

Tagging & Social Bookmarking

Tagging is another commonality of Web 2.0 tools. Social bookmarking extends tagging and organization into the realm of SNS, with tags, feeds, and RSS subscriptions included. A useful definition of the technologies highlighted in this chapter comes from librarian and blogger Ellyssa Kroski, who'll be publishing a guide to 2.0 tools with Neal Schuman in 2007.

In "The Hive Mind: Folksonomies and User-Based Tagging," Kroski writes:

Unlike social-networking sites such as LinkedIn and Friendster, which concentrate on developing relationships, social sites such as del.icio.us, 43Things and Flickr focus their attention on organizing data. Users organize their own or other's data in the public sphere and the social, or community, aspects arise from there as users share and seek out like-minded individuals.¹

Tagging is the assignment of a keyword or phrase to a bit of digital data: a blog post, a Flickr photo, a video, a Web site. Groups of tags created by the users of a certain collection of data are called "folksonomies." That means simply that the tags are a collection of words assigned by folks—everyday people, not librarians consulting their subject headings guides.

The site Technorati tracks tags for blog posts, videos, and photos. Looking up a tag on Technorati can be a useful way to see online coverage of a topic or an event, such as the American Library Association conference. A search on the tag ALA2007 yields numerous blog posts covering the event, many images, and some videos as well.

Groups of tags can be displayed as lists or as a visual representation called a "tag cloud." The size of the words in the tag cloud reflects the number of items that carry

that tag. In my personal tag cloud at Flickr, the tags JAKE, CHARLIE, and MICHIGAN are all very large because of the large number of pictures I have taken of my dogs in Michigan (see figure 16).

Libraries are using tagging in variety of ways. Many library blogs feature tags as a means of organizing information. The librarians at Williamsburg Regional Library tag posts in their blog, *Blogging for a Good Book* (see chapter 2), to help users discover books that might interest them. In her article about the service, librarian Jessica Zellers described the usefulness of tagging:

The tags are a wonderful boon to readers' advisory. They expand upon the plot summaries that typically constitute the bulk of book reviews. The tags tell at a glance whether a particular book is strong in the any or all of the six big appeal characteristics (language, story, character, setting, tone, and pace). If a review is tagged with 'setting,' the book is strong in setting; if it is not tagged with setting, it is understood that the book is not remarkable in that particular appeal. Other useful tags include genre and reading interest (i.e., Fantasy, Women's Fiction, and Nonfiction), form (i.e., short stories, graphic novels, audiobooks, and music), age level (i.e., children's and young adult), and individual recommendations (i.e., Jessica's Picks).²

The University of Pennsylvania library developed its own tagging system called "PennTags." The About page describes the tool:

PennTags is a social bookmarking tool for locating, organizing, and sharing your favorite online



Figure 16
Michael's tag cloud at Flickr.

resources. Members of the Penn Community can collect and maintain URLs, links to journal articles, and records in Franklin, our online catalog and VCat, our online video catalog. Once these resources are compiled, you can organize them by assigning tags (free-text keywords) and/or by grouping them into projects, according to your specific preferences. PennTags can also be used collaboratively, because it acts as a repository of the varied interests and academic pursuits of the Penn community, and can help you find topics and users related to your own favorite online resources.³

Other innovative uses of tagging in libraries surely point toward the future of classification systems where users and librarians will create systems together—mashing up our foundational skills with the collective mind. John Blyberg's SOPAC (see chapter 3) features a tagging function as well. SOPAC allows the display of the library catalog as a tag cloud as well as a cloud of the top searches on the catalog at any time.

Del.icio.us

Kroski writes further in her “Hive Mind” essay:

del.icio.us is a social bookmarking site. What that means is that instead of saving a Webpage link in your “Favorites” (IE) or “Bookmarks” (Firefox) folder for future use, you save it to your del.icio.us page. The benefit being that you can then access the links from any computer since they are no longer only stored locally. As you add each page to del.icio.us, you are given the opportunity to add descriptive keywords, or tags to the link. This organizes your data by category or tag. You

can look for what others have linked to and described by a particular tag or just browse others' collections of links.⁴

Del.icio.us allows users to subscribe to feeds of various tags, to display a list of tagged sites on other Web pages, and to display a customized tag cloud.

Fred Stutzman, a doctoral student and blogging expert on social tools, posted recently about del.icio.us.⁵ Stutzman writes, “When we first started bookmarking links in del.icio.us, the notion of transportable, social, rssable bookmarks was a great concept. It remains a great concept, and del.icio.us' growth is evidence of the strategy's value. Del.icio.us' UI also appealed to many—it was fast, stripped down and eminently usable.” Stutzman does go on to argue for improved features that highlight the value he sees in the tool editorship:

Del.icio.us is populated by many brilliant minds, but they are simply too hard to find! Its almost as if everyone on del.icio.us is blogging anonymously. It might have made sense a few years ago, but it doesn't anymore. Del.icio.us can improve the social aspects of the service without becoming another social network; the idea that adding social to del.icio.us is somehow a negative is completely bunk. Social can be added well, and it will make del.icio.us even more popular. It's time for del.icio.us to realize the value of editorship.

Libraries & del.icio.us

The Missouri River Regional Library uses del.icio.us to create a Reference links page (see figure 17). The tool allows the librarians to add or edit from any Web computer. The display page is dynamically updated with each change.

Another library that uses del.icio.us is the Nashville Public Library. NPL's “Teen Web” (see figure 18) includes

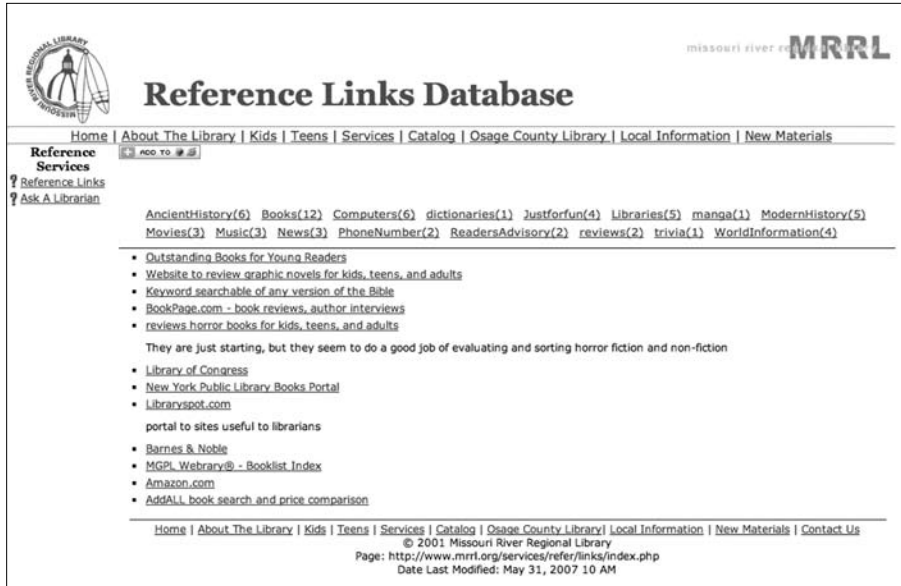


Figure 17
MRRL's Reference Links Database.

a del.icio.us feed to display other recommended teen Web sites. Jenny Ellis, reference librarian, detailed the process of creating that part of the NPL teen site. "We decided to put the recommended teen websites in del.icio.us. Then we could put the tag cloud on our Teen Web page."⁶

Ellis and her NPL colleague Kyle Cook developed the teen Web site using a number of 2.0 tools, including Flickr to display a badge of photos. They opted to use del.icio.us as well for three important reasons:

First, it invites participation. Del.icio.us gives the Teen staff some direct control over part of the Teen Web. All the teen librarians have the password and access to this single account. Staff can add or delete links from any computer, as long as they log in to the Nashpubya account. It also means that teens with del.icio.us can participate. They could suggest good sites to us by tagging them for our account.

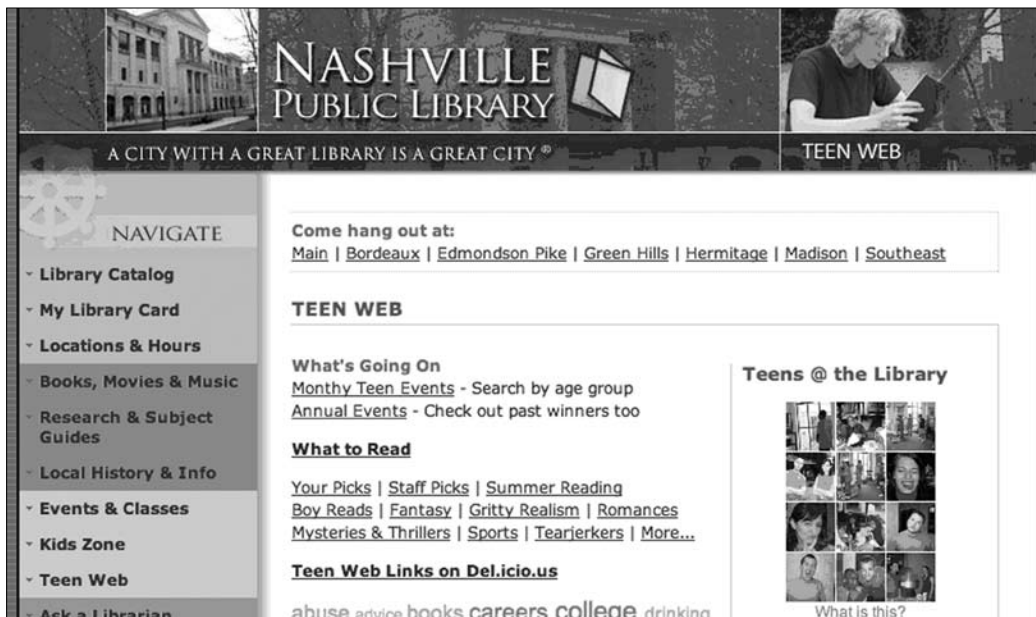


Figure 18
Nashville Public Library's Teen Web



Figure 19
Tag cloud displayed on NPL Teen Web.

Second, del.icio.us organizes links based on tags. Teens would find sites based on key terms instead of having to navigate through confusing categories. So, it should make it easier for teens to find what they are looking for.

Third, the del.icio.us tag cloud allowed us to tag sections of the teen web, so the teen web is available through del.icio.us, not just the library website.⁷

Using the tool turned out to be a smooth process. Ellis noted that getting the tag cloud on the site was easy (see figure 19). “In del.icio.us, there’s a tool where you create a tag cloud. Then you can copy and paste the html or javascript code on your webpage or blog. If you don’t have access to the webserver, your webmaster can easily paste the code. The cool part is, you get to create how it will look and you manage the content.”⁸

Ponder how you might use tagging with a site like del.icio.us at your library. I use a tag for each of the classes I teach and display a feed of the sites and articles tagged on the class blogs. Could your department do that as well? Take a lesson from the libraries above and create a low-cost, dynamic Web resource.

What You Can Do Now

Here are some steps you can take now to begin using the ideas in this chapter:

- Experiment with tagging at Flickr or your own del.icio.us account.
- Browse del.icio.us for sites and articles tagged with descriptors that interest you.
- Ponder incorporating a tag cloud in your library blog (Wordpress makes a cloud widget available) or on another part of your site.

Resources

Ann Arbor District Library Tag Cloud
www.aadl.org/sopac/tagcloud

Blogging for a Good Book
<http://bfgb.wordpress.com>

Del.icio.us
<http://del.icio.us>

The Hive Mind
<http://infotangle.blogspot.com/2005/12/07/the-hive-mind-folksonomies-and-user-based-tagging>

Missouri River Regional Library Reference Links Page
www.mrrl.org/services/refer/links

PennTags
<http://tags.library.upenn.edu>

Scriblio
<http://about.scriblio.net>

Technorati
www.technorati.com

Top 25 Social Bookmarking Sites
www.ebizmba.com/articles/social-bookmarking.html

Notes

1. Ellyssa Kroski, “The Hive Mind: Folksonomies and User-Based Tagging,” InfoTangle, Feb. 7, 2006, <http://infotangle.blogspot.com/2005/12/07/the-hive-mind-folksonomies-and-user-based-tagging> (accessed July 12, 2007).
2. Jessica Zellers, “In Blog Heaven: A Painless New Approach to Readers’ Advisory,” *Virginia Libraries* 53, no. 3 (July/Aug./Sept. 2007).
3. About page, PennTags, Oct. 11, 2005, <http://tags.library.upenn.edu/help> (accessed July 11, 2007).
4. Kroski, “Hive Mind.”
5. Fred Stutzman, “Structural Holes in del.icio.us, or, the Value of Editorship,” Unit Structures, May 10, 2007, <http://chimprawk.blogspot.com/2007/05/structural-holes-in-delicious-or-value.html> (accessed July 12, 2007).
6. Jenny Ellis, e-mail interview by the author, July 3, 2007.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.