

Projects on the Move



Being well organized is very important, and free software developers can benefit from efficient time management and planning. OpenHatch facilitates the coordination of open source projects, and GTD-Free helps structure your leisure time. *By Carsten Schnober and Andrej Fink*



Open source projects accumulate enthusiasts who contribute more or less successfully – depending on how enthusiastic they are, what skills they offer, and the kinds of resources they have available. People looking to become involved in this kind of work are received with open arms, at least in theory. In real life, new contributors typically have to overcome several obstacles, and many willing helpers want to contribute but do not know where to start.

Enter OpenHatch [1]. This “Open Source Involvement Engine” offers interested newcomers a way to contact the developers of existing projects. The search engine on the website takes volunteers wherever their contributions are most needed, with a variety of ways to contribute: from complex tasks to bugs that are easy to fix to minor text and GUI changes.

Getting Started Is Easy

The link to Bitesize Bugs (see Figure 1) promises an easy entry. These minor errors, as defined by the operators, should be easy to fix and so are ideal tasks for newcomers.

Filters organized by programming language and project provide a clear overview. If you click *More about this project* in the expanded view of a bug, you can then click the big green *I want to help* button and await instructions.

OpenHatch offers users who would like to advertise their skills the ability to set up a profile page. Besides the mandatory *About me...*, *I can...*, *I like...*, and similar tabs, you can optionally reveal your address. The Google Maps view not only shows you where many fans of free software reside but also helps you find other members of the community in your neighborhood.

Mentors help newcomers with any issues they discover, such as programming questions, thereby reinforcing the newcomers’ level of confidence. OpenHatch thus contributes to social interaction in the community.

Reaping the Benefits

Open source projects benefit from the platform in many ways. On the one hand, they offer an opportunity for finding people to help with various tasks; on the other, proj-

ects can create profile pages on OpenHatch to show new contributors exactly where they need help. The big green button mentioned earlier is also available as a code snippet for the project homepage, where it will no doubt encourage volunteers.

OpenHatch regularly browses the bug trackers published by registered projects and automatically adds the bugs to its own database. The platform currently supports Bugzilla and Trac best. The only overhead that project members can expect is to categorize bugs and to assess their degree of difficulty correctly. This exercise could also be a welcome opportunity for some projects to take a critical look at their own bug management and remove any obstacles in the way of fixing bugs.

Free Entry

In the scope of the Google Summer of Code *Training Missions* for OpenHatch are currently in progress. These interactive tutorials explain the basic software development tools and how to work with tarballs, patches, or versioning systems. The tutorials are available to registered users [2].

If you have been looking for the right way to begin contributing to an open source project, OpenHatch now takes away your last excuse. Newcomers to programming will benefit from the platform and be able to get started without delay, rather than working their way through constructed examples.

Based on the concept of “eating your own dog food” [3], the startup, which was founded in May 2009 sets a good example itself [4]. A public bug tracker [5] and a project planner with a Pivotal Tracker [6] transparently show where support is needed. The Open Hatch developers also use mailing lists, IRC, Twitter, and Identi.ca to communicate. A wiki and a blog are also in place.

Mastering the Daily Grind

Good organization obviously plays an important role in the coordination of any open source project, but the many activities in your daily life need to be organized as well. Far too often, job and leisure activities simply collide. Timers and calendars, whether paper or digital, can help you structure the daily grind. If this

doesn't always work out for you, manager David Allen published what could be the ultimate tip. In his book *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity* [7], he introduces an organization paradigm that aims to take organizational details off your mind and thus free up your capacity for getting work done.

To help you put the ideas into practice, you can use the free to-do and activity manager GTD-Free [8]. Inspired by the book with the same name, the program facilitates your entry into the Getting Things Done (GTD) philosophy while giving more advanced users the functionality they need. If you have ever looked into this field, you will be familiar with the obstacles and know that simplifying your life requires a considerable learning curve.

Phases and Processes

GTD-Free divides tasks into four main categories (Figure 2). The *Collect* phase and tab are where you enter new ideas. A proposal can be fairly vague at this stage because categories and deadlines don't become important until later. The *Process* area is where you organize your thoughts by assigning them to three categories: *Actions* (classical to-dos), *Some-day/Maybe* (ideas with initially low priority that shouldn't interfere with more important entries), or *References* (background information; e.g., literature or references that don't need any further attention.) Besides these categories, users can also define other properties, such as assignment to a larger project.

The developers also implemented another useful GTD idea. The software lets you sort tasks by external requirements, such as *On the computer*, *At home*, or *Online*. These definitions make it easier to do things at the right place and time and to take care of things at home without worrying about tasks that belong in the office that you can only complete there. The three classes are defined by

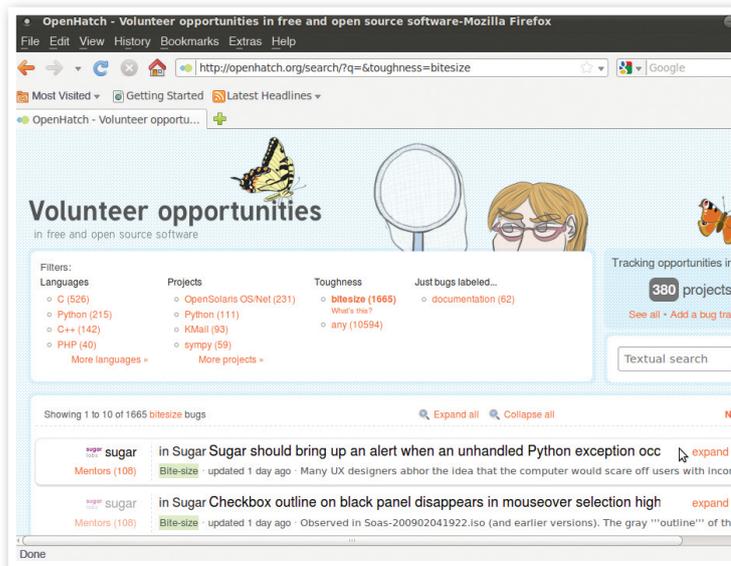


Figure 1: OpenHatch gives open source projects a head start. Bite-size bugs are perfect for newcomers and promise rapid success.

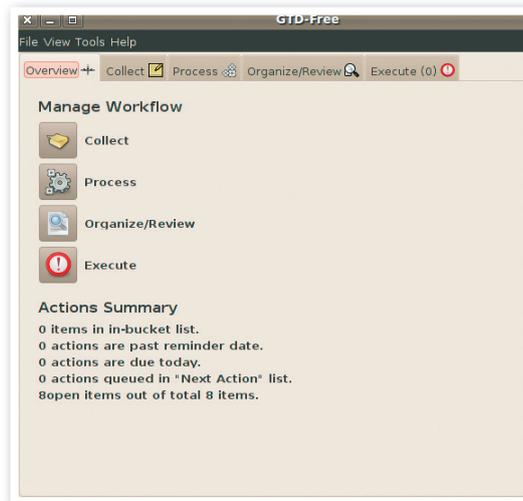


Figure 2: Getting Things Done is a paradigm for efficient time management; GTD-Free provides the free software to put this into practice.

the GTD paradigm, which is why you can't make any changes. However, you can define your own sub-categories, such as *Book*, *Video*, or *Notice* to help you find the sorted entries more easily. The to-do program also includes sample entries with predefined sub-categories that are fine as starting points for most situations.

A reminder function helps you remember deadlines. In the priority system, you can assign tasks between one and three stars to help emphasize important tasks in the overview. When the time to tackle the tasks comes, you can press the *Queue* button to queue them. The best thing about the GTD concept is that it lets you review your tasks in the *Organize/Review* tab (Figure 3). These review

sessions allow you to organize your time by modifying tasks that have changed, redefining priorities, and re-appraising your appointments and deadlines.

After categorizing and recording your new ideas, your next port of call is the *Execute* area, where you will find your list of to-dos, which you can edit, delete, or tag as done. The program also creates an overview in various formats (PDF, HTML, and XML) at the press of a button.

Pocket Planner

Just like a personal organizer, GTD-Free is a useful tool on the road. The Java archive with the program package will run on any Java-capable operating system without needing to install GTD-Free. The program stores its data in a flat file so you can carry your organizer around with you on a USB stick and deploy it on any machine.

If you are interested in contributing to GTD-Free, you don't need to be a Java programmer. Although the project team welcomes developer contributions, they have many other activities on the agenda. The GTD-Free makers are looking for support in many areas: from taking part in discussions to designing the GUI for future features, and from documenting bugs and making donations to translating the GUI, which is currently only available in English. ■■■

INFO

- [1] OpenHatch: <http://openhatch.org>
- [2] Training missions for OpenHatch: <https://openhatch.org/missions/>
- [3] Dogfooding: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eating_your_own_dog_food
- [4] Getting involved with OpenHatch: <https://openhatch.org/source-code-etc/>
- [5] OpenHatch bug tracker: <https://openhatch.org/bugs/>
- [6] OpenHatch project planning: <https://www.pivotaltracker.com/projects/28969>
- [7] Allen, David. *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity*. Penguin, 2002
- [8] GTD-Free: <http://gtd-free.sourceforge.net>

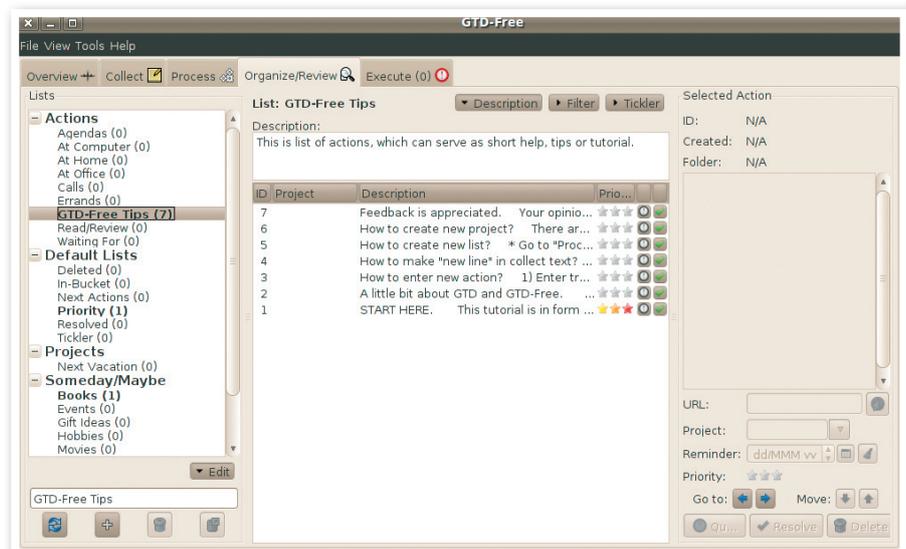


Figure 3: GTD users perform regular reviews to modify their task lists to match established facts, reassign priorities, and rework their deadlines.