Social Bookmarks 101

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Content on Internet's world-wide web continues to grow at a dizzying pace. While a wealth of engaging content for learning is now available online, locating and later RE-locating websites for instructional uses is frequently challenging. As teachers, we've all likely had an experience similar to this one: "I know I saw a great website about that topic just last week. How frustrating I cannot find the web address again so I can share this with my students!" Social bookmarking offers a free and compelling way to address the need we all have to locate, record, later RE-locate, and share "good website finds" on the Internet. Regardless of future changes in the Internet and the content it contains, this ability to ably manage website "bookmarks" or "favorites" is likely to be an enduring skill important to both teachers and students alike.

SOCIAL VERSUS LOCAL COMPUTER WEBSITE BOOKMARKING

The English WikiPedia defines "social bookmarking" as "a way for internet users to store, classify, share and search Internet bookmarks. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_bookmarking) When most people begin surfing the web, one of the first things they generally learn to do is save a website address as a "bookmark" or "favorite." These words are used interchangably: "favorite" is the term used by the Internet Explorer and Flock web browsers, "bookmark" is used by the FireFox and Safari web browsers. (See www.flock.com, www.mozilla.com/firefox, and www.apple.com/safari for more information about and download links.) In the case of all four of these web browsers, however, there are inherent limitations to the common practice of saving a website address as a favorite or bookmark on a local computer's hard drive. These include:
1. **Limited Access**: The saved bookmark or favorite is only saved on the local computer's hard drive, and is therefore not accessible from other locations. For teachers or students using computers in different locations, this can be problematic.
2. **Limited Organizational Options**: Most systems for locally saving website bookmarks or favorites provide a simple folder system for organization, but do not permit more complex organizing methods like "tagging." If a website needs to be saved in more than one category, a local system for bookmarking cannot accommodate multiple categories unless the bookmark itself is duplicated and saved more than once in the system. This is generally not desirable.
3. **Limited Sharing and Discovery Options**: When bookmarks are saved locally, user choices for sharing those bookmarks with others are sharply limited. People can email bookmarks to others or share a saved folder of bookmarks using a shared network drive or USB thumb drive, but there are generally not automated ways of permitting others to access bookmarks a user wants to share. This is a

significant limitation, since the ability to share "great website finds" online can save large amounts of time for busy teachers.

In contrast to these limited features for traditional website bookmarking, many systems for social bookmarking offer distinct advantages.

1. **Ubiquitous Access**: As long as the social bookmarking website is not blocked by a content filter at school or elsewhere, users can access their saved bookmarks from ANY computer connected to the Internet. This can permit teachers as well as students to continue research work across multiple computers in different locations: In the classroom, in the library, in the computer lab, and at home.
2. **More Powerful Organizational Options**: Unlike traditional file and folder structures which permit only hierarchical, taxonomic organization of websites, some social bookmarking sites (like del.icio.us) support "tagging." When a website is saved as a bookmark, users can also assign various keywords as "tags" to the bookmark to facilitate organization and later location of that website by themselves as well others using the same network of social bookmarks.
3. **Powerful Possibilities for Discovery and Location**: Google is a fantastic search tool, but millions of search results can be overwelming. Some social bookmarking tools permit users to search and explore the saved website favories of other users and thereby benefit from the time they have spent both locating and organizing (via "tags") those websites. Grade-level teacher teams can collaboratively find and share resources, student project teams can work together to locate sites needed for their assignment, and the collective work of thousands of other individuals using the same network of bookmarks can also be of assistance. Social bookmarking allows people to directly tap into the "knowledge residing in the network" which thousands of others have created together as they find, tag, and save worthwhile websites online.

GET STARTED WITH DEL.ICIO.US

A variety of different social bookmarking tools are available, but del.icio.us (http://del.icio.us) is one of the most powerful and versitle because of the way it facilitates sharing and collaboration with others.

Several excellent step-by-step guides for getting starting with del.icio.us are available. These include:

1. Janetta Garton's tutorial (www.willard.k12.mo.us/co/tech/Document/delicious.pdf)
2. David Muir's tutorial (http://personal.strath.ac.uk/d.d.muir/Delicious1_2.pdf)
3. Alan November's tutorial (http://nlcommunities.com/communities/files/2991/83887/Delicious+Instructions_Short.pdf)
4. Quentin D'Souza's guide to "Social Bookmarking Tools" (http://www.teachinghacks.com/wiki/index.php?title=Social_bookmarking_tools)

After registering for a free account and installing "bookmarklets" (browser buttons which facilitate the process of quickly posting or saving a new website into your del.icio.us bookmarks) be sure to check out the ADD TO MY NETWORK feature. This permits you to add other people (for free, of course) into your personal del.icio.us network so you can see, access, and (if desired) save the Internet websites they have saved themselves. Think of this as analogous to "The Borg" in the Star Trek series, but in a good way! The Borg were a formidible opponent because they were mentally connected to each other, and almost immediately were able to learn things their fellow Borg members knew. Del.icio.us offers a similar potential for shared knowledge on the network of the Internet!

After you create your own del.icio.us account and start to use it, visit my del.icio.us page (http://del.icio.us/wfryer) and click the text link at the top to ADD WFRYER TO MY NETWORK. As you find websites others have also saved, click the link SAVED BY 300 OTHER PEOPLE (or whatever the correct numbers is for that website) and look for other people with similar interests to yours who you can also add to your own del.icio.us network. This will permit you quickly access the "best Internet website finds" of other people easily and quickly in del.icio.us in the future, by simply clicking the MY NETWORK link at the top of the page.

The way del.icio.us supports "tagging" of websites to organize them into an organically created "folksonomy" is a fundamental organizing principle of the user-created web. To learn more via a powerful video on this subject, I highly recommend the video "The Web is Using/Us" by Dr. Michael Wesch. (http://mediatedcultures.net/ksudigg/?p=84) The changes in the information landscape all around us can be overwhelming. One of the best ways to better understand and leverage the opportunities this new landscape presents for learning is by regularly using web 2.0 tools like del.icio.us. I encourage you to give it a try. If you start to use del.icio.us regularly, you may never find yourself saying again, "I wish I could find that great website again I saw last week!" You'll also be amazed by the number of connections you can make to other educators interested in similar curricular subject areas who have already found terrific instructional websites perfect for you and your students to start using right away!

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