Tag based file/document management

Computers and its interfaces have evolved a lot since Windows 95. One important thing hasn't changed though: the way we store files in the system. We store files in folders in with names like C:\Users\Username\Documents. Having files organized in this way, following old technical standards is a big leftover from computing history that should be removed. Finding files in the current system is way too cumbersome. Tag based file management is the solution.

Every file should not be stored in a folder on a drive, but in a filepool, to be retrieved via tags, which are independent of the technical constraints of the folder hierarchy and thus much more flexible.

This can be done in a way that is backwards compatible with Windows, and almost all of the applications running on it.

As pictures can say a 1000 words, the explanation of this idea will continue in pictures.

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ps. This actually is a follow up on my own Windows program that was designed to make browsing throught folders easier. It's called Folder View. See www.folderview.com

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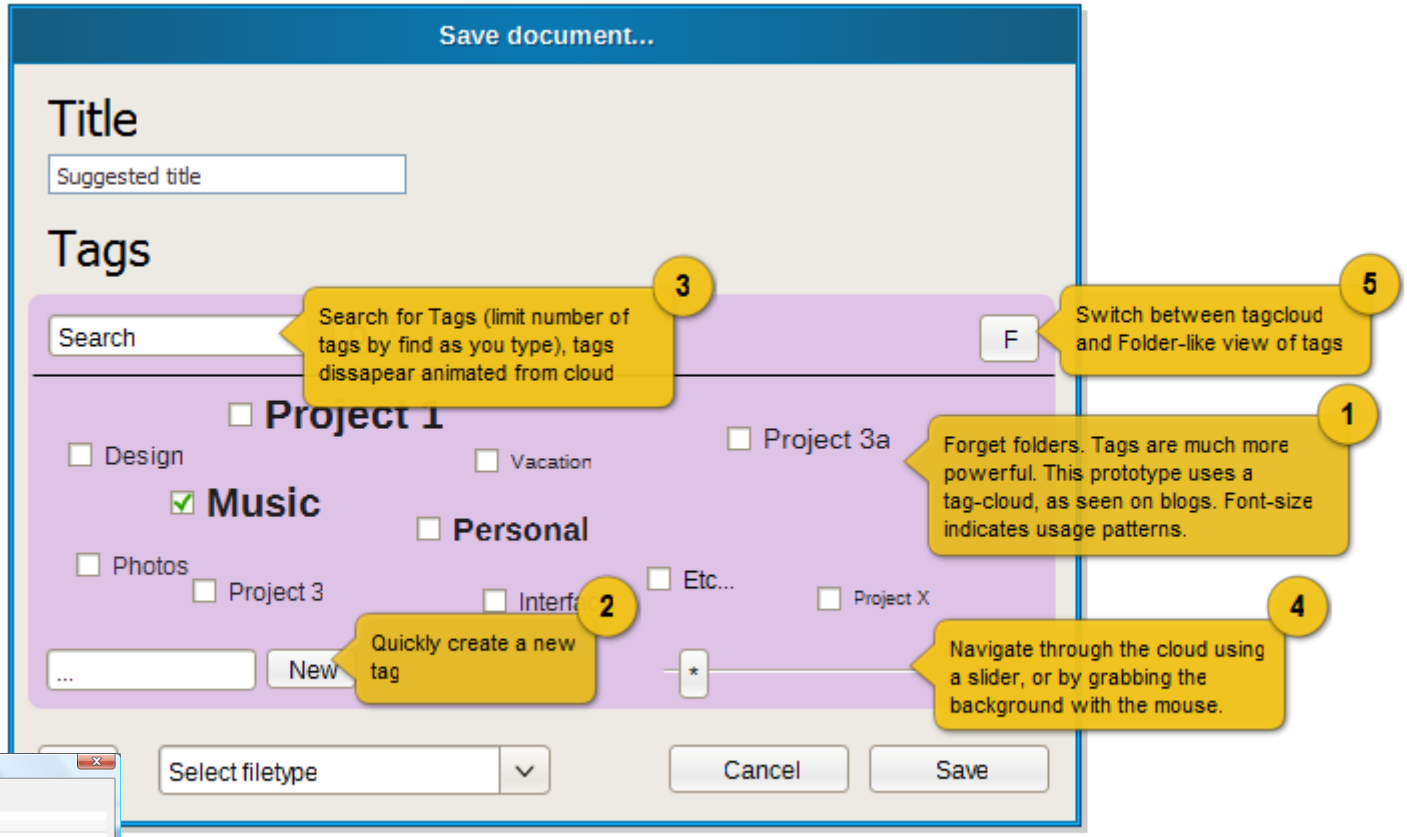
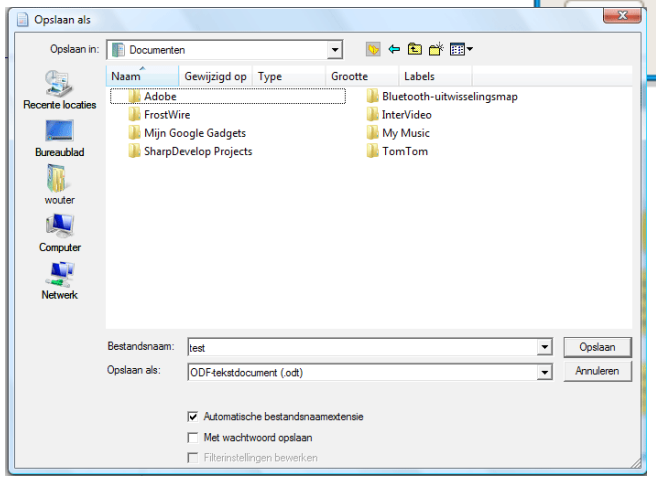
Saving documents/files

To start with the Save Document dialog. Normally this dialog is the starting point of a quest through the filesystem or the network. Including strange things like C:\, \\Server\Share\User\Folder, My Computer and H:\USB.

Not so with a tag based filemanager. A user can fill in a title, check some boxes next to the tags the file should belong to, and press Save.

Compare that simplicity to the old-style dialog below.





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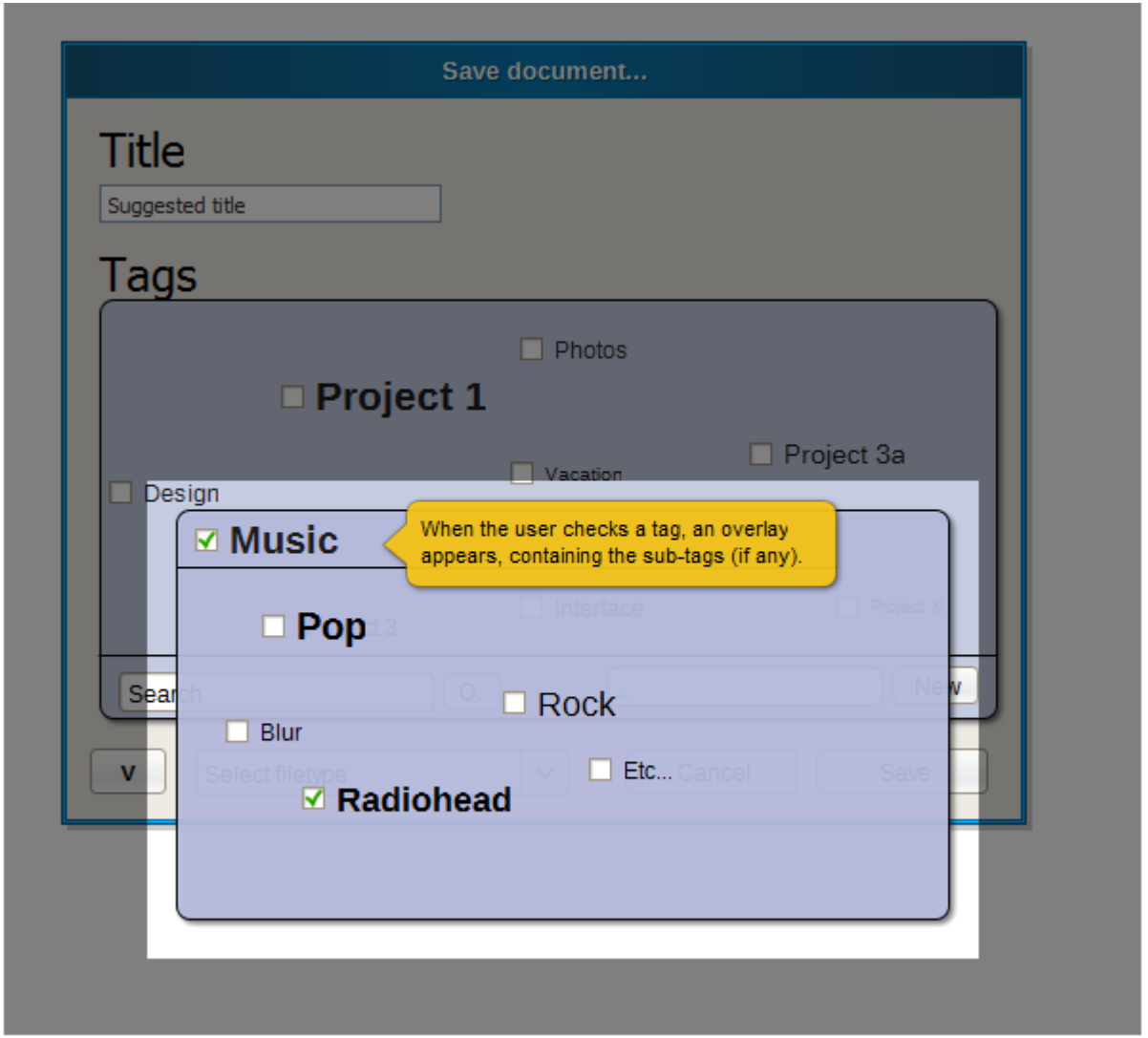
Unlike most tagging-systems, these tags can be hierarchical. So the Music tag can contain other tags like Pop, Classical, or Radiohead and Bach. If the user wants it that way, it's not compulsory.
When the user checks a tag that contains other tags, a popup will appear containing the other tags.



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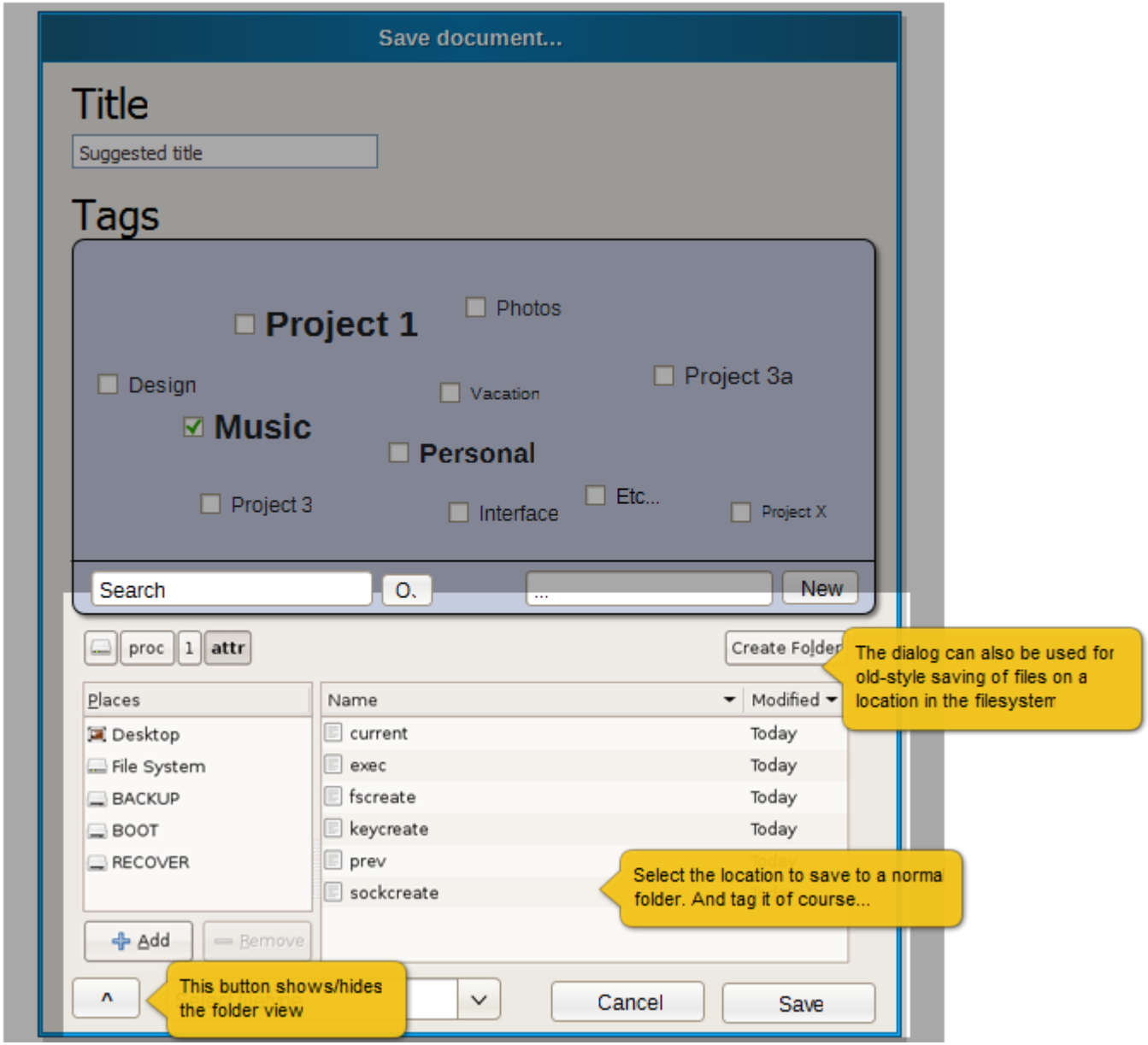
For backwards compatibility, the dialog can be expanded to save files the traditional way. Of course, a user can tag this file too, so it wil be easily accessible even though it's stored somewhere else.



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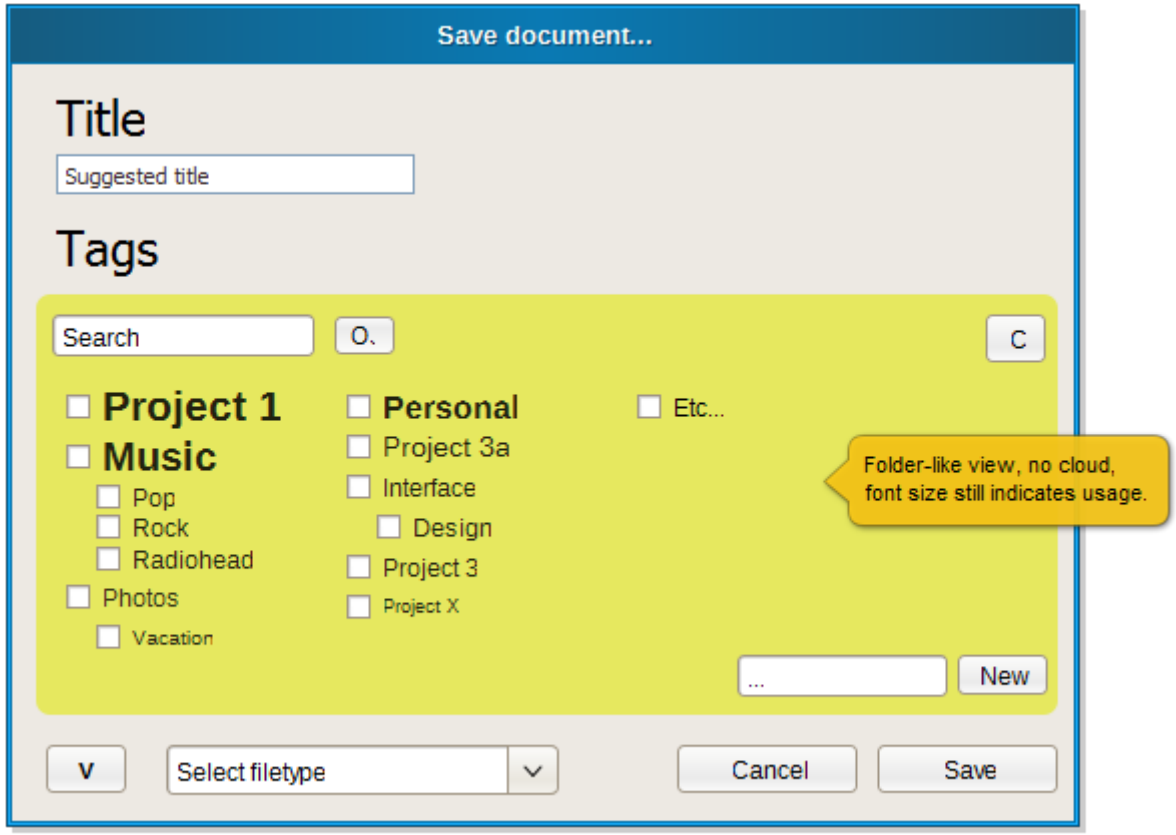
The tags in the dialog don't have to be presented in a tag cloud. They can also be presented in an hierarchical way, just like the old folder-system.



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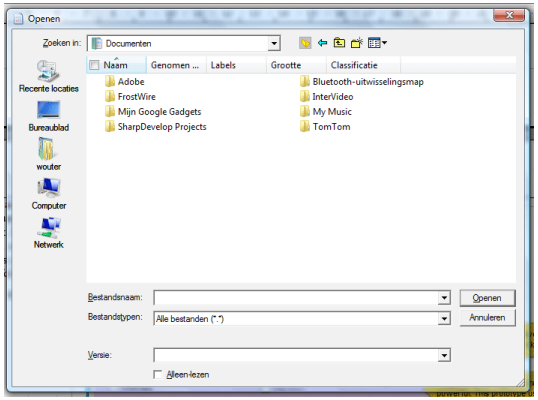
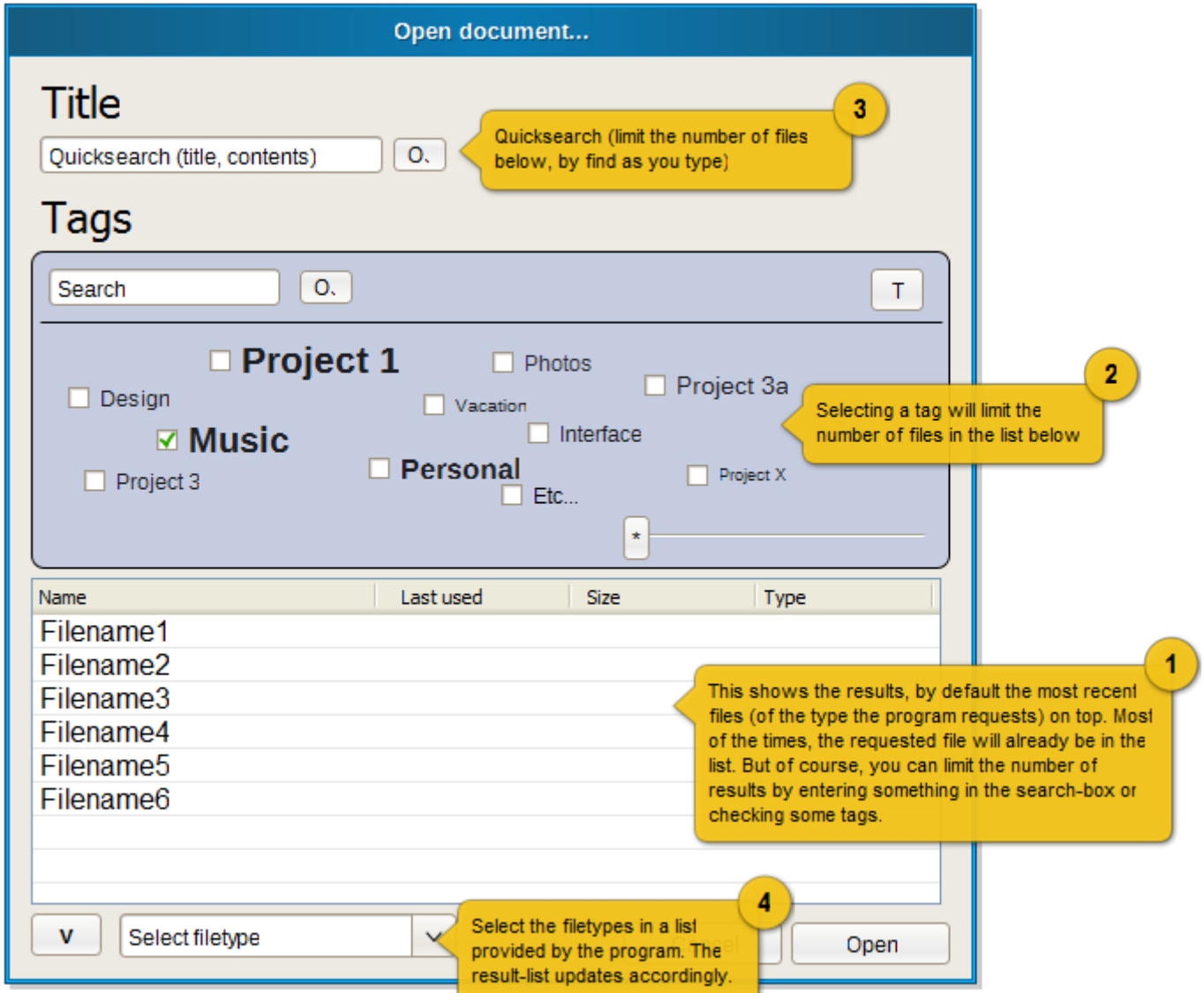
Open Document/file

Unlike in the current system, the Open Document/file dialog is very different from the Save Document dialog.
At the bottom is a file list, which contains the files. If the right file is not already there, just type the name into the upper quicksearch box, or check some tags. Both methods will limit the number of files in the filelist.

Compare that simplicity to the old-style dialog below.





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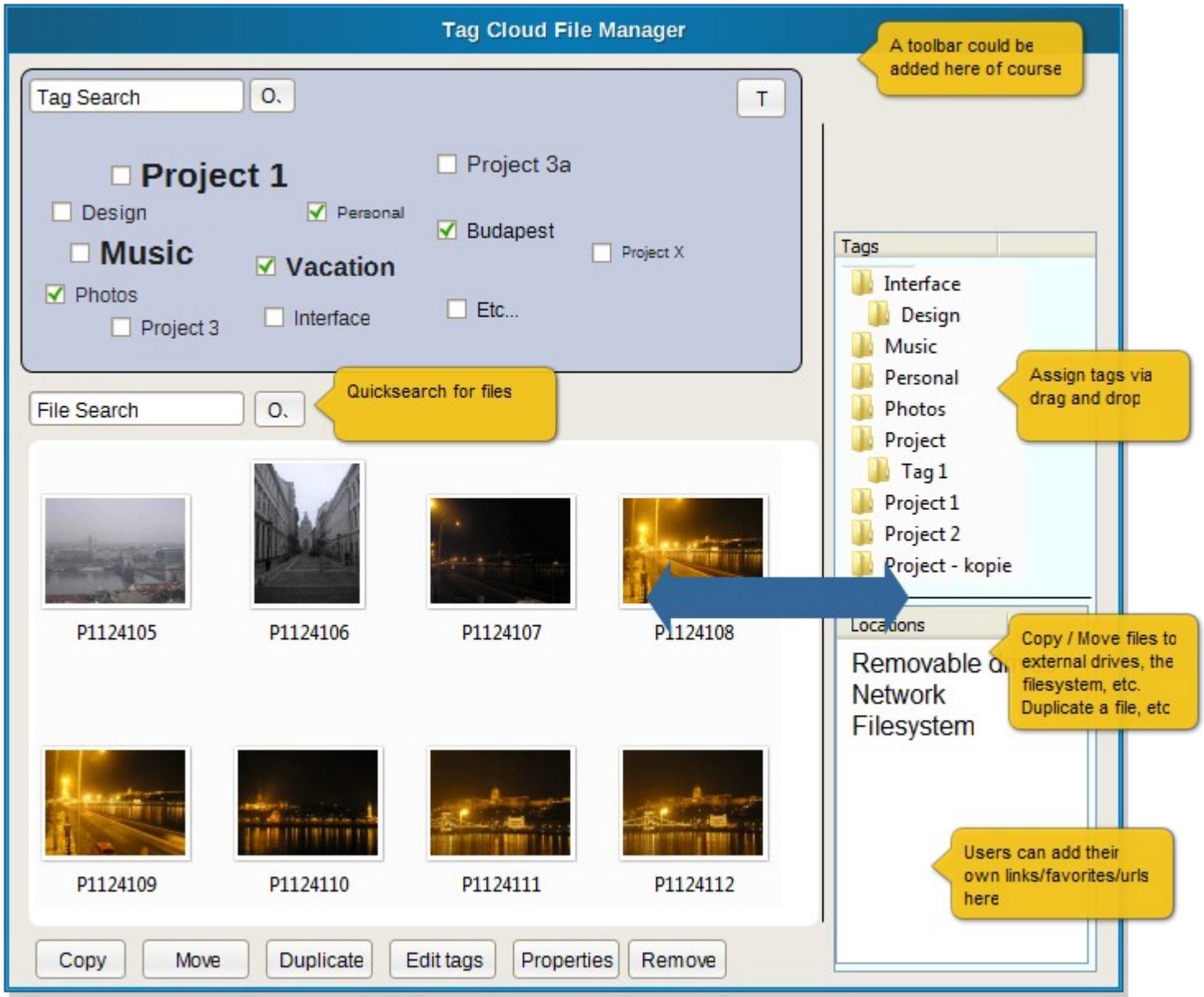
File Manager

The new tagbased filemanager is extremely simple to use. The user most probably won't use it as much as the traditional filemanager, simply because the files are by default organised much more easier and structured. The user simply doesn't have to organise as much as in a traditional system.

But nevertheless, some organizing will be needed. Again, a tag cloud is used to select the files to be organised, just like in the Open Document dialog. The selected files can be moved and copied to the lists on the right side of the window. These lists contain the tags an things like the old-school filesystem, the network and removable drives.



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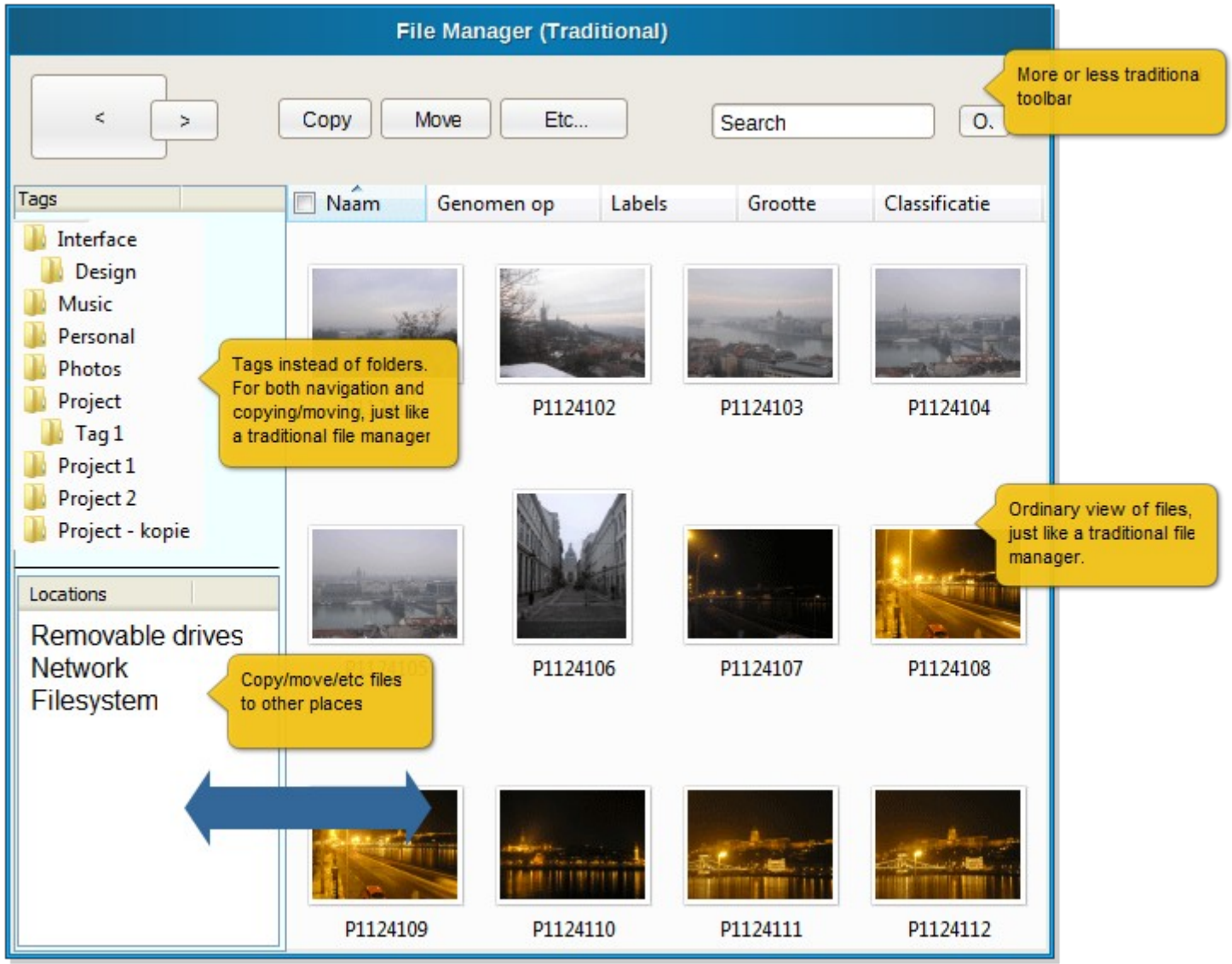
For backwards compatibility, a more traditional filemanager can be used. This one looks a lot like traditional filemanagers, but uses tags instead of folders.



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Other

To facilitate all the different uses of the filesystem and network, the tags are not just tags. Checking a tag can result in a system-action/script which can be defined by the user. But the system also contains standard actions. Examples of actions:

- a tag can be linked to a location in the filesystem (on the harddisk/external drive/network/etc)
- checking a tag let the system to sync the (encrypted) file. With pda, another folder, ftp-location, external drive, mp3player, webservice like flickr or google docs.

The system also contains default tags:

- Recent ...
- Most recent imports into the system (photos, mp3, downloads, copies from external drives, CD-rips)
- File or document-types
- External drives / Network tags
- Software

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