More on Firefox and its features

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This paper quickly mentions a number of features that you may not have seen. I will be referring to the way it looks on Firefox 39.0 on Linux Mint 17.

Standard Icons

At the top right on the toolbar a number of icons. Some of these are associated with add-ons, and others are standard. This section is about the standard ones.

If you do not know what an icon means, try moving the cursor over it and a tip may appear to describe it.

Reload

At the right hand end of the URL box, you should see a little circular arrow. Clicking on that will re-load the page. Most pages are static and this will apparently have no effect, but those which are changing, for example, with news items, will show the latest version of the page.

Search

The small box to the right of the URL box is the search box, and you can set the default search engine to whatever you like, and build in more. Click on the icon at the left hand end of the box to see more options, and to add more search engines.

Downloads

Clicking on the downward pointing arrow will show you the state of any long downloads you have started, but which are not yet finished.

Home

The little house will go straight to your home page as defined in your preferences.

Bookmarks

This icon consists of a star and little tabular. Clicking on the star will bookmark the current page by default in the unsorted bookmarks. Clicking on the table will show the menu of bookmarks entries, and the one named Show All Bookmarks will enable you to sort and re-arrange all your bookmarks, for instance by moving the one you've just saved in the unsorted list into a more suitable place.

Pocket

The little shield with a V in it is a representation of a pocket, and is connected directly to the website at http://getpocket.com which is just a save place for any bookmarks you want to have easy access to, as it would be available to you from any device when you log in to the Pocket account.

My search of the web for information seems to indicate it is useful primarily when on phones and small devices so that you can avoid typing long URLs when you want to get to a site you use a lot.

If you do not see this icon, it may be because it is not in the default theme for some locales. Changing it so it does appear means entering the dragon infested swamps of about:config and changing the list under browser.pocket.enabledLocales string.

Share

This is a recent addition to Firefox, and looks like a picture of a paper aeroplane. Looking at users comments, it may not be very useful. The idea is that if you have some account on Facebook, Twitter, etc, then if you are logged in, you can immediately send a comment to you account there containing the present URL.

Start a conversation

Mozilla seem to be trying to do too much here,and this is a way of talking to someone else also using the Mozilla. The icon is a little grey face, but I have never used it.

Open menu

The final icon is a set of three horizontal lines and will open the customisation menu and other items, like printing. It is at the far right of the

I will mention here only the question mark at the bottom that will open the help menu, icnluding the About Firefox entry so you see what version you have.

Menus

As well as the standard menu accessible from the top right, there are number of different menus accessed by a right click on various parts of the display.

Note that some add-ons will add options to one or more right click menus, so the actual list that you will see will depend on what extensions you have installed.

Private browsing

It is possible to use Firefox in a private browsing mode, in which no history, or cookies, cache, or any other data acquired during the session, will be saved when the session is ended, and no passwords that you have entered will be saved in the master password safe. It is even more restrictive than normal browsing that removes all cookies etc afterwards.

Private browsing is always done in a separate window and can be started when you right click on a link, and select the Open Link in New Private Window option in the menu.

Another way is to select the New Private Window option in the menu at top right.

This could be useful when using a machine other than your own, and you wish to erase all trace after you end the session.

Spelling checker

Firefox has a builtin spelling checker, and if you have the English version then English is the default dictionary. When typing into a text box on a web page, then a right click in the box will bring up a menu that includes the option Check Spelling. When that is ticked, the check is done automatically as you type.

Languages

You are not restricted to English. The right click menu in a text box also includes a sublist under Languages, where you can select the dictionary of choice, or from which you can download more dictionaries. Some languages are supported only with a dictionary, but some will install add-ons to add the spelling application as well the dictionary. It depends on the language and how it is implemented.

In some instances, you could also add complete translations of the user interface, too, by installing the language pack.

Bookmarks

When you are browsing a page, a right click somewhere neutral on the page will bring up a menu containing several items associated with the contents of the page, but also at the top of that menu at the right is a star. Clicking on that star will take you to the bookmarks menu where you can save the URL of the page you are viewing as a bookmark in the appropriate place for your organised bookmarks.

If however you wish to save a link as a bookmark, then right clicking on the link will show a menu including the bookmark option.

Preferences

There are a lot of possible ways of customising your use of Firefox, and the preferences menu is how you do it. It is accessed from the menu at top right. All the tabs have question marks that lead to sensible help information. I will mention only three tabs here as a reminder.

Privacy

The Privacy tab is where you change what is saved between sessions. Whast you want to do here depends entirely on whether you think your machine is safe in the hands of others, or perhaps will

never be used by anyone else. However, if you are concerned about losing the device, or other mishap, then you may wish to modify what is saved between sessions by selecting "Use custom settings for history" under the History heading, and then ticking the relevant boxes. By the "Clear history when Firefox closes" box, there is a Settings button where you can select the types of items to keep and which to discard.

Security

The Security tab is where you say whether you want to save your passwords for each site, and whether you wish to protect them with a master password.

Synchronisation

The Sync tab gives access and information about the Mozilla mechanism for saving all your personal data so you can easily transfer it between devices. They appear to have taken security and privacy seriously with this as they claim that they cannot recover your data if you lose your password to your Firefox account as they do not have it. It would appear the claims are valid – your data depends on the strength of your Firefox account password.

The help information on the Sync tab gives all the information you need to set up the sync.

Add-ons

These are extras that are obtained from other sources and enhance the functionality of the browser. Here we list a few that might be useful in general use, and others that can supply more information to the curious. I will mention only a few, as there are literally thousands to choose from doing all sorts of things, and mention only those you may not be aware of.

HTTPS Everywhere

This one will try to connect to a website suing a secure method wherever possible. However, there are still many sites that do not yet support this secure access, so it is of limited use on the general case, but all important sites do support it.

This used to be available only from EFF, not from Firefox, but that has now changed, and it is a regular Firefox extension.

No redirect

Sometimes when surfing the web you see URLs that have been abbreviated, so you do not know where they will go to. This is especially true in links from Twitter, and other social sites that attempt to "help" you share links with others. What happens is that these shortening services will provide a short form, and then when you access it, their service will redirect you to the actual address. But you cannot see where you are going to end up from the original link. The extension will suppress the forward link and will instead put up a page showing the real target address.

It comes with a selection of default addresses that it will intercept, but this list is not very useful. However you can add more and see exactly what is happening before you get there.

Flagfox

This is a simple add-on that shows you where the server you are talking to actually resides, or at least where its IP address points to. It shows as a country flag in the right side of the URL box. So you can tell where your data is held, or your search is being carried out, etc.

Exif viewer

For the nosey, you can see what information is stored in a photo you see online using the Exif viewer by right clicking on a link to the image. So far as I can tell, it displays only the camera information, and not other aspects of the image.

References

The help pages are not bad, and of course you could just search using your favourite search engine. There are lot of blog entries written by various people with instructions on most things – providing you know what you are trying to do.