

Trailing bookmarks for retrieval and viewing systems

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Problem description

When investigating a topic, a researcher can be confronted with a large number of potentially relevant sources. Gaining an overview may require partial reading of multiple sources to determine their suitability and returning to some of them at a later time. With current viewing systems, this requires placing a bookmark on each resource of interest, and moving the bookmark to the new reading position every time it is consulted. This manual process is unnecessarily cumbersome and, by discouraging bookmarking, can lead to ignoring sources whose topicality is not immediately apparent.

Proposed method

This method augments conventional bookmarking in several ways:

1. Bookmarks are updated automatically when a resource is consulted and the location in the resource changes, by moving them to the latest location.
2. Resources reached via references are bookmarked automatically when they are first consulted, unless and until the user actively discards them.
3. A list of search results is treated as any other resource. This may require caching those results if a search by the same criteria cannot be expected to yield the same results at a later time.

This allows users to continue where they left off after interruptions and retrace their steps when different aspects of the topic become relevant.

Points 1. and 2. can be achieved by executing the following algorithm whenever the viewed location changes:

```
If new position is in the same resource:  
    Update bookmark position for this resource  
Else:  
    If a bookmark for the new resource exists:  
        Go to the bookmarked location  
    Else:  
        Create a bookmark for the new resource with initial location
```

Accessing a bookmarked resource works as for conventional bookmarks, but with the last position within the resource being restored. Discarding an automatically created bookmark works as deleting a conventional bookmark, though user interface design should reflect that this operation will now be used more frequently.

Domains of application

The method is applicable to all systems or devices that allow retrieval and display or other presentation of resources that are intended to or can be consulted sequentially. This includes but is not limited to web browsers, document viewers, electronic book readers, database access systems when used to store free-form content, library or literature research software or automated services. The resources in question may be documents in any format, written or spoken text, audio, video or numerical data accessible by an appropriately qualified person. The references in item 2. of the previous section may be explicit hyperlinks or textual references as well as references inferred by appropriate extraneous methods such as face recognition, image and video tagging, or from metadata embedded in the resource.

Variations

Some variations of the base method are the following:

- The user may be allowed to configure what a resource encompasses, either globally or individually for each resource. For example, in some cases a resource may be a single document file while in others it may be composed of several files intended to be read sequentially.
- The user may be allowed to temporarily disable trailing bookmarks to skip around a resource without the bookmark following.
- Bookmarks may be presented by recency of access, frequency of access, discarded status as well as by properties of the resource they refer to.
- The chains of references by which various resources were reached may be presented as a tree view to allow quick random access. This requires noting the referring resource when creating a bookmark.

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