

Your Favourite Browser Extensions

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For me, my web browser is easily my most frequently and most extensively used application across the various computers I operate. For the last few years I've been using Mozilla Firefox as my primary web browser, as it was much less taxing on system resources than Google Chrome was, which I had used as my main web browser ever since it was first released back in 2008. In the last couple of months I've decided to give Microsoft Edge a go as my main web browser. It's now based on Chromium (the same underlying open source project as Google Chrome), and it feels much lighter on system resources than its sibling. It's also now cross platform with versions for Windows and Mac OS, and even a version for Linux in the works. And unlike the classic (or legacy) version of Edge, it's very easy to switch away from using Bing as the search engine.

So with this switch to Edge, I decided to revisit the browser extensions I use. Another good thing about Edge is that not only can you install the extensions found in the official Microsoft collection, but you can also visit the Chrome Web Store and install any other extensions you want from there. In reality I suspect there is very little difference between what you can get from Microsoft and what you can get from Google, but it's always good to have options.

With all this in mind, I decided to consult our own tremendously knowledgeable and helpful members on Yammer to see what extensions they used, in case there were any good ones that I was missing. I had contributions from (in order of posting) Malcolm Miles, Denis Street, Greg Eden, Dennis Parsons, Russell Cooper, Kevin Martin, Jan Whitaker, Peter Voylay, Roger Brown, John Nelson, Merv Smith and Peter Allen (Thank you all for your contributions).

Based on these responses, your favourite browser extensions can be broken down into the categories below. And unless specifically noted, these extensions are available for Chrome, Edge and Firefox.

Password Managers

Life is a constant battle to remember passwords these days. So password managers were devised to make it much easier for us. Instead of remembering 100 different passwords, you simply have to remember one very strong password and let the password manager do the rest. Another reason to use a password manager is that you can protect all your logins with long and very random passwords that you don't have to remember, and simply focus on remembering the one 'master password' that unlocks them all.

I've personally used **Lastpass** for many years, and find that to be an excellent program that has Android and iOS apps while you're on the go, as well as browser extensions for all the common browsers. Russell Cooper seconded my choice of Lastpass. Malcolm Miles suggested **1Password**. Depending on your likes and needs, either could suit. If you haven't used a password manager before, try them both and see which one you like best.

Writing Tools

Using a web browser can involve a lot of writing. You might send emails, you might write blog posts, you might write social media posts, you might edit and write for a computer magazine. Everyone wants their writing to be free from spelling mistakes, free from grammatical errors and to sound as fluent as possible. Web browsers do a good job of picking up spelling mistakes, but don't have inbuilt tools for those other things. Thankfully there are now a number of tools you can use to help you with this. One is **Grammarly**, the other is **Microsoft Editor** (available for Chrome and Edge only). I've been using Grammarly for a little while now, Malcolm Miles alerted me to Microsoft Editor.

Both programs are free for the basics which includes spelling and basic grammar, while they both require subscriptions for the more advanced features. Microsoft Editor is actually cheaper and comes as part of a Microsoft 365 Personal or Family subscription (i.e. with full versions of the desktop Office programs) so is actually much better value if you are looking for the advanced features.

Ad Blockers

Using the world wide web unfettered means exposure to a lot advertising. Websites would love you to help them make money from their content by looking at ads and clicking on ads. Thankfully someone clever devised a browser extension called **AdBlock Plus** which I'd been using for many years to filter out the endless commercialism. A few members on Yammer (Dennis Parsons, Merv Smith and Peter Allen) alerted me to **uBlock Origin** which is a much more lightweight blocker than the original above. I've since switched over and do notice the difference.

Tab Management

Using a web browser means having numerous tabs open at any one time. There are various extensions that can be used to better manage these tabs.

One that I particularly like is **Tabs Aside** (available for Chrome and Edge). It lets you save all the tabs you have open as a group that is then saved and closed. So you can recall the group at a later stage to resume working on that particular task, and in the meantime start with a fresh slate to move onto something else.

Jan Whitaker also suggested **FoxyTabs** (available for Firefox, hence the name) which provides much more granular management of your tabs than Firefox does, with options such as duplicating a tab, merging windows back into tabs, and saving a tab as a PDF.

Privacy

Of course the other major consideration on the Internet is privacy. Not only are websites trying to serve advertising to you, they're also trying to learn more about you so that they can better market to you. There are many extensions that can significantly limit the extent to which this takes place. One good one (as suggested by Greg Eden) is **Privacy Badger**, which completely blocks the most insidious trackers and restricts the more benign ones, as well as giving you options to customise the experience. Another good one if you are a Facebook user and specifically use Firefox is **Facebook Container** which specifically prevents Facebook from tracking you outside of Facebook.

Other Extensions

Our knowledgeable and helpful members on Yammer also suggested the following other extensions:

- **Pocket** for saving articles for reading at a later time
- **Evernote Web Clipper** which is very handy for research and is used in conjunction with Evernote note taking software - it lets you clip web information to Evernote notebooks
- **Google Translate** - great for translating content into other languages
- **Gmail Mod** - for playing videos from within Gmail
- **Australian English Dictionary** (for Firefox) - if you like a u in the word colour and ise on the end of words rather than ize, you'll love this extension
- **Printfriendly & PDF** - removes ads and cleans up web content to make it print friendly
- **Video Downloader Professional** (for Chrome and Edge)/**Video DownloadHelper** (for Chrome and Edge)/**Youtube-dlForExtension** (for Firefox)/**Easy Youtube Video Downloader Express** (for Firefox) - all extensions for downloading any non copyrighted videos your family or friends might have shared on YouTube that you want to keep

So there you have it. You truly can set your web browser up to do almost anything (within reason) and these extension suggestions should suit most workflows. Just remember that each extension is a mini application, so the more you load up, the more system resources your browser will consume and with too many extensions it will soon become slow and frustrating to use. So only install the extensions you really think you're going to use, and my rule is that if I haven't used one for a month I uninstall it.