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I Hear the Train A Comin' — Penn Tags

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As an elementary school-aged boy in the 1970s, I had very straightforward criterion for prospective friends. You had to drink Orange but not Purple Hi-C. This issue was *important*. It provided a sort of shorthand for me to determine compatibility. If you were a Purple Hi-C kid, I knew immediately that our broader interests were likely divergent. If you liked Orange Hi-C, I could trust your judgment on other key matters (like Star Wars action figures and Saturday morning cartoons). I broach the example of my younger self because so much of what we encounter within the Next Big Web Thing discussion today relies on sophisticated Hi-C litmus tests. **Facebook** and **MySpace** allow users to discover what is new and what is important among their peers by revealing commonalities within what people are reading, listening to, watching, and so forth. Twitter takes this to a new extreme. It connects people by revealing the connections within Joycean streams of consciousness posted by its users. Literally thousands of sites are devoted to a variation of “I like X,” or “I read Y,” or “I use Z.” Why? First and foremost, because I want to meet people like me who value Orange Hi-C and disdain its purple counterpart. These people are potential friends. Beyond companionship, these like-minded souls can provide a valuable service. The information age breeds clutter, so much clutter that I need not just myself, but Proxy Me’s, to cut through the tangle and help me uncover the music that I will love or the video that will make me laugh or the paper that will help my research.

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meetings, will begin this fall, generously funded by a grant from the **Andrew W. Mellon Foundation**. These meetings will explore and prioritize areas in need of standardization and will improve our community’s productivity and scalability.

Much like standardization helped improve efficiencies in manufacturing and other areas, standards can help the community improve the process of creating, distributing, managing, and curating information. As the pace and number of organizations that are creating digital information continuing to increase exponentially, customized and individualized solutions need to transition to standards-based so that the community can deal with this increasing volume of content. 🌱

Endnotes

1. **Association of Research Libraries**, ARL Statistics Tables 2004-05 — available at: <http://www.arl.org/bm~doc/05tables.xls>.

I need an army of Orange Hi-C drinkers at my disposal.

My column this issue focuses on one specific Hi-C tool, **PennTags**. **PennTags** represents the **University of Pennsylvania**’s attempt to cut through the clutter of Web resources by showing its users what like-minded community members value. It leverages the basic concept of popular sites **del.icio.us** and **Connotea**, namely that social bookmarking can provide important cues to the discovery of web-based information. Whereas these other sites are open clubs, **PennTags** establishes some preemptive commonality among its users by limiting participation to the **University of Pennsylvania** community. The assumption is that **Penn** researchers, by virtue of their engagement at the institution, have a shared universe of interests that is distinct from the larger social bookmarking alternatives. Indeed, the project was launched as a result of the **del.icio.us** experience of two librarians, **Michael Winkler** (Library Web Manager) and **Laurie Allen** (Research & Instructional Services Librarian). Both had used **del.icio.us** and enjoyed the ability to tell the world what Websites they were reading and browsing. However, they shared a frustration at the tool’s inability to work with **Penn Library** resources, notably cataloged materials, proxy services, and other items that lacked stable URLs. When Cinema Studies Professor **Peter Decherney** assigned his students a project to collect Web-based resources about a specific film, **Winkler** and **Allen** realized that to do so effectively would require an easy way for students to grab and share Web pages from both outside and within the library’s walled garden. This provided them the impetus for what has become **PennTags**.

The first iteration of **PennTags** was very rudimentary. Like many **Web 2.0** applications, it was characterized by a light “let’s figure it out as we go along” approach. **Michael Winkler** created the basic code over a long weekend, modified it with feedback from **Laurie Allen** and a small group of self-identified interested parties, and delivered it to **Professor Decherney** for the fall 2005 semester. His students received extra credit if they used **PennTags** for the resource collection project. Almost all of the students did so and provided feedback. This helped **Winkler** further hone the feature set and user experience.

As the next semester opened, **PennTags** was soft-launched to the greater Penn community. **Penn** students, faculty, and staff could use the tool to tag records within the library

catalog, any public Web pages, full-text article links via the library link resolver, and other sources of scholarly information. The largest limitation was — and remains — the inability to tag content within databases that maintain full text (e.g., **LexisNexis**).

The library did not publicize **PennTags** except to add a muted “Add to **PennTags**” link on an increasing number of **Penn** resources.

Very little marketing or support was provided. In early 2006, **Mike Winkler** and **Laurie Allen** secured library management buy-in for the creation of a small working group that met weekly to discuss **PennTags** issues and features. Many code changes and feature additions resulted from these sessions. Nearly two years into the project, the **PennTags** team

has not as yet done a formal launch or rollout campaign. Even absent this type of push, nearly one thousand users have picked it up along the way (current students, faculty, and staff — a pool totaling approximately 50,000 individuals — are eligible to use **PennTags**). This grassroots validation has prompted the **Penn** library to add resources to the project. A code rewrite and a more systematic release to the **Penn** community are both in the works as a result.

The **PennTags** footprint is a light one, designed to subtly enhance the research experience. The annotations a tagger makes are viewable both within the library catalog and via the **PennTags** site (<http://tags.library.upenn.edu>). There, visitors can search or browse by tag clouds, by contributor, and also by “project,” in effect an annotated bibliography on a specific subject. The **PennTags** site also contains a number of end user productivity tools, such as the ability to convert tags of interest into RSS feeds.

For materials tagged within the catalog, the **PennTags** appear alongside more formal cataloging elements. For example, a book in the catalog will include the **PennTags** post (who tagged it and what the tags are) sitting right below the more formal bibliographic information and subject headings. Tags may be just a few short keywords or rather long discussions of a resource’s merits. These tags appear via **Ajax** after the page loads so as not to slow down the user experience.

The Penn library, after much discussion with the university counsel’s office, decided not to gatekeep annotations. The **PennTags** user interface includes a click-through agreement that precedes a user’s first post, advising him

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or her to abide by the rules and regulations of the university. The library does not proactively police the tags. Because each user's account is tied to a university ID, any questions of legality or conformity with the campus code of conduct can be addressed directly with the tagger. To date, inappropriate use of the tagging mechanism has been a non-issue.

PennTags has produced a number of tangible benefits for the **University of Pennsylvania** community. It has added greater description and clarity to thousands of library resources through user-contributed annotations. It has provided additional discovery tools via the tag clouds and other browsable Website mechanisms. It has allowed users to organize their web resources in more systematic fashion. But what of the Hi-C test? Does **PennTags** allow its users to easily identify an army of Proxy Me's whose judgments and insights can be relied upon? Does the collective wisdom of the **PennTags** community allow individual users to cut through the information proliferation clutter? As yet, I believe the answer is a qualified no. This may, of course, be due to the lack of a critical mass. More posts are needed, as are more posters. Social networking mechanisms require a certain volume that **PennTags** does not have at present. The **PennTags** team has chosen a deliberate, systematic launch course. This certainly helps account for the slow adoption rate within the **Penn** community.

It will be interesting to see if this community grows, and whether its growth will gener-



Web 2.Uh-oh?

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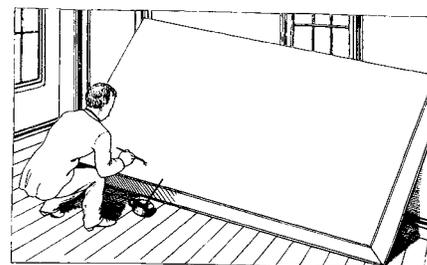
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Short-Term Engagements or "Brainiac-on-Demand"

ate some "collective wisdom of the crowd." As **Laurie Allen** points out, academic research is often highly specialized, particularly at its advanced levels. Undergraduate students interested in introductory primers may find similarly-minded individuals within the **PennTags** community. Tenured professors studying the measurement of regional cerebral blood flow during complex cognitive tasks are less likely to benefit from peer cues within a social network. And this may be the bottom line. Social networking tools aim to connect people to their interests, and to other people who share those

interests. This works well if (a) those interests are broad, like movies or music or juice flavors, (b) the network is sufficiently large to attract lots of members with lots of diverse interests, or (c) the network is sufficiently focused that all members are, by definition, like-minded. These criteria are difficult to meet within the academic setting, though by no means impossible. **PennTags** is thus an experiment well worth following. 🐛



Desperately Seeking Copyright — Reuse Licensing: Change is Underway

Column Editor: **Edward Colleran** (Senior Director, Rightsholder Relations, Copyright Clearance Center, Danvers, MA)
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Pick up any Sunday newspaper during the month of August, and the first thing you might notice is the heft of the back-to-school sale circulars stuffed in the interior of the paper. Back-to-school is always greeted with the inevitable sale on twin sheets and lava lamps. But the biggest focus is on computers for students off to college. A quick scan of those sales and it's easy to see why digital content is so important to every college and university.

Students want the convenience of accessing their instructors' notes and class reading materials online whenever they want. Faculty members enjoy the ease and speed by which they can post those materials on a course management system and get information to students instantly. But under all this convenience lies a significant challenge for many campuses, namely, how to ensure respect for intellectual property rights while using course management systems.

Electronic content use is on the rise, and so is the perception of academic institutions that these uses could leave them vulnerable. In fact, in a college survey conducted by **Copyright Clearance Center (CCC)** last year, 64% of academic administrators acknowledged greater risk of infringement due to their increased use of electronic content.

Part of the problem is that the faculty members who distribute published materials through their course management systems are generally not as copyright-savvy as their campus librarians. In general, they simply don't have the training or experience to readily determine whether a particular content use qualifies as a fair use under the Copyright Act, or whether it requires rightsholder permission. And even if they figure it out, they may not know how to secure permission or have the time to do so.

In order for instructors to take advantage of new technology that makes it easier for them

to access, use and share information, they need licensing options that take the guesswork out of permissions in cases in which fair use may not apply. Licensing is rising to the occasion. When it comes to sharing copyrighted material, there are more licensing and permission options than ever.

Integrated Rights and Permissions

Many service providers have built access to copyright permissions right into their applications. One of the most notable examples is the **Blackboard** course management system, which offers the **Copyright Permissions Building Block**. **Blackboard** customers who use the **Building Block**, can search, price and get permission to share articles and other text content without leaving **Blackboard**.

Elsevier's Scopus database service is another example of integrated rights licensing.

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