Desktop Integration

T he first part of this book really highlights its entire theme: that the Gmail service, although ostensibly a website, can be dragged over to touch the desktop in ways that make new and exciting applications possible.

The first five chapters deal with this on a very basic level, allowing you to use Gmail to its limits before delving into the nitty gritty of code and some rather extreme uses of the system.

This chapter deals with the situations that arise when you continue to use Gmail within the browser but want to use it as your day-to-day e-mail system. There are two areas to cover: new mail notification and `mailto:` link redirection.

New Mail Notification

Gmail's great features have inspired many early adopters to move their entire e-mail regime over to the service. But unlike other e-mail clients, Gmail requires you to have your web browser open to see if you have any new mail. Even with tabbed browsing, this is annoying. The alternative is to use a new-mail notifier application. This section details some of the best notifiers, grouped by platform. This is not a definitive list even at the time of this writing. By the time you read this, there will be even more options. But this is a good start.

Windows

Perhaps not the operating system of choice for the readers of this book, but certainly one with a lot of users, Windows is gifted with a wide range of Gmail integration products.

Google Gmail Notifier

The first and most obvious application comes from Google itself. Their Gmail Notifier sits in the system tray, and displays an unread mail count, and the subject line, sender, and a synopsis of newly arriving mail, all shown in Figure 1-1. At the time of writing, it, like Gmail itself, is in beta. Get the Gmail Notifier from `http://toolbar.google.com/gmail-helper/`.
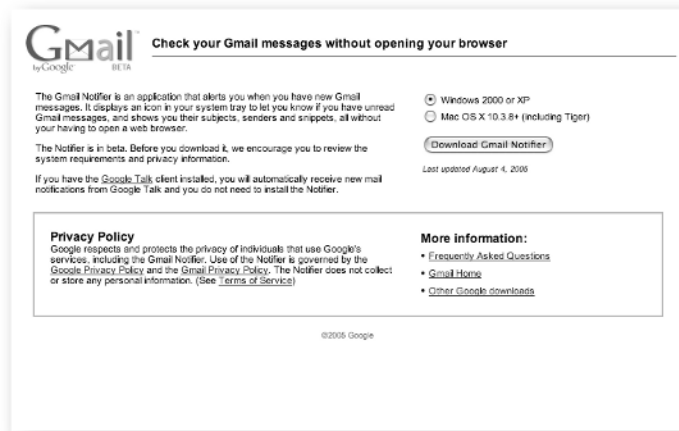

FIGURE 1-1: Google's own Gmail Notifier in action

Mozilla Extension Gmail Notifier

Technically, this will work on any platform that can run Mozilla-based browsers, but I'll put Doron Rosenberg's Gmail Notifier browser extension here (see Figure 1-2). Although it doesn't provide the same level of interface as a taskbar-based application, for people who spend a lot of time in their web browser, the Mozilla extension is very convenient.

You can find the extension at `http://nexgenmedia.net/extensions/`.

FIGURE 1-2: Mozilla Gmail Notifier in the Firefox status bar

Mac OS X

OS X users have a choice of two applications, both very similar to each other, and doing pretty much the same thing: placing the mail notification in the menu bar at the top of the screen.

GmailStatus

Carsten Guenther's GmailStatus (`http://homepage.mac.com/carsten.guenther/GmailStatus/`) is a good example. It displays new mail counts for the Inbox, and each individual label you might have set up, adds a hotkey to launch Gmail in your browser, supports Growl notifications (see `http://growl.info/` for more on that), and gives a hotkey to write a new message in Gmail (see Figure 1-3).
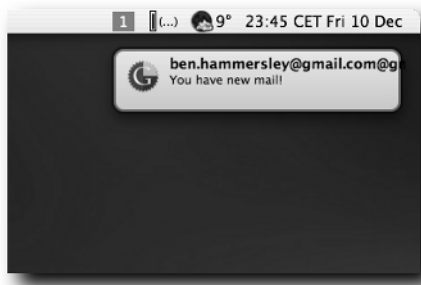

FIGURE 1-3: GmailStatus in action, with Growl notification

gCount

Nathan Spindel's gCount (`www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~natan/gcount/`), shown in Figure 1-4, is very similar indeed to GmailStatus in terms of functionality, with perhaps two interesting additions. First, you can have a new mail count in the dock, and second, it takes your Gmail username and password from the keychain. This is a nice touch.

Linux, etc.

People using Linux, or any other Unix-style operating system with the option to compile things, have a whole series of potential Gmail applications to choose from. Linux users will also find the scripting done in the later stages of this book to be very simple to implement.
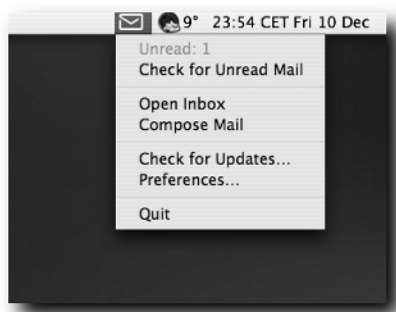
FIGURE **1-4: gCount, showing the preference menu**

Mail Notification

Jean-Yves Lefort's Mail Notification system for Linux desktops supports Gmail as well as most of the other common e-mail systems. You can get it from www. nongnu.org/mailnotify/ where it is released under the GPL. According to Lefort, it works with system trays implementing the freedesktop.org System Tray Specification, such as the Gnome Panel Notification Area, the Xfce Notification Area, and the KDE System Tray.

Wmgmail

Remarkably useful for the clarity of its Python-based code, Pasi Savolainen's Wmgmail is intended for use with WindowMaker or fluxbox window managers on the operating system of your choice. (If that sentence means nothing to you, this is not for you, in other words.)

It's a standard new mail notification app, with new mail preview added in, but it also has one very nice feature that is perfect for the hacker: You can set it to run another program whenever new mail arrives.

You can find Wmgmail at http://osx.freshmeat.net/projects/wmgmail/.

Redirecting mailto:

Now that you have your desktop telling you when you have new mail within your Gmail account, the only remaining integration is to ensure that clicking on a mailto: link on a web page opens Gmail instead of your operating system's default e-mail client.

Windows

Again, as with new mail notification, Windows users have the pick of the crop. The Google-authored Gmail Notifier, as mentioned previously, gives you the option to redirect `mailto:` links when you install it.

If you really want to, you can manually edit the Windows Registry to enact the same effect. The website `www.rabidsquirrel.net/G-Mailto/` gives a rundown of just how to do this.

Multiplatform/Mozilla

Other than the Mozilla extension, at the time of this writing there is no `mailto:` link diversion for the Linux desktop. But happily, by far the best way of repurposing `mailto:` links is to do it in the browser, and specifically in a Mozilla-based browser, which runs on all of the platforms used in this book: Windows, OS X, and Linux. The platforms can use Jed Brown's WebMailCompose extension (see Figure 1-5), installable from `http://jedbrown.net/mozilla/extensions/#WebMailCompose`.

FIGURE 1-5: WebMailCompose in action in Firefox 1.0 on OS X

This extension also allows `mailto:` links to point to many other web-based e-mail systems, should you tire of all of this coolness.

OS X

GmailStatus, mentioned earlier, also has the effect of changing `mailto:` links to launch Gmail instead of `Mail.app`. But if you don't want to use GmailStatus, a good example for OS X users is Gmailto, found at `http://gu.st/code/ Gmailto/`. Gmailto is simple to use: Just download and run it, and then go to `Mail.app`'s preference panel to change the default reader application to Gmailto (displayed in Figure 1-6) instead of `Mail.app`. Why the preference panel is inside the application you no longer wish to use is beyond the reckoning of mortal men.

FIGURE 1-6: Selecting Gmailto in Mail.app's preferences

GmailerXP

Well worth its own section, if only because it's really weird, the Windows software GmailerXP — `http://gmailerxp.sourceforge.net` — does all of the above but adds in a desktop version of all of the other Gmail features as well: labels, stars, setting filters and contacts, and so on (see Figure 1-7). I'm not sure when you would use it, but it is a brilliant example of a Gmail hack.

The second half of this book looks at how applications such as GmailerXP work and how to make your own.
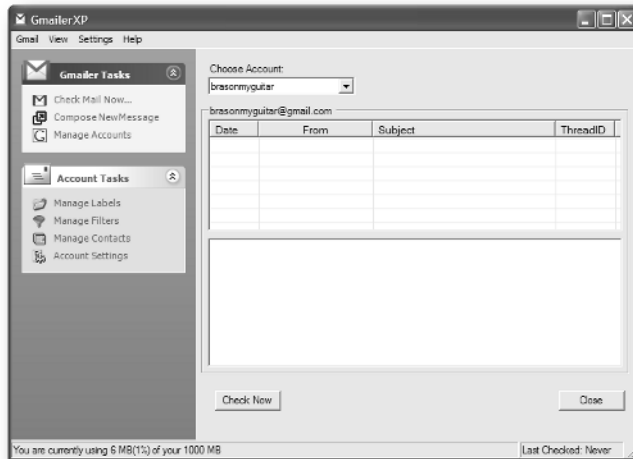
FIGURE 1-7: GmailerXP in action

And Now . . .

By now you should be happily using Gmail, with new mail showing up on your desktop and `mailto:` links on the web causing Gmail to open, not the default mail reader you got with the operating system. In the next chapter, you look at using the POP interface to pull your Gmail mail down into that very reader.