How do people use tabs?

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The back story

I have a love/hate relationship with tabs.

- Problems with back button
- Subverts OS task management
- Premature commitment
- Clutter, scrolling

So…

Could we make something better?

But…don't know <u>how</u> or <u>why</u> people use tabs.

Literature:

- Large focus on revisitation
- Almost no mention of tabs!

Field Study

22 people, 2 weeks.

Quantitative & qualitative:

- Logging extension (like Spectator)

  Tab events, navigation events, causes (link click, back button, URL bar, …)

- Periodic diary entries

  "What tabs and windows do you have open, and why?"

- Interviews

Qualitative Results

What are tabs used for?

- Instead of back button

- Lightweight bookmarks

- Reminders

- Multitasking

- Comparison

Qualitative Results

Advantages of tabs:

- "It's just right there"

- Visible browsing history

- Easier & faster than back button

- Less uncertainty

- New browsing strategies

  e.g. Pruning, opening several links at once

Quantitative Results

Frequency of tab switching:

- ~ Half as freq as link clinks
- More freq than link click in 5/22 people (4 CS)
- More freq than back button in all but 2

Browser = Navigator + <u>Task Manager</u>

Quantitative Results

Opening links in new tabs:

- 6 people <u>never</u> did

- 3 others in single digits

Discoverability Problem?

Quantitative Results

Use of back button:

- Median: 1 per 50 link clicks

- 9 people: 1 in >100

- 7 used it <u>less than once per day</u>

Back button is becoming irrelevant

Further Analysis

Qualitative:

- continue analysis – "theory of tab usage"

Quantitative:

- Very basic so far. What else?

  - Number of tabs open

  - Time spent on a tab

  - Tab switch as a *revisit* – how does it compare?

  - Actions taken in new tabs

- Other ideas?

Lessons Learned

- People love Firefox, and want to help!
- They don't care that much about privacy
- Qualitative studies are hard!
- Firefox's extensibility complicates log analysis

Fin

Questions? Suggestions?

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