

It's Del.icio.us: But Is It Good for You?

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Like many librarians, I am a tireless searcher and organizer. For me, the satisfaction of finding a great resource is second only to sharing that resource with a colleague or user who needs that resource. Over the years, I have invested countless hours bookmarking web sites and organizing (and reorganizing) those sites using a system of folders, a standard bookmarking feature in browser software. But even with careful organization and almost continuous reassessment, I often forget where within my organizational scheme I saved a fantastic resource. And, inevitably, I forget about some resources altogether. Out of site; out of mind. That is, until I discovered Delicious...

A social alternative

Delicious (<http://del.icio.us>) is a free, public, and popular web application that enables users to save and organize links to their favorite online resources. Because the tool is web-based, users can access their bookmarks at any time and from any computer.

Delicious is one of many social bookmarking tools to emerge over the past few years as a clever alternative to traditional browser bookmarking. It is a tool frequently associated with Web 2.0. That is, it is one of many related applications and technologies that encourage information sharing and collaboration among the users of information rather than just among the creators of information.

What makes these tools particularly social is they allow users to 1) share bookmarks publicly [Note: Delicious bookmarks also can be saved privately, for the user's eyes only]; 2) browse other users' bookmarks; and, most interestingly, 3) assign one or more tags (descriptive, one-word terms) to describe bookmarks and facilitate their retrieval at a later time.

Tags can be added, edited, and deleted at any time, making them more flexible than the hierarchical and often complicated systems of browser bookmark folders with which we all are familiar.

The common wisdom is that as both number of users and amount of activity within a social bookmarking application increase, the richer a resource it becomes. But, if you think the results of thousands of people creating tags to describe their favorite web resources can be chaotic, you're not alone! To address this, Delicious and other social bookmarking tools provide mechanisms that encourage users to apply standard (frequently used) tag formats (e.g., `opensource` rather than `open_source`). This social standardization of tags enables users to search effectively and enjoy large numbers of relevant results. The result of this user-driven, highly collaborative tagging is what has become known as a folksonomy; or, a taxonomy developed by folks (content users) rather than subject specialists (content developers).

Can organizations take advantage of social bookmarking?

Delicious has clear benefits as a tool for individual users to store and share bookmarks. But using a public site to manage resources of interest to your organization may be unthinkable. Even if all your bookmarks are saved as private, there are risks in storing potentially confidential and competitive resources on a public server.

While public applications like Delicious are not an option for organizations required to maintain confidentiality and protect intellectual property, there are a variety of enterprise applications (i.e., those that can be purchased and administered behind a firm's firewall) to consider. With powerful features like social bookmarking, tagging, blogging, ranking, and networking, such applications (a number of which are listed below) can encourage collaboration by:

- Facilitating resource sharing
- Building expert communities
- Promoting knowledge-management activities
- Promoting new library resources, topical collections, and services

Is social bookmarking right for your firm or organization? It's not likely an easy question to answer. But as social media applications gain popularity and continue to mature-and workplaces adopt more collaborative protocols and technologies-information professionals no doubt will be keeping these applications on their collective radar.

Free and public tools

Digg (digg.com/)	MyBookmarks (mybookmarks.com)
Google Bookmarks (www.google.com/bookmarks)	LinkaGoGo (linkagogo.com)
Furl (www.furl.net)	StumbleUpon (www.stumbleupon.com)
Ma.gnolia (ma.gnolia.com)	Mister Wong (www.mister-wong.com)
Netvouz (www.netvouz.com)	BlinkList (www.blinklist.com)

Enterprise tools

Connectbeam	www.connectbeam.com
BEA AquaLogic Pathways	www.bea.com/framework.jsp?CNT=index.jsp&FP=/content/products/aqualogic/pathways/aqualogic/pathways
Cogenz	www.cogenz.com
IBM Lotus Connections	www-306.ibm.com/software/lotus/products/connections

Special purpose tools

CiteULike www.citeulike.org	Free tool that enables users to store, organize, tag, and share links to scholarly papers on the web. Special feature enables users to import and export references and build bibliographies.
LibraryThing www.librarything.com	A service to help people catalog and organize books. Users can apply their own subject tags or use Library of Congress or Dewey systems to organize collections. Using LibraryThing for Libraries, social data can be integrated into local catalogs, allowing users to add tags, recommendations, ratings, and reviews to OPAC records.
PennTagstags.library.upenn.edu	A tool developed by Penn State University's library system for the Penn State community. The tool lets users tag and share favorite online resources and library materials.

Interesting uses of Delicious by libraries

San Mateo (CA) Public Library	The library maintains a Delicious account (del.icio.us/SanMateoLibrary) in which tags are organized by Dewey classification.
Stanford University's Green Library	The library's Information Center (IC) maintains a Delicious account (del.icio.us/sulinfocenter) and publishes its Delicious tags on the IC web site (www.stanford.edu/group/ic/cgi-bin/drupal/delicious).

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