June 2008

Innovations Affecting Us -- What's Greasemonkey, and Do I Want it in the Library?

Kristen DeVoe

College of Charleston, devoek@cofc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>

Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

DeVoe, Kristen (2008) "Innovations Affecting Us -- What's Greasemonkey, and Do I Want it in the Library?," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 20: Iss. 3, Article 33.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.2425>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

Innovations Affecting Us — What's Greasemonkey, and Do I Want it in the Library?

Column Editor: **Kristen DeVoe** (Electronic Resources Librarian, College of Charleston) <devoek@cofc.edu>

The **W3School's** site on Web browser statistics indicates that, while **Internet Explorer** is still the most commonly used browser (across 3 versions), **Firefox** is quickly becoming a popular choice for Internet users (http://www.w3schools.com/browsers/browsers_stats.asp). **Firefox** is a highly customizable browser with the addition of plug-ins and ads-ons (<https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/>) to personalize the Web browsing experience. One way that **Firefox** can be customized to integrate with library systems and services is through the use of **Greasemonkey** (<https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/748>) scripts. In this issue's "Innovations Affecting Us" column, I will explain what a **Greasemonkey** script is and demonstrate various ways that libraries can use these scripts, which are **Firefox** extensions, to promote library systems, services, and materials.

In simple terms, **Greasemonkey** is a **Firefox** extension that allows Web users to install small scripts that make "on-the-fly" changes to Web pages that they visit. **Greasemonkey** can be used to make a Website more readable or usable, it can add new functionality to old sites, and it can also be used to fix bugs that exist on the site that the site maintainer has not corrected. **Greasemonkey** scripts can alter pages to work better with assistive technologies and they can retrieve data from other Websites to make two sites more interconnected. **Greasemonkey** however, is not actually making the changes. It's simply a browser extension that allows the user scripts to run on Web pages. Once **Greasemonkey** is installed a user won't even notice a change in their browsing until he or she begins to install what are called "user scripts."

A user script is just some **JavaScript** code, with some additional information that tells **Greasemonkey** where and when it should be run. Each user script can target a specific page, a specific site, or a group of sites. A user script can do anything you can do in **JavaScript**. In fact, it can do even more than that, because **Greasemonkey** provides special functions that are only available to user scripts. There is a **Greasemonkey** script repository (<http://dunck.us/collab/GreaseMonkeyUserScripts>) that contains hundreds of user scripts that people have written to scratch their own personal itches. Once you write your own user script, you can add it to the repository if you think others might find it useful. Or you can keep it to yourself; content in the knowledge that you've made your own browsing experience is a little better. There is also a **Greasemonkey** mailing list (<http://greasemonkey.mozdev.org/list.html>), where users can ask questions, announce user scripts, and discuss ideas for new features.

Libraries have been taking advantage of **Greasemonkey** user script capabilities for quite some time in an attempt to reach the patrons in places other than the library. There are **Greasemonkey** user scripts that integrate library holdings information with Websites such as **Amazon.com** and **Google Book Search**, there are also scripts that are meant to improve the usability of pages that library patrons may wish to use. What follows is a brief description of some user scripts that different libraries have developed for **Greasemonkey**.

Amazon.com LibraryLookup

Many libraries are using **Greasemonkey** to make use of user scripts that allow patrons to check the library catalog from an **Amazon.com** page for an individual title. Examples of libraries using this type of user script are **MIT** (<http://libraries.mit.edu/help/lookup.html>), **Coastal Carolina University** (<http://www.coastal.edu/library/plugin.htm>), **Boulder County Public Library**, and many more. To view a more complete list of libraries using **Greasemonkey** scripts with **Amazon.com** visit <http://user-scripts.org/tags/library>.

LOC Photo Exhibit Greasemonkey Script

The **Library of Congress** has a large online photo gallery called "America from the Great Depression to World War II: Color Photographs from the FSA-OWI, 1939-1945" (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fsachtml/fsacsubindex1.html>) which, unfortunately, made use of seemingly primitive Web development and was difficult to use. Users who were accustomed to viewing images on Web 2.0 photo sharing sites such as **Flickr**

were put off by the use of old Web technologies to display the **LOC** photos. In response to such laments, one programmer developed a **Greasemonkey** user script specifically to fix the problems with the page. The script, called **americanmemoryfixer.user.js**, does the following for the photo gallery :

- Changes the colour scheme to black-on-white, and the typeface to Verdana.
- Removes all table borders.
- Adds headings to some pages, and fixes various title tags.
- Sets the default gallery view to be a set of thumbnails, rather than a list of names.
- Displays a large image (as opposed to a thumbnail) when you view a photograph.

Email a Librarian

One library used a **Greasemonkey** user script to handle the "not found" results of a catalog search. The script was created in an attempt to prevent patrons from giving up the search when they reached a "dead end." The **Greasemonkey** script (<http://www.chelmsfordlibrary.org/reference/test/mvlnoresults.user.js>) embeds an "email a librarian" form and a link to search the statewide catalog for the item. For libraries that use **IM (Instant Messaging)**, a similar form could be constructed. Of course, the user has to add the script themselves to their browser, but once they do many opportunities for help become available without having to go to the reference desk!

IMDB and Netflix Greasemonkey Script

DVDs are popular items at both public and some academic libraries. Making use of **Greasemonkey**, libraries like **Hennepin County Public Library** in Ann Arbor have created user scripts that allow people to search the library catalog for titles they are viewing in either the **IMDB (Internet Movie Database)** or on **Netflix**. Given the popularity of both of these sites, this user script is a great way to promote the library's DVD collections.

Will they Use It?

New technologies for the library are exciting, but one obstacle to success can be effectively promoting a service or tool. These tools should be of assistance and shouldn't be too much of a burden on the user making it more trouble than its worth. Through effective promotion using the library Website, instruction courses, word of mouth, email announcements, and more, librarians can inform patrons about the existence of the **Greasemonkey** extension and let them know that the library is involved. More and more libraries are making an effort to be where the users are rather than waiting for the users to come to them, and **Greasemonkey** user scripts are an easy way to do so. 🐵

Future Dates for Charleston Conferences

Preconferences and Vendor Showcase Main Conference

2008 Conference	5 November	6-8 November
2009 Conference	4 November	5-7 November
2010 Conference	3 November	4-6 November