

Is Reputation Management Impacting Your Research?

As you probably heard, in early September, intense rains from Hurricane Irene caused devastating floods in portions of central and eastern up-state New York. What you probably had not heard, though, was that during the flooding emergency, postings began appearing on social media sites accusing a neighborhood PETCO retail pet store chain of evacuating its employees but leaving its animals behind in their cages. This was, in fact, the case, and PETCO's failure to evacuate its animals resulted in the drowning deaths of birds, ferrets, rodents, guinea pigs, turtles, fish, and lizards. Word spread very quickly on social media sites and the

Online reputation management firms promise to improve the online image of an individual or business.

web about the decision of that store. A great deal of anger spread about the corporation, and a slew of anti-PETCO webpages and Facebook groups were quickly launched. This ultimately resulted in more mainstream media attention, leading CEO Jim Myers to admit to the store's failures to take timely action and to apologize for the incident (www.petcoscoop.com/2011/09/johnson-city-petco-flooding).

generated anger, now so easily findable all over the web.

This kind of problem for an organization—negative commentary about the firm on the open web—is causing some companies to consider performing “online reputation management.” This article takes a close look at this fast-growing movement and discusses what it means for you as researchers and business information professionals.

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The Reputation Management Industry

Certainly by now you've seen and heard the ads by firms that promise they can fix and/or improve an individual's or business' online image, as these ads seem to be appearing with increasing frequency on radio, TV, and the web. Such firms are members of the online reputation management industry, and they promote their services to persons and firms who want to have

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web searchers find more positive entries, results, and comments surface when using a search engine or browsing a social network. While the big name in the reputation management field is Reputation.com, Inc. (which recently changed its name from ReputationDefender), a simple search on Google for online reputation will retrieve the names of more than a dozen competing online reputation management firms, promoting themselves in the top and side ad spaces of a Google search results page.

Google told us it does not condone reputation management campaigns that attempt to hide relevant information.

But does this kind of intentional manipulation of search results impact the validity and usefulness of what you find when you search for information or opinions on a company, product, or brand? Let's take a closer look at the online reputation management activi-

ties and their implications for online business research.

What Is Online Reputation Management?

First, let's clarify our terms and definitions. It's helpful to distinguish online reputation management from key related concepts: social media monitoring, search engine optimization, and reputation management. Here's how these differ:

■ **Social media monitoring:** We've frequently written about social media monitoring. This is primarily a marketing function that monitors discussions, posts, and content on social media sites as a way to obtain grass-roots market research data and opinions, learn customer concerns and complaints, find new customers, and pick up signals that indicate changes in consumer preferences and trends in the industry. An example of a very basic social media monitoring tool would be the creation of a Google Alert to monitor keywords on blogs.

■ **Search engine optimization (SEO):** This is the technique employed by firms that have websites and sell to consumers (or occasionally to businesses) to create webpages in a manner that will improve the ranking of their pages on a search engine—primarily Google. This is done, of course, as a way to

increase the odds of a user click and ultimately making a sale.

■ **Reputation management:** This is the function within a company dedicated to monitoring and maintaining a firm's reputation, as this is seen today as a strategic asset. Reputation management involves several types of activities and strategies, *one* of which might be hiring an online reputation management firm.

■ **Online reputation management:** This refers to monitoring what is being said about an individual, company, product, brand, or event online—particularly by consumers—usually with a goal of increasing the number and ranking position of positive or neutral comments, and “pushing down” the ranking positions of the more negative ones. This function can be do-it-yourself, or it can be performed by hiring a specialist firm.

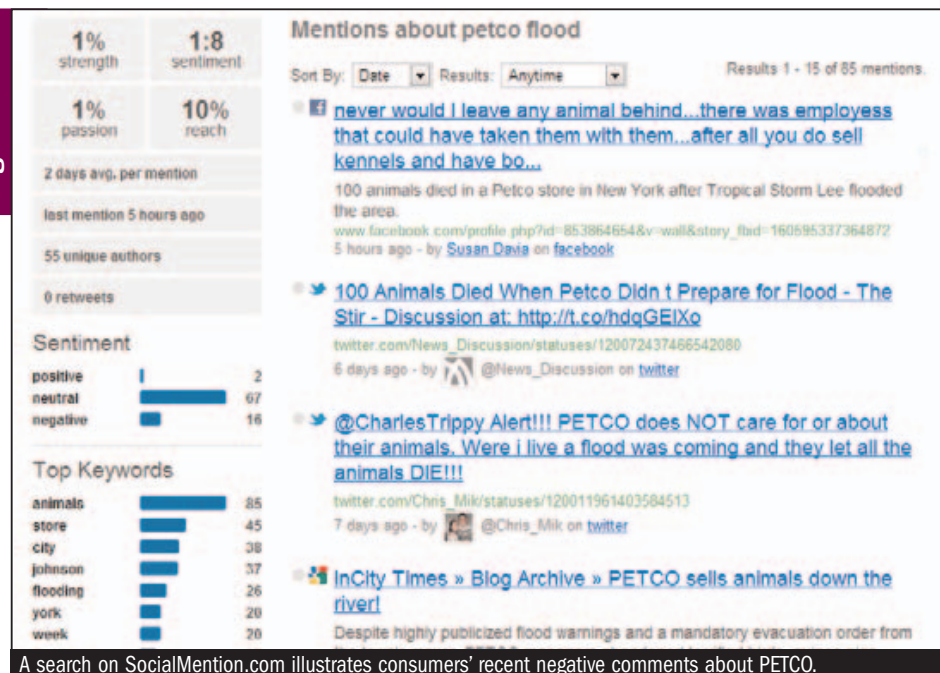
It should be noted that online reputation management has been around for several years. More firms are now looking to the online reputation management industry for help. This is due in large part to the continued explosion in consumer-generated content, the reliance of many consumers on review sites and peer commentary in making business purchasing decisions, and an increasing awareness that bad word-of-mouth on the web can result in the loss of a significant amount of sales.

How It Works: The Ugly, the Bad, and the Good

So what do online reputation management firms do to help their clients obtain a more positive image on the web? The answer varies quite a bit, as it depends on the tactics—and ethics—of any individual firm. On a spectrum, then, from simply enhancing relevant and reliable content to engaging in deception and dirty tricks, a client could be offered any of the following techniques:

■ Doing traditional “white hat” search engine optimization of a client's existing pages to make sure its content is relevant, reliable, and accurate—this is supposed to

Figure 1



A search on SocialMention.com illustrates consumers' recent negative comments about PETCO.

A Smile That's in Disguise

Is it even possible to distinguish fake and/or manufactured content from authentic opinion and commentary? If you are doing a company profile on Verizon, for example, and want to know about the satisfaction of its customers, is there a way to distinguish actual user commentary from any created in an effort to simply push negative comments down? According to researchers at Cornell University who studied the differences between authentic and phony consumer review sites (which they termed “opinion spam”), “the detection of deceptive opinion spam is well beyond the capabilities of human judges, most of whom perform roughly at-chance.” (See “Finding Deceptive Opinion Spam by Any Stretch of the Imagination,” published in *Proceedings of the 49th Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics*, pages 309–319, Portland, Ore., June 19–24, 2011; available at www.cs.cornell.edu/~myleott/op_spamACL2011.pdf.)

But while the authors found that humans were not capable of reliably distinguishing fake from real reviews, it did discover that there were some significant differences in the word choice, punctuation, and style between the fake and authentic ones. Using a hotel review as an example, Cornell researcher Myle Ott told us the following in an email:

Truthful reviews

focused more on spatial details of the hotel itself
“bathroom,” “small”

used more punctuation

- ... () \$
except “!”

used more nouns, prepositions and adjectives
(except superlatives)

Deceptive reviews

focused on who they were with
“family,” “husband”

or their reason for visiting Chicago

“vacation,” “business”

increased usage of first-person singular
“I,” “me”

used more verbs, pronouns adverbs and superlative adjectives

When we followed up and asked her if there was any research or speculation as to *why* these differences exist, she referred us to a segment in her paper (which she modified for readability in the email) that references the scholarly and research work supporting these findings:

In agreement with theories of reality monitoring (Johnson and Raye, 1981), we observe those truthful opinions tend to include more sensorial and concrete language than deceptive opinions; in particular, truthful opinions are more specific about spatial configurations (e.g., small, bathroom, on, location). This finding is also supported by recent work by Vrij et al. (2009) suggesting that liars have considerable difficulty encoding spatial information into their lies. Accordingly, we observe an increased focus in deceptive opinions on aspects external to the hotel being reviewed (e.g., husband, business, vacation).

We also acknowledged several findings that, on the surface, are in contrast to previous psycholinguistic studies of deception (Hancock et al., 2008; Newman et al., 2003). For instance, while deception is often associated with negative emotion terms, our deceptive reviews have more positive and fewer negative emotion terms. This pattern makes sense when one considers the goal of our deceivers, namely to create a positive review (Buller and Burgoon, 1996).

Deception has also previously been associated with decreased usage of first person singular, an effect attributed to psychological distancing (Newman et al., 2003). In contrast, we find increased first person singular to be among the largest indicators of deception, which we speculate is due to our deceivers attempting to enhance the credibility of their reviews by emphasizing their own presence in the review. Additional work is required, but these findings further suggest the importance of moving beyond a universal set of deceptive language features by considering both the contextual and motivational parameters underlying a deception as well.

One of the very interesting results of this research was the team's creation of a software program that analyzed the linguistic, wording, and grammatical segments of reviews to create a probability analysis on the likelihood as to whether a review was authentic or phony. While humans were only able to perform at the level of chance, the software designed to parse and analyze the segments was able to develop a classifier that was *nearly 90% accurate*, when run on a gold-standard “opinion spam” data set.

The researchers have made a demonstration of their classifier software available online. You can try it yourself with an existing or made up review at <http://reviewsnipr.org>.

make the pages more likely to obtain a higher ranking on a search engine such as Google

- Assisting the firm in creating additional useful, relevant content pages to supplement what it already has on the web
- Attempting to fix or correct factually incorrect pages or posts from third parties by contacting those third parties
- Organizing content-creation campaigns from other sites or users to post multiple pages, remarks, etc., purely to push down any existing unwanted content and page
- Requiring or subtly pressuring existing employees to post positive

things about the firm on their personal Facebook and Twitter accounts

- Creating link schemes (see page 4 for a definition)
- Posting deceptively positive reviews of the company, product, or brand by people who have contact with the firm or from paid bloggers who may or may not disclose their relationship to the firm with their readers

It should be noted that while a list such as this one may make online reputation management seem inherently nefarious and unethical, there is another side. Eric Ward, who runs

a well-known and respected content publicity and link-building business at EricWard.com, told us that he personally “despises link spam, [and] detests attempts to manipulate Google's algorithm.” His job is to “help companies create and understand linking strategies that are driven by content merit, not algorithmic loopholes.” Furthermore, he explained that there could be cases where a form of online reputation management is needed to address a certain legitimate problem: for example, if someone planted malicious and untrue information about a firm or individual or if there was something simply embarrassing about a person

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(perhaps say a bankruptcy filing) that the individual wished to make less prominent.

We also contacted Google directly to get the company's take on the tactics of the online reputation management industry and its influence on Google search results. A Google spokesperson told us the following:

Our mission is to help people find relevant information. So, we don't condone reputation management campaigns that attempt to hide relevant information. While there is nothing in our guidelines that explicitly forbids reputation management, if we uncover link schemes or other violations, we reserve the right to take action in response.

Google defines link schemes as "build[ing] partner pages exclusively for the sake of cross-linking, disregarding the quality of the links, the sources, and the long-term impact it will have on their sites." Examples of link schemes can include the following:

- Links intended to manipulate PageRank
- Links to web spammers or bad neighborhoods on the web
- Excessive reciprocal links or excessive link exchanging ("Link to me and I'll link to you.")
- Certain types of paid links (Google will actually delete sites from its index if it catches firms doing link schemes.)

So, to summarize, there is no question that there is an increasing amount of jiggering of content on the web—by marketers and retailers trying to get a high-ranking position in a kind of more aggressive extension of their public relations efforts.

Impact on the Searcher

How much and in what way is that an issue or problem for you as a business researcher? We decided to post that question via email to Andy Beal, CEO of Trackur and co-author of *Radically Transparent Monitoring and*

Further Resources

To learn more about online reputation management, we recommend the following resources:

- OutSpoken Media, Inc.: The Online Reputation Management Guide
<http://outspokenmedia.com/guides/orm-guide>
- Do It Yourself Social Media Tool: Social Mention
(See our review of Social Mention and other online media monitoring tools in our June 2011 issue.)
- Monitoring and Managing Your Online Reputation
www.youtube.com/user/dandbcredibility#p/search/0/1TvqVSJK0n0
(The editor's video series for Dun & Bradstreet Credibility Corp.)

Managing Reputations Online (Sybex, 2008). He told us the following:

All search results are subject to the bias of those that created the content, the search engine algorithms that ranked the content, and the researcher reviewing the content. In general, while one or two negative web pages can be pushed down, *the overall web reputation of an individual or company will always reflect its general character and conduct.* [Italics added]. As long as a researcher looks at more than 10 web results, and perhaps accounts for outliers—those overly positive and those overly negative results—the legitimacy of the results should not be undermined.

It's interesting that Beal's reassurance that these efforts should not invalidate the legitimacy of a search also sheds some doubt on the efficacy of the entire online management reputation industry as well.

We tend to agree with Beal that it's not likely that these endeavors to make results more positive are likely to have a significant impact on company research. However, we would also see that for certain types of business research, some online reputation management techniques could result in artificially manufactured content that would paint a deceptively positive picture of a firm.

The kind of business research where you may want to have a higher level of alert for phony, deceptive or manufactured content includes the following:

- Research on companies where users are particularly vocal about

their experiences with a firm and its customer service, products, and brands. This includes retailers, high tech, travel, finance/banking, entertainment, medical/pharmaceutical, food/beverage, supermarkets, teleco, personal care products, and other heavily consumer-oriented industries

- Firms that are particularly image-conscious
- Individual professional service firms such as law firms, doctor's offices, veterinary clinics, financial planners, tax accountants, etc., where a negative experience could have a powerful effect on the firm's reputation

One strategy you could take to help being overly swayed by aggressive online reputation management efforts is to not limit your viewing to just the first page of results—go at least to the second, third, or perhaps even the fifth page of results. One way to make this simple and to cut down on clicks is to go to Google preferences under "search settings" and increase the number of results displayed from the default of 10 to 30, 40, or 50. Then all you need to do is scroll down the list. Look for patterns and frequently appearing comments, even if they did not appear in the first 10 results.

Beal also provides another tip, that "excessive reference to the product or person's name, and a lack of depth to the web site (just a few pages), are often a good indicator [of phony or manufactured reviews]."

The bottom line, though, is that today the *intention* and *desire* of a company in how it wants its image portrayed on the web plays an increasingly larger role in what we will see when researching information about a firm. ■

Best of the *Best of the Business Web*

▶ PART 2 OF 2

In last month's issue we began our two-part series on the publication of our updated and reorganized collection of sites from our archive of our *Best of the Business Web (BBW)* newsletter. As we noted last month, this means that we have gone through each and every one of the 120 business research sites we selected over the past 2 years, eliminated any that no longer existed, updated URLs, and added any significant new features since their original publication.

In last month's issue, we highlighted our favorite sites and sources for two key categories: Company Information and Country/International Information. This month we round out our favorites with our selection of Government Information and Social Media and Social Search.

Government Information

■ **FDIC: Quick Links for Analysts**
www.fdic.gov/quicklinks/analysts.html

This site offers access to multiple databases and sets that include statistical information on banks and banking, such as FDIC Quarterly Banking Profile, FDIC State Profiles, Call & Thrift Financial Reports, Summary of Deposits, Statistics on Depository In-

stitutions (SDI), Statistics on Banking, and Uniform Bank Performance Reports. This site is a wealth of information for finding statistics on banks and banking. Among the kinds of data you can find are a directory of institutions, summaries of deposits, statistics on depository institutions, statistics on banking, historical data on banking, policy-related information, and FDIC State Profiles. The databases are produced by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp.

■ **Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System**
www.federalreserve.gov

This site offers a set of searchable documents from the U.S. Federal Reserve, including bulletin articles, papers, press releases, reports to Congress, speeches, and other data. The ability to construct advanced Boolean searches on a range of documents, reports, and official communications from the Federal Reserve makes this an excellent site for any kind of research into U.S. monetary policy research. The Federal Reserve (aka "The Fed") is the central bank of the United States. Its board of governors is currently led by Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke.

■ **Home Mortgage Disclosure Act**
www.ffiec.gov/hmda

Here you'll find annual disclosure of home mortgage and home improvement lending activity, including aggregate tables covering the lending activity of all institutions subject to the HMDA. HMDA requires lending institutions to make annual disclosures of their home mortgage and home improvement lending activity, and that data is made freely available on the web. Users can search by institution name, year, and other data. You'll be able to find statistics and data on transactions such as home loans, denials, refinances, and home improvements by region, tracts, race, income, and other fields. Consider this site if you need to find out about banking and home loans. The disclosure information is provided by a U.S. agency called the Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council (FFIEC).

■ **MetaLib**
<http://metalib.gpo.gov>

This site searches a selected set of U.S. federal government databases and retrieves actual documents as well as links to the original source material. Not only is the data set itself comprehensive and authoritative, the advanced and expert search options provide for some excellent filtering (by subject, date, author, etc.) and sorting options, truly helping make the search more precise and useful. It's one of the most useful and powerful government information search engines we've come across in several years. MetaLib was created by the U.S. Government Printing Office.

■ **National Credit Union Administration: Credit Union Data**
www.ncua.gov/CuData.aspx

The National Credit Union Administration (NCUA) offers financial and general information such as financial performance reports, online profiles, and other descriptive and financial data

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Figure 2

FDIC's Quick Links for Analysts provides statistical data on banks and banking.

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on both “natural person” and corporate credit unions. On this site you can find information such as ratio analysis, assets, investments, and cash; delinquent loan information; member business loans; and other transactional data. A quick way to get access to financial reports is by linking to this form-based site at http://webapps.ncua.gov/ncua_fpr. Here you can get an Excel file emailed to you. This site is part of the NCUA.

■ Global Reach

<http://blogs.census.gov/globalreach>

Global Reach is the official blog of the U.S. Census Bureau’s Foreign Trade Division, which is the official source of U.S. import and export trade statistics. Here you can find new posts as well as comments in an informal conversational manner on releases of foreign trade data, regulations, new electronic export filings, use of the data, and other topics under the purview of the Foreign Trade Division.

■ C-SPAN Video Library

www.c-spanvideo.org

In early 2010, C-SPAN uploaded free online streaming access to more than 160,000 hours of its footage. It covers every C-SPAN program aired since 1987 and represents the vast majority of its programming. This is a gold mine of all kinds of public policy-related interviews, book talks, speeches, congressional hearings, and so much more. Not only can you browse, search, and watch past programs and clips, the site also surfaces the “most shared” and “most” watched videos as well and offers special features such as “memorable moments.”

■ CRS Reports at UNT Libraries

<http://digital.library.unt.edu/govdocs/crs/index.tkl>

This site provides access to an extensive collection of Congressional Research Service (CRS) reports. CRS reports are sought-after, in-depth reports on matters of public interest, but they are not easy to find. A uniquely valuable characteristic of the UNT collection, in addition to its large scope, is that it permits searching of the full text of these

reports. In addition, you can browse by topic, including business reports. The site is hosted by the government documents section of the University of North Texas Libraries, Denton, Texas, and was created from a grant awarded to two of its librarians.

■ State and Local Government on the Net

www.statelocalgov.net/index.cfm

This site identifies and links to more than 11,000 local and state governmental offices’ websites around the country. What we liked about this directory was its simplicity, as well as its broad coverage of governmental offices. It appears to be timely too, as new links are supposed to be updated on at least a weekly basis. It is cleaner than many other free directory sites, as there are no banner or pop-up ads. There is a keyword search facility too. This site is owned by Clicker, LLC, a domain/web portfolio holding company located in Louisville, Ky. The site has been active in its current form since about May 2001.

■ USA.gov: Business and Economics RSS Feeds

www.usa.gov/Topics/Reference_Shelf/Libraries/RSS_Library/Business.shtml

This site provides RSS feeds on business and economic-related news and press releases issued by the federal government. If you need to keep up with business and economic-related news and releases, this is an extremely convenient and simple way to do it. You can quickly subscribe to feeds such as the Congressional

Budget Office, economic overviews from the Bureau of Economic Analysis, labor statistics from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, news from the Federal Reserve, and more. USA.gov is a federal clearinghouse of information run by the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA).

■ Tax Statistics

www.irs.gov/taxstats/index.html

This is a collection of official tax data compiled by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). In addition to data on individual tax filings, charitable organizations, and official bulletins, here you can find aggregated business tax information on corporations, international businesses, partnerships, S corporations, sole proprietorships, and more. There are scores of tables and graphs that group tax filings in all sorts of useful ways. For example, for corporate tax returns, you can view tax data by industry, type of firm, and company size. There are also groupings based on statistics of income, deductions, tax credits as reported by corporations filing specific forms (such as 1120, 1120-A, 1120-L, 1120-PC, 1120-REIT, 1120-RIC), and many others. The information is produced by the IRS.

Social Media and Social Media Aggregators

■ Addict-o-matic

<http://addictomatic.com>

Addict-o-matic provides a single window to display search results from multiple social media and news sites, ranging from Twitter to Google News and several others. This is not the only

The screenshot shows the Addict-o-matic website interface. At the top, there is a search bar with the text "Instantly create a custom page with the latest buzz on any topic." Below the search bar, there are several sections: "Hot Topics" (listing Alec Baldwin, Michael Vick, Irene, Burning Man, NFL, Rick Perry), "Popular" (listing Thought 2.0, Web 2.0, TV, Sports, Parenting), and "Business News" (listing Forbes, NYT Business). The interface is dark-themed with various navigation options and social media links.

Addict-o-matic displays results from searching multiple social media and news sites.

Figure 4



lyst relations. The tool he used to create the listing is called TweetLevel, which was created by Edelman.

■ **Using Twitter for Business**
<http://johnjantsch.com/TwitterforBusiness.pdf>

This is a guide for businesses on how to use Twitter for PR, marketing, and other business applications. While there's no shortage of sites and sources on how to use social media for business purposes, we were particularly impressed with this one that focuses on the use of Twitter. The PDF document is clear, direct, to the point, nicely designed, and written by a recognized expert in the field.

This report was created by John Jantsch, a marketing and digital technology coach, well-known social media publisher, and author of *Duct Tape Marketing* and *The Referral Engine*. Jantsch lives in Kansas City, Mo.

■ **Poll Everywhere**
www.polleverywhere.com

Poll Everywhere allows one to give a live audience an instant real-time poll, to text or Twitter back their selections, and to instantly display the results of the survey in a PowerPoint slide to that group. While substantive and business applications for Twitter are still evolving, this is one of the more interesting concepts we've come across. We've given it a try ourselves, and it is simple and seems to work just fine. Poll Everywhere is a virtual firm and was founded in June 2007 by former Deloitte Consulting employees Sean Eby and Brad Gessler.

■ **Twtpoll**
www.twtpoll.com

This site allows you to quickly create and disseminate simple surveys and polls to members. Twtpoll provides a nice, easy option for creating short simple polls that can be sent to members of social networks or others on the web. You can also browse recently created surveys by others, surveys related to current Twitter trends, polls containing particular keywords, or all polls from a specific user. See an example of a Twtpoll we created on paying for online news at <http://twtpoll.com/693nl6>. Twtpoll is a creation

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social media site aggregator around, but it works well and has an attractive display. It is a good way to get a quick snapshot of what's being said and written about your topic on key social and real-time news sites. Addict-o-matic was launched in May 2008 by Dave Pell of San Francisco.

■ **Twapper Keeper**
<http://twapperkeeper.com>

This site allows users to create a "notebook" of incoming tweets. One of the downsides of Twitter as a legitimate research source is the difficulty in maintaining an archive of past tweets for future browsing or searching. However, Twapper Keeper permits users to create and maintain archived notebooks of a person's tweets or even a specified grouping/list of followers, as well as tweets categorized by hashtags. The notebook is hosted on Twapper Keeper's own site. You can also browse other notebooks on other topics on the same site, which could also potentially be a valuable research source.

Twapper Keeper was created by John O'Brien III in the summer of 2009, and version 2.0 of the site was released in March. O'Brien is employed as a special assistant to the agency director at the U.S. Department of Defense's Business Transformation Agency, where he was previously CIO and CTO.

■ **oneforty**
<http://oneforty.com>

oneforty is a directory of applications and add-ons for Twitter. The site describes itself as "Thousands of Twit-

ter tools that make Twitter more useful for your business, career or life." While this site is "only" a directory, we really like it very much—it is organized, timely, and well put together. It includes useful sections such as "essential" Twitter tools and is keyword-searchable. There is a specific section for business Twitter tools too. oneforty was created by Laura Fitton, who co-wrote *Twitter for Dummies*. oneforty was recently acquired by HubSpot, a marketing software platform creator based in Cambridge, Mass.

You can find popular industry analyst tweeters on the Top Analyst Tweepers blog.

■ **Top Analyst Tweepers**
<http://technobabble2dot0.wordpress.com/2010/01/19/top-analyst-tweepers-via-tweetlevel-2>

This blog page identifies, describes, and links to the top industry analyst Twitter pages. The TweetLevel tool applies its own algorithm to score a tweeter's influence, popularity, engagement, and trust to get a total score, and this blogger applied that formula against industry analysts to create this top list. The Technobabble blog is a creation of Jonny Bentwood, a PR consultant for Edelman specializing in ana-

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of Twtapps, a firm founded in 2008 by Felipe Coimbra. Twtapps is based in Montreal.

■ **ClosetLibrarian**

<http://twitter.com/ClosetLibrarian>

This Twitter user is a librarian who provides mini-summaries and links to important and authoritative research and studies on a range of business, technology, and social topics. What we really appreciate about ClosetLibrarian is her ability to find the really significant research studies, to summarize quickly the scope and results in short tweets, and to provide the link to the original study. Topics range from technology use to education, business trends, social life, and more, but virtually all are substantive and valuable for serious research purposes. ClosetLibrarian is Anna Shallenberger of Shallenberger Intelligence Services, located in Tualatin, Ore.

■ **Nearby Tweets**

<http://nearbytweets.com>

Nearby Tweets identifies tweeters and recent tweets in your current (or manually specified) geographical location. This is a very interesting way to discover who is tweeting in your current geographic region. From a business research standpoint, we could see this being of potential value if you are at a conference or other business meeting where there may be tweeters, or if you want to find people who may be near small businesses you are researching and may have some geographically based knowledge of the firm. Nearby Tweets was launched this past January by Brian Cray of Columbus, Ohio. Cray describes himself as experienced in internet marketing, user experience design, web development, and social media.

■ **Evri**

www.evri.com

Evri filters and surfaces news on specific topics by reviewing data streams from traditional wire and online services as well as social media sources such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. While there is no shortage of search engines, directories, and news-filtering sites, it's rare to find new ones that add

something of value to the existing news aggregation landscape. We were intrigued with Evri's capabilities to pull relevant streams of information from multiple sources on a specific topic—which of course could also include an industry, company, or other topic of interest to business researchers. There are pre-existing topics, or you can enter a term to create your own set of news sources. Evri, which is currently in beta, is funded by Paul Allen's well-known Vulcan Capital. It is based in Seattle and was launched in 2008.

■ **Cadmus**

www.thecadmus.com

This site identifies the most commonly used words, topics, and phrases from the posts of those you follow on Twitter. We think Cadmus is a great idea. While there are scores of trending sites and tools, all of them surface popular words from *everyone* on Twitter. But this one is customized to identify the most common phrases, words, and topics being discussed from only the people you follow. So it has the potential to be an excellent way to identify emerging trends and issues among your own selection of trusted sources and people in your field. Cadmus is the creation of a two-person software firm created by Frank Wang and Jay Air in November 2009. The firm, Anomaly Innovations, Inc., is based in Toronto.

■ **Twellow**

www.twellow.com

Twellow is a Yellow Pages-like directory of Twitter users. Members are categorized and broken into hundreds of niche categories and segments such as industries and job titles. This site looks to be a convenient and useful resource if you are trying to reach or find certain types of Twitter users, either for market research or other related business purposes. While the site is a bit busy with ads and graphics, it seems to have done a good job of pulling together and organizing Twitter users into logical categories useful for researchers. Twellow was launched by the popular online website WebProNews. This is a publication of the iEntry network, which has published online newsletters and provided advertising

services since 1999. iEntry is located in Lexington, Ky.

■ **TweetBeep**

www.tweetbeep.com

TweetBeep provides email-based alerts when one's keywords are mentioned somewhere in the Twitter network. We tested TweetBeep and were pleased with the results. You can set up keywords to be tracked with some advanced features, such as by hashtag (hashtags are Twitter's method for permitting users' to describe what their post is "about"), the subject, geographical origin, and other criteria. You can also set the alert to arrive on an hourly or daily basis.

TweetBeep was created by Michael Jensen, a software and marketing tool entrepreneur who lives in St. George, Utah.

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