

Manage RSS feeds with BilboPlanet

Aggregate and Publish

On the web, a planet is a tool for collecting and displaying blog posts from members of an Internet community. We show how to do this using BilboPlanet. *By Dmitri Popov*

DMITRI POPOV

Dmitri Popov holds a degree in Russian language and computer linguistics. He has been writing exclusively about Linux and open source software for several years, and his articles have appeared in Danish, British, North American, German, and Russian magazines and websites.

At first glance, BilboPlanet [1] looks suspiciously like a regular web-based RSS reader. But if you dig deeper, you'll find that BilboPlanet is not your ordinary RSS aggregator. BilboPlanet is a so-called planet portal that pulls content from multiple RSS sources and presents it in an easy-to-use manner. The BilboPlanet app is designed specifically for communities and workgroups to allow their members to follow each other and share useful information. How does that work in practice? Let's say you have a community where all members have blogs. If you

want to follow their blogs, you have to subscribe to all individual RSS feeds. The same goes for all community members: They have to subscribe to each other's RSS feeds to stay up to date. Things get even more complicated when each member subscribes to other feeds that may be relevant to the community.

BilboPlanet offers an elegant solution to this problem by aggregating and publishing the RSS feeds of the community members. Although BilboPlanet is developed with communities and workgroups in mind, this application has other uses, too. For example, you can deploy BilboPlanet as a tool for publishing content from your favorite RSS feeds.

Getting Started

Because BilboPlanet runs on the Apache/MySQL/PHP stack, you need a server or a web host that has the required components. The application comes with an automated installer, so deploying BilboPlanet is a few simple steps. To begin, grab the latest release of the application from the project's website and unpack the downloaded archive. Move the resulting *BilboPlanet* folder to the document root of your server, then make the *BilboPlanet/admin/cache/* directory and the *BilboPlanet/inc/config.php* file writable. Next, point your browser to <http://127.0.0.1/BilboPlanet> (replace *127.0.0.1* with the IP address or domain name of your server) to get the installation wizard (Figure 1). Fill out the required fields and press *Save*. In the next step, provide information about your BilboPlanet instance, specify the administrator's credentials, and press *Save* again. The installer will take care of the rest. Once BilboPlanet has been installed, you can remove the *BilboPlanet/admin/install* directory and press the *Go to the administration interface* button to configure BilboPlanet's settings.

When you enter BilboPlanet's administrative interface, you are automatically dropped into the Dashboard section, which provides a quick overview of your BilboPlanet installation (Figure 2). This overview includes a list of the latest articles, statistics, and system information. If you need to modify your account's settings, you can do so in *Common | Manage your account*. Here, you can update your email address and change your password.

Before you can put BilboPlanet to practical use, you have to populate it with users. To do this, go to *Administration | Manage users* and press the *Add a user* button to provide the name of the user, ID, email, password, and website; then, press *Add*. In this way, you can add as many users as you need. Note that although the *Website* field in the *Add a user* form is marked as optional, it is, in fact, mandatory. You must specify at least one website for each user (usually the user's own blog or personal website) because BilboPlanet can't assign RSS feeds to users without websites.

If you didn't add a website when creating a user, you can do so later by clicking on the *Add a new website* link next to the user in the list of all existing accounts. In theory, you should add a website for every RSS feed you plan to assign to the user. In practice, however, you can link multiple feeds to a single website. This process might sound slightly confusing but it's pretty easy to grasp when you start adding RSS feeds.

Once you've populated BilboPlanet with users, you can add RSS feeds. Go to *Administration | Manage feeds* and press the *Add a feed* button (Figure 3). Here, you'll need to assign the feed to a specific member using the *User id* drop-down list. You'll also need to link the RSS feed to a website (pick it from the *Website id* drop-down list).

As mentioned previously, ideally you'd link each RSS feed to the related website. For example, the RSS feed from *Linux Magazine* should be linked to <http://www.linux-magazine.com>, and the *Slashdot* feed should be connected to <http://slashdot.org/>. But in reality, it doesn't seem to make any difference which websites the RSS feeds are associated with, so you can link all RSS feeds to a single website assigned to the user.

The next step is to fetch the most recent articles from the added RSS feeds to make sure everything works properly. To do this manually, point your browser to http://wxy.0.0.z/Bilboplanet/inc/update_manual.php (where *wxy.0.0.z* is the IP address of your server). Then, once the script has done its job, you can check the output for errors. If everything went smoothly, you should see new articles on BilboPlanet's main page.

By default, BilboPlanet automatically publishes all fetched articles, but you can manage them manually via *Administration | Manage posts*. Here, you can change the status of each article from *active* to *inactive* or *pending*, or delete the article altogether. BilboPlanet's filtering capabilities let you display articles only from a certain user or narrow the list only to articles with a specific status. BilboPlanet offers yet another way to moderate articles using the dedicated *Moderation | Moderation* section (Figure 4).

To disable a specific article, click on the *Refuse* icon. You then have the option to compose and send an email to the user who submitted the article explaining why the article has been disabled. Enabling articles is equally easy: Click on the *Accept* icon next to the desired article, and you are done.

Installation wizard of the Bilboplanet

Welcome to the BilboPlanet. Before you begin, we need some informations concerning the database. You'll need to provide the following information to begin the installation and to create the configuration file.

1. The host of the database.
2. The name of the database.
3. Your username to the database.
4. Your password to the database.
4. Table prefix for your database.

Host of the database: ex: localhost

Name of the database: ex: bilboplanet

Username: Your username depends of your provider

Password: Your password depends of your provider

Database Tables Prefix: bp_ is the default prefix

Figure 1: BilboPlanet features a user-friendly installation wizard.

Dashboard

Quick summary of the planet

Latest articles :

- 17/05/2011 : Just posted: Our in-depth Fujifilm X100 review
- 16/05/2011 : Your Complete Guide For Photographing Star Trails
- 16/05/2011 : Process RAW Files with Rawstudio
- 15/05/2011 : digiKam Tricks 3.5 Released
- 14/05/2011 : Nikon S4100 and S8100 still available says Nikon U...

System information :

- Date server : Tuesday 17 May 2011 - 11:04:04
- Operating System : Linux
- PHP version : 5.2.10-1
- MySQL version : 5.1.49
- Server : Apache/2.2.16 (Debian)
- Memory : 128M
- Your BilboPlanet version : 1.0.5

Statistics :

- The update is running
- The update on loading of index page enabled
- Current size of the database : 432 Kb
- Number of articles in the DB : 67
- Number of votes in the DB : 1
- Number of members in the DB : 1
- Number of feeds in the DB : 3

BilboPlanet news - Official Website :

- 14 April 2011 - 2:51 pm : Mais qui utilise le bilboplanet?
- 5 April 2011 - 10:05 am : Nouvelle version du Bilboplanet 1.0.5
- 17 January 2011 - 11:40 am : Faute de sécurité dans la version 1.0 stable
- 15 January 2011 - 7:41 pm : Bilboplanet 1.0 STABLE

~ BilboPlanet.com - Open Source Feed Agregator - 2010 ~

Figure 2: BilboPlanet's Dashboard panel.

Add a feed

Manage member's feeds. Notice that you can only add a feed to a user who has a website. So you first need to create the user and add a site to him

User id :

Site id : Choose the website of the feed

Full feed URL : ex: http://www.bilboplanet.com/feed/atom/

Feed name : ex: gnu/Linux posts

Trusted URL :

Manage feeds

Manage member feed.

User	Website(s) user informations	Feed	Action
dmpop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feed name : Scribbles and Snaps Site URL : http://scribblesandsnaps.wordpress.com/ 	http://scribblesandsnaps.wordpress.com/feed/	<input type="button" value="Accept"/> <input type="button" value="Refuse"/> <input type="button" value="Delete"/>

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Figure 3: Adding a feed.

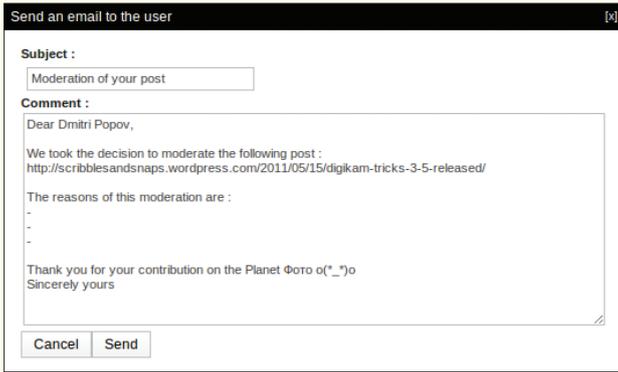


Figure 4: BilboPlanet allows you to moderate articles.

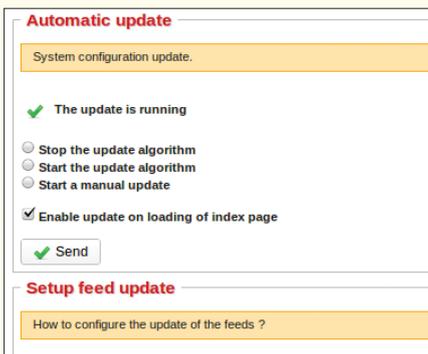


Figure 5: Configuring feed fetching options.

INFO

[1] BilboPlanet:

<http://www.BilboPlanet.com/?lang=en>

Besides acting as a planet for community members, BilboPlanet can also be used as an internal mailing list solution. In *Administration | Newsletter*, you can compose a message and send it to all or selected users registered with BilboPlanet.

The *Configuration* section lets you tweak several key settings. In *Planet Author*, you can edit your info, including email address, website, instant messaging account, and short bio. As you might have guessed, the *Planet configuration* section lets you configure the settings of your BilboPlanet installation. Here you can edit the planet's name and description, choose a different theme, and specify an info message to be shown on the main page. You can also enable or disable the contact page and the voting and moderation functionality.

If you want to keep track of your planet's stats, you can enable the *Planet Analytics Engine* option and specify the stats engine you want to use. BilboPlanet supports Google Analytics and its popular open source alternative called Piwik. If you choose the former, you'll have to provide your Google Analytics ID to link your planet to your Google Analytics account. You can also enable the subscription option to allow visitors to add their own feeds to your planet. If you enable the subscription feature, you should also edit the default content of the subscription page, which explains the rules and requirements of your planet.

Options in the *Import/Export* section allow you to export BilboPlanet's data for safekeeping. Exporting the data is as easy as selecting the desired database tables and hitting the *Export* button. Getting the exported data into BilboPlanet is not particularly difficult either: Just select the .json.gz backup file and press the *Import* button.

BilboPlanet also supports several ways of updating the RSS feeds, which you can enable and configure in *Feed fetching* (Figure 5). Probably the easiest option is to let the system update the feeds when a visitor accesses the main page. To activate this function, tick the *Enable update on loading of index page* checkbox. The main disadvantage of this approach is that it could slow down your site. Fortunately, BilboPlanet lets you set up a cron job to fetch RSS feeds automatically at regular intervals. Finally, the *System | Permissions* section allows you to specify roles and privileges for every

BilboPlanet user. BilboPlanet's access control feature is rather simplistic, but you can choose different roles and enable certain privileges, such as the ability to moderate articles and administer the BilboPlanet installation.

As you would expect, BilboPlanet is not particularly difficult to use. The main page displays all fetched articles with their short summaries (Figure 6). Visitors can vote on articles as well as subscribe to a unified BilboPlanet RSS feed. The main page also offers a number of filtering options, so visitors can view articles posted on the current day, week, or month. The *Top 10* page displays the articles with the most votes, and the *Archives* section lists all articles grouped by month.

All in all, BilboPlanet won't replace a dedicated RSS reader application, but it can come in rather handy when you need to aggregate and publish content from multiple RSS sources. ■■■

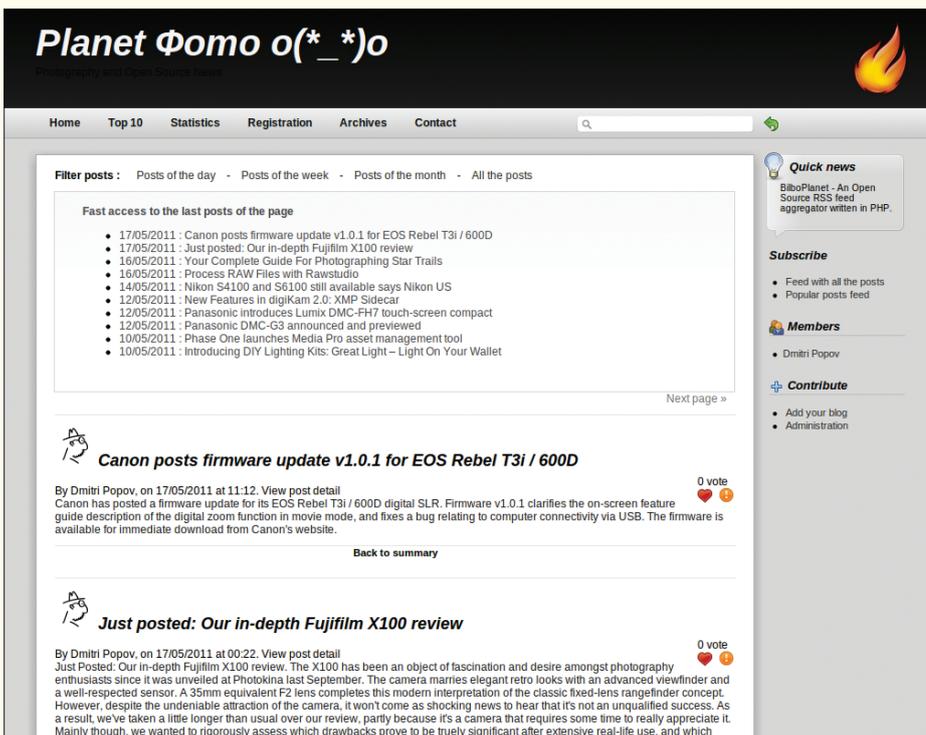


Figure 6: BilboPlanet in all its beauty, with easy access to the most recent posts, the Top 10 posts, and filtered posts.