

Action! Project workbook

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Abstract

Action! is an attempt at creating a simple and fast task manager; in simplicity, the goal isn't to make it primitive, Action! isn't aimed at being a shopping list. Action! is a working tool, implementing something akin to the *cycle system*, as described in "Time Management" (T. A. Limoncelli, 2006, O'Reilly), helping quickly jot down specific next actions, promoting or demoting them throughout the day, with the ability to reschedule any action to another date. The cycle system is deceptively simple; it is easy enough to use and to put tasks into, while still demanding its practitioner thinks carefully through each action, apportioning it a priority and a possible time required for completion.

There is an endless number of task managers, why not use any of them? Many task managers are either far too simple to be of use in a working environment, or are endlessly open-ended, haranguing the user of the system to record an torrent of information of increasingly marginal utility, yet requiring time while providing the illusion of qualitative, useful work. In this spectrum, Action! will only ever require a limited amount of information, while eventually permitting customisably more details to be recorded, even though these are either only necessary at the project planning and management level, or in a support role. In both cases, it is arguable that the bulk of detail belongs firmly in the project management or ticketing system, where a task manager's role is to record and remind.

On the speed front, quite apart from the sheer amount of detail, many popular task managers are very slow to use. Despite recording actually very little information, they are slow to start, and take time to record an action and to be ready for the entry of the next action. Further, they are either only available as an installable desktop program, or mobile or web application. This often makes it non-trivial to open the system just to record an action, placing a significant cognitive burden on the user, who often may simply choose not to record an action but simply remember it. Obviously, no computer-based system can ever be completely spontaneous—paper is the ultimate best choice for spontaneity—but there are levels of usability. My aim here is to design as close to instantaneous

system as possible, primarily providing fast usage from the command-line interface (CLI). This in no way prevents multiple interfaces such as a fast, installable desktop or mobile application, or a web-based one.

Finally, Action! is open; all data files are plain-text files which can be opened on any system in existence, read and manipulated by a user as necessary, so that there is no proprietary hold over the stored data. All data will be recorded, in an append-only fashion, forever providing a log of all activities undertaken.

1 Windows

In Unix-derived systems, it is easy to use `lpd/lpr` to print a file directly from the command line. That feature exists in Windows too, but it's not activated by default. To use it, activate it the following way:

1. Use keyboard shortcut `Win+x`
2. Select 'Apps and features'
3. At the bottom of the list of installed programs, go to 'Programs and Features'
4. Click on 'Turn Windows features on or off'
5. Expand the 'Print and Document Services' tree
6. Tick both 'LPD Print Service' and 'LPR Port Monitor'
7. Click 'Ok' and wait for the components to install