

Knowledge MANAGEMENT

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Social Bookmarking as a Knowledge Management Strategy

The fundamental concept behind knowledge management has not changed since we first launched this supplement back in 1996. Basically, firms are more effective if they can do a better job in identifying both the explicit and hidden (tacit) knowledge and expertise scattered throughout their organizations and if they can make it easy for staff to locate that expertise when needed.

But while the basic premise of knowledge management hasn't changed, the practical methods and strategies employed to achieve that goal has evolved significantly. Initially, the approach of many organizations was to install full-

blown knowledge management software and systems. However, these proved to be complex and burdensome for most employees. They were not regularly used, and sometimes they created more information problems than they solved. Over the last few years, though, much simpler, Web 2.0-like solutions to sharing knowledge—notably blogs and wikis—look to be providing a much more effective (and much less costly!) strategy for effectively sharing information within the enterprise.

We have, in fact, covered the use of blogs and wikis as a knowledge management strategy in several issues over the past couple of years. And while

blogs and wikis remain the highest profile examples of these simpler knowledge-sharing technologies, there are also other Web 2.0 tools and approaches that can help staff members do a better job of finding and sharing their expertise.

Perhaps the simplest Web 2.0 application is social bookmarking.

These tools encompass shared office applications such as word processing, spreadsheets, and presentations; shared calendars; and Web research assistants. We will cover at least some of these in future issues of our *Knowledge Management* supplement. But perhaps the simplest Web 2.0 application that is proving to be the most fruitful for knowledge management is what has come to be known as social bookmarking.

This quarter's *Knowledge Management* supplement is devoted to the use of social bookmarking as a knowledge management strategy for the enterprise.

What Is Social Bookmarking?

We're all familiar with Web bookmarks: These are just links to the Web pages you save, usually right in your

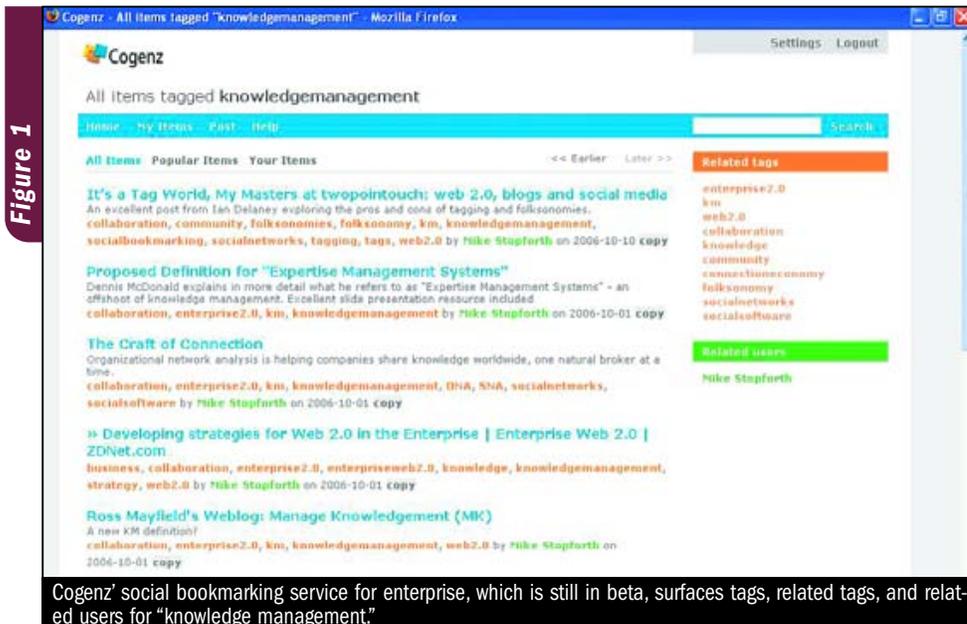


Figure 1

Cogenz' social bookmarking service for enterprise, which is still in beta, surfaces tags, related tags, and related users for "knowledge management."

browser. “Social bookmarking,” though, is a networked/Web 2.0 approach to creating bookmarks, where you not only save them for your own convenience but also for sharing with others. Social bookmarking, which occurs on the open Web, also enables you to find others’ bookmarks so that you can discover relevant pages and learn who else is researching and collecting Web pages on the same topics. (We’ll discuss social bookmarking when it’s limited to an enterprise shortly.)

The most prominent example (it’s also one of the most popular) of these social bookmarking sites is del.icio.us. But today there are dozens, perhaps even a hundred or more, similar social bookmarking sites. While the features and capabilities of each differ, they mostly work in the same manner, as follows:

- You register on the social bookmarking site and receive a user name and password.
- You download a bookmarklet to drag onto your browser’s toolbar. When you are on a Web page you want to save and bookmark, you click that button to bring up a pop-up screen where you can enter key data on the page.
 - A couple of bookmark programs allow you to save just a portion or “clip” of a page and/or to highlight a section of that page.
 - In that pop-up window, you have a space to enter tags to describe the page or to add some notes. (*Tip:* The default protocol for entering a phrase for almost all social bookmarking sites is to use an underscore between words.)
 - Those tags, your notes, and the page’s title are made available to you for searching and browsing on the social bookmark site. If you choose, you can make the bookmark public, so it will be available to other users as well.

That’s basically it. There are lots of optional and extra features provided by the different bookmark sites (see the chart on page 3), ranging from the ability to import your existing bookmarks from another site or browser to various advanced search features.

Why Use Social Bookmarking for Knowledge Management?

So what does this have to do with knowledge management? Clearly, the concept of social bookmarking is all about sharing resources, in the form of relevant and substantive Web pages. But even more important is the fact that social bookmarking sites will surface like-minded communities, as people with similar interests find others who are tagging the same pages. For example, if you are working on a research project on the potential consumer market for home fuel cells, you can find out who else is doing a lot of tagging of Web pages with “fuel cells.” You will not only locate good, vetted Web resources, but also find key people who are doing research on that same topic.

The concept of social bookmarking is all about sharing resources.

Social Bookmarking in the Enterprise

Normally, when we are talking about knowledge management, we are discussing locating and sharing expertise *within* an organization (or at least within a bounded and defined group). You may wonder if these public social bookmarking Web sites, which allow anyone and everyone to join in, are really a logical knowledge management solution for teams or staff within your own organization. Shouldn’t there be a “social bookmarking” solution geared just for enterprises?

Well, as with so much of Web 2.0, what’s first being tried out on the open Web is ending up migrating to the enterprise, and this is the case with social bookmarking. There are already at least two fee-based social bookmarking products (one still in beta) that were specifically created for use within the enterprise. One is from Connectbeam, headquartered in Sunnyvale, Calif., and the other is from Cogenz, located in the U.K. (See Figure 1 on page 1.) We compare the features of these two vendors in the chart on page 3; we also compare them to a few of

our favorite free, public bookmarking sites.

It’s worth noticing what these enterprise social bookmarking vendors say their products can do for companies. Here, for instance, is an excerpt from Connectbeam’s literature on what it sees as the uses of social bookmarking in the enterprise:

- **Information Technology (IT):** Gather and harness the collective intelligence of your enterprise. Harness the collective power of your employees by empowering them to leverage, organize, collaborate, and contribute to this data.
- **Product Management & Marketing:** Collect and share product ideas and features. Track research by monitoring product releases. Set up teams and groups within and outside of your department to share information as needed. Keep track of industry trends and information on your competition.
- **Public Relations:** Share and collaborate on your company’s and competitors’ news coverage. Quickly reference information and past and present press releases. Jot down your comments and refer back to them when creating collateral and press material.
- **Research & Development (Engineering):** Capture, reference, and share information about new industry trends, conferences, coding and programming sites, internal product releases, product features, and more.
- **Sales & Marketing:** Gather competitive intelligence, and keep track of the latest news on your accounts and competition.

Connectbeam’s competitor Cogenz cites these benefits for the enterprise:

- **Research functions** could share information about clients, prospects, and industry trends.
- **Product development teams** could collect and share product ideas and features.
- **Sales and marketing staff** could gather consumer and competitive intelligence.
- **Public relations teams** could share news coverage.
- **Management** could quickly and

Enterprise			Public with Group Function						
Enterprise Functions	Cogenz	Connect-beam	BlinkList	BlueDot	del.icio.us	Diigo	Magnolia	Simpy	Shadows
URL	www.cogenz.com	www.connectbeam.com	www.blinklist.com	http://bluedot.us	http://del.icio.us	www.diigo.com	http://magnolia.com	www.simpy.com	www.shadows.com
Group Enabled	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES via "add network"	Beginning March 2007	YES	YES	YES
Security –Firewall –User Validation –IP/Email	N.A. via email YES	YES YES YES	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Domain Restriction –Hosted or On-site	Hosted	Either	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Use on Intranet	NO	YES	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Use on Extranets	NO	YES	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Integration with Search –Enterprise –LDAP –Other	YES ¹	YES YES	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Dashboard	YES	YES	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Centralized Administrator Controls	YES	YES	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Fee-Based	YES Pricing TBD	YES Tiered/\$9-plus per user per month	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
DESIRABLE FEATURES									
Clip Page Portions	NO	Planned	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO
Highlight Portions	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO
Annotate on Page	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO
Archive Page –Search Full Text of Archived Page –Advanced Search Options	NO	Planned Planned TBD	NO	NO	NO	YES, via highlights YES	YES NO NO	NO	NO
OTHER FEATURES									
RSS Subscribe	YES	Planned	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Related Tags	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO
Related Users	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO
Tag Suggest	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO
Tag Cloud	Planned	"My Tags"	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Import/Export	YES	Planned	YES	Import only	YES	YES	YES	YES	Import
Create Larger "Topics"	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	Via "groups"

1. Cogenz told us that for LDAP it "provides user data import/export" and that "any data from Cogenz can be extracted via an API, so there are lots of other enterprise integration possibilities."

easily see the collective intelligence of the organization and the connections between employees.

What about applications for a library or centralized information center? Some immediate opportunities and benefits that come to mind include the following:

- Working as a team on an internal client's research project to surface and share the best new sites and

resources; this could be particularly useful if your staff is spread out geographically

- Helping work groups and internal project teams set up a social bookmarking process and providing them with training and guidance
- Reviewing the collected content of a project team for quality and relevance, and perhaps then repackaging the collection into a best practice or best source report

Choosing a Social Bookmarking Solution

As you might expect, while all of the open Web-based social bookmarking products are free, both Connectbeam and Cogenz are fee-based. If you see the merits of social bookmarking in your organization, the initial question you'll need to ask is whether you really need to pay for an enterprise version or if a free, public one is good enough.

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To answer that question, you need to address these questions:

1. What is absolutely necessary for enterprise use of social bookmarking?
2. What is strongly desirable in an enterprise solution?
3. What is nice but perhaps not absolutely critical?

Here's how we would answer these questions:

1. Absolutely necessary: The ability to create a *defined group*, which can be as large as your entire firm or as small as a two-person work team. Clearly, you need to have the option to facilitate the sharing of bookmarks within a closed group rather than with everyone on the Web.

2. Strongly desirable: Security features, firewall protection if hosted on-site, and customer support. Also, since we would say that it is strongly desirable to avoid dealing with spam (which can occur with public sites), spam avoidance is another argument for choosing an enterprisewide solution.

3. Nice but not absolutely critical: We'd say that integration with existing enterprisewide systems, such as enterprise search or internal directories, would fall under this category.

Leading Vendors in Enterprise and Public Social Bookmarking

So what are your options when it comes to choosing a social bookmarking site or vendor? The first step is to determine which ones offer the features that you consider essential.

Both Connectbeam and Cogenz offer the features we listed as "absolutely necessary" as well as "strongly desirable." (See the chart on page 3.) But, interestingly, some free public social bookmarking products also offer the "absolutely necessary" features, through a feature where users can carve out and create separate "groups." So you may, in fact, be able to employ a solution that works for your enterprise, but *without* having to pay for an enterprise product, if you consider a public bookmarking site that permits the creation of customized "groups." In fact, in our feature chart, we have only included those public social bookmarking sites that support private groups.

Finally, in making a selection deci-



Shadows' free public bookmarking site has a very attractive display that includes thumbnail images of saved pages.

sion, consider the specific features of each service, which vary widely among vendors. In our view, the following are features that would be extremely useful for any social bookmarking product (enterprise or public), particularly for users who are engaged in serious research and information collection:

- Ability to clip *portions* of a Web page
- Ability to *highlight* a portion of a Web page
- Ability to *annotate* on a Web page
- Ability to *archive* the page, and then *search* the full text of the page in order to retrieve it from the archive

Note that some of these features are not even available from the two enterprise vendors; again, you may not necessarily need to choose an enterprise vendor as a solution.

Social Bookmarking Sites: Feature Comparison

The chart compares the features of two fee-based enterprise social bookmarking vendors (Cogenz and Connectbeam) and seven of our favorite free public social bookmarking sites. Note that all of these are potentially suitable for enterprise use because they permit the creation of a group function. (At press time, Diigo's expected release for this function was March 2007.)

Although it has no group creation function (therefore it is not on the chart), we want to mention Furl. Owned by LookSmart, Furl is unique in that it allows the *archiving* and searching of the *full text* of bookmarked Web pages, which of course is an extremely valuable function for researchers (see our full review of Furl in the February

2005 issue of *The Information Advisor*). Furthermore, although there is no group creation function on Furl, Michael Grubb, CTO of furl.com, gave us some workaround tips that can be used to create groups on-the-fly. For example, you can do the following:

- Subscribe to specific other users' headlines
- Create and share a specific tag (and make it obscure enough to prevent others from using it)
- Perform a "save and email" function to designated persons or an alias that emails to larger group
- Create a single name/email account for use by members of the entire group

We also have created a short blurb describing the key features of Furl and each of these other sites. Due to space constraints, we have decided to list that information on our blog, Intelligent Agent (www.ia-blog.com). In general, though, our top picks for free public bookmarking sites are as follows:

- Best graphics and interface: Magnolia, Shadows (see Figure 2)
- Best group-creation functions: Magnolia, Shadows
- Best site for research and full-text searching: Furl (with group workarounds), Diigo

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