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The Internet Application of Our Dreams? -- A Review of Onfolio

—Debbie Ginsberg
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When I first became a librarian at Chicago-Kent, I wanted an application which would let me organize my Internet research on a PC the same way I did on my beloved Mac. On a Mac, saving research is fairly simple thanks to Internet Explorer. As a browser, IE for the Mac certainly has its issues, but I've always loved its Scrapbook feature. With Scrapbook, I can save entire web pages in the sidebar to review later. I can even organize what I save into folders.

I never was able to locate anything comparable in the PC environment. Likely, something existed that I couldn't find (well, at least for a good price). However, judging from the strong reaction that Onfolio engendered upon its release, other researchers must have found such a program similarly elusive. Within days of launching, write-ups appeared in the Washington Post, Boston Globe, and innumerable blogs, all quite excited about this new program. Not only did Onfolio easily capture links, snippets, and even entire web pages, it stored the information in portable collections and folders. Moreover, it easily generated reports from captured data which could be printed, emailed, or posted on the web. It was Scrapbook on steroids.

Onfolio is an add-in for Internet Explorer (there's no escaping this browser). Like Scrapbook, Onfolio uses the left-hand side panel to store captured information. You can select sites using a button, F9, or right-click. When you capture a site, you can add comments and assign priority flags. The captured sites can be arranged in a variety of ways, including alphabetically and in the order the sites were captured.

Fortunately, Onfolio doesn't stop there. With the professional edition, you can generate reports of the sites you've collected. Don't like the way the report looks? You can use CSS to modify the themes included with Onfolio or create your own.

Not surprisingly for a new product, it has some drawbacks. The biggest problem I've seen so far is that the reports it generates can be hard for some users to open and read. Other problems I've seen are more minor. For example, it doesn't capture PDFs from certain databases very well. You cannot generate HTML versions of the report without publishing it on a website. Also, there is something strange about the way it generates anchors, making them difficult to remove without altering the code itself.

That said, I've found this program to be invaluable. I can easily search databases and send professors my findings in one complete file (rather than emailing many PDFs). When examining other library websites for ideas, I make notes instantly about features we might consider emulating (no longer using random pieces of paper I might lose later). Finding daily news stories for our bulletin is a breeze; I press one button for each item rather than continually cut and paste titles and URLs. In all, Onfolio has saved me a great deal of time and has allowed me to better organize my work.

Onfolio is available for a free 30-day download at <http://www.onfolio.com>. The basic version costs \$29.95. The professional version, which includes the ability to generate reports, is \$79.95. Unfortunately, it's not available for the Mac.