With this extension, you can create bookmark sets for each day of the week and open them with a single click (Figure 2). So if you regularly visit Slashdot, Linux Pro

Magazine, and other sites, you can add them all to a specific set and open them at once. The clever part is that you can add a website to a particular day. For example, if your favorite blog is updated on Mondays, you can add it to the Monday set and check it once a week.

TimeTracker

The main purpose of the TimeTracker extension [4] is to make you feel bad about spending too much time watching YouTube videos and hanging on Facebook instead of working. Unlike other tools that simply register how long your browser has been opened, TimeTracker provides a few features that you can tweak to get a better idea of how much time you spend working or slacking (Figure 3). For starters, you can add websites to the *Do not track* filter, so TimeTracker pauses when you navigate to any site on the list. The timer also stops after a specified idle time (60 seconds by default) and when Firefox is not in focus. Of course, TimeTracker can't prevent you

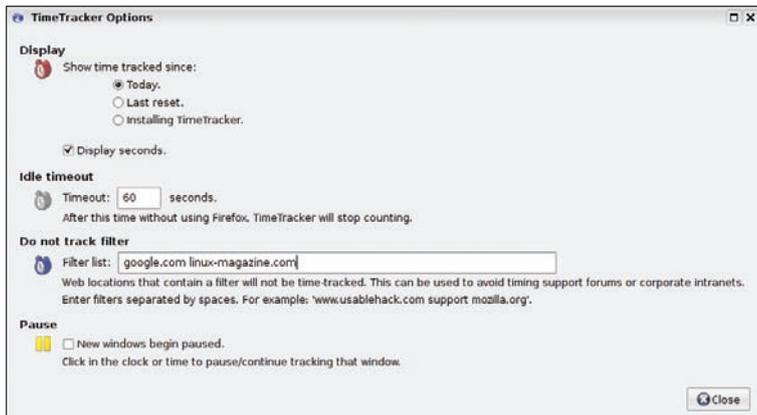


Figure 3: Track time with TimeTracker.

from chatting with your friends on Facebook for hours, but psychologically, the ticking timer can be highly motivating.

Lazarus

Here is a situation many users might find familiar: You spend half an hour writing a forum post, Firefox crashes, and all your work is gone. Even if Firefox doesn't crash, too many things can still go wrong and force you to start from scratch. To avoid pulling your hair out each time this happens, install the Lazarus form recovery extension [5]. It runs quietly in the background and saves the text you enter into forms in a database. When you need to restore a form, right-click in it and choose *Recover Form* from the context menu. Using Lazarus' options, you can specify how long you want to keep the saved form data and protect the data with a password.

Word Count Plus

In some situations you need to know the exact word count in a text area of a form – for example, when you are working on a blog post of a specific length directly in the browser. Such a situation as this is when the Word Count Plus extension [6] can come in really handy. First, select either a text fragment or all the text in the form, then click on the Word Count Plus icon in the Status bar to view the word count. To view the character count, mouse over the icon. That's it!

Mouseless Browsing

Although a netbook is a perfect machine to have with you on the road, its minuscule trackpad can be a real pain. Also, an airplane seat or a coffee table does not have much space for a mouse. In these situations, you need the Mouseless

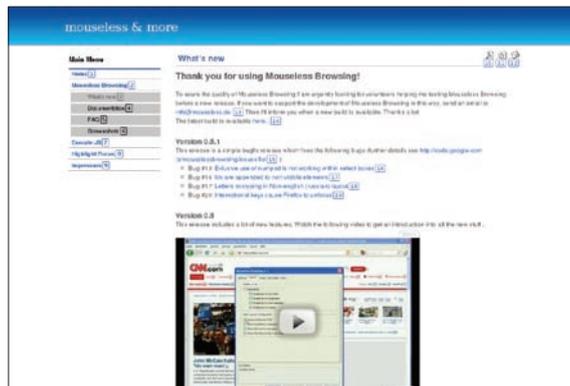


Figure 4: Browse the web without touching the mouse with Mouseless Browsing.

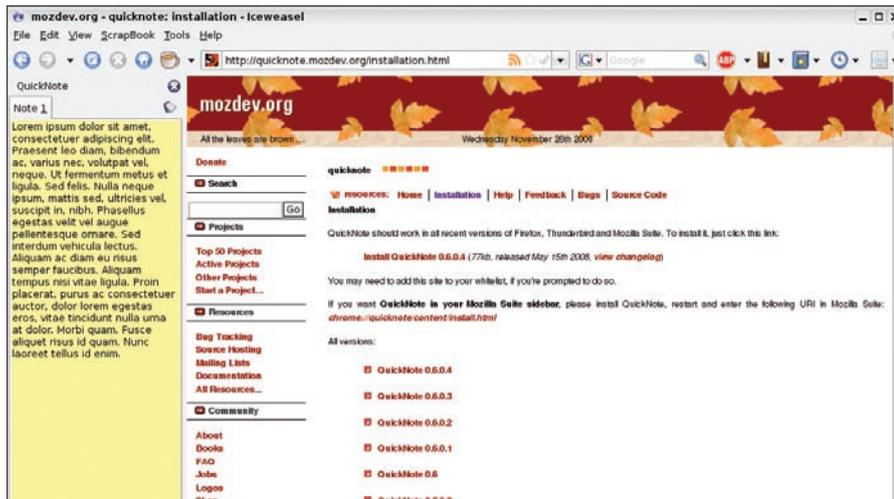


Figure 5: Scribble notes with QuickNote.

Browsing [7] extension (Figure 4). When you restart Firefox after you've install the extension, you will notice that every link on any web page now has a unique number. Now just type the number next to the link you want to open and press Enter. In this way, you can navigate the web without touching your mouse or trackpad. The Mouseless Browsing extension has a host of options you can tweak to make it behave the way in which you want. For example, you can make the extension show the ID numbers only when you press a specific key combination, tweak the ID number style to minimize clutter, and enable the numeric pad for mouse-free browsing.

Screengrab!

Quite a few extensions are out there that you can use to take screenshots of web pages, but Screengrab! [8] lets you do this with a minimum of fuss and has a few useful features to boot. With this extension, you can take a screenshot of a selected portion of the page, the visible part of the page, the entire page, or even an individual frame. When taking a screenshot, you can save it on the disk or copy it to the Clipboard. By default, Screengrab! saves screenshots in the PNG format, but you can switch to JPEG if you like.

QuickNote

The web is brimming with services that let

you save and share notes, but sometimes you just need a simple tool to scribble down notes and ideas quickly. In this case, you need QuickNote [9]. As the name suggests, this extension adds a notes feature to your browser.

Although QuickNote installs as a conventional Firefox extension, it requires an extra step if you want it to load notes in the sidebar (Figure 5). After installing, restart your browser and enter *chrome://quicknote/content/install.html* in the Address bar. Now press the *Install QuickNote in the Sidebar* button, and you are set. From QuickNote's preferences, you can tweak note colors and enable multiple tabs, allowing you to manage several notes at once. All notes are saved as plain text files, and you can always extract them from the browser by pressing the *Save as* button.

ReminderFox

Because you spend most of your time in Firefox, it only makes sense to use it for keeping tabs on your to-dos and reminders, which is exactly what the Reminder-

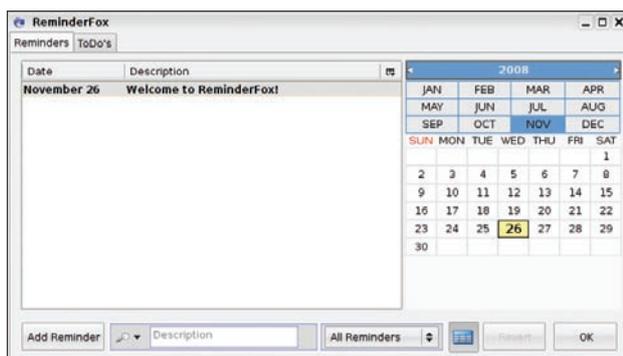


Figure 6: Keep tabs on your to-dos and reminders with ReminderFox.

Fox extension [10] allows you to do. Although it's not a full-fledged calendaring tool, it provides all the features you need to manage your tasks with minimum effort. Besides reminders and to-dos, you can use ReminderFox to create so-called quick alarms, which you can use to help you remember small things (Figure 6).

In addition to the default sections Reminders and To-dos, you can create custom task lists and group your tasks by type. For example, to keep tabs on your article deadlines, create a separate list. When creating a custom list, you can specify a link to an iCalendar file, and the calendar will appear as a separate list. The features don't stop here, though, because you can sync your ReminderFox data with either an FTP or WebDAV server. To enable this feature, specify the synchronization options in the Options dialog window under the *Network* tab.

Final Word

In this article, I've covered just a fraction of the simple yet useful Firefox extensions. If you are willing to spend some time digging through the official Firefox Add-on repository [11], chances are you will find dozens of other one-trick ponies that can make your daily computing more efficient and even pleasant. ■

INFO

- [1] FoxClocks: addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/1117
- [2] dragdropupload: addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/2190
- [3] Morning Coffee: addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/2677
- [4] TimeTracker: addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/1887
- [5] Lazarus form recovery: addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/6984
- [6] Word Count Plus: addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/4718
- [7] Mouseless Browsing: addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/879
- [8] Screengrab!: addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/1146
- [9] QuickNote: quicknote.mozdev.org
- [10] ReminderFox: reminderfox.mozdev.org
- [11] Firefox Add-ons repository: addons.mozilla.org