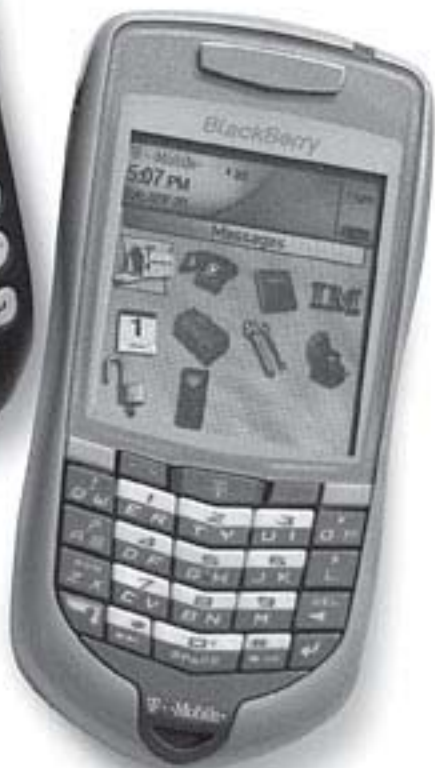


BLACKBERRY HACKS™

*Tips & Tools for
Your Mobile Office*



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Dave Mabe

BlackBerry Hacks™

by Dave Mabe

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HACK
#47

Use Backpack as Your Mobile Workspace

Add notes, to-do lists, and more directly from your device.

Have you ever tried to update a site using a form in your browser like many web applications require? For example, try updating a wiki page from your device. Usually it is not that easy, because most web sites were designed with a computer's browser in mind, not your handheld's.

The Backpack web service (<http://www.backpackit.com>) makes updating web sites easy using email. You just send the content you would like added to a secret email address, and the text is added to your page immediately.

What Exactly Is Backpack?

Backpack is a web service that allows you to get organized by storing your to-do lists, notes, photos, and files online. You can set up reminders that are sent via email. You can optionally share your content with others. The feature that makes Backpack so great for the BlackBerry is the ability to add content to your pages by sending emails.

To use Backpack, you need to create an account. Best of all, there is a basic account that is free and requires no credit card to sign up. Once you choose a username and register, you'll be directed to your newly created section of Backpack, accessible using the URL: <http://username.backpackit.com>.

Click the Make a New Page button on the right to add another page to Backpack, as shown in [Figure 4-45](#). Add a title and some content and click Create. You'll be taken to your new page, where you can use Backpack's very spiffy web interface to add lists, notes, files, images, and links to your page.

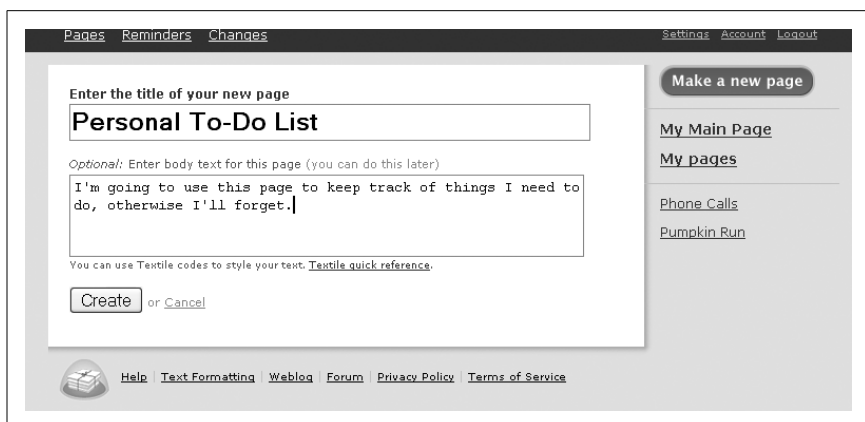


Figure 4-45. Creating a new page in Backpack

Send Email to Your Pages

Each page in Backpack has an email address. Look at the bottom of your newly created page, as shown in [Figure 4-46](#). This particular page has an email address of `lewis00lily@dmabe.backpackit.com`.

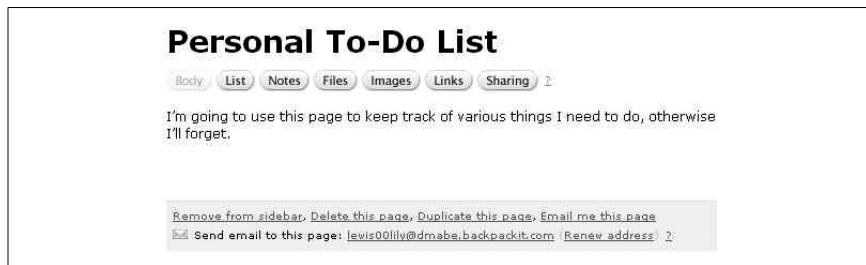


Figure 4-46. A page and its email address

You can send any email to this address and it will appear on your page almost instantly. This turns out to be perfect for those moments when you think of a good idea and you need to write it down before you forget. Just send an email to your page, and then access it from your computer later. [Figure 4-47](#) shows a new message from my device, and [Figure 4-48](#) shows how it appears on my page.

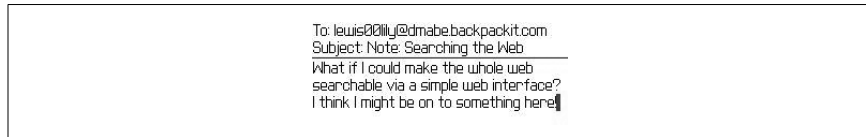


Figure 4-47. Adding a note to Backpack

Have Reminders Sent to Your Device

Backpack also allows you to set up reminders that can be sent to you by email. The interface for adding reminders in your desktop browser is sleek and usable. It makes clever use of JavaScript using a method called Asynchronous JavaScript and XML (AJAX). [Figures 4-49](#) and [4-50](#) show setting up a reminder and the email that is sent when it's time. Notice that the formatting of the email allows you to easily use [filters \[Hack #30\]](#) to create a vibration or audible alert when a reminder is received. If you use a calendaring application that supports the iCal standard (for example, Apple's iCal and Mozilla Sunbird), you can subscribe to your reminders so they appear within your calendar program automatically.

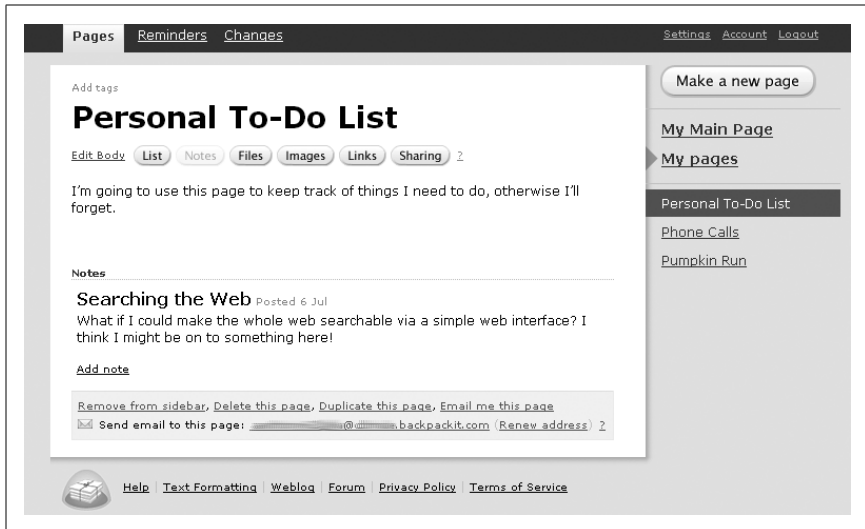


Figure 4-48. The note appears on the Backpack page

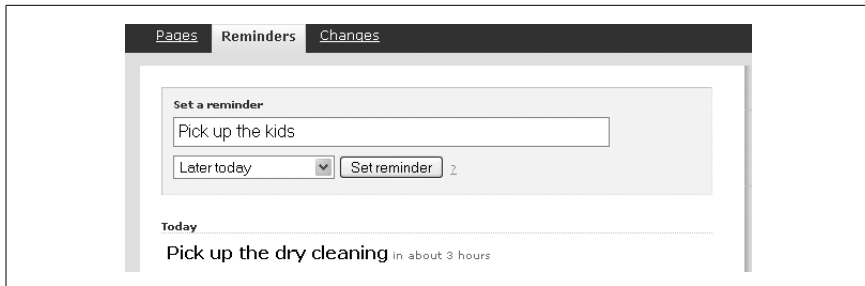


Figure 4-49. Adding a reminder in your desktop browser

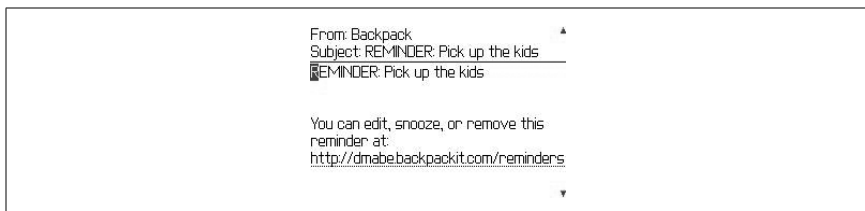


Figure 4-50. A reminder email as it shows up on your BlackBerry

Access Backpack from Your Device

One of the nice things about Backpack is its ability to access your pages from a mobile device; just append */mob* onto the end of your Backpack URL like so:

http://username.backpackit.com/mob

You can create reminders, new pages, to-do list items, and notes by using this trimmed-down HTML interface in your BlackBerry Browser.



You can also have the contents of a page emailed to you from the mobile or standard interfaces. Backpack uses a pseudo-wiki style formatting that provides shortcuts for creating new list items and links among other things. You can email the Backpack documentation to yourself and file it in a folder, so you always have access to a good “refresher” course on how to use these shortcuts to produce the markup you’d like in your page. You could also have the Backpack page emailed to you—the email will contain the actual markup Backpack uses to display the page.