

Incubator for a Zettlekasten Tool

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Contents

1	What is Zettlekasten?	1
2	Why Zettlekasten makes sense?	2
3	What is Roam?	2
4	Is Roam a monopoly?	2
5	My problems with Roam and Zettlekasten Techniques	3
6	Will I build a tool?	4

ACFYT

A few weeks ago, I found Roam Research while searching for a Clojure Job. They had an opening listed on Angel Co and their primary stack: Clojure, ClojureScript, React and Datomic was same as my primary stack.

I applied for the job but they didn't respond, but on the flip side, I was introduced to the Zettlekasten Cult.

1 What is Zettlekasten?

It's a technique to link analog ideas using a special sequence. It was originally an analog system.

2 Why Zettlekasten makes sense?

I take notes, a lot of them and I have tried a ton of products. If I see a notes app, I download it.

Over the years, my goto editors have changed from Google Docs to Google Keep to Markdown to Notion to iCloud Notes. As of now, I'm trying to switch to org-mode, because Emacs is my primary text editor.

The problem with all notes app is that the information recorded exists in silos. If I wrote something about a meditation on anger today, I might not be able to recall it after two months, when I'm meditating on anger again.

Most note-taking apps are page based, however, our brain is a graph. Our brain links information but it's hard to link pages (that's perhaps the reason why we have only one search engine).

Zettlekasten is an analog technique to link notes, and Roam Research is one of the best digital implementations.

Linking ideas makes it easy to generate new ones.

3 What is Roam?

For me, it seems to be a text editor with two special features:

1. It lets you make bi-directional links to ideas
2. It lets you edit your notes like you'd edit an S-Expression, unlike a page

These added features lead to a personal knowledge graph. A Google for your brain if you'd call it.

4 Is Roam a monopoly?

No and yes. There are numerous Zettlekasten tools. But Roam seems to be the best in terms of implementation and ease of use. Other significant alternatives are:

Tool	Website	Open Source?	Format
Workflowy		No	Proprietary
TiddlyWiki		No	HTML
Athens		Yes	?
Neuron		Yes	Markdown
Org Roam		Yes	Org

This list is not comprehensive check this resource: <https://www.reddit.com/r/Zettelkasten/wiki/softwarecomparison>

5 My problems with Roam and Zettlekasten Techniques

- It needs a certain discipline to write notes in a way that they can become nodes in a knowledge graph
 - I have seen multiple people saying that, "I write while asking myself the question that in what context would I like to review this note in future"
- There is no way to import my existing juice
- What happens if Roam is no more? Will my knowledge graph stay stuck in a propretory format?
 - It's a problem similar to Word or PDF. Propreitory formats are not for me.
- It's hard if not impossible to take notes on Mobile
 - It's a fact that I don't have a computer all the time, that's probably the reason behind massive popularity of things like Google Keep
- Costs?
 - I pay next to 0 USD for my current setup. Cost was one of the reasons I stopped using Notion.
- Open source and free?
 - This is a tough question.
- Security and Privacy
 - This question is two fold, firstly should I have just one database for my personal and public life, because ideas and people overlap or
 - Should I have different databases for each, essentially bringing back the problems related to silos

- And if my life is in a graph, how do I ensure the security. Something like GPG will not be feasible because digital Zettlekasten essentially needs access to contents of a note.

6 Will I build a tool?

Maybe. I want to sit on this idea for a few months and wait for someone to build something. Athens and Org Roam look promising.