printout

Keystone MacCentral Macintosh Users Group ❖ www.keystonemac.com

Keystone MacCentral
September Meeting

Please see your membership email for the links
to this month's Zoom meeting or email us
at KeystoneMacCentral@mac.com.

During our program this month we plan to discuss

• Apple devices that turn off unexpectedly. (It has been known to happen.)

• New iPhones and using iPhones for scanning

• Photomyne, an app for using your iPhone or iPad for scanning. See https://www.youtube.com/photomyne for an introduction to the app.

We have virtual meetings via Zoom
on the third Tuesday of each month.

Emails will be sent out prior to each meeting.
Follow the directions/invitation each month
on our email — that is, just click on the link
to join our meeting.

Contents

Keystone MacCentral is a not-for-profit group of Macintosh enthusiasts who generally meet the third Tuesday of every month to exchange information, participate in question-and-answer sessions, view product demonstrations, and obtain resource materials that will help them get the most out of their computer systems. Meetings are free and open to the public. **The *Keystone MacCentral printout*** is the official newsletter of Keystone MacCentral and an independent publication not affiliated or otherwise associated with or sponsored or sanctioned by any for-profit organization, including Apple Inc. Copyright © 2023, Keystone MacCentral, 310 Somerset Drive, Shiresmanstown, PA 17011.

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By Adam Engst

Copytables Simplifies Extracting Tabular Data from Web Pages

On the Web, tables are everywhere—you may not even realize how many sites rely on tables behind the scenes for their formatting. Useful as they are for aligning content and displaying columnar data, tables can cause significant frustration if you need to extract data from them. I find myself wanting to do this quite often now that I have the open-source Copytables. I use the free Copytables Chrome extension in Arc, Brave, and Google Chrome, but you can also download Copytables for Firefox (forked from the Chrome version) and Copytables for Safari ($2.99 on the Mac App Store). I haven't tested those.

Here's an example of what Copytables makes possible. Earlier this week, I wanted to email someone a list of opportunities from the volunteer-management tool Helper Helper. To extract the text from the table in the Web app's interface without Copytables, I would have to select the entire table (below left), copy it, and paste it into BBEdit (below right). The results in BBEdit aren't terrible compared to some tables I've seen, but I'd still need to delete every other line. That would be doable with such a small table, but what if there were hundreds of lines or the data didn't break cleanly at line breaks?
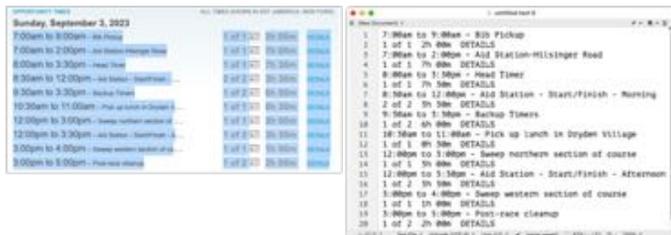

With Copytables in Arc, I instead pressed the Option key to enter cell-selecting mode and dragged over the cells in the leftmost column to select just them (below left). When I copied and

pasted into BBEdit, I got exactly what I wanted (below right).

Another example. I've been in a pitched battle with spambots for the last few weeks, and one of my most successful interim defenses has been blocking IP ranges. Using Copytables, I can extract hundreds of IP addresses quickly from the logs of our WordPress security plug-ins. To select the contents of a column, I press Command-Option and click the column header. Then it's trivial to copy the data into BBEdit for manipulation. You can even make discontinuous selections—cells that aren't next to each other.
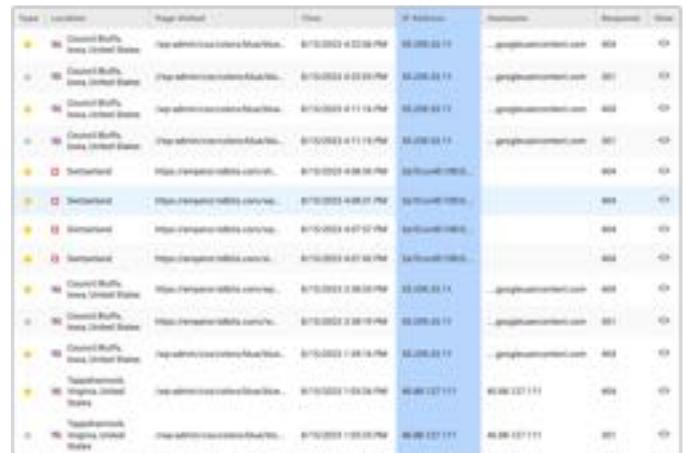
Copytables also enables you to select rows or entire tables. Those features aren't as commonly used—they don't even get default keyboard shortcuts—so whenever I need them, I open the Copytables window (from the Extensions menu in Arc, or by clicking a pinned extension toolbar icon in Brave or

Google Chrome), click Rows or Tables to enable the associated capture mode, and then click to select. If you do use the Capture buttons, make sure to disable them when you're done, or certain Web apps won't work correctly due to Copytables capturing their clicks. To select entire tables more quickly, click the Previous Table or Next Table buttons in the Find row.
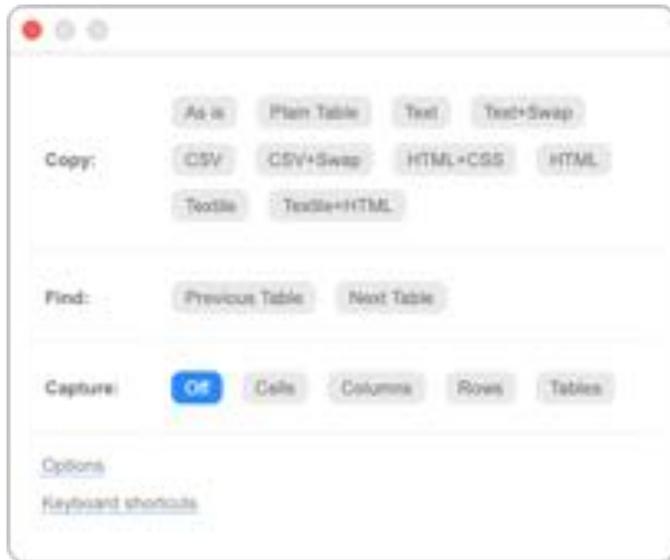
The Copy options at the top require more explanation. I haven't needed them, but they offer various formats for the copied data, some of which could be handy (I'm particularly taken with the options that swap columns and rows). Theoretically, you can set one of these options as the default to use with Edit > Copy, but that didn't work in my quick testing. Stick to the buttons in the Copytables interface.

• **As is:** Copy the table as seen on the screen

• **Plain Table:** Copy the table without formatting

• **Text:** Copy as tab-delimited text

• **Text+Swap:** Copy as tab-delimited text, swap columns and rows

• **CSV:** Copy as comma-separated text

• **CSV+Swap:** Copy as comma-separated text, swap columns and rows

• **HTML+CSS:** Copy as HTML source with formatting

• **HTML:** Copy as HTML source without formatting

• **Textile:** Copy as Textile (text content)

• **Textile+HTML:** Copy as Textile (HTML content)

Copytables has one other clever feature I occasionally find handy: the infobox. It's an inset box that shows information about your current selection. Consider this table of data about Canadian wildfires from 2000–2021. When I select the contents of the Area Burned column, Copytables displays the blue infobox at the top that counts the number of selected cells, calculates the sum and average, and calls out the min and max. These simple calculations can preclude the need to move data to a spreadsheet.


If the infobox gets in your way, you can turn it off or have Copytables display it in a different corner of the window. To access this and other settings, click the Options link in the Copytables window. The most useful settings are the modifier keys for click-and-drag selection (below). You'll want to adjust these if they conflict with something else on your system. The Copytables window also has a Keyboard Shortcuts link that provides a browser-wide approach to setting keyboard shortcuts for extensions; the Copytables options match the Find and Capture buttons in its window.
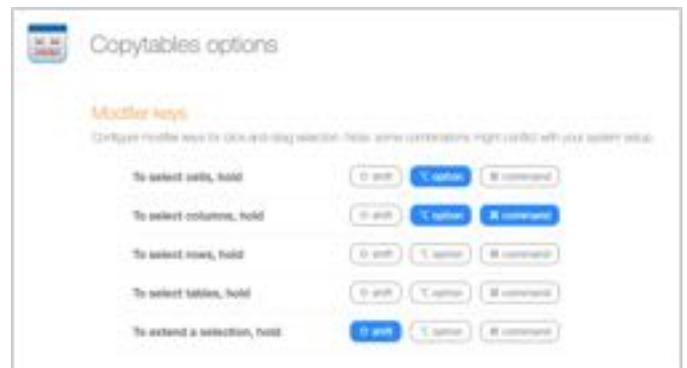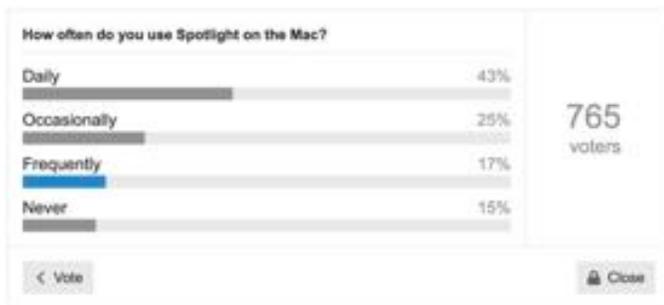

Copytables is free, but if you find it useful, you can join me in donating to the author, Georg Barikin.
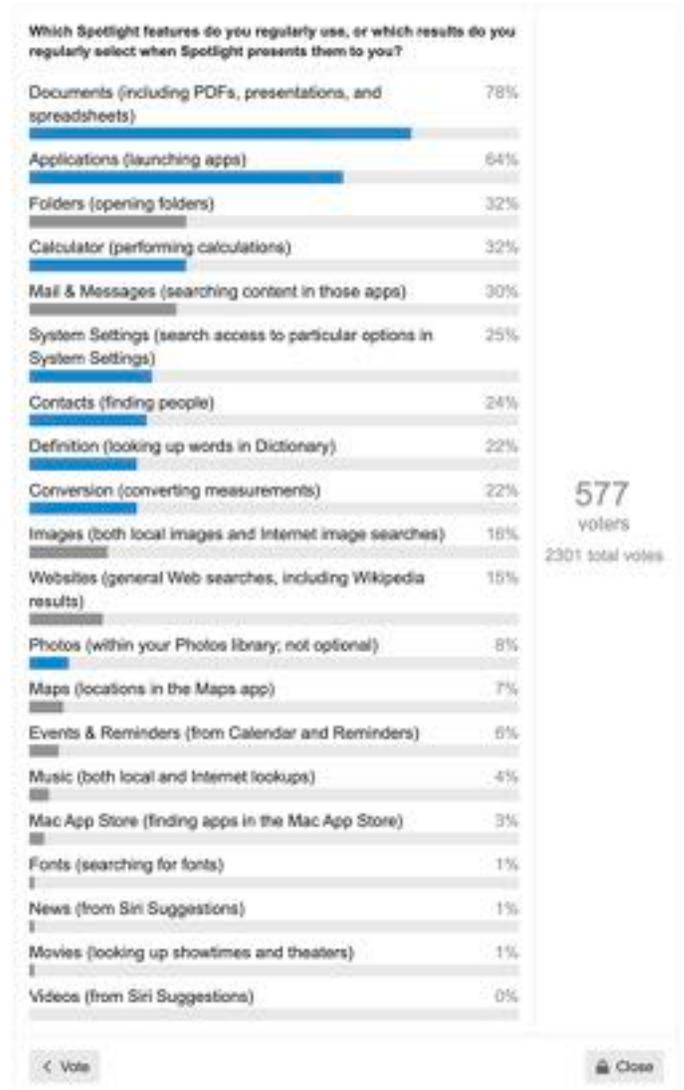
By Adam Engst

Do You Use It?
Spotlight Sees Targeted Use for Finding Files and Launching Apps

The first two Do You Use It? polls revolved around features that are easy to use or ignore: Stage Manager and Launchpad. The story is much more complex with Spotlight, the focus of our third poll. Apple introduced Spotlight in 2005 with Mac OS X 10.4 Tiger, making it a fixture on the Mac for 18 years. Over that time, Apple has continually added features beyond searching for files on the local drive. Its capabilities have garnered widespread use among TidBITS readers, with 85% of respondents to our poll saying that they used it at least occasionally. The blue bar in the chart below indicates my vote—although I employ Spotlight for various tasks, they don't crop up every day.

How often do you use Spotlight on the Mac?

Daily	43%
Occasionally	25%
Frequently	17%
Never	15%

765 voters

< Vote   🔒 Close

Notably, 43% of respondents use Spotlight daily, but what they use it for varies widely. That's unsurprising, given all that Spotlight can do, so the poll posed a second question to tease out Spotlight's most popular features, as you can see below. Note that the poll explicitly asked about the standalone Spotlight interface, not uses of the Spotlight database within other apps, like the Finder, Mail, and Messages. (Again, blue bars indicate my responses.)


Which Spotlight features do you regularly use, or which results do you regularly select when Spotlight presents them to you?

Documents (including PDFs, presentations, and spreadsheets)	78%
Applications (launching apps)	64%
Folders (opening folders)	32%
Calculator (performing calculations)	32%
Mail & Messages (searching content in those apps)	30%
System Settings (search access to particular options in System Settings)	25%
Contacts (finding people)	24%
Definition (looking up words in Dictionary)	22%
Conversion (converting measurements)	22%
Images (both local images and Internet image searches)	16%
Websites (general Web searches, including Wikipedia results)	15%
Photos (within your Photos library; not optional)	8%
Maps (locations in the Maps app)	7%
Events & Reminders (from Calendar and Reminders)	6%
Music (both local and Internet lookups)	4%
Mac App Store (finding apps in the Mac App Store)	3%
Fonts (searching for fonts)	1%
News (from Siri Suggestions)	1%
Movies (looking up showtimes and theaters)	1%
Videos (from Siri Suggestions)	0%

577 voters
2301 total votes

< Vote   🔒 Close

Spotlight's features fall into three basic categories: searching, navigating, and utilities.

• **Searching:** As befitting its original purpose, the most-used Spotlight feature was finding files, with 78% of responses. Beyond basic searching, however, usage dropped off quickly, with only 30% of respondents using Spotlight to search within Mail and Messages, 24% using it to find contacts, 16% using it to search for images locally or online, and 15% using it to find Web content.

Searches for images within Photos and even more specific searches for locations in Maps, events and reminders, music, Mac App Store apps, fonts, movies, and videos rated only single-digit responses.

- **Navigation:** The second most popular Spotlight use was launching apps, with 64% of responses. Following that came opening folders, with 32% of responses. 25% of respondents also use Spotlight to access specific parts of System Settings rather than browse manually or search within the System Settings app. Spotlight has long been helpful for opening System Preferences panes in macOS versions before Ventura, but the tangled mishmash of System Settings may encourage more Spotlight-driven access.

- **Utilities:** Although they weren't the most common Spotlight features, using it as a calculator (32%), for dictionary definitions (22%), and to make conversions (22%) all ranked in the top half of the responses. No one mentioned using Spotlight to track flights, but if you enter an airline code and flight number like AA123, you'll get tracking information. This requires the Siri Suggestions category to be enabled.

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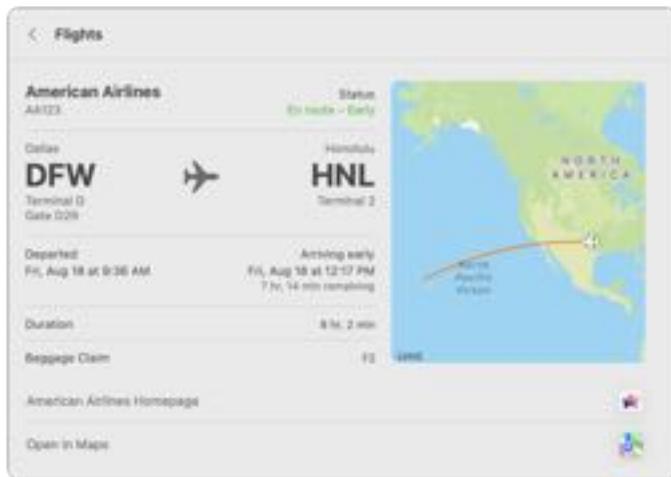
The takeaway? Most people use Spotlight for finding files and launching apps, with only 20–30% venturing into its more esoteric features. I see two paths forward.

First, if you have somehow missed out on all Spotlight can do, invoke it by clicking the magnifying glass in the menu bar (which can be turned off in older versions of macOS in System Preferences > Dock & Menu Bar > Spotlight) or pressing Command-Space (which you can change in System Settings > Keyboard > Keyboard Shortcuts > Spotlight). Then start typing and see what pops up in the results below. Explore all the possibilities—there will be a lot!
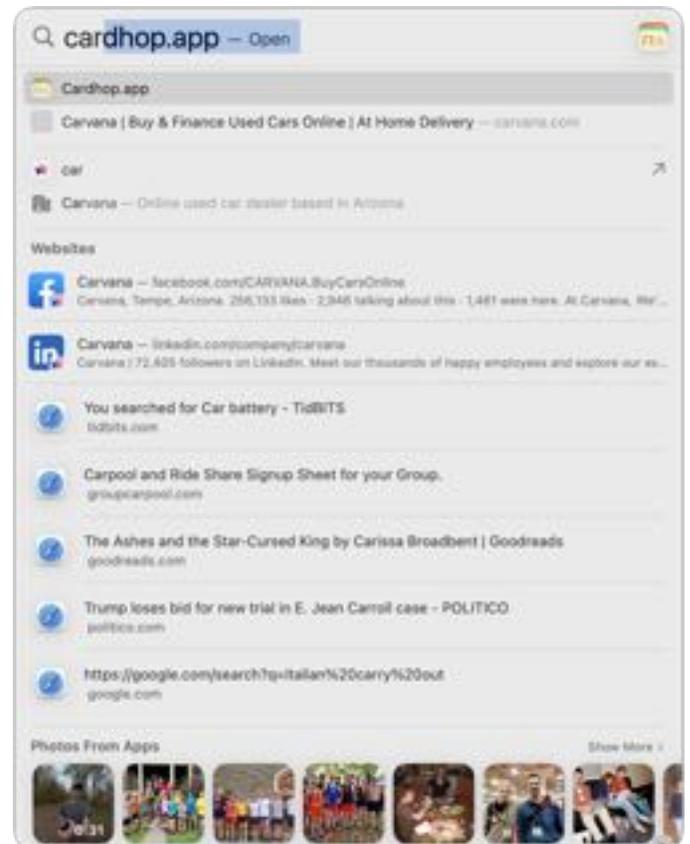
Second, if you find the Spotlight results overwhelming, turn off categories you'll never use. Open System Settings > Siri & Spotlight to find them. In macOS 12 Monterey and earlier, they're in System Preferences > Spotlight.

Spotlight results can be hard to navigate if the results window is too small, forcing you to scroll. Many people don't realize you can move and resize the Spotlight window, and it will remember its location and size for future searches. Try putting it at the top of your screen and expanding the results window to the bottomton see many more results at a glance.

You can also navigate the Spotlight results window with the arrow keys, and adding the Command key moves you between categories. Pressing Return opens the selected result. Apple lists a few other Spotlight keyboard shortcuts, but I've found others:

• **Command** by itself reveals the path to the selected file or folder.

• **Command-B** opens the search in your Web browser.

• **Command-D** opens the search term in the Dictionary app.

• **Command-H** opens Spotlight help.

• **Command-L** scrolls to the dictionary definition.

• **Command-R** or **Command-Return** reveals the selected file or folder in the Finder.

• **Command-Y** or **Space bar** previews the selection in Quick Look.

I suspect many people don't use Spotlight as much as they could because the results appear in random order. Before macOS 10.11 El Capitan, Apple let users rearrange the order of the Spotlight results. Few people probably took advantage of that option, but it's a shame Apple removed it. Now Spotlight puts the results in what it thinks is the most helpful order, but that means the order is different on every search, eliminating the benefit of familiarity. Turning off unused categories may reduce the randomness.

The most common complaint among poll respondents is that Spotlight can be unreliable, particularly for finding files and Mail messages. Although it may be only temporary, the fix is to rebuild the Spotlight database, which you do by opening System Settings > Siri & Spotlight > Spotlight Privacy, dragging your entire drive in from the Finder, and acknowledging what you're about to do. (You can also add specific private folders here to ensure Spotlight never indexes them.) Wait a few minutes for Spotlight to delete the database, and then remove the drive from the Privacy list so Spotlight can reindex it. Be warned that the indexing process can take quite some time and cause significant CPU usage—you'll see a bunch of mdworker processes in Activity Monitor, and there's an Indexing progress bar at the top of the Spotlight results window while it works.

In some cases, Spotlight may seem unreliable because your search isn't sufficiently specific. You can narrow your search results in four ways:

- **Metadata attributes:** Anything that appears in the Info window for a file (select it in the Finder and choose File > Get Info) can be part of a search, such as modified date, kind, author, and much more—photos contain a lot of camera metadata.

- **Item type:** In the link above, Apple provides a long list of item types you can specify by adding `kind:type` to your search, including apps, contacts, folders, email, and much more.

- **Keywords:** Along with `kind`, Spotlight supports other keywords, including `from`, `to`, `author`, `with`, `by`, `tag`, `title`, `name`, `keyword`, and `contains`.

- **Boolean searches:** To make your search highly specific, use the Boolean operators `AND`, `OR`, and `NOT`, along with the minus sign (`−`), which means `AND NOT`.

I'd be surprised if many people took advantage of Spotlight's options to narrow searches. Those who want more search power often resort to a third-party app that provides a graphical search interface, like HoudahSpot and Tembo. Another common approach is to sidestep the Spotlight database and search directly, which is slower but can be more reliable—EasyFind and Find Any File use this technique. The most common alternatives to searching for files with Spotlight include:

- Finder: Even though the Finder window search field (also accessible with Command-F) leverages the Spotlight database, many people prefer the Finder because it returns only files and folders.

- EasyFind

- Find Any File

- FoxTrot

- HoudahSpot

- NeoFinder

- Tembo

When it comes to Spotlight's other popular feature, app launching, the list was essentially the same as for our Launchpad poll (see "Do You Use It? Launchpad Doesn't Compete for Longtime Mac Users," 11 August 2023). A few people even said that Alfred and LaunchBar were sufficient for most of their file-finding needs.

- The Dock, often holding the Applications folder or a folder of app aliases

- Alfred

- Butler

- iCollections

- LaunchBar

- Quicksilver

- Raycast

- SwitchGlass

In the end, it seems that Spotlight is earning its keep in the Mac world primarily for finding files and launching apps—the other features are frosting on top. That's not to say that Apple should drop them, but I encourage you to turn off unnecessary categories. Also, Apple should bring back the feature that lets us rearrange categories and add the capability for Spotlight to detect and fix corruption automatically. We shouldn't have to realize there's a problem and reset the Spotlight database manually.

By Adam Engst

Innovative Web Browser Arc Reaches 1.0 Release

I seldom write about beta software, particularly in great depth, but the utility and maturity of Arc, the new Chromium-based Web browser from The Browser Company, caused me to make an exception with "Arc Will Change the Way You Work on the Web" (1 May 2023). Nevertheless, recommending an app with a waitlist was awkward, even though TidBITS readers generously posted invitation codes in the article comments.

I'm pleased to note that The Browser Company has now released version 1.0 of Arc, making it a free download for everyone. Since I penned my 7000-word opus, I have changed none of my core opinions about Arc—I still feel it is the most impactful app I've used on the Mac in years. I particularly appreciate being able to switch fluidly between the synced copies of Arc on my iMac and my MacBook Air, and I've become increasingly fond of Arc's iPhone companion app because it contains pinned tabs to all the websites and pages on which I rely. (That said, the iPhone app still doesn't display Favorites, an annoying and seemingly easily rectified lapse.)

My sole disappointment has been with the responsiveness of The Browser Company. None of my bug reports or suggestions were acknowledged (though some have been resolved), nor did my article generate any communication despite being more comprehensive than anything else ever written about Arc. (Yes, that's authorial pique speaking; in contrast, I got a nice note from the developers of the WebKit-based Orion after just a brief mention in "A Roundup of Vertical Tab Support in Mac Web Browsers," 5 June 2023.) Other TidBITS readers have noticed a similar lack of response to support questions. This silence feels at odds with how garrulous The Browser Company is on The Service Previously Known as Twitter (sadly) and YouTube, and the company's seeming desire to encourage community (such as by creating a Credits page with over 34,000 names of beta testers.

Perhaps the company will devote additional resources to customer support now that the beta period is over.

[Update: I've now heard from The Browser Company with an apology for the silence. I hadn't internalized how many tens of thousands of users were beta testing, but as I suspected, the communication problem was too few staff for the volume of inquiries—thousands per day. The company is now focusing on scaling up. -Adam]

Arc's developers have been far from idle in the months since my review. A significant release with new features and interface polish has arrived every Thursday like clockwork. Some of the more compelling changes include:

- **Boosts:** Although The Browser Company promotes Boosts heavily as a fun way to personalize any website, what keeps me from muttering "Waste CPU cycles drawing trendy 3D junk" under my breath is how Boosts are an accessibility win for those who need to make websites easier to read. Don't like something about a site you regularly use? Create a Boost to change it. You can even use the Zap feature to remove entire elements from a page. Boosts get a section in the Library sidebar, and a Boost Gallery collects submissions from the community if you want to see what others have done. And no, I didn't keep the Boost for the TidBITS site shown below.

- **Optional toolbar and Site Control Center:** If Arc's lack of a traditional wide toolbar at the top of the

page is too jarring, you can now turn one on by choosing View > Show Toolbar. Or don't—I prefer Arc's small toolbar at the top of the sidebar, where you can access Boosts and other site-specific settings in the new Site Control Center.
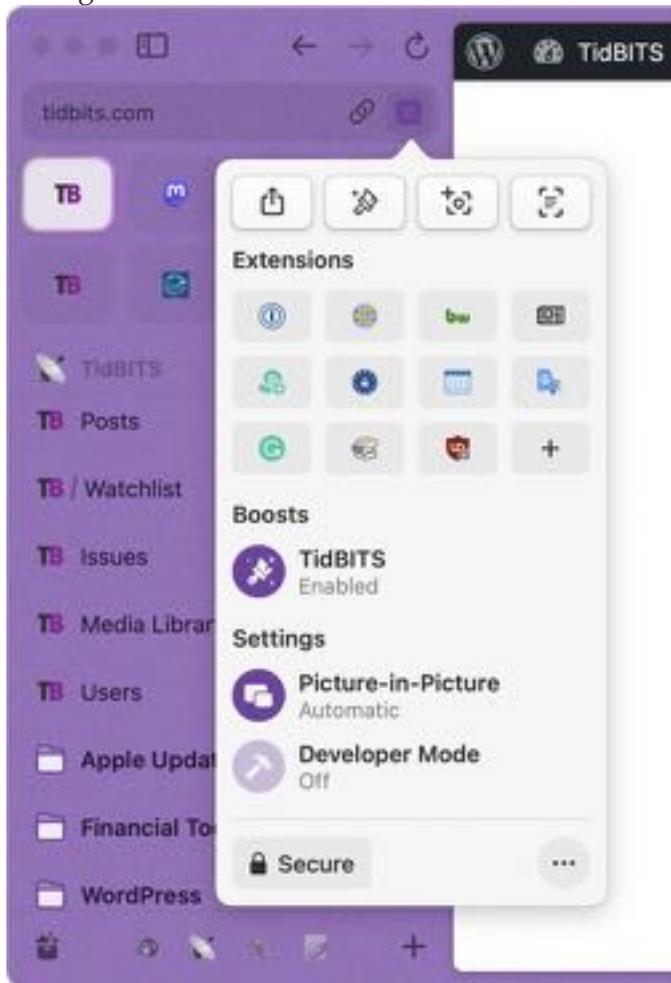

- **Option-click for Split View:** Arc's Split View is great when you need to work back and forth between two tabs, such as when I'm copying an article I've written in Google Docs to a new post in WordPress. To make it even easier to create a Split View, you can now Option-click the second tab to create a Split View with it instantly. Now there's no need to select both tabs, Control-click, and choose Open in Split View.

- **Better multi-window behavior:** Despite Split View, sometimes you need to open something in another window. In Arc, you can now drag any tab or favorite out of the window to create another window with its contents. It's a full-fledged Arc

window, although the sidebar is hidden by default. I love this feature, though I'm less happy about how unpinned tabs are now window-specific and don't sync across systems. Sometimes I want those synced and have to remember to pin them temporarily.

- **Page translation:** When you visit a page in another language, Arc automatically offers to translate it. I don't need this often, but it's handier than the Google Translate extension I had been using.
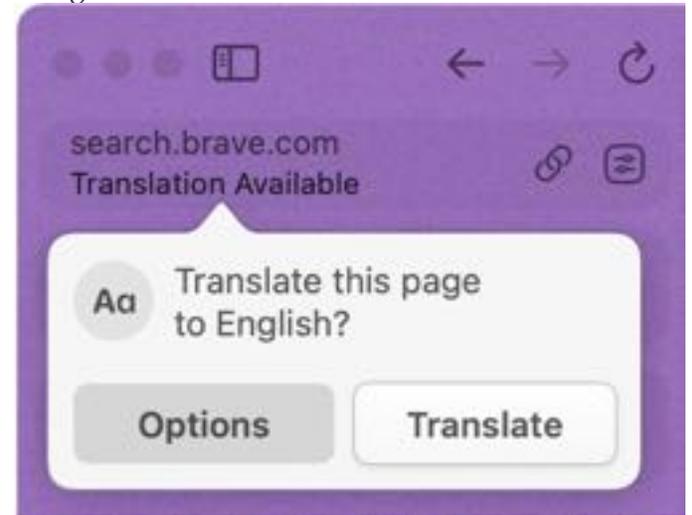
- **Multiple adblocker detection:** Arc's developers found that more than a third of people who import from Google Chrome have multiple adblockers enabled, which can radically hurt performance in any browser. Arc now detects that on import and prompts the user to pick one.

- **Peek at any site:** It's now easier to open any link in a Peek over the current tab so you don't lose your place—Shift-click a link. If you dislike this feature, turn it off in Arc > Settings > Links.

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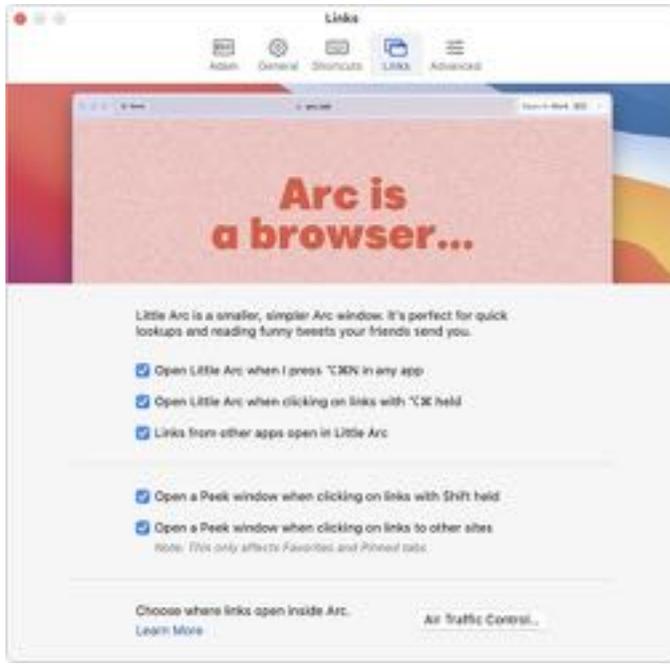
- **Air Traffic Control:** Although I'm a massive fan of Little Arc, the standalone window for links clicked from other apps, I'd prefer to open some links in a Space. The Air Traffic Control feature accessible in the Links settings lets you specify where links that match or contain specific strings open.

- **Paste New Tabs:** You can now create a new tab with the contents of the clipboard by pressing Command-Option-V. If the clipboard contains a URL, Arc makes a new tab with it; if it contains text, the new tab loads with search results.

I still haven't wrapped my head around Easels and Notes, so I can't say any more about how they might be helpful. Nor do I ever peruse my archived tabs, media, or downloads—the Library sidebar remains terra incognito.

But I don't care—Arc has become such a part of my work life that I actively dislike using other browsers now, not the least because I'm addicted to being able to press Command-Shift-C to copy the current page's URL, something I do many times per day as I write and edit. I've built up hundreds of pinned tabs across my four Spaces, and I can quickly switch among the many sites I need to use without losing my place in any of them. And as I noted, I can easily do all that on either of my Macs or my iPhone because Arc lets me make a mental map of everything I have stored.

Arc may be overkill for those who use just a handful of tabs at a time, but if you spend much of your day working in websites, I recommend giving it a try. Arc is free to download and requires macOS 12.1 Monterey or later. Remember, though, that it will take a few days to set up your Web *mise en place* before you really start cooking with fire. 🗑