

iMacro – Firefox add-on to reduce repetitive task

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Todd Quinn
Assistant Professor, Librarian
Northern State University
todd.quinn@northern.edu



Macros are a set of instruction used in programming that help people overcome repetitive tasks and save time. Most macros are used in programming software and hardware. Tabbed browsing in Firefox lets a user load web pages in separate tabs of a single browser window, that lets one jump among web sites quickly and easily. iMacros, a Firefox add-on, takes advantage of both macros and tabbed browsing. Instead of applying macros to software/hardware programming, iMacros applies the concept to navigating the Internet. The free tool allows users to input a search expression once and search multiple databases, search engines, other sites, or a combination of all three. The search expression is automatically placed in the search box for each database. For example, one could create an iMacro to search WorldCat, Google Books, and Gale Virtual Reference Library for the same search expression. Each database will have its results display in a separate tab. Thus, iMacros allows one to search in the native interface and the results are not parsed unlike federated search and metasearch engines. Another way to use iMacros - create a macro to perform click-throughs of clunky web sites/tools (e.g. course management software).

Librarians may use iMacros to create search or navigation macros. One does not need to know programming to create these macros. Once one understands the basics, he/she can create many macros for different tasks, subject searches, etc. Plus, a librarian may bookmark an iMacro in Firefox, or share iMacros with others via a web link or Delicious bookmark. Then the hyperlink can be shared as long as each user has iMacros installed. Some may see it as a very light alternative (no bells and whistles) to federated search.

Get the add-on at - <https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/3863>

Or search: imacros and firefox

Other useful information

- **Video demo** – A three-minute video on creating an iMacro for the local catalog, and then adding it to a search macro of Google Books, and WorldCat.
<http://www.northern.edu/library/demos/imacros/imacros.htm>
- **Handout** on ACRL conference site - An example of an iMacro code with edits.
- **LibGuide** with all this information - <http://research.northern.edu/BCR2008>

The major parts of the code to understand

- The variable prompt
 - **PROMPT Please<SP>enter<SP>your<SP>search: !VAR1**
 - NOTE: You do not need to use “Please enter your search”, but you must include <SP> between each term and a colon after the last term.

- Variable(s) - **!VAR1** and **{{!VAR1}}**
 - **!VAR1** is the first variable and it is placed at the end of the PROMPT.
 - **{{!VAR1}}** is placed in the code (see below)
 - When you edit the code, find your dummy search term (e.g. dog) and replace it with **{{!VAR1}}**
 - You may create multiple variables (e.g. **!VAR2 – {{!VAR2}}**)

- Use of tabs (This code informs browser to open tabs)
 - TAB 1**
 - The default tab (see examples below)

 - TAB OPEN**
 - TAB T=2**
 - Add this code just above each additional search source (see second example) (TAB T=2, TAB T=3, etc)

Tips

- Saving iMacro – Save as .iim files. Your computer may try to save as .txt. The iMacro add-on cannot read .txt files, only .iim.

- When recording the macro it is saved as #Current.iim. Each time you record a new macro the #Current file is overwritten. Thus, rename each new macro after recording it. Right click on the macro to rename it.

- Test the macro every few months. Often the web site coding will change, which is problematic for the macro.