Figure out what to do with Torbirdy vs. Thunderbird 78 ESR

10/11/2019 07:07 AM - intrigeri

| Status: | Rejected |
| Priority: | Elevated |
| Assignee: | |
| Category: | |
| Target version: | Tails_4.10 |
| Feature Branch: | |
| Type of work: | Research |
| Blueprint: | |
| Start date: | |
| Due date: | |
| % Done: | 0% |
| Estimated time: | 0.00 hour |
| Spent time: | 0.00 hour |
| Starter: | |
| Affected tool: | |

Description

Even if we manage to ship Torbirdy on Thunderbird 68 (see #16771 for details), it's quite unlikely that it'll still work on Thunderbird 78, so we will probably need to figure something out.

Info gleaned on Thunderbird mailing lists:

- Updating Legacy Extensions for Thunderbird 78
- Traditional add-ons (including bootstrapped ones) will no longer be supported, possibly as early as Thunderbird 72, and almost certainly in Thunderbird 78.
- addons dev matters are primarily discussed on https://thunderbird.topicbox.com/groups/addons/
- "WebExt Experiments" and "MailExtension Experiments" may go away in a few years

Related issues:

- Related to Tails - Feature #16771: Upgrade to Thunderbird 68 Resolved
- Related to Tails - Feature #17219: Replace TorBirdy Resolved
- Blocks Tails - Feature #16209: Core work: Foundations Team Confirmed

History

#1 - 10/11/2019 07:07 AM - intrigeri
- Blocks Feature #16209: Core work: Foundations Team added

#2 - 10/11/2019 07:07 AM - intrigeri
- Related to Feature #16771: Upgrade to Thunderbird 68 added

#3 - 10/11/2019 07:11 AM - intrigeri
- Target version changed from Tails_4.11 to Tails_4.10

(Actually we can, and possibly should, do this as soon as Thunderbird 78 is released, ahead of the time when Thunderbird 68 is EOL and it becomes urgent and stressful.)

#4 - 10/11/2019 07:21 AM - intrigeri
- Description updated

#5 - 11/07/2019 04:09 PM - Anonymous
Here is a summary from today's meeting. I hope I did not mix things up too much, our running around in circles was quite hard to break! @segfault please correct me if I'm wrong.

- Thunderbird 78 will not support traditional addons anymore, possibly even TB72 won't
- https://developer.thunderbird.net/add-ons/tb73
- planned for summer 2020
a lot of stuff will not work anymore, XUL is going away
→ it's unclear if preferences can even be set by a MailExtension. And if all needed preferences can be set.

- One can't directly access preferences via WebExtensions: https://wiki.mozilla.org/WebExtensions/FAQ#Does_the_WebExtensions_API_provide_access_to_preferences.
- For reference, Thunderbird preferences set by Torbirdy here:
  https://gitweb.torproject.org/torbirdy.git/tree/components/torbirdy.js#n30
  https://gitweb.torproject.org/torbirdy.git/tree/chrome/content/emailwizard.js
- For reference: overlays that are set by Torbirdy:
  https://gitweb.torproject.org/torbirdy.git/tree/chrome/content

How to go further
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- user interface can probably go away so we're left with a set of preferences.
- we need to check if all the preferences could actually be set (segfault)
  (sukhbir is happy to help with this in any way)
  → this would be a prerequisite to port to WebExtensions/MailExtensions
- check whether a hypothetical WebExtension ported Torbirdy will be broken with TB72 already (segfault)
  → legacy support will be removed from the code base within the Thunderbird 72 time frame (end of 2019):
    https://developer.thunderbird.net/add-ons/tb78
  → this means our timeframe would be even shorter.
- If we think it is useful, to benefit more, also non-Tails, users, we could try to fix things in Thunderbird directly, possibly hiring an Outreachy or a GSoC student. Sukhbir could do the mentoring.
- But we will not have enough time to fix this for TB 78 in any case be it by porting to MailExtensions, be it by fixing it in Thunderbird directly.
  → This short time frame means that we will have to find a Tails specific solution.
- That could be a Git repo that can be used by other privacy distributions. (We should communicate with them about this.)
- And then set the preferences for Thunderbird in Tails directly.

05/15/2020
How to go further
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- we need to check if all the preferences could actually be set (segfault)
  (sukhbir is happy to help with this in any way)
  → this would be a prerequisite to port to WebExtensions/MailExtensions

I looked through the MailExtensions (that just seems to be the name of WebExtensions in Thunderbird) API of both Thunderbird 68, and the pre-release version, and didn't see any functions which would allow us to set the preferences set by TorBirdy:


So I don't think it will be possible to port TorBirdy to a MailExtension.

- check whether a hypothetical WebExtension ported Torbirdy will be broken with TB72 already (segfault)
- legacy support will be removed from the code base within the Thunderbird 72 time frame (end of 2019):
  [https://developer.thunderbird.net/add-ons/tb78](https://developer.thunderbird.net/add-ons/tb78)

After reading more, I understand a bit better what will be removed in which Thunderbird version:

- Thunderbird 68 already only supports MailExtensions, **but** legacy extensions can supposedly be converted to MailExtensions relatively easily: It requires converting the old RDF manifest to a JSON manifest, and then in the JSON manifest the legacy key can be used to load the legacy XUL extension.
  [https://developer.thunderbird.net/add-ons/tb68](https://developer.thunderbird.net/add-ons/tb68)
  [https://developer.thunderbird.net/add-ons/tb68/overlays](https://developer.thunderbird.net/add-ons/tb68/overlays)

- In either Thunderbird 72 or 78, the support for loading a legacy XUL extension via the JSON manifest will be removed. I still don't understand in which version that will be removed, the page is titled "Updating Legacy Extensions for Thunderbird 78" but it then says "it should be [removed] within the Thunderbird 72 time frame - so by end of 2019".
  [https://developer.thunderbird.net/add-ons/tb78](https://developer.thunderbird.net/add-ons/tb78)

So we could spend some time to convert the manifest and try getting TorBirdy to work in Thunderbird 68, but that would only work for a few months. I think that instead we should try to implement and test a Tails-specific solution (i.e. set the Thunderbird preferences via our hooks) ASAP.
I agree with segfault's analysis and conclusions. We're dropping Torbirdy in #17219 so this ticket does not make sense anymore ⇒ rejecting it.