BasKet Tutorial

How to use a nifty tool called BasKet to organize all the data you normally find impossible to track down.

RYAN PAUL

Organization is no trivial task. How does one keep track of the myriad figures, facts and files that seem to fill our digital lives? As a journalist, I tend to accumulate information. With more than a thousand Web pages in my browser bookmarks, I can almost never find what I need. I often drop quotations and URLs in temporary files so I have them for future articles. Over time, the number of temporary files has become obscene, and I can no longer scrounge up the data I require in a timely manner.

A number of excellent, open-source data management utilities are available for Linux. Many of you are probably familiar with Tomboy, a handy note-taking application for GNOME. Tomboy simplifies information control, but its GNOME bias and awkward spatial interface make it a poor choice for KDE users. When I use KDE, I rely upon BasKet, a versatile data management tool with a great interface and lots of nifty features. If you need a better way to keep track of notes, images, URLs, files, folders and applications on your KDE desktop, BasKet is the tool for you.

ADDING CONTENT

BasKet enables users to deposit data snippets in individual containers, aptly called baskets. The application displays the contents of each basket in an associated tab within the interface. Users can drag or paste existing objects into the baskets or create new objects for direct insertion.

The first time you start BasKet, you will see a default, empty basket tab for clips and notes. Let's add an object and see what happens. Fire up Firefox and navigate to your favorite Web site. Click the icon that appears to the left of the URL, and drag it into the white space of the BasKet window. When you let go of the mouse, a link to the URL appears in the list. When you click that link, the page launches in your default browser.

Now, let's try to add some text from the page. Highlight a paragraph of text, then drag the highlighted content to the BasKet window. As you hover over the drop space, you will notice that a line appears inside the window. That line indicates where the object will appear in the list when the mouse button is released. You can use this feature to ensure that the new item is placed in the appropriate position within your list. Drag down and make sure that the line appears below the URL, and then let go of the mouse button to add the text to the bottom your list.

Now, let's use the KDE file manager to add a few extra items to our list. Launch Konqueror and navigate to an image file. Drag the file from Konqueror into the BasKet list. When you release the mouse button, BasKet presents you with a context menu that asks whether you want to Copy, Link or Move the file. If you select Copy or Move, BasKet copies or moves the file to its own internal
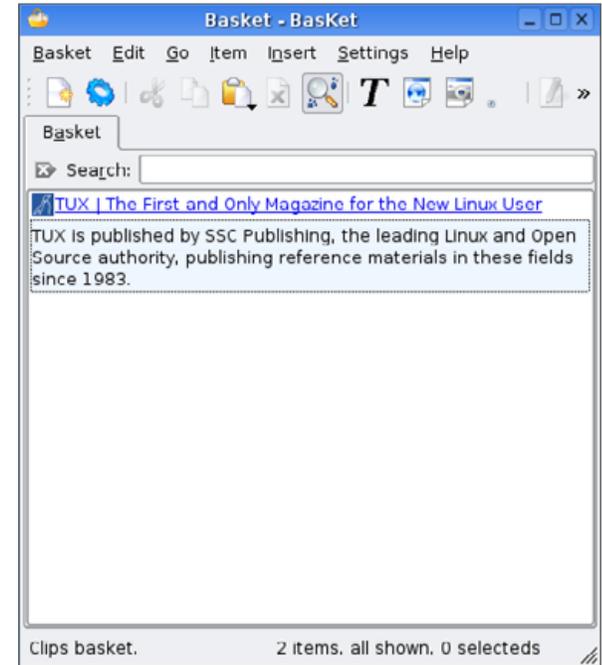

Figure 1. A Basket That Contains a URL and Some Page Text

data storage location and displays the image in the list. If you select Link, BasKet adds a link to the file's URI to the list, but it does not display the actual image. In this case, select Copy. You also can use the BasKet system tray icon to add items to the list. Drop a directory from Konqueror onto the BasKet tray icon, and select Link from the drop-down context menu. You should now see a link to the directory in your basket.

It is also possible to create new list items with the Insert menu. Select Import KMenu Launcher from the Insert menu to launch the application selection dialog. Use the dialog to select an
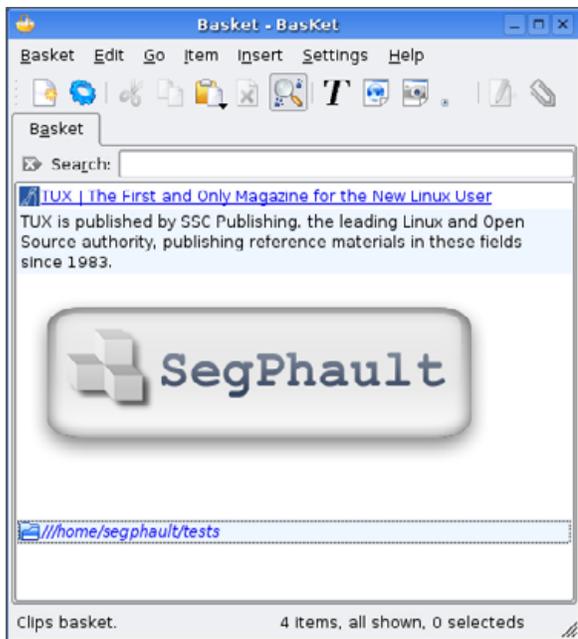
Figure 2. Adding an Image and a Directory Link to the Basket

Figure 3. Using the BasKet Tray Icon to Add a Directory Link

application that you use regularly, and then click OK to add an application launcher to your basket. You can experiment with other types of items available on the Insert menu to learn more about what they are and how they work.
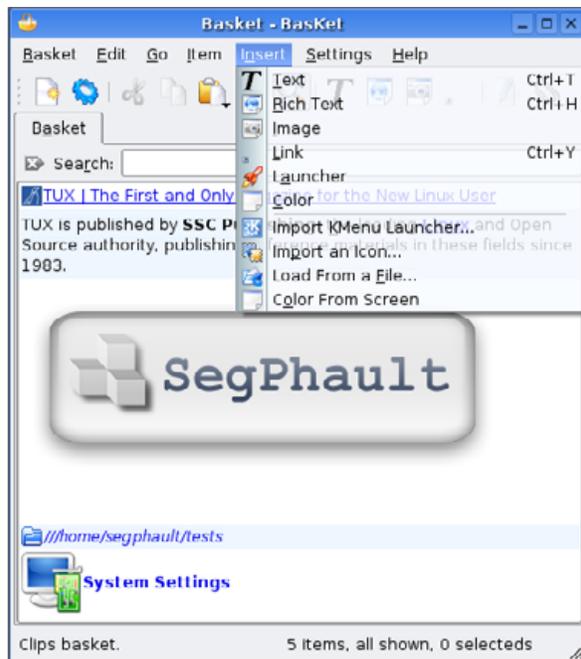

Figure 4. The Insert Menu

EDITING AND ANNOTATION

BasKet also facilitates editing and annotation. Let's change the text snippet we grabbed from the Web site. Right-click the text snippet and select Edit from the context menu. The formatting tool-bar appears above the basket tab, and the text becomes editable. Change some of the font colors and add some extra text to the end of the snip-pet. When you are done, click outside of the text snippet to leave Edit mode. The Edit behavior is slightly different for other kinds of content. If you right-click the URL link and select Edit from the context menu, BasKet launches the Link Item Properties dialog, which allows you to specify the URL, title and icon of the link.
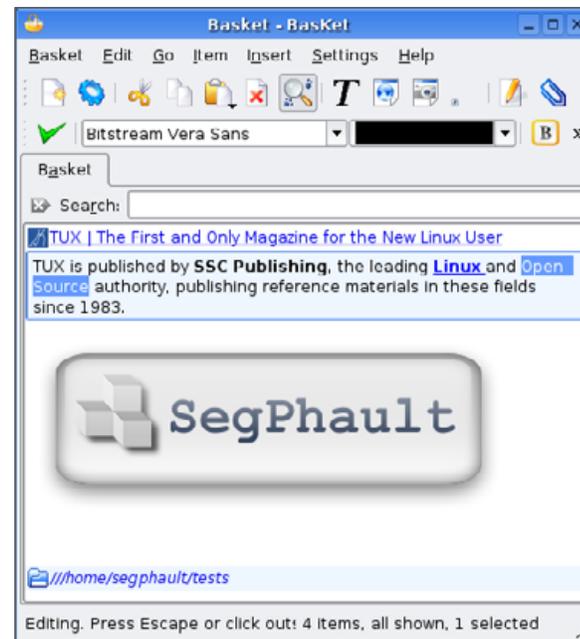

Figure 5. Editing a Text Snippet

Figure 6. The Link Item Properties Dialog

Now we will add an annotation. Right-click the text snippet and select Edit Meta-data from the context menu to launch the Meta-data dialog. Type a sentence or two into the Annotations text
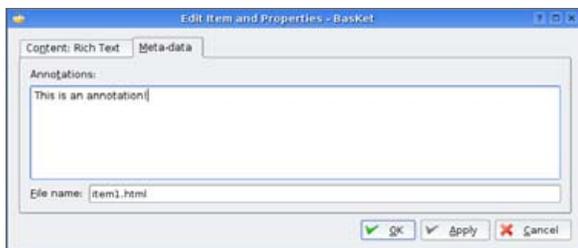
Figure 7. The Annotation Dialog

Figure 8. An Annotation Tooltip

box and click OK. Now when you hover the cursor over that list item, the annotation appears as a tooltip. You can use annotations to associate notes with various snippets to help you remember the significance of the content. Some list items come with annotations by default. The image that you

copied from Konqueror, for instance, contains the URI of the original file in its annotation.

CREATING A NEW BASKET

With only one tab, it won't be long before our list starts to look cluttered. Perhaps we should add extra baskets. Select New from the Basket menu to initiate the New Basket Wizard. The first step of the wizard requires that you indicate the type of basket you want to create. Your current default basket uses the Notes and Clips model, which is ideal for generic data storage. The Check List basket model associates a check box with each item in the list. The Stack model is just like the Notes and Clips model, but when a stack basket is active, the BasKet tray icon can be used to access the item most recently added to the list. The Clipboard Manager basket model is like a stack basket, but it intercepts and duplicates content sent to the clipboard via copy operations, so whenever you copy content in any KDE application, that content is also automatically added to your clip-board baskets. In the New Basket Wizard dialog, select the a basket model, and click Next. The sec-ond page of the wizard asks you specify a name for the new basket. Enter a name and then click the Finish button to complete the construction of a new basket. You can experiment with various basket models to learn more about how they work.

SETTINGS AND PROPERTIES

Select Properties from the basket menu to alter the settings of the active basket. The Basket Properties dialog window has four tabs that pro-vide an assortment of options for basket cus-tomization. The Properties tab allows you to alter the name, icon, alignment and background colors of the list, and it also lets you add check boxes. The Add Item Policy tab allows you to customize

Figure 9. The New Basket Wizard

Figure 10. Basket Properties

Figure 11. The BasKet Settings Dialog

Figure 12. BasKet's Advanced Options

the default placement of new list items, the Click Actions tab lets you customize the actions associated with clicking list items, and the Stack tab allows you to enable stack mode for the active basket and control various stack-related options.

Select Configure BasKet from the the Settings menu to launch the global settings dialog. The settings dialog allows you to customize the system tray, the BasKet window layout, the copying behavior, default list item appearance, external applications associated with list item behaviors and an assortment of interesting, nonstandard options that make BasKet more useful but less user-friendly.

SEARCH AND ORGANIZATION

When your baskets start to get full, it can become difficult to find specific items. With BasKet's integrated search functionality, your content never gets lost in the shuffle. If the BasKet search bar isn't visible, select Show Search Bar from the Edit menu to enable it. When you type some text inside the search box, BasKet filters your list and displays only the elements that contain the search phrase either in the content or in the annotations.
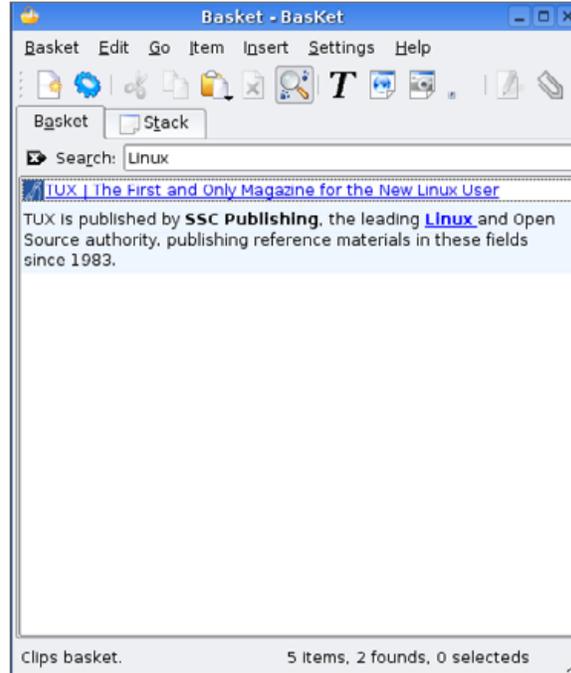
With proper organization, you can further

Figure 13. The Integrated Search Feature

improve your ability to find items at a glance. BasKet allows you to reposition list items and tabs. To move a list item, simply click it, hold down the mouse button and drag. Tabs can be moved the same way. Move around your basket tabs and list items to find a layout that is convenient and helpful for you.

CONCLUSION

Now you know how to use BasKet to manage your data. There are a few interesting features that you may want to explore on your own, particularly the options available in the Addictive Features section of the settings dialog. According to BasKet developer Bastien Laot, future versions will include visually appealing usability enhance-
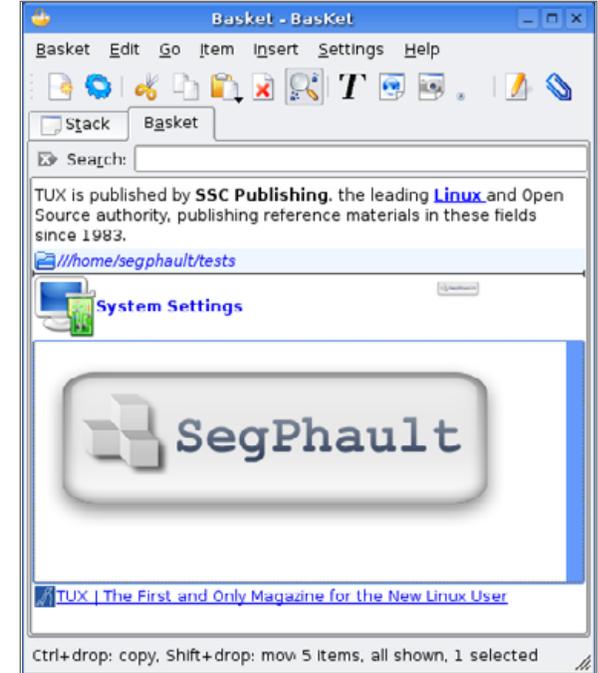

Figure 14. Moving Basket List Items

ments, much needed support for hierarchical basket management and better export functionality.

BasKet is distributed under the GPL license and can be acquired at no cost from the BasKet Web site. Binary packages are available for most major Linux distributions and FreeBSD. For downloads and more information, please see the BasKet Web site: http://basket.kde.org.∎

Ryan Paul is a systems administrator, a freelance writer and an ardent proponent of open-source technology. He welcomes your questions and comments. Ryan can be contacted at segphault@sbcglobal.net.