Chapter 11
Extensions of Web Browsers Useful to Knowledge Workers

Sarah Vert
Centre Virtuel de la Connaissance sur l’Europe (CVCE), Luxembourg

ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on the Internet working environment of Knowledge Workers through the customization of the Web browser on their computer. Given that a Web browser is designed to be used by anyone browsing the Internet, its initial configuration must meet generic needs such as reading a Web page, searching for information, and bookmarking. In the absence of a universal solution that meets the specific needs of each user, browser developers offer additional programs known as extensions, or add-ons. Among the various browsers that can be modified with add-ons, Mozilla’s Firefox is perhaps the one that first springs to mind; indeed, Mozilla has built the Firefox brand around these extensions. Using this example, and also considering the browsers Google Chrome, Internet Explorer, Opera and Safari, the author will attempt to demonstrate the potential of Web browsers in terms of the resources they can offer when they are customizable and available within the working environment of a Knowledge Worker.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, Web browser customization will be illustrated from the perspective of the Internet working environment of Knowledge Workers on a laptop or desktop computer. The term ‘Knowledge Worker’ is taken to mean ‘someone who works at any of the tasks of planning, acquiring, searching, analyzing, organizing, storing, programming, distributing, marketing, or otherwise contributing to the transformation and commerce of information and those (often the same people) who work at using the knowledge so produced’ (TechTarget, 1999). This definition therefore covers a wide range of professionals including university researchers, students and information...
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specialists such as information science engineers, knowledge managers and information officers. The Internet has become a prime resource for them (Doyle & Hammond, 2006), as well as one of their many working environments (Germain, 2010). It can provide them with a host of quality sources and cloud computing applications via a single interface: the Internet browser.

Given that such applications are designed to be used by anyone browsing the Internet, their initial configuration must meet generic needs such as reading a Web page, searching for information, and bookmarking. In the absence of a universal solution (Microsoft, 2011)\(^1\) that meets the specific needs of a target audience (Collaud 2007),\(^2\) browser developers offer additional programs known as extensions, or add-ons.\(^3\) Even though the five most used Web browsers in the world (StatCounter, 2011) — Internet Explorer, Firefox, Google Chrome, Safari and Opera — now all offer an official add-ons gallery for their users, this is a fairly recent development.\(^4\) As we will see, Mozilla’s Firefox browser offers the largest number of quality add-ons that can serve the needs of Knowledge Workers, but how long will this continue to be the case, given the stiff competition from the add-ons galleries of Google Chrome, Safari, Opera and Internet Explorer, which are developing rapidly through the addition of extensions that mostly experienced initial success with Firefox? We have therefore decided to illustrate our ideas by presenting the add-ons that are most suitable for the purposes of Knowledge Workers for all five Web browser leaders.\(^5\) The add-ons selected were chosen according to various criteria.\(^6\) We began by choosing extensions that feature in at least one of the official galleries of the browsers analyzed\(^7\) and can be tested. This meant that only free add-ons or those with a ‘freemium’ version not requiring any programming knowledge were selected. The add-ons also had to meet specific requirements of Knowledge Workers which are not covered, or only partly so, by the basic features of the browser for which they were designed. These include improving the user-friendliness of the browser to provide quicker access to information; refining search results; analyzing the information retrieved while browsing; and collecting and managing sources and documents effectively. Finally, where several add-ons offered equivalent feature(s), we have favored those developed by public and private research entities over those developed by individuals. Through these examples, we will attempt to demonstrate the potential of Web browsers in terms of the resources they can offer when they are customizable and available within the working environment of a Knowledge Worker. To this end, we will only present the most noteworthy, well-developed add-ons. As most add-ons offer several features, we have chosen to present them according to the feature that offers the most potential for Knowledge Workers. However, for particularly comprehensive add-ons, we have occasionally highlighted several relevant features. We have organized the add-ons according to three main activities: searching, collecting and managing.

In order to demonstrate the degree of customization available for the browsers considered in this chapter, add-ons similar to the main extensions selected will also be mentioned. To provide an overview of all the selected add-ons according to the above criteria, tables have been inserted in which the add-ons are summarized according to their main features and also by browser\(^8\) and by similarity.

1. SEARCHING FOR INFORMATION

For those wishing to access information quickly, it can be useful to be able to customize the Web browser on their computer to make it more user-friendly. This involves being familiar with the browser’s basic features and its search interfaces. An informed choice can then be made as to which extensions it may be helpful to install in order to reduce the number of clicks required and/or search
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