

Launching programs and actions with Gnome Do

# CENTRAL LAUNCHER

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**

**D**ocuments, 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 want, 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 because Ubuntu includes all the necessary packages [3]. Simply run *Applications | Add/Remove...* and enter *gnome-do* into the *Search* box. Then mark the resulting entry *GNOME Do* for installation and click on *Apply Changes*.

After you finish the install, *Applications | Accessories | GNOME Do* takes



**Figure 2: Gnome Do even finds your music.**



**Figure 3: Plugins extend Gnome Do's functionality.**

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, you just press its configured keyboard shortcut – by default, that's Windows + Spacebar.

## Session

After installation, Ubuntu automatically launches Gnome Do in the background at every start of the desktop. With the session management feature, you can undo and later reactivate this behavior if you want.

To remove Gnome Do from the list of programs that are started automatically, press *System | Preferences | Startup Applications* and search for the *GNOME Do* entry. Now you want to deactivate the checkbox next to it and click on *Close*. In the same way, you can later configure the desktop to run Gnome Do at startup again.

Gnome Do does not use a traditional application window. Assuming you have desktop effects enabled, Gnome Do does without a frame and the window is transparent.

To enable the desktop effects, click on the *Appearance* entry in the *System | Preferences* menu. Now, in

the *Visual Effects* tab, you can choose *Normal* or *Extra*.

## Triple Functionality

The Gnome Do main window has three sections, two of which are visible on 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.

Because Gnome Do uses the names in the start menu to identify applications, it can 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

The recent Plugin improvements have made Gnome Do a flexibly extendable tool [4]. Each plugin has a library with a

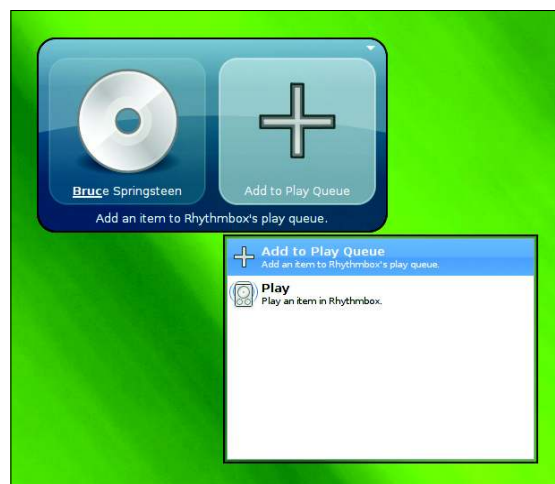
file extension of *.dll*, which is fairly surprising for Linux users. Simply drop the plugin into the *.local/share/gnome-do/plugins* directory below your home directory and relaunch the program to allow Gnome Do to detect the plugin. This gives users a simple approach to adding a variety of functions.

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 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 the WindowManager plugin that lets you arrange windows on your desktop. Developers who enjoy working with Mono can also refer to the detailed documentation to 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](http://docs.blacktree.com/quicksilver/what_is_quicksilver)
- [3] Installation: [http://do.davebsd.com/wiki/index.php?title=Installing\\_Do](http://do.davebsd.com/wiki/index.php?title=Installing_Do)
- [4] Gnome Do plugins: <http://do.davebsd.com/wiki/index.php?title=Category:Plugins>
- [5] Developing plugins: [http://do.davebsd.com/wiki/index.php?title=Getting\\_started\\_with\\_writing\\_plugins](http://do.davebsd.com/wiki/index.php?title=Getting_started_with_writing_plugins)

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