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Software Review: TinyTask

Tammy Ivins

University of North Carolina at Wilmington

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Software Review: TinyTask

Abstract

Tammy Ivins, Transfer Student Librarian at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington reviews the software, TinyTask.

Keywords

TinyTask, software review



Software Review: TinyTask

In my last column I discussed IFTTT, a web tool that can save you time by automating your devices and services connected to the internet. This column I take a look at a tool, TinyTask, that can save you time

Very often we find ourselves on our computers performing repetitious, boring acts such as entering data. The answer of course is to program a macro or script in order to automate those repetitious tasks for us. However most of us do not know how to program computer scripts, and while there are macro tools in most Windows programs, these are often unintuitive and complicated. Additionally, these macros are often limited to one program and cannot interact with other programs on the computer.

TinyTask is a tool that can automate repetitious acts without the need for program-specific macros or learning to write computer scripts and code. It functions by making a recording of you performing an action or series of actions on your computer and plays that recording back. Only instead of just a video recording, the computer actually performs the same actions again: the mouse, the keyboard, and your screen go through the same task you already performed. You can play the recording back once, indefinitely, or for a limited number of times.

Let me give you an example of how it can be used. At Francis Marion University we librarians submit our purchase requests using an online form. This form takes some time to complete, since it required both my personal information and information about the book I was

requesting. I found it was faster to create a simple list of the book information. Once I had a list of 15 to 20 titles, I would use TinyTask to automatically fill out the form and submit my requests for me.

Because TinyTask performs the same action repeatedly, you have to have your task organized ahead of time. For example my list of books had to be organized in structured fashion. First the book title, then the author, then the ISBN, and finally the associated subject:

The Art of Racing in the Rain
Garth Stein
978-0061537967
General Reading

Opening TinyTask, I recorded myself completing all the steps of submitting a book request: opening the online book submission form, systematically cutting and pasting over the book information from my list, filling in my personal information, and finally submitting the form. Once that recording was created all I had to do was set the TinyTask to repeat the action for the number of books I had to submit. From then on I could submit dozens of books with only a few clicks of my mouse.

One challenge with TinyTask is it is fairly 'dumb': is only as good as the organization of your information, or your recording of your action. For example: in the book submission form example above, if my title and ISBN were switched, then the information will end up in the wrong part of the form. If you were interested in a more robust automation system the makers of TinyTask have a piece of software available for purchase, however with

careful and thoughtful planning to set up your task, TinyTask can automate virtually any repetitious task you perform. Additionally, because this is freeware, there is little to no documentation, help documentation, or tech support. Therefore you should be prepared to spend some time experimenting with the program in order to master it.

Have to email every student listed an Excel spreadsheet? Not a problem. Just use TinyTask to automate the process. Now, if you know Excel macros, you know there are ways to program Excel to automatically send those emails, but the beauty of TinyTask is that you only have to learn a single program, which can be used for any program on your computer. As an extra bonus, TinyTask is completely portable.

This means that you can run it from a flash drive or use it on a computer without having to have the administrative access needed to install the program. For those of us that find ourselves working on multiple computers throughout the day, such as a reference desk computer, this can be a lifesaver.

I'd be neglectful if I didn't suggest that you also consider both vTask Studio's paid software options (including an even more robust computer automation tool), and their other free software. Out of their other free tools, I am particularly fond of their text expander TyperTask. Like TinyTask, TyperTask is completely portable (can be run from a flash drive) and has been a huge time saver for me when sending repetitious emails or handling fast-paced chat reference interactions.

TinyTask and other free tools can be downloaded from www.vtaskstudio.com/support.php. There is no cost, though if you use the tools often, you

might consider making a donation to support the developers.

Tammy Ivins, University of North Carolina at Wilmington
tammyivins@gmail.com