

ToDo Manager

Well Planned

With email clients such as Evolution already providing fully fledged solutions for individual information management, who needs a stand-alone task manager?

BY FREDERIK BIJLSMA AND

PATRICIA JUNG

If you ask the authors of the ToDo Manager the above question, the answer is ‘anyone who needs an uncomplicated GUI helper that delivers the goods most of the larger packages forget and provides a quick overview of your to-do list.’

What would you call a program that considerably reminds you that have forgotten to buy the drinks for this Saturday’s party, and that you still have not got round to installing that important security update on your Linux machine at work?

How about *ToDo Manager*? And the name is somewhat of an omen: this useful tool, which is available from <http://todo-manager.sourceforge.net/> (or on the subscription CD) manages to-do lists and tasks.

Compared with similar tools, *ToDo Manager* takes up a modest amount of desktop space and does without graphical gimmicks for the most part. *ToDo Manager*’s uncluttered interface is a big help in getting used to this friendly desktop companion.

In addition to normal management functions *ToDo Manager* has a few



extremely useful additional features up its sleeve. For example, it can export tasks to HTML, allowing you to upload a task list to your web server where it is accessible for you on other machines, whenever you need it.

Installation Planner

The planner is a **Python script** that can be installed by typing:

```
tar xzf todo-manager-0.70.2.tar.gz
```

immediately after unpacking the archive. However, this does assume that you have pre-installed one or two packages, such as *python2*, *tkinter*, and *tix*.

Most distributions include these binaries, so you may be able to just

launch *rpm* or *apt-get* to install them. Depending on what distribution you use, the package names may be slightly different.

Besides the program code, the new directory created when you unpack the archive should include *todomanager-0.70.2* and some documentation in HTML format in the *docs* subdirectory.

Launch

To launch the tool simply type:

```
python todo-manager
```

in the *todo-manager-0.70.2* directory (depending on your *PATH* variable, you may be able to call *todomanager*) without changing directory (Figure 1). Users who require support for

OUT OF THE BOX

There are thousands of tools and utilities for Linux. “Out of the box” takes a pick of the bunch and each month suggests a little program, which we feel is either absolutely indispensable or unduly ignored.

GLOSSARY

Python script: Python is a scripting language. That is, the source code is interpreted at runtime. This contrasts with programs written in languages such as C or C++ that need to be translated to binary format (compiled) before they can be executed. Python may create binaries at runtime; if so, you can recognize them by their extension, *.pyc*.

LANG: This environment variable, if set, tells any programs to use a specific language. Of course, this will only work if the software actually provides language support itself. If needed, you can find out your default language by using the shell command “echo \$LANG” to output the setting for the current user session.

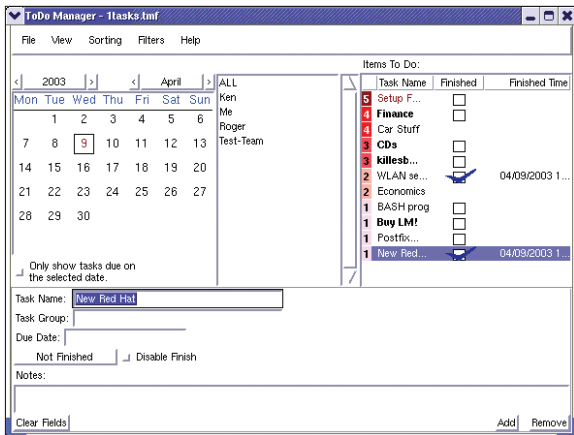


Figure 1: The Manager interface

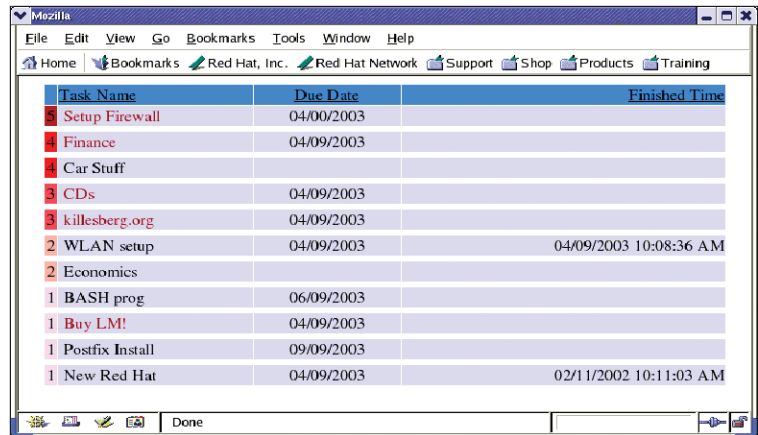


Figure 2: A task list, sorted by priorities and exported to HTML

languages other than English can set the **LANG** variable, and with some luck have the program talk German or Dutch to them (at least in parts). The following command:

```
LANG=nl python todo-manager
```

should launch the Dutch version, for example. If you have configured your system for non-English support in general, you will need to type:

```
LANG=C python todo-manager
```

to launch the English language version of the tool.

Following this, you can use the lower part of the interface to assign yourself masses of tasks. A description is assigned to every new entry in the to-do list (*Task Name*). The names of the people involved with a project can be added to the *Task Group* field as a comma-separated list.

Finally, don't forget to specify a completion date for the task in the *Due Date* field. Note that the date *must* be specified in one of the standard formats (depending on your system this can be either in a YYYY-MM-DD or MM/DD/YYYY format). The program will suggest and highlight today's date by default.

If you want to modify a suggestion without completely deleting it, you first need to move the cursor left or right, before you can start typing. Finally, you can add any additional comments in the (*Notes*) field. Clicking on the *Add* button will then transfer the task to the to-do list.

Priorities

The new tasks now appear on the right of the Task Manager. Clicking on the number in the first column changes the priority that the program automatically assigns when adding a task. This defaults to the value of 1 for "unimportant". You should assign a value of 5 to extremely important tasks; this will also highlight the tasks to make them more visible (see Figure 1).

A quick look at the overview lets you see which tasks are scheduled for when. Selecting a task moves the task description back into the editing boxes. Clicking on *Finished* or in the checkbox in that column will modify the completion status.

You can select a name in the team box to specify which team member's tasks you want to view (see Figure 1 center). [Ctrl-D] also enables the calendar view. Checking the *Only show*

tasks due on the selected date checkbox, applies a filter leaving only those tasks scheduled for completion on your chosen date.

Attached

If you are scheduling tasks for multiple users, it makes sense to allow them to see what is in store for them. To help you do so, the ToDo Manager provides its own plug-in library, which includes plug-ins for HTML and text exports. The *Plug-Ins* tab in the *File / Options* menu provides more details of the choices available (see Figure 3).

You can use the *File / Export / HTML File* option to export the current contents of the *ToDo Entries* box to an HTML file, as shown in Figure 2, and then share this file by uploading it to a web server. Unfortunately, you may have to do without any of your added notes, if you do so.

Users interested in improving the HTML module or adding their own plug-ins to the ToDo Manager can base their efforts on the *plugins/export_html.py* and *plugins/export_text.py* templates. Exporting to various formats, or even direct writes to a database using an appropriate client are conceivable.

There is even an elegant way of delegating tasks to colleagues with Windows PCs. The complete Python package is available for Windows, and can be downloaded at <http://www.python.org/ftp/python/2.2.2/Python-2.2.2.exe>, for example. This should allow the ToDo Manager to run natively on Windows. ■

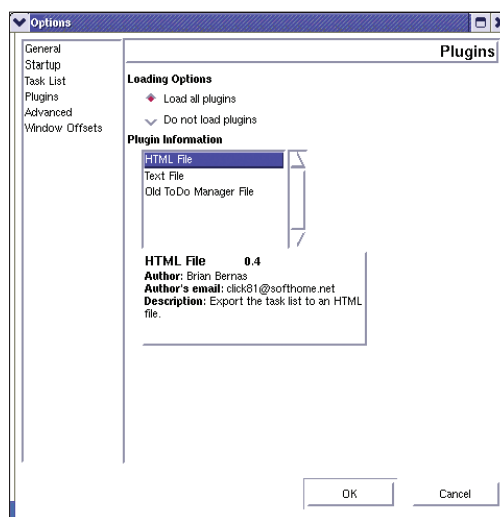


Figure 3: The ToDo Manager needs a plug-in for formats other than its native tmng format