

# Review: Evernote tops Yahoo for online note-taking

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In this screen shot, the Evernote Web interface is demonstrated. (AP Photo)

(AP) -- Like many people, I often find myself with a dozen open browser tabs and countless bookmarks as I plan trips or comb through reviews for a new gadget.

It's amazing I haven't discovered online note-taking until now. Yahoo gets credit for introducing me to that concept with a new, automated service, though I ultimately found others that are more versatile and powerful - most notably, Evernote.

Bookmarks suddenly seem rudimentary. All they'll do is point you back to a previously visited [Web site](#).

The Web-based note-taking services, on the other hand, let you zero in on specific passages and entries within a Web site. The programs also let you keep a copy of information in case it disappears from the original site. And the collections are stored online and can be shared with friends.

I can see using them to keep track of summer events, hobbies, nutritional advice and more, replacing my clunky system of e-mailing myself tidbits or storing them on documents I'd never find later.

Yahoo Inc.'s new Search Pad tries to automate all that, which ends up being its chief advantage and its chief shortcoming.

As I searched on Yahoo for free kayaking opportunities, Yahoo began remembering the links I clicked on and compiled them for me. I didn't have to turn the feature on or do anything else. To access the links, all I had to do was hit "View Notes" on the upper right corner of the search page.

From there, I can delete irrelevant links or add notes next to each, by typing my own reminders or pasting highlights copied from the Web site. I can save them to my Yahoo account to continue research later.

I can also manually add information from sites I find on my own, rather than through Yahoo's search.

Once I paste a short passage, Yahoo combs through its index to find the Web site it came from and adds a link to it in my notes. (It doesn't always work when multiple sites have the same passage.) With the link, I can return to the source if I later realize I forgot to copy and paste a key detail.

But I quickly ran into limitations with Yahoo's approach.

For one thing, because it's tied to Yahoo's search, Search Pad only tracks links from its search results. If from one of those sites I discover additional links relevant to my research, I'd have to add them manually.

And the automation doesn't produce much more than I'd get from a standard bookmark - the Web link and the page title. To add a specific passage, I have to flip to another browser tab, copy the text, return to Search Pad and paste.

Search Pad results also automatically expire after about a half-hour. That's good for privacy because many people may not even realize the Search Pad is there. Imagine researching gifts for a roommate on a shared computer. The Search Pad will clear itself if you forget to close the browser before leaving.

But that also means you'd have to remember to save results.

I went looking for other services that might address some of Yahoo's shortcomings.

Online note-taking services from Google Inc. and Microsoft Corp. essentially have been discontinued. Microsoft's Thumbtack never left its Live Labs experimental section, though anyone can still try it out.

Of the other services still out there, I found none as good as Evernote, from a Mountain View, Calif.-based startup by that name. You lose Yahoo's automation but gain more functions.

Evernote offers customized software for Mac and Windows computers as well as the iPhone, BlackBerry, Palm Pre and other devices. I mostly tested Evernote using its Web-based interface, to more directly compare it with Yahoo's Search Pad.

Beyond tracking Web sites, Evernote lets you add photos, attach PDF documents and even submit notes via Twitter or cell phone text messaging. I used my phone to snap a photo of a recipe for hot dogs wrapped in Pop Tarts. Character-recognition software built into Evernote even pulled the handwritten text from that photo so I could search for it.

It was pretty easy to add a tool called a "bookmarklet" to the browser's bookmarks toolbar. That lets me add any note with just a click - a paragraph or two from a Web site or even the entire Web page. Unlike Yahoo, I'm not limited to sites I find through search.

When I added five notes on free Shakespeare performances throughout New York, I could tag each note with such keywords as "Shakespeare" "outdoors" and the location of the performance, for easier searching later.

I wish Evernote had a calendar function so I could tag each item with a specific date to more easily view upcoming events. The company says the feature is coming this summer.

I'm even considering using Evernote for all the documents I have collected over the years and just dumped haphazardly into a folder on my computer. With Evernote, I'd be able to add descriptions, including when and where I got the documents, to help me find and make sense of them.

The danger is I'd rely on it so much, I'd exceed the monthly uploading cap for the free version and have to start paying \$5 a month or \$45 a year for an upgrade. The 40-megabyte cap gives you about 20,000 text notes a month, but only a few hundred substantial Web clippings.

Yahoo is free - and unlimited - but largely restricted to text.

I asked Yahoo about some of the features I'd like to see in Search Pad and was told many of them were deliberately left out for simplicity.

Yahoo, for example, could have developed a toolbar that one can install to permit note-taking beyond the Yahoo search results. But the company worries that requiring any installations would limit usage. [Yahoo](#) may provide it as a supplement in the future, once enough people discover and start using the service.

Until then, some users will find Search Pad enough for keeping track of their research. For those needing something more robust, turn to Evernote.

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