A Comparison of Bookmarking Tools

By Roger Keays, 16 July 2007

I've started switching desktops more and more often now, and one of the most annoying problems is losing bookmarks which you added on some other computer. Of course there are a lot of tools out there specifically written to solve this problem, so all I have to do is pick one right? Well, being slightly obsessive compulsive I drew up a list of requirements and set out to find the *best* one to solve my network-enabled bookmarking problem.

Requirements

Here is the list of features that I came up with:

1. Plugin: A Firefox plugin which allows me to *browse* and *edit* my bookmarks.

2. Private: Support for private bookmarks. While most of my bookmarks would be fine to be shared with every man and his dog, I do have many of my competitors sites' bookmarked and it wouldn't make sense for me to promote their sites!

3. Folders: I believe the Web 2.0 pioneers went overboard when they decided that all you need is tags. I like to organise and browse my bookmarks and find folders the best way to do this.

4. Tags: Yes, I want tags too! Folders for organising and tags for searching and annotating. I often bookmark designs and want to attach metadata to these pages with information I can use in a query.

5. Ratings: Native support for ratings would be great, especially sorting bookmarks by rating. A rough equivalent can be acheived with tags, but with less capable sorting functionality.

6. Groups: It could be useful to ability to share certain bookmarks with private groups. I'm thinking along the lines of unix permissions here - so you could make a bookmark readable by any member of a certain group, identified by a group name.

7. Public: Public bookmarking is a useful way to give your vote to a certain website or web page.

Head to Head

After much searching and browsing forums, I wittled the competition down to the following main contenders:

- del.ici.ous

- Google Bookmarks

- Yahoo! Bookmarks

- Simpy

- [Netvouz](#)

- [Foxmarks](#)

- [Furl](#)

There were a few others which I glanced at, but which didn't capture enough of my interest to make it into the final review:

- [Blinklist](#)

- [Ma.gnolia](#)

- [de.lirio.us](#)

Here is the final comparison table of each of the tools:

	del.ici.ous	Google	Yahoo!	Simpy	Netvouz	Foxmarks	Furl
1. plugin*	yes	gmarks	toolbar	smarky	no	yes	no
2. private	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	?	yes
3. folders	no	no	yes	no	yes	yes	tags
4. tags	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	keywords
5. ratings	no	no	no	no	yes	no	yes
6. groups	no	no	no	yes	no	no	?
7. public	yes	no	no	yes	yes	?	yes

* must allow browse and edit capability

Commentary

The table shows that Netvouz has the best feature set to match my requirements, but unfortunately the plugin only offers basic bookmarklet functionality. I soon discovered that a good plugin really *was* my #1 requirement (along with network access obviously), and the rest were very secondary to this.

I was initially quite excited about the Yahoo! bookmarks tool because it had folders and tags, however it quickly let me down. The Web UI is very slow and cludgy. I hadn't planned to use the Web UI much, so this wouldn't be a problem, except that the Firefox toolbar looks more like a 'spambar'. So, while Yahoo! had a decent set of features, the UIs didn't have that seamlessly integrated feel I was looking for.

Enter del.icio.us. The del.icio.us plugin felt great - it was fast, looked good and common functionality was easily accessed. As delicious doesn't have support for folders, the plugin creates a hierarchy by enumerating all possible combinations of your tags. For me, this creates a lot of mess in the sidebar since I use a lot of tags which are purely meta information and only really useful in search. The plugin does have a 'favourite tags' feature, but this is a local setting and is not shared across computers.

Simpy had an interesting feature for sharing bookmarks amongst a private group, but again, the plugin was a bit rusty and didn't match up the native Firefox bookmarks manager.

Google Bookmarks suffered from the same problem. Although there are several plugins available I was unable to find any that were really great.

The verdict

As it turns out, I got frustrated with all of these products - perhaps my habits are too entrenched with the regular Firefox bookmarks. I find that the Firefox bookmarks UI is just so much more efficient for organising your bookmarks.

I also noticed that bookmarks search and synchronizing is on the list of features for Firefox 3. As such, I've decided to wait for Firefox 3 for a permanent solution to the problem. Until then, I'm using [Google Browser Sync](#) to keep my bookmarks synchronized on each of my desktops. Its working quite nicely for me so far .

... and it wasn't even on the list of contenders (although Foxmarks is quite similar).

About Roger Keays

Roger Keays is an artist, an engineer, and a student of life. He has no fixed addressand has leftfootprints on 40-something different countries around the world. Roger is addicted to surfing. His other interests are music, psychology, languages, the proper use of semicolons, and finding good food.