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Have You reddit? Exploring Ways to Digg Some del.icio.us Stories

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Have You reddit? Exploring Ways to Digg Some del.icio.us Stories

by Sara Sampson and Roger V. Skalbeck

What do the *Washington Post*, the *Huffington Post*, and *Wired's Listening Post* all have in common? They each provide a single-click method for you to bookmark stories and share them with others. Almost anybody who has read an online newspaper or blog recently has probably seen the names del.icio.us, Digg, or reddit. These are three of the most popular social networking sites included in the concept that makes up part of the buzzword Web 2.0.

Beyond letting you collect and share information, these services also have great research and marketing potential. In this article, we explore some of these concepts and how to use them.

When you read an article online, it is great to be able to email it to someone directly from the website. From a technology standpoint, this is not hard to do. So why don't sites like the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* provide this option? First of all, many people complain that email traffic can be overwhelming. Beyond that, transmitting a single story from point A to point B gives no added context to the recipient. This is where content sharing sites come in. These services allow people to save links to stories in a common location, providing added value through shared comments and subject classification.

Overview of Three Content Sharing Sites

Before going any further, it is important to describe the phenomenon of content sharing websites, often referred to as "social bookmarking" services. Whether you've noticed or not, you've probably seen icons and names for del.icio.us, Digg and reddit. These are all websites where users post content to share with others, and each has a way to display the most popular content more prominently.

del.icio.us (<http://del.icio.us>)

Created in fall 2002, del.icio.us is a site where users can store bookmarks online and share their bookmark collections with others. The domain name for this site is broken up into three syllables, emphasizing the ".us." For those who can't

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remember this quirky URL, you can also use www.delicious.com. Yahoo! bought this site in 2005, and it is now one of the most common ways for people to save and share links to newspaper articles and blog posts. Users post links to the site and assign single-word tags to categorize them, and anyone can see links not marked as private.

reddit (<http://reddit.com>)

This is a social news-sharing site where users contribute stories from around the Internet. Visitors to the site then rank stories by voting them up or down, influencing story ranking on the reddit homepage. There is also a section of the website where people can discuss news stories. Created in 2005, reddit is now owned by the parent company of *Wired* magazine.

Digg (www.digg.com)

Similar to reddit, Digg is a site where readers post news stories to share online, ranking them to influence where they appear on the Digg homepage. This site initially had a focus on technology and science articles, but now includes other areas such as entertainment and international news. They also include sections of the most popular videos and podcasts. For all three content types, users can vote on to promote ("digg") or demote ("bury") each entry. These votes determine which stories make it to the Digg homepage. There have been complaints that some users game Digg's voting system. Digg now requires users to log in to vote content up or down.

Importance of Crowd Popularity

Because reddit and Digg allow users to vote on news stories, researchers can use these services to check the zeitgeist of the day and to find stories that are popular but not in the mainstream media. Del.icio.us posts a hotlist and the most popular and recent bookmarks on its homepage. Beware, though, of these popularity contests. Among the relevant sites there are many amusing and fascinating sites. To prevent wasting too much time, just bookmark the websites that look interesting to you and move on.

Ubiquity and Ease of Use

Of all the social sharing sites on the Internet, del.icio.us offers one of the most predictably useful services. Even as far back as Netscape's first introduction in 1994, people have been saving bookmarks

to return to their favorite sites. Del.icio.us makes storing bookmarks incredibly easy while also adding value through the comparison capabilities it provides. The success of del.icio.us arises as much from its ubiquity as well as its ease of use.

For each URL posted to this site, del.icio.us creates a page with the website name, user comments (which often include a description of the website), a tag cloud, and the posting history. A tag cloud shows the words that users have used to describe the website and the frequency of each word's use by making more popular words larger. Words that appear in a large percentage of all of the tags used to describe the website are in bold. The tag cloud is interactive; just click on a word to get a list of websites that have been tagged with it. Del.icio.us always allows you to view just your bookmarks or the most popular bookmarks related to a tag.

Del.icio.us offers add-ons for your browsers that make adding a website and jumping to your bookmarks very simple. The add-on has two buttons: **tag** and **del.icio.us**. By clicking the **tag** button, you're presented with a form that contains the URL and name of the website currently in your browser. Just fill in the **tag** field and the website is added to your bookmarks. If someone else has already tagged the website, you'll see the most popular choices for that tag. To view your bookmarks, just click the **del.icio.us** button. To see what other users have tagged with the same words, just click on the tag. A list of the websites that have been tagged with that word most often will appear.

Research Opportunities

Del.icio.us can be used both in your research and to organize your online research. Del.icio.us tags are like subject headings, so you can find similar websites by linking to websites that other users have tagged with the same words. Since the tags are uncontrolled, be sure to be flexible with your search strategy. For example, when tagging information related to the United States Supreme Court, users have used terms such as Supreme Court, Court, SupremeCourt, supreme_court, and SCOTUS. It's easier to find related materials if you tag helpful websites with an established term instead of creating your own. On the other hand, if you are bookmarking websites for your own use, such as a reading list or presentation preparation, you may want to use a unique tag.

Once you've posted a single story on del.icio.us, you can see how many other people have posted the same link. By looking at the collections of other people who have linked to the same content, this is a

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way of tracking down related materials. If you find an obscure but important news article online, check to see who else has linked to it in case they have tagged similar stories. This kind of associative research isn't perfect, but when successful, it's a great way to track related materials online where Google might fail.

To use del.icio.us to organize your research, be consistent with your choice of words for tags. For example, if you are looking for newspaper coverage of a particular company, just tag all of the relevant pages you find during your search with that

Social bookmarking services and related content sharing websites allow researchers one more method of finding answers.

company's name. To make sure that you have not missed anything, check out what other del.icio.us users have tagged with the company's name or stock ticker symbol. Once you're done, you can view all of the websites you've saved by viewing your bookmarks with that tag. You can share this list with others by sharing the web address for your tag.

Marketing Opportunities

Del.icio.us can be helpful when planning and making presentations about Internet content. Just mark all of the websites you will be visiting during a presentation with the same tag. Because you can mark each website with multiple tags, you can label a website by subject and presentation type. When you are done collecting websites, just click on your unique tag and you have created a source for all of the websites you'll visit. Use this during the presentation and then share the address with those attending the presentation.

At Georgetown Law Library, we've used del.icio.us to build lists to share among the library staff. For example, we've tagged catalog records that need to be fixed and built lists of websites to be reviewed before a meeting. Because these lists can be created without opening another program like Word or Outlook, you don't lose time or momentum when searching. Also, it allows those reviewing the links to do so in one place on their own timetables.

You can see how people have tagged your web pages on del.icio.us by bookmarking it yourself. Don't worry if no one has bookmarked your page yet. By being the first person to bookmark it, you can set the tag suggestions that will pop up whenever anyone

tags your page. For example, we bookmarked our Supreme Court Research Guide before anyone else. We assigned many different tags to it, including SupremeCourt, court, research, certiorari, and history. By viewing the bookmark in del.icio.us, we could see what websites other users had tagged with those terms and get related terms, such as SCOTUS.

Tracking News with RSS

All three services provide ways for people to track updates through RSS feeds, with del.icio.us providing the greatest flexibility. If you don't already know, RSS (short for "real simple syndication") is a way to automatically distribute content updates. Users can read RSS feeds in many email programs, track them through a Google or Yahoo! account, and monitor them through sites such as Bloglines.

With both reddit and Digg, you can track the latest stories on their homepage. Altogether, Digg has around 40 RSS feeds for each of the topics and subtopics in their article and video links. For some reason, there are no RSS feeds associated with the podcasts, but this feature is still being beta tested.

On del.icio.us, absolutely everything can be tracked with RSS. You could monitor links posted by an individual, every page marked with a specific tag, or popular links. At almost every conceivable page there is an option to track it with RSS. If you need to track a company, product name, or legal topic for any period of time, this might be a way to do it. Since tags are all single words on del.icio.us, some of this tracking is uneven. For instance, you can't track "legal research" but you can monitor the tag "legalresearch" all run together.

Conclusion

Social bookmarking services and related content sharing websites allow researchers one more method of finding answers. These services will not replace search engines or commercial databases, but they can provide a level of context and very current peer evaluation unavailable through Google or LexisNexis. There are as many as three dozen content sharing services on the Web, so the three we covered here are only the beginning. If you choose one or two that you can learn well, you should find that they give you a new approach to finding and sharing answers to whatever questions come your way.

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