

Bookmarks Launcher+



User Guide

Project Home: <https://launchpad.net/bookmarkit>

Summary

Bookmarks Launcher+ is a web application that is designed to be a quick launchpad for frequently visited URL's. The main idea behind this an application is ease of maintenance – it should be easy to change a link if the URL changes, delete old links, and add new ones. The other main objective is that links should be in grouped in categories so they are easy to find and launch.

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Background

This application has evolved quite a bit since its inception. Like most creations, it was born partly of necessity, and partly of “*wouldn't it be cool if...*”.

I work as a software developer, and I maintain dozens of applications at work. Between the application URL's (for development, test, and production), server management consoles, diagnostic and monitoring tools, and company intranet sites, there are a lot of URL's to remember.

Why not just use the “bookmarks” feature in my browser? I did, but I have a laptop and two desktop machines at home, and 2 desktop machines at work. Keeping bookmarks in sync between those machines was a major hassle.

Why not one of the online bookmarks sites? Most of the links I was dealing with were internal applications and sites available only on my company intranet. I wanted local, personal, portable, and convenient for *me*, with no ad banners or other BS. And I wanted everything in one place for easy launching.

Syncing between multiple machines sucked, so I wanted to utilize my USB thumb drive. And so “version 1.0” was born. Not much of an application, it was merely a static HTML page. I had a big HTML table with each cell being a different color, each representing a category (e.g. Web Applications, Troubleshooting + Monitoring, Jboss Consoles, etc.). I did a few “fancy” things with CSS and JavaScript to make it cooler than just a dull links page, but in the end it was just static HTML. It did its job very well as a launcher, *but...*

When I wanted to add new links, or worse, new categories, I realized this just wasn't the long term solution. Maintenance to static HTML sucks, especially for a developer *who ought to know better*. That's when I lamented on my [blog](#) about wanting to make it an application. A friend of mine commented on the blog entry to peer pressure me into doing it, [so I did](#).

My thought was this would be a great chance to play more with Ruby on Rails. With XAMPP or InstantRails, I could still run the application off of my USB drive without any issues. I showed off the first version of the application to some coworkers, who wanted copies for themselves. That's when I decided to continue improving it, and eventually release it under the LGPL license for others to use.

It has evolved quite a bit, with many usability features and some design and layout changes. I also added a “Notes” feature, where you can create and edit notes for yourself, kind of like a “personal portable wiki”. I use it to keep to-do lists, scraps of code, programming tips and tricks, etc.

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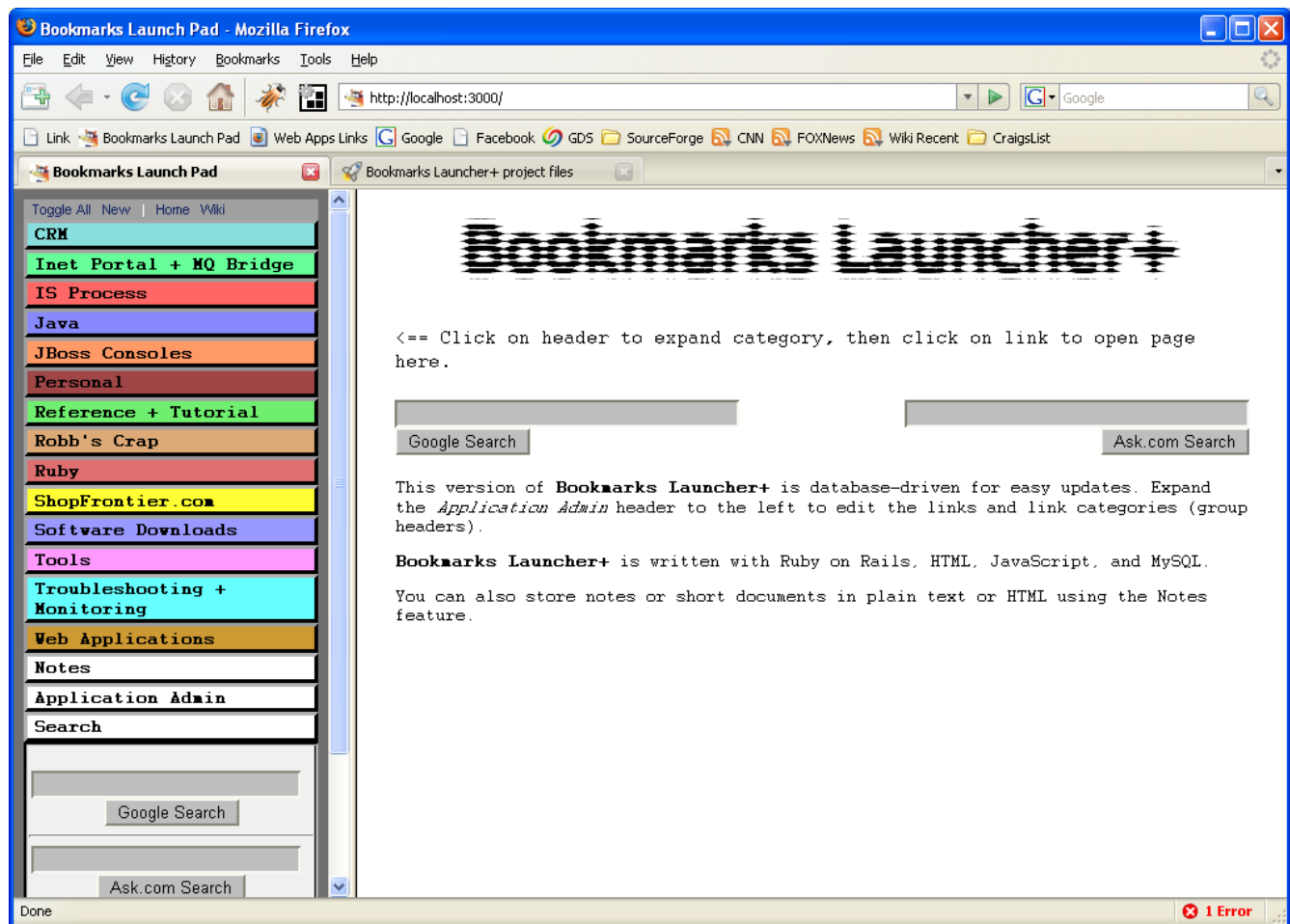
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Application Overview

So what does this thing look like? On the left is a frame containing the menu “launcher”. This initially shows up as a listing of color-coded categories that are user-defined, as well as special entries for Notes, Application Admin, and Search that always show up.

The right frame is a simple landing page. When you open the admin screens or notes, they open in the right frame. Clicking one of your links from the other categories launches in a new window (or a new tab depending on how your browser is configured).

In the search panel, there are search boxes for Google, Ask.com, and Yahoo. Since I use this as my homepage and launchpad onto the web, I have included these as a convenience. *Currently they are hard-coded, but I plan on making them configurable in the future.*



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The landing page has some basic usage information, so using the application should be fairly straight forward. In future revisions, the user will be able to easily choose a new landing page without changing any code.

Clicking on any of the category headers will expand the selection to show all the links under it. Simply click on the link to go to that website. You will also notice each link has a small pencil icon next to it, which takes you to the Edit form for that link. Here you see I expanded out the Java category.



The categories themselves are defined by the user via admin screens. You control the name of the categories, along with the color of the header and color of the links box body. The following screenshot shows you the admin menu expanded, along with the listing of categories. In the admin menu, there are options for listing all the current links, quick links (show up at top of menu in the gray area), categories, or notes, and also options to create a new link, quick link, category, or note.

► **NOTE:** *Throughout the application, the pencil icon means “edit”, magnifying glass means “view only”, and red X means “delete”.*

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Bookmarks Launch Pad - Mozilla Firefox

File Edit View History Bookmarks Tools Help

http://localhost:3000/

Bookmarks Launch Pad

Application Administration

Home

Link Categories

	Name	Header color	Body color
Q	✗ Troubleshooting + Monitoring	#66ffff	#ccffff
Q	✗ IS Process	#ff6666	#ffcccc
Q	✗ Inet Portal + MQ Bridge	#66ff99	#99ff99
Q	✗ JBoss Consoles	#ff9966	#ffcc99
Q	✗ ShopFrontier.com	#ffff33	#ffffcc
Q	✗ Software Downloads	#9999ff	#ccccff
Q	✗ Tools	#ff99ff	#ffccff
Q	✗ Reference + Tutorial	#70ee70	#aaffaa
Q	✗ Web Applications	#cc9933	#ffcc33
Q	✗ Personal	#a04646	#ce8888
Q	✗ Ruby	#e07070	#e0c0c0
Q	✗ Java	#8989fe	#ccccff
Q	✗ CRM	#88dddd	#afefef
Q	✗ Robb's Crap	#ddaa77	#ddaa77

New link_category

©2007, 2008 Robb A. Nicholson

Done

1 Error

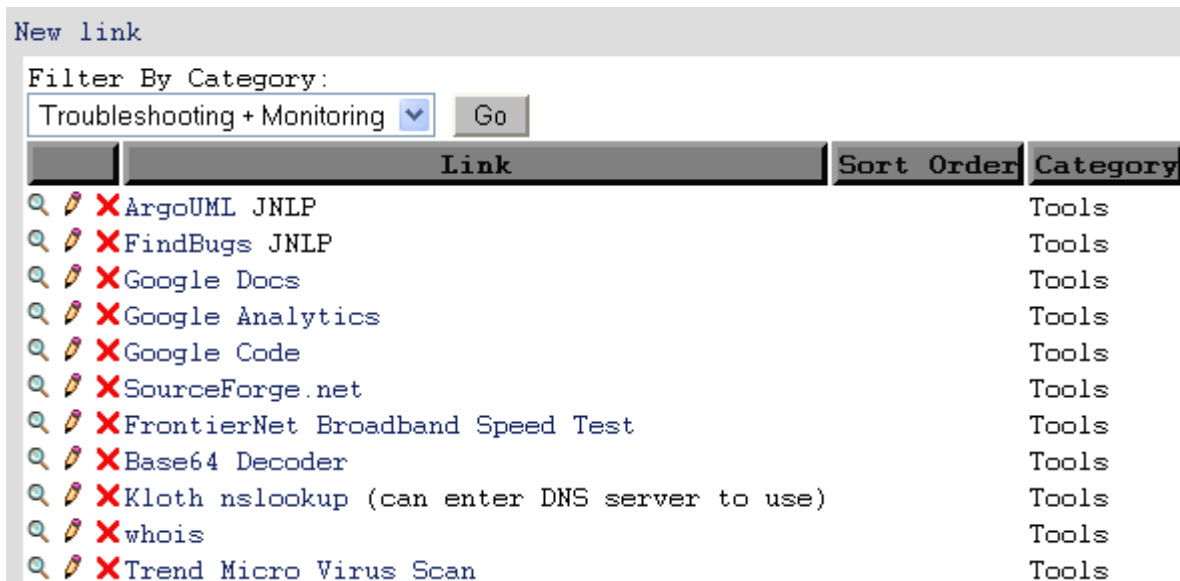
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The list of links can get very large, so the List view for links also includes a selection box to filter the view down to only links of a specific category. The following screenshot shows the list view filtered to only show the “Tools” category.



The screenshot shows a window titled "New link" with a "Filter By Category:" section. A dropdown menu is set to "Troubleshooting + Monitoring" and a "Go" button is next to it. Below this is a table with three columns: "Link", "Sort Order", and "Category". The table lists ten links, all of which are categorized as "Tools". Each link entry includes a magnifying glass icon, a pencil icon, and a red 'X' icon.

	Link	Sort Order	Category
🔍 ✎ ✖	ArgoUML JNLP		Tools
🔍 ✎ ✖	FindBugs JNLP		Tools
🔍 ✎ ✖	Google Docs		Tools
🔍 ✎ ✖	Google Analytics		Tools
🔍 ✎ ✖	Google Code		Tools
🔍 ✎ ✖	SourceForge.net		Tools
🔍 ✎ ✖	FrontierNet Broadband Speed Test		Tools
🔍 ✎ ✖	Base64 Decoder		Tools
🔍 ✎ ✖	Kloth nslookup (can enter DNS server to use)		Tools
🔍 ✎ ✖	whois		Tools
🔍 ✎ ✖	Trend Micro Virus Scan		Tools

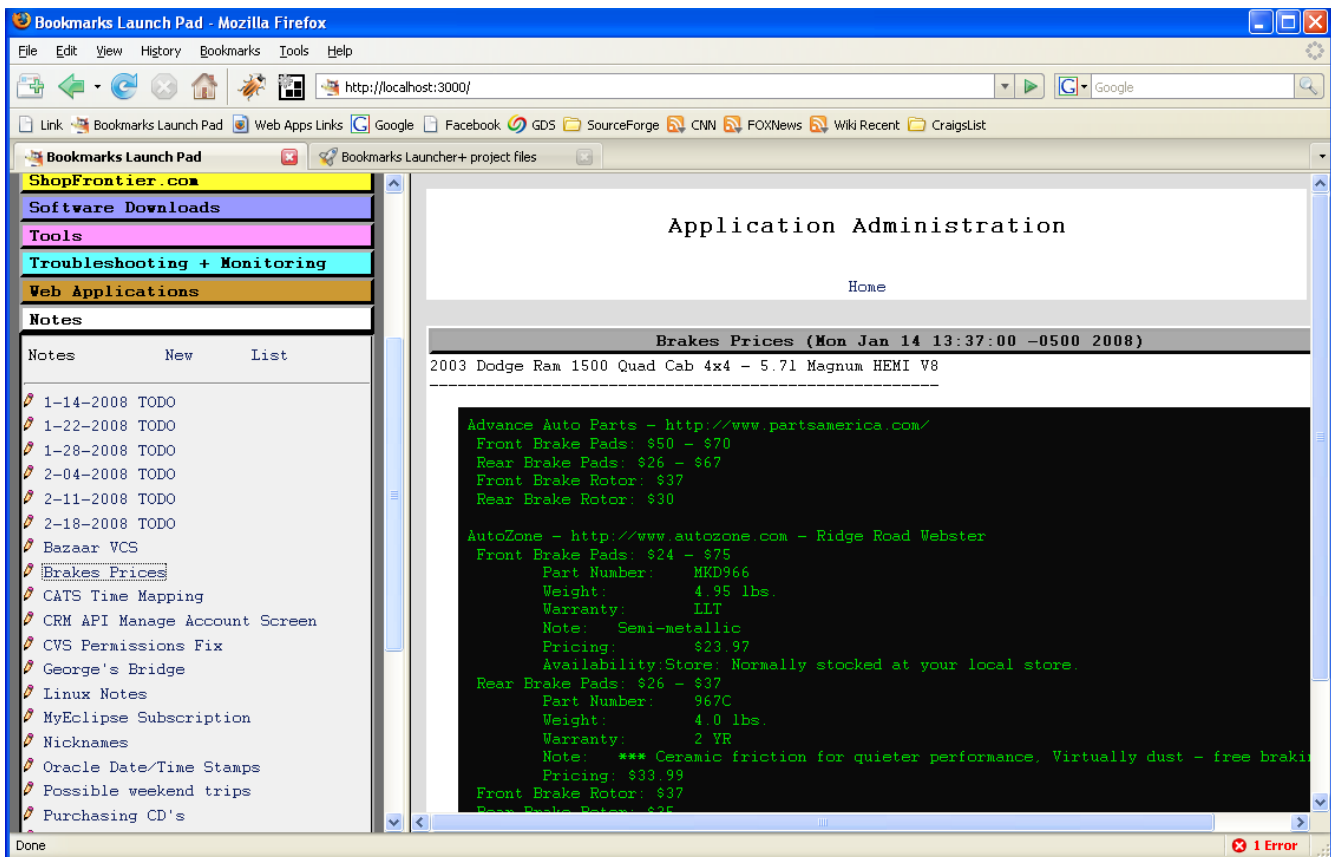
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The next screenshot shows the current Notes functionality. Each note's title is listed under the Notes category like any other link, with the edit icon next to each one. Clicking on the note title brings up the note in the right panel in read-only mode. Clicking the edit icon opens it in the right panel in edit mode. Options for listing all notes and creating a new note are also at the top of the notes list.



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Getting Started

Prerequisites

You will need:

- [Ruby](#)
- [Rails](#)
- A database (e.g. [MySQL](#))
- A Ruby server (e.g. [WEBrick](#), [Mongrel](#))
- [Bazaar VCS](#) (optional, as you could download the ZIP file instead)
- A text editor (e.g. [Notepad++](#))
- A database admin tool (e.g. [phpMyAdmin](#), [Squirrel](#))
- Version 1.4 introduces the ability to subscribe to ATOM and RSS feeds. You will need to install “Atom”. To install, type “gem install atom”.

► **NOTE:** My recommendation if you are just getting started with Ruby and Rails is to download [InstantRails](http://instantrails.rubyforge.org) (<http://instantrails.rubyforge.org>). InstantRails is a single tightly integrated package including Apache web server, Mongrel Ruby server, MySQL database server, phpMyAdmin, Ruby, Rails, and any other Ruby “gems” or libraries needed for RoR applications. Best of all, you can run it from your USB thumb drive or portable hard drive. You can even launch it from the [PortableApps.com](#) menu.

Download

To download as a ZIP file, go to <https://launchpad.net/bookmarkit/+download> and choose the latest release. You can get a copy of the source tree from Launchpad using Bazaar version control. If you have Bazaar installed, the following command will get you a copy of the current trunk:

```
bzr branch lp:bookmarkit
```

Installation

Ruby is an interpreted scripting language, so you will not need to run a build or compile any code. The project source tree in Bazaar is laid out in the same directory structure needed by Rails framework.

You can point your server at the top-level “bookmarkit” directory. Or, the recommended approach for getting started quickly is to use InstantRails. If you are using InstantRails, simply copy the “bookmarkit” directory into your InstantRails “rails_apps” directory.

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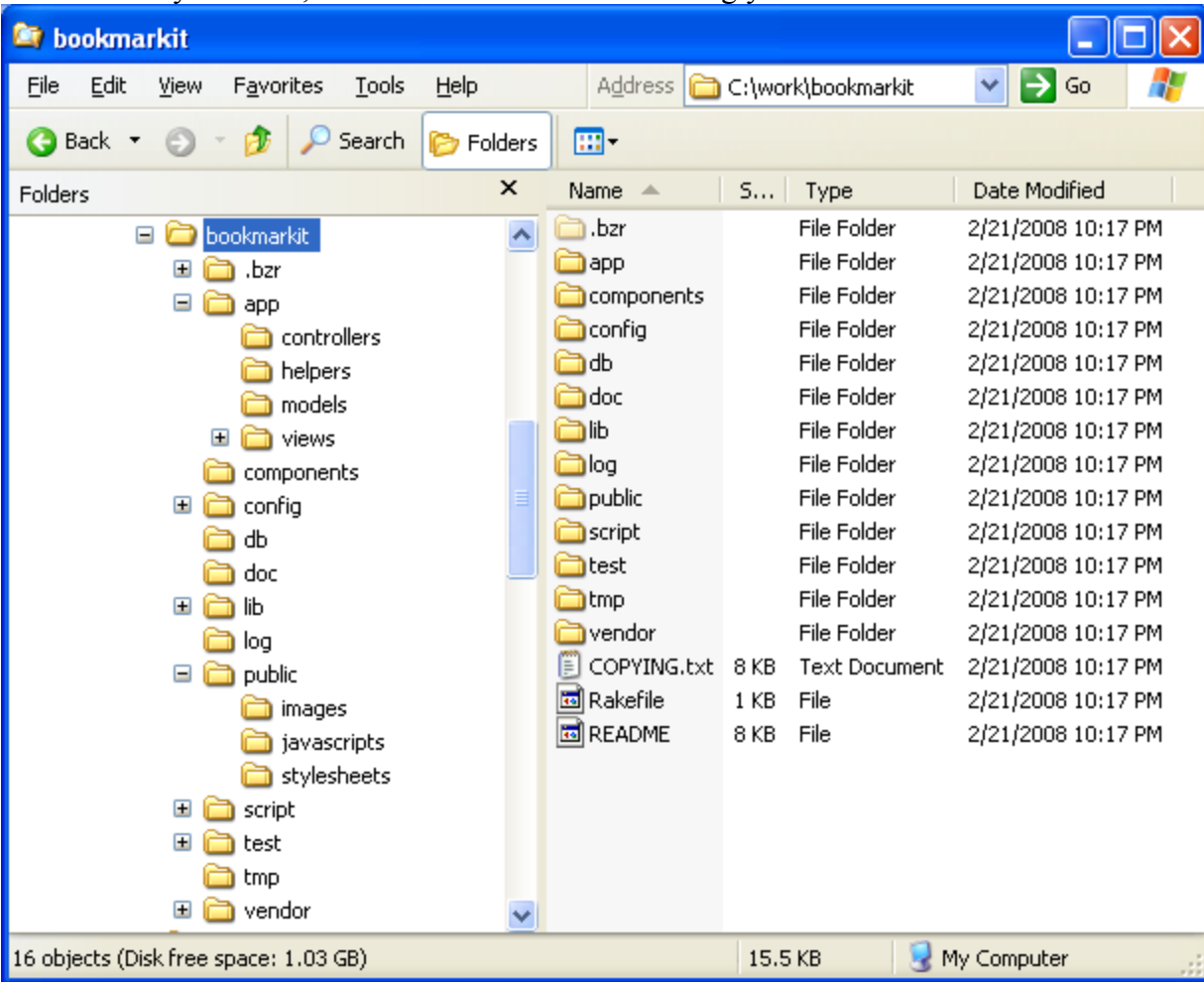
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The following screenshot shows the directory structure of the project as pulled from Bazaar. If you are familiar with Ruby on Rails, the structure should look strikingly familiar.



Setting Up The Database

Before you start up your Rails server, the database server has to be running. You will also have to create the necessary tables to hold your categories, links, notes, and quick links. A DDL SQL script, “bookmarkit/db/DB-init.sql”, is provided to create the necessary tables.

If you are doing all the following...

- using MySQL
- your database is named “bookmarks”
- you are using “root” user with no password

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Then you can just create your tables and move on to the next step.

If you answered no to any of the above, then you need to do some configuration to tell Rails about your database. Edit “bookmarkit\config\database.yml” to set your database, user, and passwords. See Ruby on Rails documentation if you need help figuring that out (or just use the defaults set forth above).

Running The Application

You can start up the Rails application using the included WEBrick server using the following command (started from the “bookmarkit” directory):

```
ruby script\server
```

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```
C:\WINDOWS\system32\cmd.exe - ruby script\server
Microsoft Windows XP [Version 5.1.2600]
(C) Copyright 1985-2001 Microsoft Corp.

C:\Documents and Settings\Robb>cd c:\work\bookmarkit

C:\work\bookmarkit>ruby script\server
=> Booting WEBrick...
=> Rails application started on http://0.0.0.0:3000
=> Ctrl-C to shutdown server; call with --help for options
[2008-02-21 23:15:59] INFO WEBrick 1.3.1
[2008-02-21 23:15:59] INFO ruby 1.8.6 (2007-03-13) [i386-mswin32]
[2008-02-21 23:15:59] INFO WEBrick::HTTPServer#start: pid=1500 port=3000
```

However, WEBrick usage outside of development is generally discouraged in the Rails community. My suggestion is to use the more robust (and faster) Mongrel server. This is the server included with InstantRails.

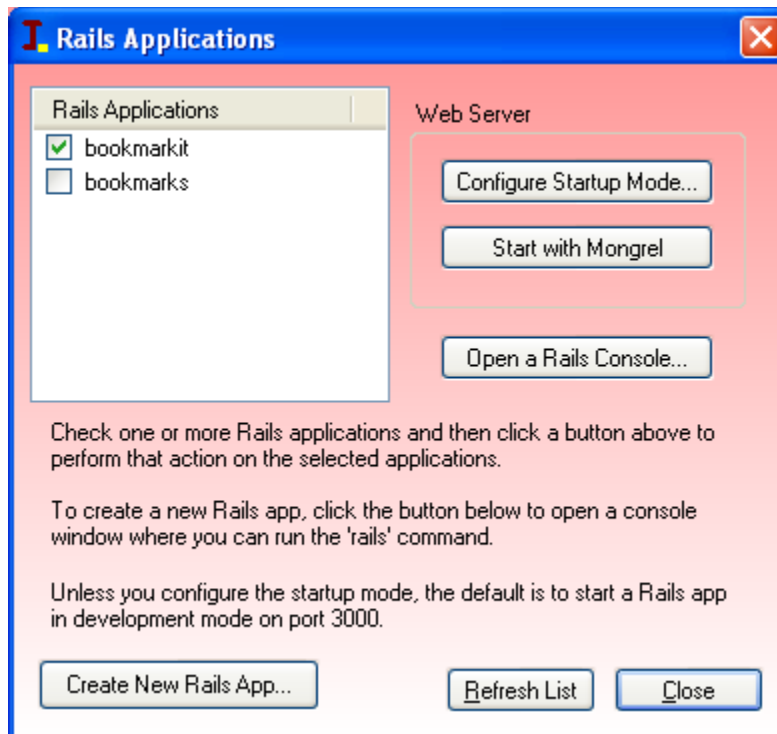
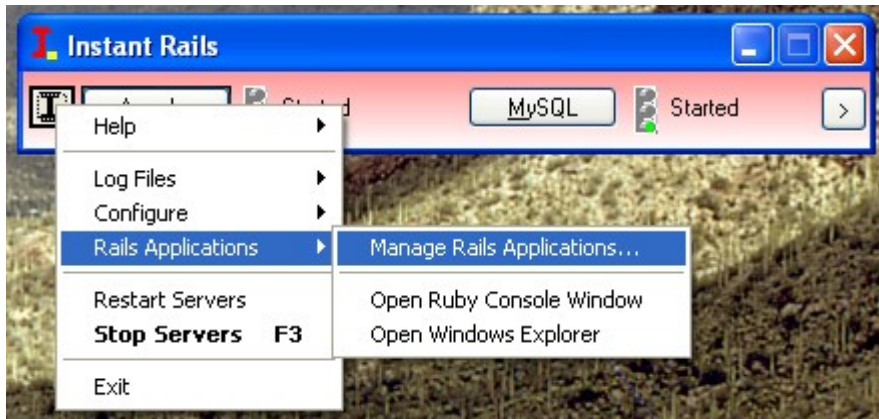
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If using InstantRails, you can start the Mongrel server like you normally would through the InstantRails window. Click the “I” button to get the pop-up menu, then choose *Rails Applications* -> *Manage Rails Applications*. If you put the “bookmarkit” directory in the right place, the next screen should have a **bookmarkit** entry with a checkbox next to it. Select the checkbox, and hit the “Start with Mongrel” button. The Mongrel server will start up in a new window. You can now close out of the InstantRails “Rails Applications” window (*but don't close the newly launched Mongrel server window*).



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You could also start Mongrel outside of InstantRails using a command similar to the one below. See the Mongrel documentation for more details on Mongrel start options.

A screenshot of a Windows command prompt window. The title bar reads "C:\WINDOWS\system32\cmd.exe - mongrel_rails start -p 3000 -c ..\..\rails_apps\book...". The command prompt shows the following output:

```
C:\dist\InstantRails\ruby\bin>mongrel_rails start -p 3000 -c ..\..\rails_apps\bookmarks -l ..\..\rails_apps\bookmarks\log\s
** Starting Mongrel listening at 0.0.0.0:3000
** Starting Rails with development environment...
** Rails loaded.
** Loading any Rails specific GemPlugins
** Signals ready. INT => stop (no restart).
** Mongrel available at 0.0.0.0:3000
** Use CTRL-C to stop.
```

Project Information

Bookmarks Launcher+ is a Ruby on Rails application. The code base is Ruby, Rails, JavaScript, HTML, and CSS. The underlying database is MySQL (though any DB supported by Rails should work).

Project Hosting And Version Control

The project is hosted at Launchpad. The project homepage is <https://launchpad.net/bookmarkit>.

Bazaar is used for the version control system. Bazaar is a distributed versioning system that can be downloaded and installed for free.

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License

This code is licensed under the Less GNU Public License (LGPL). See “COPYING.txt” or check out <http://www.gnu.org/licenses/lgpl.txt>.

Roadmap

To see what features are slated to be added to the application, see the blueprints on Launchpad at <https://blueprints.edge.launchpad.net/bookmarkit/>. At the time of this writing, some features I would like to add are security for when this is used in a workgroup, a wiki-style markup language for “Notes” instead of unfiltered HTML, a working search that searches notes and links, and a preferences admin screen so application appearance and behavior can be customized without writing code.

Customizing The Application

Currently, most customization will have to involve changing code to some extent. Most of the appearance with respect to colors, fonts, etc. can be changed simply by tweaking the cascading style sheets (CSS) in the “bookmarkit/public/stylesheets/” directory.

If you want to change how the left menu pane is rendered, you would most likely change the “bookmarkit\app\views\layouts\menu_template.rhtml” template. One example is that most links are launched in a new window (except admin screens and notes). You could change the target to “contents” if you instead wanted all pages to load in the right panel (*that's how it used to be, but I found it annoying*).

To change how the admin screens are rendered, you would edit the “bookmarkit\app\views\layouts_admin_template.rhtml” template.

In the future, much of the customization will be done through an admin screen so that code changes are not required to change fonts, colors, landing page URL, etc.

Getting Involved

If you have ideas for features, or want to take on development for some of the roadmap features, please feel free to contact me. Report bugs via the [Launchpad site](#).

For More Information

See the [Launchpad site](#) for more information, or feel free to contact [me](#).