

LibraryCrunch

Bringing You A "Library 2.0" Perspective, by Michael Casey

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Taskable and the issue of stand-alone programs

Sean Nolan, author and owner of [Taskable](#), responded to comments I made in a [recent post](#) regarding my take on Taskable. I took Taskable to task (sorry!) for being a stand-alone program (instead of something like a Firefox extension).

In his comment, Sean asks, "certainly all of the extensions you talk about putting into Firefox required downloads, right? And I don't see that users do or should perceive a difference between functionality that lives within a browser "process" or outside of one -- I would imagine that very few users know what a "process" is!"

Now, let me first say, I like Taskable. I have it installed on my work computer and I find it to be a very handy and innovative tool. But my criticism is twofold. My first concern centers around its usability in an environment likely to be found in a library – on a public OPAC or a managed staff computer. Because of the constant tug-of-war between usability and security, many libraries severely restrict what can and cannot be downloaded or executed on a public access computer or a general staff computer that is often shared by many people.

Installing stand-alone programs often requires a complicated approval process through the IT department. This process isn't impossible to get through, it's just painful. Being able to sell a browser extension – or, in most instances, being able to simply install the browser extension without any extra approval steps – is far easier and more efficient. If we don't like it, we can remove it, all without needing special approval or administrative rights at any point during the process.

My second concern is more personal – I do not like running more apps than I must. I frequently find myself taxing my computer's resources – running several Firefox tabs, Photoshop, ACDSee, an FTP program, Word, and IM all at the same time, not to mention the inevitable programs that always seem to force their quick-launchers on me, like Quicktime, Adobe Acrobat and the like. This makes me very hesitant to install new programs. The fact that the tool I want plugs into Firefox as an extension instead of running as its own process makes a difference in my decision making, no matter how irrational that may sound!

So, try Taskable – don't let me stop you. Be encouraged by the fact that Sean cares what people are saying about his program! Oh, Sean, if you have any ideas for tools for libraries, please share!

Posted by Michael on October 23, 2005 11:16 PM | [Permalink](#)

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Michael, thanks for the thoughtful response ... Your points, especially about the challenges of client software in an IT-controlled world make a lot of sense.

While I think it would be difficult to make Taskable "work" the way it does within a browser context, I take away two key messages for me and anybody else trying to add value on the client:

1. Be additive --- don't force a change in existing behaviors/habits that already work.
2. Be tiny --- People have been burned by too much fat software running on their machines. Be a good guest and make sure you use bandwidth, memory and cpu as carefully as possible.

Sound about right? Thanks again!
---S

Posted by: Sean | [October 24, 2005 10:07 AM](#)

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