On The Net

Web Browser Keyboard and Navigation Shortcuts

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Each new version of a Web browser brings its new share of features. The most heralded browsers are typically the biggest memory hogs, and occasionally the least useful. At the same time, other new features may be less feted in the Internet press, but can be far more useful for everyday roaming on the Web. While some may have the time to read every sentence of the new documentation and explore the changes under each menu and new icon, most of us don't seek out these hidden gems. To help, this column summarizes some of the most useful keyboard and navigation shortcuts available with the latest Web browsers.

The mouse ... is not always the quickest way to navigate on the Web.

While Netscape's Communicator and Navigator version 4, running on Windows 95, is the focus of this article, many of these tricks and shortcuts described also work on Internet Explorer. Most work just the same under Windows 3.1. Mac users should use the apple key rather than the <Ctrl> key.

People choose their own favorite way of moving around within software. Graphic icon buttons, word icon buttons, drop-down menus, and keyboard shortcuts often all provide a way to accomplish the same function. On the Web with a graphical browser, most of us are familiar with moving around entirely with the mouse. The keyboard shortcuts described here may not appeal to everyone, but knowing what is available at least gives us an option for alternate ways to navigate, and offers a choice for the most effective shortcuts. Try them all, then memorize the ones that fit best into your particular style of Web use.

KEYSTROKE SHORTCUTS

The mouse is a primitive, but rather useful pointing device. However, it is not always the quickest way to navigate on the Web. Many standard browser functions available by mouse clicks also have keyboard alternatives. These can become essential for moving around the Web when the mouse freezes, but some can even speed up regular Web browsing.

Navigation Keys

The Back and Forward buttons are essential for easily navigating the intertwining strands of the World Wide Web, but it is not necessary to click them. Hold down the <Alt> key and press the left (for back) or right (for forward) arrow key to achieve the same result. These can be used even before a page has fully loaded. After a bit of practice, the <Alt>-arrow key combination can become much faster for moving about within a Web site than

Browser Keystroke Shortcuts	
Back	<Ctrl> <ï¿½>
Forward	<Ctrl> <ï¿½>
Stop	<Esc>
Reload	<Ctrl><r>
Find	<Ctrl><f>
Find Again	<Ctrl><g>
Open	<Ctrl><o>
History	<Ctrl><h>
View Source	<Ctrl><u>

always hunting for the mouse, positioning the cursor over the proper button, and clicking.

The Stop button also has a keyboard shortcut: the Escape key. Simply press <Esc> to stop the remainder of the page from loading.

If a page is stopped too soon, does not load properly, or contains frequently updated information, the Reload button is an essential tool. It even rates two keyboard shortcuts. A simple reload is available with <Ctrl><r>. However, depending on the browser's settings, this may just reload the same page from the cache. To force the browser to go back out to the remote server and reload the page from there, hold down <shift> and click the reload button. This is known as a "super reload."

Page Information	<Ctrl><i>
Save	<Ctrl><s>
Mail	<Ctrl><m>
Print	<Ctrl><p>
Close	<Ctrl><w>
Quit	<Ctrl><q>
Copy	<Ctrl><c>
Paste	<Ctrl><v>
Select All	<Ctrl><a>

For navigation within a page, using the mouse to move the scroll bars is only one way of moving around. The arrows and the <Page Down> and <Page Up> keys can make quick work of intrapage navigation. If these do not seem to work, be sure to either click somewhere on the page or use the <Tab> key to move onto the page from the toolbars.

For long pages, the ability to search a page for a specific word is available with the Find button. This button disappears from the toolbar with Netscape 4, but the keyboard shortcut of <Ctrl><f> still remains. Pressing <Ctrl><f> brings up the search box. The box contains a Find Again button, but once the box is closed, <Ctrl><g> will jump to the next occurrence of the term within the page without even displaying the Find box.

Two keystroke options are available for jumping to a new page. <Ctrl><o> brings up the Open box for entering a new URL. Alternatively, and with a bit more work, repeatedly pressing the <Tab> key will eventually bring the cursor to the location box at the top of the screen. Once there, enter a new URL. In Netscape 3, <Ctrl><u> must be used instead of <Ctrl><o>. For pages previously visited, pressing <Ctrl><h> brings up the history folder, and specific pages can be chosen from that list.

FORM FILLING

Multipart forms can be quite tedious to fill out if you have to click on each box before entering data. Fortunately, there are easy keyboard shortcuts to use when filling out a form. The <Tab> key is the easiest and most essential. To move from one data entry box on a form to the next, simply press the <Tab> key. <Tab> again to get to the next. <Shift><Tab> moves the cursor back to the previous box.

What about forms with check boxes and radio buttons? All of these can be managed as well. Continue to use the <Tab> key to move to the buttons or select boxes. Then use the space bar to select or deselect specific options. <Tab> into drop-down boxes and use the arrow keys to select an item. Even the Submit button can be reached with the <Tab> key and then "clicked" by pressing the space bar, unless it is a graphic, which may require the mouse.

The <Tab> key can eventually take you out of the form. It also moves from hyperlink to hyperlink on a Web page and even to the location box, as mentioned earlier. Thus, the <Tab> key can be used for filling out forms as well as navigating within a Web page. When using <Tab> to move to a specific link, pressing the <Enter> key will work the same as clicking on the link and will open the new page.

INFORMATION AND OTHER SHORTCUTS

Other keystroke combinations provide more detailed information about Web pages. With Netscape 4, a new shortcut was introduced to view the HTML source code for a page: <Ctrl><u>. Remember this is the same key combination that brought up the Open URL box in Netscape 3. This shortcut is most useful for Web developers

who frequently want to check out the HTML tricks used at other sites. It is also helpful when some of the text fails to display on the screen. It may become visible in the source code.

A similar command is the Page Information shortcut. <Ctrl><i> brings up information about the page currently being displayed, including the date it was last modified, page structure, file size, URL, security, and other miscellaneous information.

For the keyboard-oriented, there are plenty of other shortcuts, including many standard ones. Use <Ctrl><s> to save a page as a local file. <Ctrl><m> can be used to email a page. <Ctrl><w> closes the current, open window, whether it is a browser window, a bookmark window, or the mailer. <Ctrl><q>, for quit, will close down all the windows and exit the program. The dangerous aspect of <Ctrl><q> is its proximity to other keyboard shortcuts. A slip of the finger when aiming for a w, a, or s can easily result in killing the whole program if it ends up on q.

In terms of selection and moving operations, standard Windows key combinations work quite well. <Ctrl><c> copies marked text to the clipboard. To Paste, <Ctrl><v> does the job. The less common <Ctrl><a>, Select All, marks the entire page. As in many other Windows applications, <Ctrl><p> for Print, brings up the Print Options box.

Knowing some of these keystroke shortcuts can be invaluable in an online presentation when the technology starts to fail. If the mouse pointer disappears on the projection unit, locks up, or responds slowly, using the keyboard may be the only option. Even when all the hardware is working properly, you may find that a few of these keyboard shortcuts become favorite additions to your personal arsenal of Web surfing tricks.

BOOKMARK SHORTCUTS

Bookmarks (or Favorites as Internet Explorer names them) are an important tool in quick navigation to frequently visited sites. While the keyboard shortcut of <Ctrl><b> is a quick way to bring up the Edit Bookmark window, there are plenty of other non-keyboard shortcuts introduced in the fourth version of Netscape. The Personal Toolbar folder provides a user-customizable toolbar for very quick access to the most frequently used bookmarks. This feature may not be obvious, especially to those who installed version 4 over a previous version with a pre-existing bookmark list. On a new installation, the Personal Toolbar folder is the top folder in the bookmark file and contains a number of Netscape-chosen bookmarks. The individual bookmarks and sub-folders in this Personal Toolbar folder then show up as the third toolbar at the top of the browser. In Internet Explorer, a similar customizable toolbar is labeled Links.

The personalized toolbar can be ... used on public Internet computers to provide easy access to selected sites.

Both toolbars can contain any links you choose-and you can delete the prepackaged ones. The only limitation is the space available on the bar, but since folders can be placed there as well, a good number of bookmarks can be easily reached from the toolbar, as seen in the nearby screen. In Netscape, from the Edit Bookmarks menu, any folder can be designated as the Personal Toolbar folder. Just select the desired folder and choose View/Set as Toolbar Folder or right-click the mouse and choose Set as Toolbar Folder. This is especially useful if you are dealing with a preexisting set of bookmarks that has no Personal Toolbar folder.

Did you ever wonder what that funny little icon was to the left of the URL in the location box? It is supposed to look like a page with a green bookmark on top. (Internet Explorer has a functionally similar icon in the same place, but it has a blue "e" floating above a page.) Its purpose is that once you find a page to bookmark, just drag the icon to the section of your bookmark list where you want it to appear. It can also be dragged directly onto the Personal Toolbar or into a folder on the Personal Toolbar. If you are still using the Add Bookmark feature that simply puts the bookmark at the end of the list, try dragging the icon to a more appropriate place in your bookmark organization.

This dragging principle works on more than just the icon to the left of the URL. Most links on a Web page can also be dragged into a specific section of the bookmark list, onto the customizable toolbar, or onto the desktop in

Windows 95.

DATA ENTRY SHORTCUTS

Version 4 of the Web browsers introduced automatic completion. With automatic completion, after a URL such as http://www.name.edu/library/catalog.html has been entered into the Location box, the next time something similar is keystroked, the site, and then the full URL may appear. For example, entering just www.na would bring up http://www.name.edu/. Start adding the URL after the host name and http://www.name.edu/ library/ or http://www.name.edu/ library/catalog.html will appear.

This feature is often an effective way to find partially-remembered URLs or to quickly enter a long one you've used recently. While the History list can also provide the same assistance, it is not always as convenient. On the negative side, when many pages have been visited on a site, the browser may complete a URL for a different page. If you are not watching carefully, you can end up at the wrong location. Note that the automatically completed portion is also automatically selected, so if the program completes a different URL, just keep on entering the correct one, delete the incorrect addition with the <Delete> key, or edit it to force it to point to the correct location.

Another data entry shortcut may not always save time. With version 3 of the browsers it was possible to enter a company name and the browser would not only add the http:// but the www. and the .com as well. While this trick still works, it often results in a longer time to load the page, since the browser first checks just the name against the Domain Name server and then tries again with the added www. and .com. It is usually more efficient to simply enter `www.companyname.com` than just using `companyname.`

Most of the shortcuts described here do not save a great deal of time. They will not make a multimegabyte file download faster or speed the transfer of a graphics-intensive Web page. On the other hand, when you are trying to drill quickly through multiple layers of a site or you're looking for a previously seen page, these suggestions can decrease the time spent on basic navigation, form entry, and bookmarking.

When you're helping a user, teaching a hands-on class, or giving an online presentation, many of these tricks can be invaluable in getting quickly to the appropriate screen. The personalized toolbar can be an important navigation tool for the individual searcher and can be equally well used on public Internet computers, to provide easy access to selected sites. While few people will want to use all these shortcuts, try some of them to see which will be most useful in your particular work environment. And if you know of other useful Web navigation shortcuts, drop me a note.

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