

Launching programs and actions with Gnome Do

CENTRAL LAUNCHER

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Information at your fingertips with actions to match – Gnome Do merges search engine and application launcher functionality to create a new and convenient tool. **BY CHRISTOPH LANGNER**

Documents, applications, messages, and bookmarks tend to spread all over a system. Gnome Do [1] gives users a new launcher for Gnome and other desktops that not only finds information but also triggers actions on the basis of the results.

The flexible Gnome Do [1] application launcher is similar to the Quicksilver [2] launch tool for Mac OS X. Users press a keyboard shortcut to pop up a window in which they enter the name of the program they need.

Because Gnome Do auto-completes the entry, entering just part of the name is sufficient (Figure 1). For example, typing *text* will launch your text editor. Gnome Do bases its auto-complete suggestions on start menu entries.

Gnome Do can do more than just launch programs – it will find music in Rhythmbox (see Figure 2), Amarok, or Banshee databases or contacts in Evolution, Gmail, or the Pidgin instant messenger. If you like, you can tell Gnome Do to set up a chat session with the con-

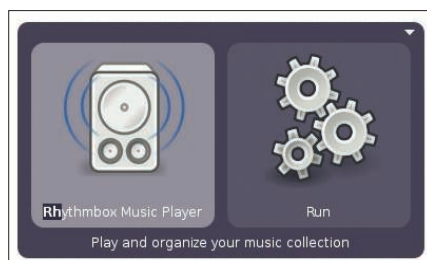


Figure 1: Gnome Do auto-completes the entry. (Screenshots courtesy of David Siegel)

tact in Pidgin. The tool also supports file operations and much more. Various plugins give users a convenient approach to extending functionality.

Installation

Gnome Do is easy to install. The authors offer binary packages for popular distributions – from Arch to Ubuntu – along with source code packages and HOWTOs [3]. Recent distributions, such as Ubuntu 8.04 “Hardy Heron,” include Gnome Do out of the box.

Simply run the package manager and install the *gnome-do*, *gnome-do-plugin-*

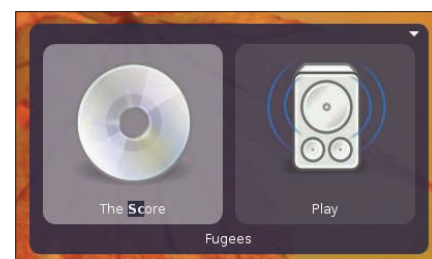


Figure 2: Gnome Do even finds your music.

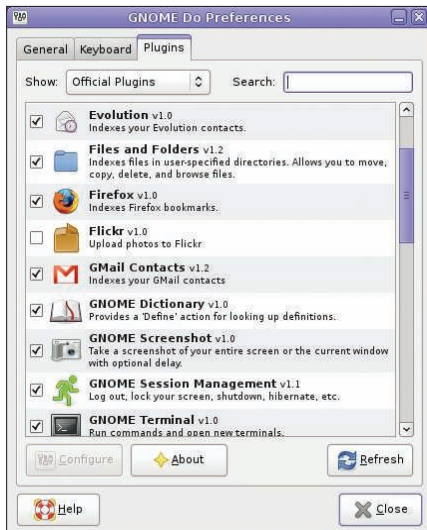


Figure 3: Plugins extend Gnome Do's functionality.

rhythmbox, and *gnome-do-plugins* packages.

After you finish the install, *Applications | Tools | GNOME Do* takes you to a program launcher. First you will see the application window.

If you click on the desktop or perform some other action, Gnome Do disappears into the background.

To move the tool to the foreground, just press a keyboard shortcut, such as Windows + Spacebar.

Session

To launch Gnome Do in the background, you can add the program to your current Gnome session with the session management feature.

To add Gnome Do, press *System | Settings | Sessions* and then press *Add*. Entering *gnome-do --quiet* tells the program to launch in the background.

Gnome Do does not use a traditional application window. Assuming your window manager supports compositing, Gnome Do does without a frame and the window is transparent. Window managers with this ability include Compiz or Metacity, which Gnome 2.2 uses.

To enable compositing, enter *gconftool-2 -s --type bool /apps/metacity/general/compositing_manager true*. On Ubuntu, this just means

that Compiz fails to launch. If you want to use Compiz, you need to disable Metacity compositing by replacing *true* in the command with *false*.

The main window has three sections, two of which are visible upon launching the tool. When you enter a search key, an action to match the search automatically appears in the second section. For example, if you enter *text*, Gnome Do automatically selects *Run* to execute a program. If you then confirm the action by pressing Enter, the Gnome text editor launches.

The fact that Gnome Do uses the names in the start menu to identify applications does cause some confusion. The Gnome text editor binary is called *gedit*. If you enter the name in Gnome Do, the program fails to find a match. To be on the safe side, stick to the names in the application menus.

If you enter the name of a file or directory in your home directory and press Tab to move to the action area, you can then press the Down arrow key to select other actions, such as moving or copying. After selecting an action, a third section appears and you can choose a target for the action.

These controls are typical of Gnome Do: You start by typing a search key and then press Tab to move on to the next section, where you press the Down arrow key to select an action.

Plugins

Plugin improvements is the big news in the Gnome Do 0.5 release [4]. Each plugin has a library with a file extension

of *.dll*, which is fairly surprising for Linux users. Simply drop the plugin into the *.local/share/gnome-do/plugins* directory below your home directory and re-launch the approach to allow Gnome Do to detect the plugin. This gives users a simple approach to adding a variety of functions.

Gnome Do 0.5 introduced a new preferences window and plugin manager (Figure 3), which helps you browse, download, install, and enable or disable plugins from within the tool. Additional plugin information is available on a wiki page, and you can do plugin-specific configuration.

Gnome Do will search Firefox or Epiphany bookmarks and open links in your browser, and it will also search for music in your Rhythmbox, Amarok, or Banshee database and add this to a playlist (see Figure 4). Also, you can add Pidgin or Evolution contacts to the launcher.

Community Contributions

New plugins are released almost daily. Gnome Do 0.5 provides a community plugin category with plugins from a variety of contributors. New community contributions include Skype, Twitter, Flickr, and Google Calendar plugins, as well as a "WindowManager" plugin that lets you arrange windows on your desktop. Developers who enjoy working with Mono can also refer to the detailed documentation to help them implement their own ideas [5]. ■

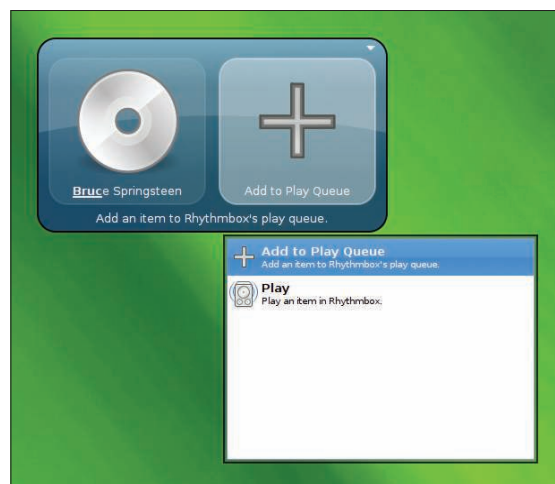


Figure 4: Gnome Do searches the Rhythmbox music database for artists and albums and offers actions relevant to the current context.

INFO

- [1] Gnome Do: <http://do.davebsd.com/>
- [2] Quicksilver: http://docs.blacktree.com/quicksilver/what_is_quicksilver
- [3] Installation: <https://wiki.ubuntu.com/GnomeDo/Installation>
- [4] Gnome Do plugins: <https://wiki.ubuntu.com/GnomeDo/Plugins>
- [5] Developing plugins: <https://wiki.ubuntu.com/GnomeDo/BuildingPlugins>

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