

O'REILLY®

2nd Edition



Designing Social Interfaces

PRINCIPLES, PATTERNS, AND PRACTICES FOR IMPROVING
THE USER EXPERIENCE

Christian Crumlish
& Erin Malone

www.allitebooks.com

Designing Social Interfaces

Designers, developers, and entrepreneurs today must grapple with creating social interfaces to foster user interaction and community, but grasping the nuances and the building blocks of the digital social experience is much harder than it appears. Now you have help.

In the second edition of this practical guide, UX design experts Christian Crumlish and Erin Malone share hard-won insights into what works, what doesn't, and why. With more than 100 patterns, design principles, and best practices, you'll learn how to balance opposing forces and grow healthy online communities by co-creating the experience with your users.

- Understand the overarching principles before applying tactical design patterns
- Cultivate healthy participation and rein in misbehaving users
- Learn patterns for adding social components to an existing site
- Encourage users to interact with one another, whether it's one-to-one or many-to-many
- Use a rating system to build a social experience around products or services
- Orchestrate collaborative groups and discover the real power of social networks
- Explore numerous examples of each pattern, with an emphasis on mobile apps
- Learn how to apply social design patterns to enterprise environments

Christian Crumlish is VP of Product at 7 Cups of Tea (7cups.com). He also served as director of product at CloudOn, director of messaging products at AIM, and curator of the Yahoo! Design Pattern Library.

Erin Malone, Principal with Tangible UX, has over 20 years of experience leading design teams and developing social experiences for a host of startups and large enterprises. She's the former director of the team that produced the Yahoo! Design Pattern Library.

“Designing Social Interfaces is a fantastic reference for people who want to find the right design patterns fast. If you need to understand how to connect your users to your product and to each other, this book is perfect for you.”

—Laura Klein

author of *UX for Lean Startups*

*“Chock-full of visual examples, *Designing Social Interfaces* is a smart and readable reference that will help you apply appropriate design patterns so you don't waste time re-inventing the wheel.”*

—Kate Rutter

UX Instructor and Visual Thinking Consultant, Intellecto

INTERNET APPLICATIONS / SOCIAL WEB

US \$49.99

CAN \$57.99

ISBN: 978-1-491-91985-9



Twitter: @oreillymedia
facebook.com/oreilly

[Praise]

“Designing Social Interfaces is a fantastic reference for people who want to find the right design patterns fast. If you need to understand how to connect your users to your product and to each other, this book is perfect for you.”

LAURA KLEIN AUTHOR, UX FOR LEAN STARTUPS

“Chock-full of visual examples, Designing Social Interfaces is a smart and readable reference that will help you apply appropriate design patterns so you don’t waste time reinventing the wheel. If you’re designing products where people interact with other people, you’ll benefit from the expertise of these two seasoned practitioners.”

**KATE RUTTER, UX INSTRUCTOR AND VISUAL THINKING
CONSULTANT, INTELLETO**

“Kids today! They are constantly changing the game on what’s considered hot or not in social media. Thankfully Christian and Erin have assembled (and updated!) these powerful models for the social experience, which apply no matter WhatsApp people happen to be using these days.”

KEVIN M. HOFFMAN, FOUNDER OF SEVEN HEADS DESIGN

“A comprehensive catalog of best practices that no UI/UX developer should be without. A highly recommended reference.”

**MATTHEW RUSSELL, CHIEF TECHNOLOGY OFFICER,
DIGITAL REASONING**

Designing Social Interfaces

Second Edition

*Principles, Patterns, and Practices for
Improving the User Experience*

Christian Crumlish
Erin Malone

O'REILLY®

Beijing • Boston • Farnham • Sebastopol • Tokyo

Designing Social Interfaces, Second Edition

by Christian Crumlish and Erin Malone

Copyright © 2015 Christian Crumlish, Erin Malone. All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America.

Published by O'Reilly Media, Inc., 1005 Gravenstein
Highway North, Sebastopol, CA 95472.

O'Reilly books may be purchased for educational, business, or sales promotional use. Online editions are also available for most titles (safaribooksonline.com). For more information, contact our corporate/institutional sales department: (800) 998-9938 or corporate@oreilly.com.

Acquisitions Editor: Mary Treseler and
Nick Lombardi

Editor: Angela Rufino

Production Editor: Melanie Yarbrough

Copyeditor: Octal Publishing

Proofreader: Charles Roumeliotis

Indexer: Angela Howard

Cover Designer: Randy Comer

Interior Designers: Ron Bilodeau and
Monica Kamsvaag

Illustrator: Rebecca Demarest

Compositor: Melanie Yarbrough

September 2009: First Edition.

August 2015: Second Edition.

Revision History for the Second Edition:

2015-08-04 First release

See <http://oreilly.com/catalog/errata.csp?isbn=0636920036821> for release details.

The O'Reilly logo is registered trademarks of O'Reilly Media, Inc. *Designing Social Interfaces* and related trade dress are trademarks of O'Reilly Media, Inc.

Many of the designations used by manufacturers and sellers to distinguish their products are claimed as trademarks. Where those designations appear in this book, and O'Reilly Media, Inc., was aware of a trademark claim, the designations have been printed in caps or initial caps.

Although the publisher and author have used reasonable care in preparing this book, the information it contains is distributed "as is" and without warranties of any kind. This book is not intended as legal or financial advice, and not all of the recommendations may be suitable for your situation. Professional legal and financial advisors should be consulted, as needed. Neither the publisher nor the author shall be liable for any costs, expenses, or damages resulting from use of or reliance on the information contained in this book.

978-1-491-91985-9

[LSI]

[*contents*]

<i>Preface</i>	xiii
----------------------	-------------

PART I WHAT ARE SOCIAL PATTERNS?

Chapter 1 Mommy, What's a Social User Experience Pattern?	3
A Little Social Backstory...	3
What Do We Mean by Principle, Best Practice, and Patterns?	11
So, That's All the Little Parts: Now What?	19
Further Reading	22
Chapter 2 Social to the Core	25
Social but Not Social Only	27
Deliberately Leave Things Incomplete	27
Palimpsest	35
Talk Like a Person!	38
Don't Break Email!	46
Be Open	47
Learn from Games	47
Cargo Cult Anti-Pattern	48
Haight-Ashbury Anti-Pattern	50
Lord of the Flies Anti-Pattern	52
Respect the Ethical Dimension	52
Further Reading	53

PART II I AM SOMEBODY

Chapter 3	You're Invited!	57
	Engagement.....	57
	Sign-Up or Registration.....	59
	Sign In.....	68
	Two-Factor Authentication.....	73
	PIN.....	74
	Fingerprint/Bio.....	76
	Sign-In Continuity.....	77
	Sign Out.....	79
	Invitations.....	82
	Receive Invitation.....	83
	Send Invitation.....	85
	The Password Anti-Pattern.....	89
	Authorize.....	90
	Private Beta.....	93
	Welcome Area.....	101
	Reengagement.....	103
	Further Reading.....	109
Chapter 4	Where's the Rest of Me?	111
	Identity.....	112
	Profile.....	118
	Testimonials (or Personal Recommendations).....	135
	Personal Dashboard.....	137
	Reflectors.....	140
	Identity Cards or Contact Cards.....	144
	Attribution.....	148
	Avatars.....	150
	Portable Identity.....	155
	Further Reading.....	156

Chapter 5	Here We Are Now	159
	A Brief History of Online Presence	161
	The Future of Presence	163
	Buddy List	172
	Activity Streams	175
	Statuscasting	177
	Managing Incoming Updates	180
	Further Reading	186
Chapter 6	Would You Buy a Used Car from This Person?	187
	Reputation Influences Behavior	188
	Competitive Spectrum	189
	Levels	191
	Named Levels	191
	Numbered Levels	195
	Labels	198
	Awards	200
	Collectible Achievements	200
	Peer-to-Peer Awards	204
	Rankings	206
	Points	206
	Leaderboard	210
	Top X	216
	Tools for Monitoring Reputation	220
	Friend Ranking	221
	For the Win	223
	Further Reading	227

PART III OBJECTS OF MY DESIRE

Chapter 7	Hunters Gather	233
	Collecting	233
	Saving	234
	Favorites	238
	Displaying	242
	Add/Subscribe	244
	Tagging	247
	Find with Tags	252
	Tag Cloud	254
	Further Reading	257
Chapter 8	Share and Share Alike	259
	Tools to Enable Organic “Word of Mouth”	259
	Send/Share Icon	260
	Bookmarklet	264
	Private Sharing	266
	Send This	267
	Casual Privacy	270
	Ephemeral Sharing	271
	Give Gift	272
	Public Sharing	275
	Share This	279
	Reposting	282
	Social Bookmarking	284
	Uploading to the Cloud	285
	Embedding	285
	Passive Sharing	288
	Further Reading	289
Chapter 9	The Global Soapbox	291
	Broadcasting	292
	Blogging	292

	Podcasting	298
	Video blogging	299
	Microblogging	300
	Publishing	301
	Virtual Magazine	301
	Timestamp	302
	Rights	305
	Terms of Service	306
	Licenses	309
	Further Reading	316
Chapter 10	Long-Time Listener, First-Time Caller	317
	Soliciting Feedback	317
	Vote to Promote	323
	Thumbs Up/Down Ratings	327
	Ratings (Stars or 1–5)	334
	Multifaceted Ratings	336
	Comments	339
	Reviews	343
	Soliciting Feedback	347
	Further Reading	353
Chapter 11	Watson, Come Quick!	355
	Synchronous versus Asynchronous Communication	357
	Sign In to Participate	358
	Meta-conversation	358
	Forum	359
	Public Conversation	363
	Private Conversation	366
	Group Conversation	369
	Arguments	374
	Response Notifications	375
	Further Reading	376

PART IV A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Chapter 12	Barnraising	379
	Collaboration	379
	Manage Project	381
	Voting	385
	Collaborative Editing	388
	Suggestions	392
	Edit This Page	393
	The Wiki Way	396
	Crowdsourcing	399
	Further Reading	400
Chapter 13	Heard It Through the Grapevine	403
	Keeping Up	403
	Tuning In	409
	Following	409
	Filtering	410
	Recommendations	412
	Social Search	415
	Real-Time Search	416
	Conversational Search	418
	Pivoting	420
	Anticipatory Content	420
	Further Reading	421
Chapter 14	One of Us, One of Us	423
	Relationships	423
	Find People	425
	Adding Friends	437
	Circles of Connections	446
	Publicize Relationships	454
	Unfriending	458

	The Ex-Boyfriend Anti-Pattern.....	461
	Groups.....	463
	What's Age Got to Do with It?.....	469
	Dating and the One-on-One Connection.....	475
	Flirting.....	476
	Cybersex/Sexting.....	479
	Further Reading.....	481
Chapter 15	Good Cop, Bad Cop.....	483
	Community Management.....	484
	Collective Governance.....	487
	Group Moderation.....	491
	Collaborative Filtering.....	493
	Report Abuse.....	496
	Further Reading.....	499
Chapter 16	Where in the World?.....	501
	The Local Connection.....	501
	Being Local.....	502
	Face-to-Face Meeting.....	503
	Party.....	513
	Calendaring.....	519
	Reminding.....	524
	Geo-Tagging.....	526
	Geo-Mapping or Near Me Now.....	529
	Geo-Tracking or Where I've Been.....	533
	Neighborhood.....	535
	Further Reading.....	538

PART V BUT WAIT...THERE'S MORE!

Chapter 17	Corporations Are People, My Friend	541
	Consumer Enterprise Experiences	543
	Workers are Mobile	544
	Single Sign-On	545
	The Corporate Identity and Profile	545
	Contacts and Relationships	547
	What Is the Social Object?	547
	What Are the Jobs to be Done?	547
	The Status/Activity Stream	548
	Communicating Without Email	548
	Administration and Moderation	550
	Other Tools	553
	Further Reading	553
Chapter 18	Designing Around Openness	555
	Play Well with Others	556
	Opening Out	561
	Open Standards (Semantics and Microformats)	564
	Opening In	565
	Hosted Modules	567
	Going Both Ways	568
	Open APIs	569
	Further Reading	570
Chapter 19	Epilogue	571
	And In the End.....	571
	<i>About the Authors</i>	577
	<i>Index</i>	579

Preface

Why We Updated This Book

WE WROTE AND DECIDED TO UPDATE THIS BOOK BECAUSE WE NEEDED A BOOK LIKE THIS, and we knew there wasn't one on the market yet. Our own pattern collection, documentation, and arrangement of social user experience interface design patterns grew large and complex enough that we felt it warranted a book-length treatment. We wrote this book to build on the work we were doing at Yahoo! several years ago, and the work of the social design community at large. We wanted to propose a large macro-landscape for organizing and discussing these interaction patterns and to help build a consensus on a common language and set of conventions for discussing social design. We wrote this book because every web designer and developer in the world today is being asked to consider the social dimension of their work, and we wanted to help. We updated the book because in the five years since the first edition, social experience design has evolved—some things that looked like patterns haven't stood the test of time, and some new potential patterns have emerged. Beyond that, mobile has become a major part of the lexicon and new patterns and ways of interacting have become part of the landscape.

What This Book Is About

This book is not about designing social behaviors, although many of the interactions are either dependent on or drive specific social behaviors. Many of the principles in the first section of this book talk about different kinds of user behavior, but are best considered across the landscape of the entire pattern collection.

This book is about *interaction design*, specifically designing *social* interactions and interfaces on the Web and in mobile environments. The collection of patterns is a distillation of many years of experience in designing social and community products for the Web and mobile

devices that have led us to define this set of best practices, principles, and patterns for social interfaces. We focus on consumer-facing interactions, primarily because that's where our experience lies. We have expanded the enterprise and mobile coverage; remember that all the patterns can be applied in the enterprise and in devices, provided the problems and solutions are viewed with the appropriate lens and set of constraints.

This collection is emerging, evolving, and continues to grow with time and technical innovations.

The Visual Examples

In the first edition, we referred to Yahoo! in many examples because we had developed many of the patterns in the context of designing products and features across the Yahoo! network. The patterns were tried and tested across hundreds of millions of users. In the second edition, we have tried to include visual examples from many sources around the Internet to illustrate the interactions of various patterns (and pieces of patterns), and to leverage the past several years of experience and growth across the social landscape of software. They say a picture is worth a thousand words, so wherever possible, we try to *show* how something can be accomplished instead of just talking about it.

How This Book Is Organized

This book is organized into five parts. The first introduces the concept of user interface design patterns and outlines some high-level principles for social design that we believe inform all the subsequent patterns. The next three parts each introduce a major cluster of related patterns, grouped together by theme. The final part explores some emerging considerations that have not yet attained the status of patterns but warrant close attention.

Part I: What Are Social Patterns?

In Chapter 1, we lay out exactly what we mean when we're talking about patterns in the design of interfaces for social user experiences and how to work with them. In Chapter 2, we cover some of the broad, overarching principles that can make the difference between a successful, thriving online community and a ghost town.

Part II: I Am Somebody

One of the building blocks of social experiences are representations of individual people in the system. Just as in *Monopoly*®, each “player” needs a “token” that represents him in the “game.” Chapter 3 explores how to engage users and get them to register for and sign into your service, thus establishing the beginnings of a new “self” in your system. Chapter 4 offers patterns for the representation of an individual identity, using things such as profiles and avatars. Chapter 5 discusses ways to indicate presence and show people in your application who else is there. Chapter 6 presents a family of reputation patterns that can help encourage the sort of behaviors you wish to foster.

Part III: The Objects of Our Desire

This is the largest chunk of the book, where we get into the actual behaviors that people engage in online and introduce the concept of social objects: those “conversation pieces” that anchor and give meaning to social interactions online. Chapter 7 addresses how people may collect objects in your application. Chapter 8 looks at how sharing and gift-giving work. Chapter 9 presents interfaces for publishing and broadcasting found objects and original content. Chapter 10 examines techniques for enabling people to give one another feedback on their contributions. Chapter 11 talks about communication and how it is bound to social objects. Chapter 12 looks at collaboration and how people can work together to create and evolve shared objects. Chapter 13 takes a step back to discuss larger social media ecosystems and interfaces that help people make sense of them.

Part IV: A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood

The third cluster of patterns addresses relationships and the communities that can grow out of them. Chapter 14 examines relationship terminology and models of reciprocity or asymmetry, and how to enable users to find one another and form and declare relationships. Chapter 15 presents interfaces for community management and moderation, and models for collaborative filtering. Chapter 16 explores how to enable people to meet one another in the real world and create shared events.

Part V: Closed and Open Social Networks

In the final part, we approach the leading edge of social design and discuss some of the considerations you may encounter there. In Chapter 17, we look at many models of openness and the benefits and consequences of embracing them in your social architecture. In Chapter 18, we look to social in the enterprise.

Sidebar Essays

Just as we have approached the collection of patterns as both authors and as curators of information from many sources, we have curated a collection of different voices from around the Internet to share alternative opinions, more in-depth exploration, and thoughts about social user behavior that provide seasoning around the patterns in each chapter. Look for continued conversations on these topics on our wiki and on the individual essayists' personal blogs.

Who Should Read This Book

Anyone involved in building social interactions will be interested in this book.

User experience and interaction designers will find the detailed interaction patterns useful in their arsenal of tools. Product managers will appreciate the checklist and a thorough airing of pros, cons, and consequences of applying a pattern.

The explanations in the patterns and the related principles will provide the designer with a full spectrum of details to consider when making decisions for designing the social experience. The patterns don't always prescribe how to design the thing, but they will offer up everything the designer needs to think about when designing, as well as what trade-offs may need to be made to design a great experience given a specific business and audience context.

Although this book does not go into technical details of how to build these interfaces, the web developer will appreciate the patterns, as they can be mapped to specific code solutions and provide the "why" behind design decisions.

Everyone on the product team will benefit from this book, as it provides a common vocabulary around social interactions and offers rich explanations and real-world examples that can benefit team discussions and communication.

Using the Interaction Patterns

You can read this book cover to cover. It's arranged with a narrative flow in which ideas build on one another, but we designed it to work just as well as a reference. You can zero in on a particular section of interest or just read about a specific interface pattern, exploring related concepts through cross-references and the index.

This book is here to help you get your job done. In general, you may use the patterns in this book in your programs and documentation. Not all patterns should be used for every application; different ideas and social objects will require different solutions. Ideally, you will sample from each of the categories, adding more complex features and concepts as the community grows and you learn what is useful for its needs. We believe that the entire collection gives context to the social landscape and provides information about what types of things you should consider as you are making design decisions.

You do not need to contact us for permission unless you're reproducing a significant portion of the text of the patterns. For example, creating a pattern repository that uses several patterns or excerpts of patterns from this book does not require permission. Selling or distributing a CD-ROM of examples from O'Reilly books does require permission. Answering a question by citing this book and quoting the patterns does not require permission. Incorporating a significant amount of pattern material from this book into your product's documentation does require permission.

We appreciate, but do not require, attribution. An attribution usually includes the title, author, publisher, and ISBN, for example, "*Designing Social Interfaces*, by Christian Crumlish and Erin Malone. Copyright 2015. 978-1-491-91985-9."

What Comes with This Book

This book has a companion website (<http://designingsocialinterfaces.com>) that offers an open forum for conversation around the patterns presented here; an addendum containing updated examples; additional thoughts about emerging patterns and principles; and helpful links to articles, resources on designing social interfaces, and discussions on specific topics touched on in this book by us or our many guest essayists.

All the book's diagrams and figures are available under a Creative Commons license for you to download and use in your presentations. You'll find them at Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/socialpatterns/sets>).

How to Contact Us

Please address comments and questions concerning this book to the publisher:

O'Reilly Media, Inc.
1005 Gravenstein Highway North
Sebastopol, CA 95472
800-998-9938 (in the United States or Canada)
707-829-0515 (international or local)
707 829-0104 (fax)

We have a web page for this book, where we list errata, examples, and any additional information. You can access this page at:

<http://bit.ly/designing-social-interfaces-2e>

To comment or ask technical questions about this book, send email to:

bookquestions@oreilly.com

For more information about our books, conferences, Resource Centers, and the O'Reilly Network, see our website at:

<http://www.oreilly.com>

Safari® Books Online

Safari Books Online is an on-demand digital library that lets you easily search over 7,500 technology and creative reference books and videos to find the answers you need quickly.

With a subscription, you can read any page and watch any video from our library online. Read books on your cell phone and mobile devices. Access new titles before they are available for print, and get exclusive access to manuscripts in development and post feedback for the authors. Copy and paste code samples, organize your favorites, download chapters, bookmark key sections, create notes, print out pages, and benefit from tons of other timesaving features.

O'Reilly Media has uploaded this book to the Safari Books Online service. To have full digital access to this book and others on similar topics from O'Reilly and other publishers, sign up for free at <https://www.safaribooksonline.com>.

Acknowledgments

We'd like to thank Mary Treseler at O'Reilly, who initially acquired the manuscript from us, helped us develop the outline and voice for the book, and shepherded us through the publishing process, encouraging and gently nudging us all along the way. I think it's fair to say that without her support and guidance we would not have been able to pull this off. The consummate editor, Mary was really a pleasure to work with.

For the First Edition

Sanders Kleinfeld answered our endless anxious questions about DocBook and XML that failed to validate even when we yelled at it.

Rachel Monaghan steered us crisply through production and Genevieve d'Entremont copyedited a prodigious mound of pages in a shockingly brief amount of time, somehow paying close attention to subtle inconsistencies, cross-references, and infelicities of style. Jacque Quann helped us track the contract terms and shake loose the advance checks (yay).

Havi Hoffman, of Mozilla, who managed Yahoo! Press at the time of the first edition, worked a lot of behind-the-scenes magic to incubate and nurture the original book deal through an elaborate process. She made some of the earliest suggestions about doing a book of this kind and kept the relationship among the authors (one a Yahoo! employee, the other not), the publisher, and the imprint on a healthy footing. Dan Brodnitz of Lynda.com (<http://lynda.com>) offered helpful advice and coaching in the initial proposal phases of the project.

Thanks to Matt Leacock and Bryce Glass, earlier collaborators on this project and the Yahoo! Social Media Toolkit that was one of its ancestors, and ongoing contributions (Matt helping to design a social patterns card game with us and Bryce contributing the drafts of the reputation patterns and some visualizations of the entire social design landscape).

Thanks to Bill Scott from Paypal, Abby Kirigin then of Tipjoy, Adina Levin then of SocialText, and Paul Kroft from MITRE, who reviewed the first draft of the manuscript for technical and market viability and offered detailed, thorough feedback and suggestions that consistently improved the quality of the book.

For the Second Edition

The second edition was born over glasses of wine at the Information Architecture Summit in Baltimore last year, when Mary Treseler sat us down to discuss how much the social web had evolved in the past six years. Once again we benefited from her insight and focus and unique perspective surveying the digital design landscape.

Nick Lombardi, our acquisitions editor, helped get the whole revision project on track and ushered us through the planning stage and the initial few chapters.

Angela Rufino, our developmental editor, did an amazing job of shepherding our updated manuscript, conferring with us on tricky questions, and talking us through the inevitable tough spots. What a pleasure working with you, Angela. Thanks!

Thanks to Kate Rutter, UX Instructor and Visual Thinking Consultant at Intellecto; Laura Klein, the author of *UX for Lean Startups* (O'Reilly); and Matthew Russell, CTO of Digital Reasoning. Thanks to the flourishing community of UX designers and strategists we're connected to—via Twitter, the IA Institute, the IxDA, LinkedIn, Facebook, blogs, 'zines, and plenty of face-to-face events—who collectively encouraged us as we were writing this book, offered feedback on wiki drafts, linked to our project, asked for advice, interviewed us, and generally helped make writing the book itself a social experience.

With the (tough but fair!) technical reviews done, Melanie Yarbrough, our production editor, took the reins and guided us through the remaining copyediting, revision, proofreading, and quality checking. Her steady hand made the whole thing a breeze.

Our copyeditor, Bob Russell (of Octal Publishing), did a marvelous job making our prose sound its best and threw in the occasional personal observation to give us a smile or raise our spirits. What a pleasure. We highly recommend him.

Dianne Russell, our project manager at Octal kept the trains running on time with a cheerful, professional manner.

The whole process was smooth as silk, and that's not always true in the book business!

FROM CHRISTIAN

I'd like to thank Briggs, who knew what she was getting into when I agreed to write a book in my "copious spare time" and through both forbearance and numerous small kindnesses, made it possible for me to take on this ambitious effort.

My collaborator, Erin Malone, has been by far the best coauthor I've ever partnered with, but even before this project came into being, Erin mentored me, recruited me to curate the Yahoo! Pattern Library, encouraged my exploration of social design patterns, and gamely agreed to come on board to help write the book. Through thick and thin, Erin has been the mainstay of this project and a wonderful person to work with.

I'd like to thank George Oates, the original designer for Flickr, who sat down with me for a couple of hours over a nice long lunch, talking about the fundamental principles of social design as she sees it and has lived it. Much of the content of Chapter 2 and insights sprinkled throughout the book found their genesis in that conversation.

Elizabeth Churchill from Yahoo! Research also helped me clarify my thinking on a number of related topics over the course of several wide-ranging conversations. The organizers of BarCamp Block in Palo Alto in October of 2007 provided a great environment for brainstorming the original "tree of patterns" that evolved into this book. Many of the patterns identified that day survived into the latest version of the taxonomy. Likewise, the organizers of BayCHI's monthly program and Ignite SF also provided opportunities to rehearse some of the ideas about social patterns, social anti-patterns, antisocial patterns, and so on, over a series of presentations.

I'd like to thank my family and friends who also cut me a great deal of slack as I became incommunicado, at best, and irritable, at worst.

I'd also like to thank Micah Laaker, who ran the user experience design team for the Yahoo! Open Strategy (where I worked at the time of the first edition) and contributed an essay on openness.

Among our essayists, I'd also like to single out Matte Scheinker, a mentor to me while he was still at Yahoo! and contributor of a nuanced essay on the ethical implications of this type of design work.

In the years since the first edition, I've launched blogs for Patch; directed the messaging products team at AOL (working on AIM, one of the grandparents of online presence); directed the product team at CloudOn, an enterprise productivity startup since sold to Dropbox where we facilitated collaboration in the workspace; and am now head of product at 7 Cups of Tea (7cups.com) where we are building a social environment and community founded on compassion and support.

In each of these roles I've continued to learn a lot about how people are adapting to online social connectivity, and my teachers have included Matte Scheinker (again) and Jason Shellen at AOL, Jay Zaveri at CloudOn, and all my colleagues at 7 Cups.

FROM ERIN

When we wrote the first edition of the book, there were so many excellent people who shared our ride and contributed to the formation and evolution of the content—the platform design team, the amazing researchers across the company, the community development and product teams, and a host of other folks at Yahoo!—thanks to you all who were instrumental in helping develop and test many of the concepts we talked about in the first edition of the book.

In the five years that have passed, the expanding user experience design community and the many companies and startups that have taken our patterns, mixed them and matched them, challenged them and built on them and created new ways of thinking—you have inspired me in both my everyday work as a UX designer and in pulling this new material together. So many of you are nameless and faceless to me, but I thank each and every one of you for pushing the boundaries of this work, helping me see new ways of doing things, and inspiring the next wave of social experiences.

I want to thank, again, my business partners, Bruce Charonnat and James Young for being open and flexible with my time while working on this update. Thanks to my clients who tolerated my distractedness

as I was thinking about patterns and for the opportunities over the last five years to really push my thinking especially around Identity, Privacy, Registration, New User Experiences, Reputations, Ratings and Reviews, and other aspects of developing a good social experience.

Thanks to Christina Wodtke for challenging me to write on a regular basis; she has taught me so much about how writing is fun and good for my soul. Thanks, also, for often inviting me to her classroom to teach her students the basics of social experience design and to play the game.

Thanks to all the workshop participants over the last five years for helping test the game, for questioning what I've been teaching and helping to refine and recraft what makes a good social experience. You all never cease to amaze me with the crazy ideas developed in the process. I want to create a company with all of you and release these ideas out into the world.

TO OUR ESSAYISTS

Thanks to all our essayists from the first edition for reviewing their essays and providing updates or new thoughts for the revision.

Many thanks to Bryce Glass, our unsung third author, for his expertise on Reputation systems and the reputation patterns, and for writing two essays for us.

To Randy Farmer, for his excellent thinking on Identity from all perspectives and his core set of “open” patterns.

To danah boyd, for encouraging Erin to go foraging through her wonderful thesis document and allowing us to excerpt it in our section on Youth.

To Billie Mandel—thank you so much for your excellent advice on designing for Mobile, which readers can find on our website.

To Stuart French, for his expertise in social knowledge management in the enterprise environment.

To Joshua Porter, for paving the way with his book, *Designing for the Social Web*, and for graciously adding his thoughts to our book.

To Thomas Vander Wal, for thinking about the future in his essay on social metadata.

To Chris Fahey, skeptic, coach, and friend, for his essay distinguishing patterns from clichés.

To Tom Hughes-Croucher, YDN evangelist colleague and deep thinker on social application design, for his thoughts on users' mental models.

To Matt Jones, inspiring pioneer and gifted communicator, for his elaboration on the intriguing palimpsest metaphor he contributed to this body of thought.

To Leisa Reichelt, pioneer of open design processes and sharp theorist, for expanding on her ambient intimacy coinage.

To Andrew Hinton, information philosopher, advanced practitioner, and community leader, for his illumination of the problems of context in these new environments.

To Derek Powazek, trailblazer of community-oriented design and communication, for his exploration of people as meaning-making machines.

To Harjeet S. Gulati, who found our project through the wiki, added a wealth of definitions and other useful contributions there, and then consented to contribute his thoughts on knowledge management in the enterprise.

To Gary Burnett, who has been studying and publishing about online community dynamics from an information science perspective, for his findings on the establishment of social norms.

To Shara Karasic, accomplished professional community moderator, for her deeply useful, hard-won tips about fostering a thriving community online.

To Micah Laaker, design leader on the identity team at Google, for his enumeration of 13 types of openness.

To Robyn Tippins, founder at Mariposa Marketing, for her insights on the community-building trifecta.

Without the work of the numerous thinkers, designers, builders, and schemers who have been mapping the digital social product space for the past decade or more (cited for further reading throughout the book)—notably, Ward Cunningham, Howard Rheingold, Amy Jo Kim, Dave Winer, Marc Canter, David Weinberger, Gene Smith, Clay Shirky, Mary Hodder, Stewart Butterfield, Edward Tufte, Kevin

Marks, Tom Coates, Jeremy Keith, Allen Tom, Brian Oberkirch, Liz Lawley, Lane Becker, Susan Mernit, Tara Hunt and many, many others—we could not have written this book. This is decidedly an effort in sense-making and organization, an attempt to give the community at the very least a straw model that tries to wrap its metaphorical arms around the entire landscape of social interaction design.

TO OUR NEW ESSAYISTS—WELCOME TO THE FAMILY

To Paul Adams, VP Product at Intercom, researcher and author, for the excellent research on groups and for sharing the thinking behind what works and doesn't work when designing for managing one's network, based on his analysis of his experience working as a designer on Google+.

To Josh Clark, whose thoughts on mobile design have paved the way for us all to go to the next level and think more holistically about all the spaces within which we dwell.

To Samuel Hulick, who has been publishing breakdowns and constructive critique of the most popular products' new user experiences and onboarding practices, and in the process, creating a wealth of information for others to learn from and be inspired by when thinking about their customers.

TO OUR REVIEWERS

Thank you so much for taking the time to read the book in detail and for being open and honest with what works for you and what doesn't. We heard you and spent a fair amount of time recrafting portions to better clarify and explain our intent.

What Are Social Patterns?

IN THE PAST 20 YEARS, we have watched the proliferation of Internet technology spread across the globe and have been immersed in the creation of tools and interactive experiences to help people navigate their way to information, find other people, and create their own places in the digital space. As both designers and participants, we have seen the rise and fall of the first wave (the dotcom boom and bust), experienced firsthand the explosion of Web 2.0 and social media, and witnessed the coming age of the Internet of Things (IoT).

These electronic connections and social tools are changing the way we interact with one another and our environments. We believe that these tools can be designed and simplified to help normal people expand their digital experiences with others. These social patterns of behavior and the interfaces to support them have emerged and continue to evolve as we find better ways to bring people together.

Social patterns are the components and pieces of interactivity that are the building blocks of social experiences. They are the best practices and principles we have seen emerge from hundreds of sites and applications with social features or focus. They are the emergent interaction patterns that have become the standard way for users to interact with their content and with the people who matter most to them.

Mommy, What's a Social User Experience Pattern?

I have a dream for the Web... and it has two parts. In the first part, the Web becomes a much more powerful means for collaboration between people. I have always imagined the information space as something to which everyone has immediate and intuitive access, and not just to browse, but to create. Furthermore, the dream of people-to-people communication through shared knowledge must be possible for groups of all sizes, interacting electronically with as much ease as they do now in person.

TIM BERNERS-LEE, WEAVING THE WEB (1999)

A Little Social Backstory...

SOCIAL DESIGN FOR INTERACTIVE digital spaces has been around since the earliest bulletin-board systems. The most famous being The Well (1985), which was described by *Wired* magazine in 1997* as “the world’s most influential online community” and predated the World Wide Web and browser interfaces by several years.

* Hafner, Katie. 1997. “The Epic Saga of The Well: The World’s Most Influential Online Community (And It’s Not AOL).” *Wired*, May 5, 1997. http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/5.05/tt_well_pr.html.

The Well

The Well began in 1985 on a Digital Equipment Corporation VAX system and a series of modems. Conceived by Stewart Brand and Larry Brilliant, Brand had a simple idea: “take a group of interesting people, give them the means to stay in continuous communication with one another, stand back, and see what happens.” He also had the idea that a community created online through written dialogue could be strengthened through offline, face-to-face meetings, and he set out to combine the two quite successfully.

From the 1997 *Wired* article: “But probably the most important of Brand’s early convictions for The Well was that people should take responsibility for what they said. There would be no anonymity; everyone’s real name would be available on the system, linked to his or her login. Brand came up with a credo that would, through the years, spark no end of debate: ‘You own your own words.’ That proviso greeted members each time they logged on. ‘I was doing the usual, considering what could go wrong,’ he recalls. ‘One thing would be people blaming us for what people said on The Well. And the way I figured you get around that was to put the responsibility on the individual.’”

Since the beginning of connected computers, we have tried to have computer-mediated experiences between people. As Clay Shirky notes in a 2004 *Salon* article, “Online social networks go all the way back to the Plato BBS 40 years ago!”

In the early days of the Web, social experiences were simply called *community* and generally consisted of message boards, groups, list-servs, and virtual worlds. Amy Jo Kim, author and community expert, calls these “place-centric” gathering places. Community features allowed users to talk and interact with one another, and the connection among people was usually based on the topic of interest that drew them to the site in the first place. Communities formed around interests, and relationships evolved over time. There was little distinction between the building of the tools to make these gatherings possible and the groups of people who made up the community itself. Bonds were formed in this space but generally didn’t exist in the real (offline) world.

PLATO*

“PLATO (Programmed Logic for Automated Teaching Operations) originated in the early 1960s at the Urbana campus of the University of Illinois. Professor Don Bitzer became interested in using computers for teaching, and together with some colleagues, he founded the Computer-based Education Research Laboratory (CERL).

“The sense of an online community began to emerge on PLATO in 1973–74, as Notes, Talkomatic, ‘term-talk’, and Personal Notes were introduced in quick succession. People met and got acquainted in Talkomatic, and carried on romances via ‘term-talk’ and Personal Notes. The release of Group Notes in 1976 gave the community fertile new ground for growth, but by that time it was already well established. The community had been building its own additions to the software infrastructure in the form of multiplayer games and alternative online communications. One such program was Pad, an online bulletin board where people could post graffiti or random musings. Another was Newsreport, a lighthearted online newspaper published periodically by Bruce Parelo, aka The Red Sweater.”

* Excerpted from David R. Woolley’s 1994 article “PLATO: The Emergence of Online Community” (<http://thinkofit.com/plato/dwplato.htm#community>). An earlier version of this article appeared in the January 1994 issue of *Matrix News*.

The interfaces and interaction design for these types of tools were all over the board—from graphical representations such as eWorld (see Figure 1-1) to scary-looking, only-for-early-adopters, text-only BBSs, to the simple forms of AOL chat rooms.

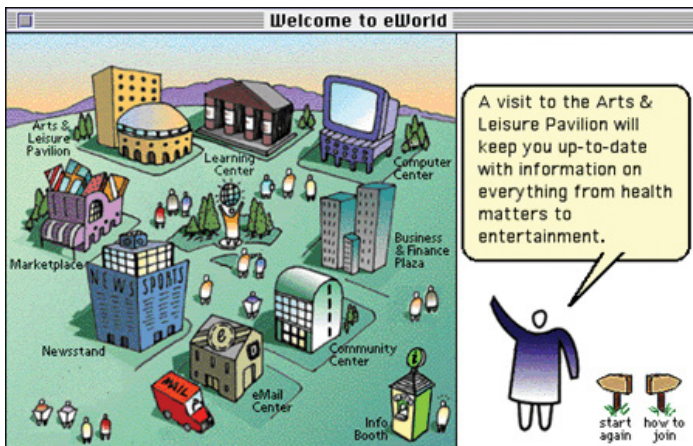


FIGURE 1-1

The very graphical interface of eWorld was the next step up from BBSs and was competing with AOL.

The first example that straddled the line between *community* and what we now call *social networks* was the site SixDegrees.com, which made its debut in 1997 (see Figure 1-2).

FIGURE 1-2
SixDegrees.com was one of the first social networks that connected people and built user profiles.



SixDegrees showcased connections among people, gave users the ability to create and manage their personal profiles, and brought people together based on interests and other features. Sound familiar?

Somewhere along the way, though, before the first dot-com bust in 2000, *community* became a dirty word—most likely because it was overly resource-intensive to build and maintain, and no one had quite figured out how to make money from all that work.

The advent of Web 2.0 paved the way for the second wave of websites and applications and the richer experiences they offer. It also ushered in the proliferation of mobile devices, allowing people to carry their networks with them everywhere they go—more sophisticated technologies and faster bandwidth for the masses. With Web 2.0, social networking has become table stakes. Every experience must have social pieces integrated. In fact, mobile thrives on this, and even enterprises now understand the values of these features. In this phase, social has many more components and options available to users, but the term

still generally means features or sites that allow interaction in real or asynchronous time among users. The tools are more robust, storage space is more ample, and more people are online to participate. The increase in online population is a major driving force for the shift to prioritizing these types of features and sites. There is critical mass now. By 2014, 87 percent of Americans, 70 percent of Europeans, and more than 50 percent in the rest of the world were online and participating.

Another key difference between the first cycle of social then and the current cycle today is that the social network—the real relationships with people that we know and care about—is key to the interactions and features. Features are gated based on the degrees of connection between two people. Many of the tools, apps, and websites offer features and functions that support existing offline relationships and behaviors. These places count on each person bringing his personal network into the online experience. The concept of tribes and friends has become more important than ever and has driven the development of many products.

What was ho-hum in 1997 is now the core—for user features as well as opportunities for making money. Additionally, the power of the many, or the wisdom of crowds, is being utilized to exert some control over content creation and self-moderation processes. Companies are learning that successful social experiences shouldn't and can't be overly controlled. They are learning they can take advantage of the crowd to do some of the heavy lifting, which in turn spares them some of the costs. User-generated content has helped many businesses and the participating community to keep things moderated.

The other factor contributing to the spread of these types of features is the expertise of a new generation of users. These folks have grown up with technology and expect it to help facilitate and mediate all of their interactions with friends, colleagues, teachers, and coworkers. They move seamlessly from computer to their mobile device or phone and back, and they want the tools to move with them. They work with technology, they play in technology, they breathe this technology, and it is virtually invisible to them.

In the past few years, as we have been living in the social web, we are seeing tensions with respect to privacy, and concerns regarding permanence versus ephemerality of content and data. Some people are

beginning to question how this information can be archived for future generations, whereas others want guarantees that the words, ideas, and experiences they share have a half-life shorter than the speed at which they are propagated across the Internet. The deeper philosophical, ethical, and cultural questions are now part of the dialogue, and the differing attitudes across the world and demographically affects how these tools and experiences are developed and nurtured.

The terms *community*, *social media*, and *social networking* all describe these kinds of tools and experiences. The terms often are used interchangeably, but they provide different views and facets of the same phenomenon.

In a paper published in the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* in 2007, danah boyd, a noted researcher specializing in social-network sites, and Nicole B. Ellison defined social-network sites as “web-based services that allow individuals to:

1. Construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system.
2. Articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection.
3. View and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site.”

According to Wikipedia, “social media is the use of electronic and Internet tools for the purpose of sharing and discussing information and experiences with other human beings,” and it defines social networking as “a platform to build *social networks* or *social relations* among people who share interests, activities, backgrounds, or real-life connections. Most social network services are web based and provide a means for users to interact over the Internet, such as e-mail and instant messaging services.” Community is defined as the group of people who utilize these environments and tools.

Well, What About That Social Media? Can You Expand on That?

The term *social media* first appeared on our radar as a way of generalizing what was going on with blogs circa 2002. The combination of blogging and Really Simple Syndication (RSS) (newsfeeds, feedreaders)—sometimes in the same application (as with Dave Winer’s Radio Userland software)—enabled a call-and-response, many-to-many conversational ecosystem to arise, become a bubble, calve into many smaller overlapping and distinct subcommunities, and so on.

In that scenario, the blog posts were the media, but then (as now) much blogging involved linking to sources that themselves might come from the traditional, mainstream media (or *MSM*, as some of the political bloggers tend to refer to it) or from other independent voices. Many people online realized that they were consuming much of their media (i.e., news, gossip, video clips, information) through social intermediaries: reading articles when a more prominent blogger linked to them, discovering media fads and memes by following BoingBoing or many other similar trend-tracking sites, and tuning in to the blogs and publications of like-minded people and relying on them to filter the vast, unfathomable information flow for those valuable nuggets of relevancy.

Along the way, the term *social media* began to stand in for Web 2.0, or the Social Web, or social networking, or (now) the experiences epitomized by Facebook and Twitter. Christian called this “the living web” in his last book, *The Power of Many: How the Living Web Is Transforming Politics, Business, and Everyday Life* (Wiley). Technorati tried branding it as the “World Live Web.” The idea is that as the Internet in general becomes more *social* (that’s the word we’ve all converged on) and everything is social and social is everywhere, there is an element of it that is read-write that involves people writing and revising and responding to one another, not in a one-to-one or one-to-many fashion, but many-to-many. The problem with using *social media* as a generic term for the entire Internet-enabled social context is that the word “media,” already slippery (does it refer to works of creation or to finding relevant news/media items, or to public chatter and commentary, or all of these things?), begins to add nothing to the phrase, and doesn’t really address the social graph.

We continue to see a proliferation of social-media marketing experts and gurus online, and their messages range from the sublime (that marketing can truly be turned inside out as a form of customer service, through Cluetrainful engagement[†] with customers, that is, treating them as human beings through ordinary conversations and public responsiveness), to the mundane (as in the early days of the Internet, every local market has its village explainers), to the ridiculous (a glorified version of spam).

[†] *The Cluetrain Manifesto* (<http://www.cluetrain.com>)

The collection of patterns that comprise this book were once labeled “social media patterns,” after the social media toolkit that Matt Leacock started at Yahoo!. But, as it evolved, it became clear that we were using “social media” to mean “social networking” or “involving the social graph” or just “social,” so for clarity’s sake, we’re using it to refer to “media that is created, filtered, engaged with, and remixed socially.”

Here’s a similar, but slightly more community-oriented definition of social media from Harjeet Gulati:

Social Media collectively refers to content (in the form of Text [Blogs, Discussion Forums, Wikis], Voice [Podcasts], or Video [YouTube]) that is generated by the community of users for consumption within the same community. In this model, the role of Publisher and Consumer of information is delegated to the community at large. The role of the Channel becomes key in this model, even as the degree of control that the community exercises over the content that is displayed within the boundaries of a given system varies. Where the term “media” meant traditional channels like Newspaper, Radio, and Television, the advent of the Web in the early nineties accelerated the inclusion of the Web as a medium to reach out to others. The content ownership in traditional media continued to be with the “publishers” of content—the production houses, newspapers, TV channels, and radio stations. Content Owners/Publishers, the Channel, and the Consumers were clearly differentiated. As the Web continued to evolve, the term “Social Media” has come to dominate the discussion. Social Media encourages a participative, collective model of content creation, distribution and usage and is more representative of the tastes and inclinations of the community at large.

We find it most useful to focus on the social objects (which can be media objects, but might also be such things as calendar events) and the activities people can do with them, and with one another, through our social interfaces.

For a further exploration of this term, see also “Social Media in Plain English” from Common Craft (<http://bit.ly/1SNdOqf>).

What Do We Mean by Principle, Best Practice, and Patterns?

With the growing expectation of seamless experiences, it is important for designers to see the emerging standards and to understand how one experience of a product and its interactions affects expectations for the next product. By working with standard and emerging best practices, principles, and interaction patterns, the designer removes from the user some of the burden of understanding how the application works. The user then can focus on the unique properties of the social experience she is building.

To begin, we do define these three things differently. They live along a continuum, from prescriptive (rules you should follow) to assumptions (a basic generalization that is accepted as true) to process (ways to approach thinking about these concepts).

Principle: A Basic Truth, Law, or Assumption

Principles are basic assumptions that have been accepted as true. In interaction design, they can lend guidance for how to approach a design problem and have been shown to be generally true with respect to a known user-experience problem or a set of accepted truths.

For example: Be learnable—create systems that are easily learned and provide cues for users to predict how things work from one area to another.

Principles don't prescribe the solution, though, like an interaction pattern does; instead, they support the rationale behind an interaction design pattern or set of best practices.

Practice (or Best Practice): A Habitual or Customary Action or Way of Doing Something

Best practices are funny things. They are often confused with principles or interaction patterns. They fall along the continuum and are less prescriptive than an interaction pattern solution—at least in our definition. We often include best practices inside an interaction pattern.

For example: In a mobile context, Design for Touch. Ensure that buttons, forms, and other elements are large enough for users to interact with them, accommodating human fingers so that they don't accidentally trigger neighboring elements.

The *best practice* helps clarify how to approach a design solution, and is generally the most efficient and effective way to solve the problem, although not necessarily the only way.

Pattern: A Model or Original Used as an Archetype

When we first began working with interaction design patterns, we defined a *pattern* as follows:

Common, successful interaction design components and design solutions for a known problem in a context.

Patterns are used like building blocks or bricks. They are fundamental components of a user experience and describe interaction processes. We can combine them with other patterns as well as other pieces of interface and content to create an interactive user experience. They are technology and visually agnostic, meaning we do not prescribe particular technological solutions or visual design aesthetics in the patterns. User experience design patterns give guidance to a designer for how to solve a specific problem in a particular context, in a way that has been shown to work over and over again.

The notion of using interaction design patterns in the user experience design process follows the model that computer software programming took when it adopted the concepts and philosophies of Christopher Alexander. Alexander, an architect, wrote the book *A Pattern Language*. In his book he describes a language—a set of rules or patterns for design—for how to design and build cities, buildings, and other human spaces. The approach is repeatable and works at various levels of scale.

Alexander says that “each pattern describes a problem which occurs over and over again in our environment, and then describes the core of the solution to that problem in such a way that you can use this solution a million times over, without ever doing it the same way twice.”

In addition to developing this language of elemental repeatable patterns, he was concerned with the human aspect of building. In a 2008 interview, Alexander says that his ideas “make [homes] work so that people would feel good.” This human approach and concern for the person (as user) is part of what has appealed to both software developers and user experience designers.

The idea of building with a pattern language was adopted by the computer software industry in 1987, when Ward Cunningham and Kent Beck began experimenting with the idea of applying patterns to programming. As Ward says, they “looked for a way to write programs that embraced the user, where users felt supported by the computer program, not interrogated by the computer program.”

This approach took off, and in 1995 the book *Design Patterns: Elements of Reusable Object-Oriented Software* by Erich Gamma, Richard Helm, Ralph Johnson, and John Vlissides (known as the Gang of Four) was published.

In 1997, Jenifer Tidwell published a collection of user interface patterns for the human-computer interaction (HCI) community based on the premise that capturing the collective wisdom of experienced designers helps educate novice designers and gives the community as a whole a common vocabulary for discussion. She specifically stated that she was attempting to create an Alexandrian-like language for interface designers and the HCI community. The evolution of that site and her work became the book *Designing Interfaces*, published in 2005 by O'Reilly Media.

Several others published collections on the Web, including Martijn van Welie, a long-time proponent of patterns in the interaction design realm, which in turn inspired my (Erin's) team at Yahoo! to publish portions of our internal interaction pattern library to the public in 2006.

I (Erin) had joined Yahoo! in 2004 to build a pattern library for the ever-growing user experience design team and to create a common vocabulary for the network of sites that Yahoo! produced for its hundreds of millions of global users. We built the library in a collaborative manner, utilizing the most successful, well-researched design solutions as models for each pattern. Designers from across the company contributed patterns, commented and discussed their merits, added new information as technology and users changed, and moderated the quality and lifecycle of each pattern. In 2006, spearheaded by Bill Scott, we were able to go public with our work with a subset of the internal library.

The work was very well received by the interaction design and information architecture community, and it inspired many people in their design work. From 2007 to 2010, Christian further evangelized the

library to bridge the gaps between design and development and open source communities. Since our first edition, several other pattern libraries have joined the growing body of work, including pattern collections for mobile (for Android specifically) for supporting responsive code libraries, and many other companies have publicly published their libraries (MailChimp, BBC, Intuit Small Business's Harmony ecosystem, Google and its Material Design patterns) to share their knowledge, inform third-party developers, and inspire the design community.

The notion of having a suite of reusable building blocks to inform and help designers develop their sites and applications has gained traction within the interaction design community as the demands for web and mobile interfaces have become more complex. When the Web was mostly text, there wasn't a whole lot of variety to how a user interacted with a site, and the toolkit was small. The complexity of client applications was difficult at best to duplicate online. But that was then. Now, entire businesses and industries rely on easy-to-use, web-based software (Software as a Service [SAAS]) and mobile applications to conduct their business. There is more need than ever to have a common language for designers and developers. And because social is now integrated into every facet of interactive experiences, it is important to put a stake in the ground regarding just what those pieces should be and how they should and shouldn't behave.

The Importance of Anti-Patterns

The term *anti-patterns* was coined in 1995 by Andrew Koenig in the *C++ Report*, and was inspired by the aforementioned Gang of Four's book *Design Patterns*.

Koenig defined the term with two variants:

- Those that describe a bad solution to a problem that resulted in a bad situation
- Those that describe how to get out of a bad situation and how to proceed from there to a good solution

With the publication of the book *Anti-Patterns: Refactoring Software, Architectures, and Projects in Crisis* by William Brown et al., anti-patterns became a popular method for understanding bad design solutions in programming.

For our purposes, anti-patterns are common mistakes or a bad solution to a common problem. It is sometimes easier to understand how to design successfully by dissecting what not to do. In the world of social experiences, often the anti-patterns have some sort of jarring or malicious side effects such as social group *faux pas* or, in the extreme, identity theft.

The anti-patterns we illustrate in Chapters 2 and 3 will point out why the solution seems good and why it turns out to be bad, and then we will discuss refactored alternatives that are more successful or gentler to the user experience.

Desktop, Mobile, Enterprise, or Devices

The patterns collected here are intended to be considered, mixed together, and applied across all facets of delivery—regardless of whether that is mobile, in a browser, in a watch or refrigerator, for consumers, or in the enterprise.

There are nuances to each context that should be taken into account, but ultimately the goal should be creating opportunities for connecting people to others and their content.

Designing for the Space Between Devices

Mobile arrived as both opportunity and crisis, forcing designers to find new ways to present information across a challenging range of screen sizes. Through responsive web design and app development, we've done heroic work to design for each of those devices individually. Yet, for all of our advances in technique, a new design crisis has developed. This one's less about the variety of devices that we use and more about the sheer number.

As we juggle more and more gadgets in our daily lives, we often become stuck between them. As devices multiply, the new opportunity is less about designing individual screens; rather, it's more about designing interactions between the devices—often without using a screen at all. There's untapped magic in the gaps between gadgets.

ONE TASK, MANY DEVICES

We're all constantly switching between devices, from phones to laptops to desktops and tablets. A 2014 study in the United Kingdom found that during the course of a typical weekday evening, the average British tech user switches devices about 21 times each hour—and 95 percent of the time, the television is on in the background, too. Much of the time, this gadget-switching takes place while we're completing a single task. An August 2012 study by Google found that 90 percent of people who own more than one device complete tasks across their multiple devices. For example, two-thirds of us shop across devices: we begin shopping on one device, typically a phone, and finish the transaction on a laptop or tablet.

The way we shift tasks across devices isn't pretty. We lurch and heave our data from one to another, often through clumsy hacks. You know the drill: we're constantly emailing ourselves URLs just to shift an activity from our phone to our laptop, or vice versa. We text a phone number or photo to the person sitting right next to us. Or, most often of all, we just start from scratch on the second device, firing up a new search to find our place and begin all over again.

The consumer desire to shift tasks across devices is obvious, but the design solutions aren't in place yet. As customers, we've come up with the aforementioned primitive hacks to make it work, but as designers, we've simply ignored the problem.

WHAT SHOULD INTERACTIONS LOOK LIKE?

Operating systems are just beginning to address these transitions between devices. Apple's 2014 OS update, Yosemite, does so with Continuity and Handoff. With Handoff, if it's taking me too long to write that email on my phone, I can go over to my laptop, and there's a little icon waiting for me. When I click it, the very same email from my phone materializes on my computer and I can continue typing right where I left off. Similarly, if I'm looking at a map on my laptop, I can tap an icon on my phone, and I can see the map there. Android is rumored to be working on a similar service called Copresence, and Samsung has announced its version, called Flow.

This is all heartening to see, but at the moment, these efforts are only plumbing—the basic infrastructure to connect devices. To be certain, that's badly needed, but it's only half the story. Designers have the fun challenge of creating effortless interactions to improve these services. Right now, features such as Handoff are entirely screen based, a virtual interaction that ignores the fact that they're bridging a physical gap—the space between phone, tablet, desktop, laptop, or television.

Digital experiences have become physical in recent years as we've etched our interfaces onto the slabs of glass that we carry out into the world with us. When we stop considering these things as screens and instead regard them as physical objects that can interact, the possibilities become at once simpler, more playful, and more human.

THE ROLE OF SENSORS FOR INTERACTIONS

Our phones, tablets, and computers are loaded with sensors. With sensor-based interactions, we can now move interactions off the screen. One fun example is DrumPants, a sensor kit that you, um, slip into your pants to turn it into a musical instrument. Tap out a rhythm on your knee, slap your thighs, and tap your foot to become a twenty-first-century one-man band. It's far more immediate, natural, and familiar than using a new-fangled touchscreen music app. It bends technology to our natural behavior rather than the reverse.

We absolutely have more important problems to solve than giving the world DrumPants, but toys such as this are important. It's novel, playful thinking like this that can help us begin to imagine and develop off-screen interactions. What does it mean to begin thinking of our devices as physical objects with real, local presence, instead of disembodied screens on the network?

I prototyped one example of how this might work with my studiomate Larry Legend. He listens to music in the studio, and he has his headphones plugged into his phone. He gets to his computer and wants to begin listening to music there. So, he taps the phone twice on the computer, as if he's shaking the music out of his phone onto his desktop. The music picks up on his computer seamlessly, playing from the exact same moment.

It's something you can do now by tapping buttons on your screens, but it could (and should) be better. That's the kind of natural, physical interaction we should be aiming for. We also have this working with maps, URLs, text, and photos—just shake the content from your phone into your computer. It makes your gadgets, and you, happier together.

DESIGNING OBVIOUS INTERACTIONS

We're beginning to see other early experiments that recognize the physical relationships between our devices. For example, the Misfit Shine fitness tracker lets you sync the device with your phone by laying it right on the touchscreen. Waves slowly begin to radiate out from the Shine, and you can watch the data soaking right through the screen, like magic. Or so it seems. Like all magic, there's some misdirection at work here. It has nothing to do with the screen—it's actually a familiar wireless sync via Bluetooth.

This charming interaction was the result of a design flaw. When the Shine got its lovely metal casing, it blocked the radio signal so much that the designers realized it worked only when you brought the Shine right next to the phone. As a wireless sync, it seemed like a bust. How could you get people to put these things so ridiculously close to each other? Then they thought, "Maybe we can get them to put it on the screen." The result is the illusion of a direct physical link. Just put the two devices together, and they talk to each other. It's almost as if they were kissing, exchanging their data in a lovely, social, physical interaction. Sometimes, hitting what seems like a roadblock or constraint ends up working in your favor.

SIMPLER THAN YOU MIGHT THINK

Here's the thing: this kind of magic doesn't require new science or new technology. There are tons of tech and code ready and waiting for us to use—often laying fallow in our pockets, handbags, and living rooms.

For example, Aral Balkan built Grab Magic, a nifty interaction that turns you into a wizard, in an overnight hack. You play a video on a projector, grab an image from the video from thin air, and throw it right onto your phone. It's startling to see in action, breathtaking in its novelty.

Yet, the underlying technology is disarmingly simple. To make the stunt work, Balkan taught an Xbox Kinect to take a screenshot and send it to his phone when it saw his "grab" motion. He then taught the phone to reveal the image with a touch of the screen. These are such simple, fundamental interactions to the Kinect and smartphone that you wouldn't give them a thought in isolation. But the combination is exciting, and that's where the magic lies.

We tend to think of our interfaces in isolating ways: "Oh, this a mouse and keyboard interface. And here is a touchscreen interface. This one is for voice. This one is for Kinect air gestures. This one is for camera vision." But the reality is that more and more of the computers we carry every day have all of these features onboard. They can and should do these things in combination—for both ease and wonder.

MAKING INTERACTION HUMAN AGAIN

Creating natural interactions for these freshly physical interfaces has the important potential to diminish the importance of the screen. As the Internet of Things (IoT) expands, becoming embedded into everyday places, objects, and even people around us, we should move interactions off the screen and into the our surrounding environment.

Screens isolate us from one another. The more connected we are, the more disconnected we seem to be from the people and places we care about. At the dinner table, in bed, at the office, on the street, we're heads-down in our devices instead of heads-up in our lives. We can do better.

By embracing (and combining) sensors, we have a fresh chance to create interactions that bend to the way we interact with the world, rather than the reverse.

JOSH CLARK

So, That's All the Little Parts: Now What?

Our approach for the rest of this book is similar to Christopher Alexander's, in that we begin with a foundational set of high-level practices that underpin the individual interactions detailed in subsequent chapters (see Figure 1-3).

In each section, we talk about which patterns build on others and how you can combine patterns to create a robust experience. We cross-reference patterns and give examples from the wild where we see examples of these patterns in action.

The social patterns support the entire lifecycle that a user might experience within a site or application, from signing up to actively participating, to building a reputation, to dating or collaborating with friends, to collaborative games and even moderation. We are building a vocabulary and language for social application design in the same spirit as Alexander:

We were always looking for the capacity of a pattern language to generate coherence, and that was the most vital test used, again and again, during the process of creating a language. The language was always seen as a whole. We were looking for the extent to which, as a whole, a pattern language would produce a coherent entity.

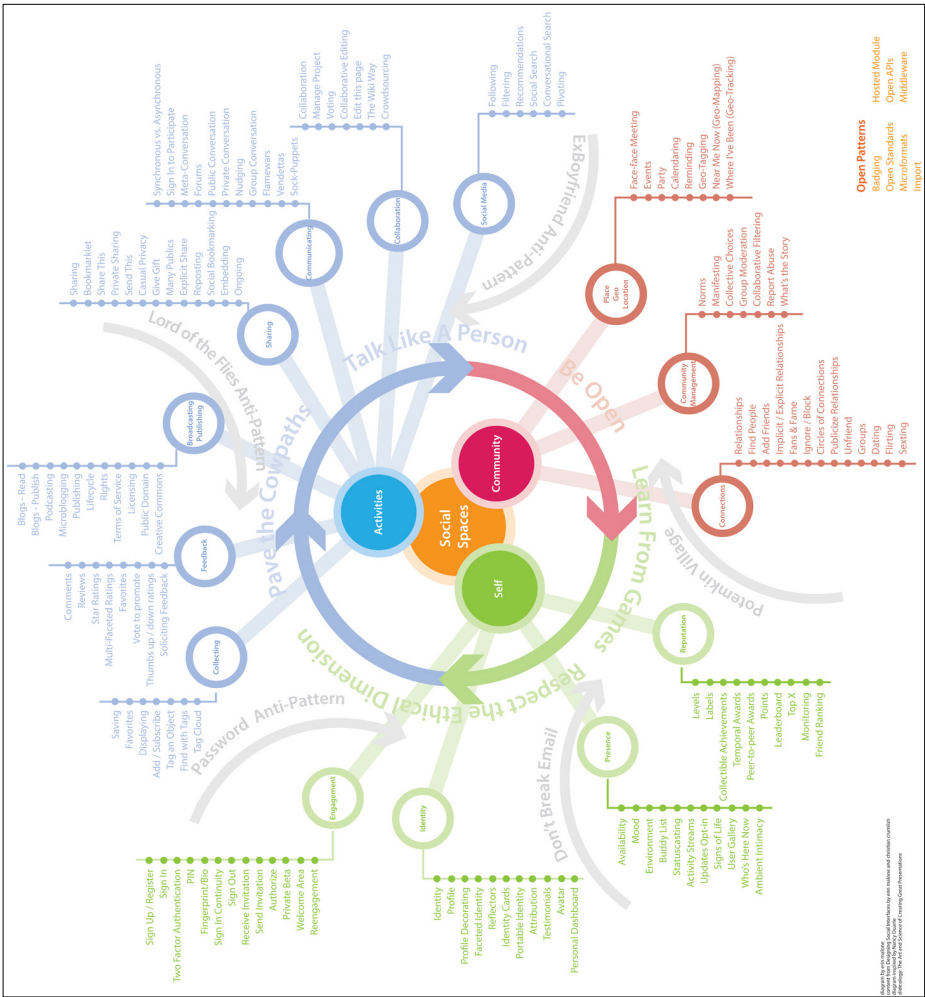


FIGURE 1-3

The social ecosystem encompassing all the patterns, categories, anti-patterns, and principles found here in this book. You can find a printable PDF of this poster at <http://www.designingsocialinterfaces.com>.

Patterns... or Clichés?

Clichés. They're a dime a dozen. Avoid them like the plague, or so we're told.

But are they really that bad? Would we really be better off if, every single time we wanted to say something, we had to start from scratch and think of a completely new way of saying it?

The word *cliché* comes from printing with movable type: typesetters would take a commonly used expression and cast it in a single block called a cliché, rather than setting the entire phrase by hand every time. Over time, the term came to be used to describe the words and phrases themselves. For authors who are tempted to use them, clichés can indeed be problematic:

- In a writer's hasty use of a cliché, he might end up saying something he didn't exactly mean.
- By choosing a cliché instead of looking for something new, the author loses an opportunity to surprise and delight the reader with more elegant or thought-provoking words.
- An overly obvious cliché can come across as cheesy and banal: readers will hear the cliché, not the message.

But in normal life, clichés are not only permissible, they are, in fact, critical to our everyday communication. Clichés make our messages efficient and more easily understood.

So, are design patterns the same as clichés?

In a sense, yes: they're proven, ready-made, and often familiar ways of solving creative problems. And, just as with clichés, it's important to recognize when they are useful and relevant, and when they are ill-suited or misleading.

In an interview with the Unbeige blog, designer and author Steven Heller was asked about his design process:

Unbeige: What's the first thing you do when you're starting to design something, and you're faced with a blank page/computer screen?

Steven Heller: Pray. Then fall into my bag of clichés and wiggle around.

It's true: a design pattern, or a cliché, is often just a starting point. It's often the first thing you reach for from your palette of design tools when assembling the rough outlines of a design solution. A writer's quick first draft of an essay or story might include a few hackneyed clichés that she will eventually improve, sometimes with the help of an editor. Think of patterns the same way: your first pass at a UX design might include a few basic patterns that, as initially drawn, feel a little too obvious, almost cliché. However, when you view them again as part of the big picture, you can see where they don't quite work and will require some changes and improvement—a little wiggling around, as it were.

Occasionally, a basic design pattern will be a perfect fit the first time out. But this is usually not the case. You should always think carefully about how the pattern itself could be reimagined to suit the particular demands of your product. So go ahead: reinvent the wheel.

CHRISTOPHER FAHEY, VP PRODUCT DESIGN AT SPRING

Further Reading

1. Brown, William, Raphael Malveau, Skip McCormick, and Tom Mowbray. *Anti-Patterns: Refactoring Software, Architectures, and Projects in Crisis*. Wiley, 1998.
2. Kim, Amy Jo. *Community Building on the Web: Secret Strategies for Successful Online Communities*. Peachpit Press, 2000.
3. Gamma, Erich, Richard Helm, Ralph Johnson, and John M. Vlissides. *Design Patterns*. Addison-Wesley Professional, 1994.
4. Powazek, Derek. *Design for Community*. Waite Group Press, 2001.
5. Porter, Joshua. *Designing for the Social Web*. New Riders Press, 2008.
6. Tidwell, Jenifer. *Designing Interfaces*. O'Reilly Media, 2005.
7. Li, Charlene, and Josh Bernoff. *Groundswell*. Harvard Business School Press, 2008.
8. Alexander, Christopher. *A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction* (Center for Environmental Structure Series). Oxford University Press, 1977.

9. Alexander, Christopher. *A Timeless Way of Building*. Oxford University Press, 1979.
10. Social Media in Plain English, <http://bit.ly/1SNdOqf>.
11. Rheingold, Howard. *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, The MIT Press, 2000.
12. Hafner, Katie. *The Well: A Story of Love, Death and Real Life in the Seminal Online Community*. Carroll, Graf Publishers, 2001.

Social to the Core

The Web is more a social creation than a technical one. I designed it for a social effect—to help people work together—and not as a technical toy.

TIM BERNERS-LEE, *WEAVING THE WEB* (1999)

IN HIS BOOK *A Timeless Way of Building*, Christopher Alexander explains the purpose of pattern languages in part by saying that they are about imbuing built spaces with “the quality without a name.” There is something, often ineffable, about some architectural spaces that make them inviting, warm, humane, comfortable, healthy, and alive. Analyzing these spaces can tell us that the seating area is built on a good scale or that the lighting helps foster small group conversations, but underlying these granular design decisions are some higher-order principles that can be applied across the board.

Metaphorically, online social spaces operate similarly. A well-designed sign-up flow will have a real, direct impact on whether people feel invited and encouraged to join and capable of doing so. That’s just one of many specific interfaces you will need to define for your product. Internalizing some higher-level principles first can help you make better design decisions as you get down to the details.

This is equally true if you are introducing social aspects to an existing product or working on making changes or extensions to an already-built and shipped product.

So, before delving deeply into all of the specific design decisions you're going to make when creating a new product, it can be helpful to take a step back and think about what underlying principles will help to make your project successful. Consider the example in Figure 2-1. How can you create a space that invites healthy participation from users, grows organically, and creates value that is greater than the sum of its parts?

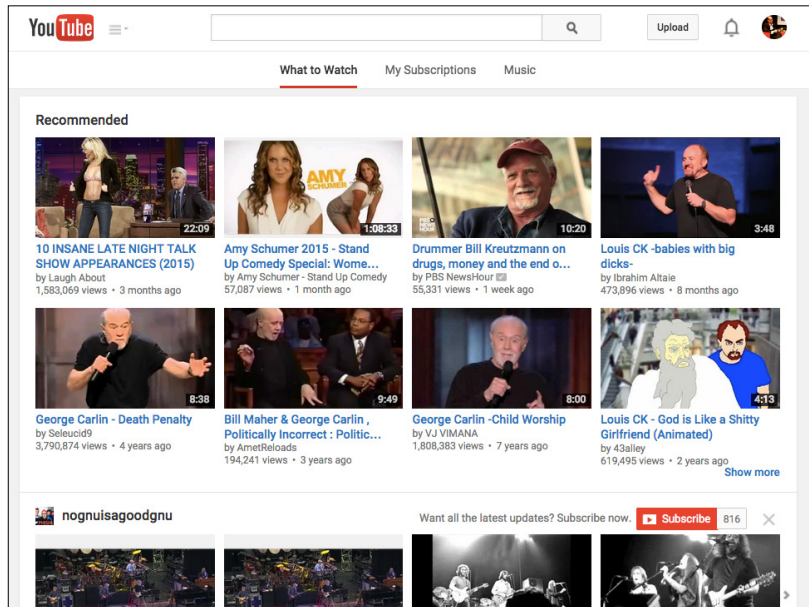


FIGURE 2-1

The home screen that YouTube created for me automatically after I'd used it for a while (and signed up for an account) employs a number of different strategies to engage my attention, to invite my participation, and to try to encourage me to explore some of the more social aspects of the product. Can you identify any social design principles at work here?

We've identified a few principles that are as close to universal as possible. Most or all successful social websites and apps exhibit these factors. They can help you to decide how and when to apply the more tactical design patterns we'll be explaining throughout the rest of this book, too. Before diving into the interconnected language of the design patterns, take a few moments to consider these principles and stow them in the back of your mind. Not only will you find that they cut across

and inform many of the behavioral scenarios you're designing for with these patterns, but they will also assist you in making decisions when you go beyond the comfortable boundaries of past experience.

One common characteristic of social products is that they must strive to work for everyone (that is to say, everyone in the target audience). They can't be tailored to a specific, narrow niche. But how do you cut across the variations in your user group? You can't please everybody. In fact, user experience (UX) design inherently involves trade-offs. So how do you cast as wide a net as possible and include as many people as possible?

Social but Not Social Only

Throughout this book, we will at times introduce patterns and principles whose domain is not limited to the realm of social applications. That's OK. There has always been a social undercurrent to the Internet, inherent in the fact that it has always offered a connection among people. For most of us, before we had Internet access, our computers were more like filing cabinets than telephones. They weren't communication devices, at least not in any direct way. (A typewriter might enable you to write a letter, but it doesn't deliver the letter to your correspondent.)

When personal computers became more readily networked and ultimately the "cloud" of the Internet, the experience of getting in front of a screen and typing on a keyboard (and later perhaps talking into a microphone and staring into a camera) all became potentially social rather than solipsistic.

Thus, a number of the patterns and principles in this book, such as the next set of patterns in this chapter, might be considered good advice for most contemporary app development projects, but they are particularly applicable to products with a social dimension. (And, of course, that's also becoming a greater and greater percentage of the products out there over time.)

Deliberately Leave Things Incomplete

One of the key differences between designing a social environment online and designing a traditional media-style, broadcast-oriented content site is that the design of a social community online cannot be

entirely predetermined. Or, rather, let me say that it *should not* be. The denizens of a social app must be given the opportunity to “finish” the design themselves.

This principle finds form in a number of familiar concepts: customization, skinning, user-contributed tags, and the emergent folksonomies to which they can give rise.

You might call this part of the process *metadesign*. Rather than giving our users a fish, we are giving them a rod, reel, bait, and instructions to teach them how to fish. We design the rules of the system but not all of the outcomes. Some call this *generative design*, because you are designing interfaces that make it possible for your participants to generate their own finished environments.

By designing with this philosophy, we create open space rather than filled-in labyrinths. If we are successful in bringing people to our product, engaging them, and involving them in the life of the community (as will be discussed in the following chapters), they will make the subsequent choices, individually and collectively, that will determine the more detailed shape of their shared environment.

Clearly, though, there are limits. There is a boundary you must find between the parts of your environment that are fundamental (stable, unchanging, and reliable) and those that are malleable. The line by necessity is drawn in different parts of the architecture depending on the type of product. Think of a fairly simple example: skinning one’s own profile screen. MySpace permitted a riot of design permutations, creating a carnivalesque atmosphere reminiscent of the homestead on Geocities in the olden days of the Web. Facebook came along and offered you whatever color scheme you liked, as long as you liked a tasteful medley of blue tones. Neither design choice is inherently correct or incorrect, but the choice itself determines a vastly different outcome, potentially setting the tone for your entire social app.

Pave the Cowpaths

A motto that comes down to us from architecture and has been championed in various forms by web practitioners from its earliest days is “Pave the cowpaths,” which means, essentially, look where the paths are already being formed by behavior and then formalize them. This is far more effective than creating some sort of idealized path structure that ignores history and tradition and human nature and geometry and

ergonomics and common sense. This principle is sometimes applied on campuses, and sometimes a rear-guard “Keep off the grass” action is fought instead, to no avail.

In the design of social interfaces, this rubric has two applications. The first is simply to do your ethnographic homework and study some of your potential customers. How do they do what they do today? Yes, of course the thing you want them to do will be better, but is it really entirely different? Can you offer people a way to continue doing most of the things they’re comfortable doing today as you introduce new possibilities into their lives, or are you really going to insist on them changing everything at once?

The second application of “Pave the cowpaths” comes later in the life-cycle of your product, when you have a user base and it begins to do things you never anticipated. Often the impulse is to stamp out these rogue behaviors and enforce draconian rules requiring only the behaviors for which you had planned. This really only make sense if the behaviors you are trying to stamp out are truly destructive or evil. There are many anecdotes about thriving social sites that killed themselves off by legislating against fun and forcing their users into exile to find the activities they had been improvising “incorrectly” in the app they had to leave.

A better plan is to support the behaviors in which your users are engaged. Let your users tell you what the best and highest use of your interface might turn out to be. Don’t be so arrogant as to assume that you know everything about how the social dynamics you’ve unleashed need to evolve.

Beware the Pitfalls of Unclear Mental Models

One of the things I like about computers is their ability to create magic. They provide abilities that no one thought possible and make them a reality. Yet, for many people this is also the biggest source of complaint about computers.

When you drive a car, you probably don't understand the thermodynamics of expanding chains of combusting hydrocarbons happening under the hood. Perhaps you understand the concept that gas expands in the engine block, pushing pistons in sequence, which makes the car go. But, even if you don't, you can still understand that there is a direct correlation between the accelerator and the car moving forward. Of course, most interfaces are not quite this simple, even in cars. If the car won't move, you assess what might have happened. And lo, you've left the parking brake on! With this error dealt with, you are free to go about your driving.

Obviously I'm not going to ask you to model your user interfaces after cars. However, it is interesting that although cars contain significant amounts of complexity (complexity you and I almost certainly don't fully understand), we can still functionally use them and recover the situation when things go wrong. This is because the sequence of events that makes the car work has formed a mental model in our heads. The car goes forward only when it contains fuel, the engine is on, you are not applying the brakes, and you are pressing the accelerator. Because we have this model of how the car works, we are able to troubleshoot when it doesn't behave as we expected.

What is significant about the models we create is how functional they are. They aren't based on the combustion of hydrocarbons or lateral torque. Heck, if there is serious engine trouble, that is still a black box to me, but I know I can call AAA to tow me to a garage. And this, dear friends, is the crux of it: you need to design interfaces that let people recover from their mistakes. The problem you face as the designers of magical boxes rather than cars, however, is that users do not have the same robust mental model of computers that they have for cars. When things go wrong, and they certainly will, your users are lost in a sea of uncertainty.

So, how do we solve this dilly of a pickle? Let's begin with what we know. Users must have a mental model of computers; otherwise, they wouldn't be able to use them at all. However, the scope of this mental model covers, say, user interface widgets and probably some landmark- or list-based navigation. The problem—the thing that makes computers different from cars—is that computers interact differently based on context or conditions outside of our control. Much of this context might not be understood by the user, or might have never been explained. Cars are pretty old technology, and children learn about them in school. By the time we first learn to drive a car, we are expected to have a basic understanding of how it works, however generalized that model is. The same is not true for computers. Computer users are often actively discouraged from learning the underlying principles of what they are doing and told to focus on the specifics of the interface.

A great example of how this leads to the breakdown of users' mental models is interaction with the Web. The Web is probably one of the least benign environments for a user on his computer, and yet it is arguably the most successful computing platform. When using the Web, there are numerous contextual or circumstantial errors than can occur, but the majority of users have no mental model with which to understand and recover from them. We looked at four possible causes of the gas pedal not accelerating a car, and yet a web page failing to load can have upward of a dozen causes. Because users lack a mental model, the best plan of action is to try to self-diagnose the error and educate the user. The distinction is important. Although it might seem sufficient to alert users that something went wrong and instruct them as to what they can do next, they eventually are going to get into the same state again with the same confusion. Instead, if there were a problem with the Domain Name System (DNS), let them know, and help them understand what DNS is. Maybe you have to use an analogy of a phone book for website numbers that their computer dials, or maybe you can convey the information in a more straightforward way. However you do it, don't just let your users continually fail and become frustrated. Instead, give them a mental model that will last them a lifetime as a satisfied customer.

**TOM HUGHES-CROUCHER, SOFTWARE ENGINEER,
UBER TECHNOLOGIES**

Strict Versus Fluid Taxonomies

In social products, people tend to contribute content within some at least partially defined structure. When we talk about taxonomies, we are talking about the organization schemes used for everything from product structure to navigation to categorization of content.

Part of leaving the design unfinished involves determining which elements to nail down and which to leave more free-form. Flickr pioneered an interesting mix of both design approaches (strict versus fluid) applied to different contexts. Some elements of Flickr's interface are rigidly defined. These include the object model, the product's master navigation, and the short list of predefined relation types.

The object model provides for people: people have collections of media objects, people can join groups and submit media objects to them, and so on. The master navigation has these items at its top level: Home, You, Organize, Contacts, Groups, Explore. The short list of predefined relation types allows for a person to define another person as a contact

(this relationship need not be reciprocated to take effect), and optionally to further classify the person as a friend, a family member, or both (see Figure 2-2).

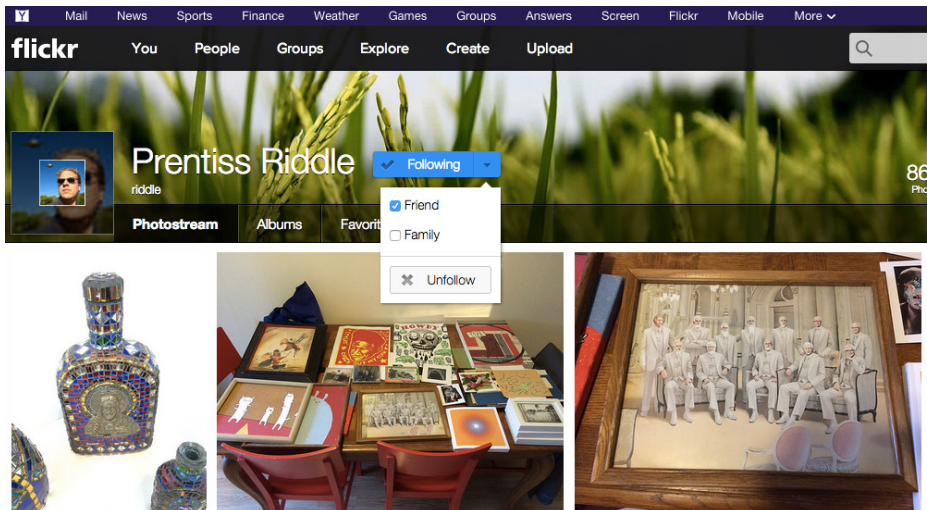


FIGURE 2-2

At Flickr, contacts can be friends, family, or both (but that's it).

I'm not saying these design and information architecture decisions have never changed. Since its launch, Flickr has added a second media type (video) and has refactored its navigation menus without changing the basic philosophy. It has also changed from a free-form connection model that gave users the ability to define additional relationships to the narrow one it has today (because relatively few users took much advantage of this feature, so it offered limited value for the maintenance required).

This last change backed off from the more fluid taxonomy approach that, where appropriate, can provide users with the capability to invent concepts, labels, classifications, and groups in an evolving way that meets their needs without requiring you, as the designer, to fully anticipate every conceivable scenario that your social application might foster and support.

In addition to these "rigid" taxonomy elements, Flickr also gives its users unlimited freedom along some carefully defined axes to invent whatever meaning they need. Examples of this include Flickr's

well-known free tagging feature, with which users can tag their own objects. It also gives users the option of permitting others to tag them (see Figure 2-3).

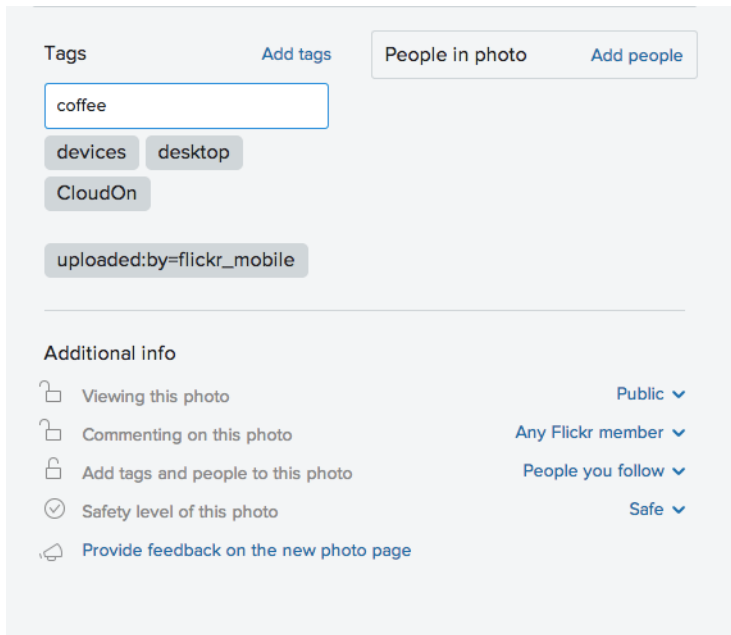


FIGURE 2-3 There’s no way the designer of a social application can anticipate every tag a user might want to apply.

Another free-form taxonomy element inherent in Flickr’s design is the unlimited ability to create groups with any conceivable name or purpose. This feature involves a number of patterns we’ll discuss presently, including the concept of a group, ridiculously easy group formation, discussions, joining, invitation, and the ability to add media objects to a group’s “pool.”

Flickr users also invented the concept of an award associated with a group. These often gaudy images are offered to users in the comments on a particularly relevant image or video and generally accompanied by an invitation to join the associated group (or at the very least to proudly display the award, which, incidentally, then functions as a sort of advertisement for the related group). Many people consider these awards tacky and pushy, but they do represent an innovation invented by users and permitted (but not directly supported) by the Flickr UI.

In this way (with or without awards), groups can function as a browsing “pivot” for users, taking them from the image of a friend to a related group, and then on to other images (see Figures 2-4 and 2-5).



La Poutré says:

Hi, I'm an admin for a group called [Vitruvian variations](#), and we'd love to have this added to the group! It's a new group. I try to collect all kind of pictures inspired by Da Vinci's drawing.

Posted 2 months ago. ([permalink](#))

FIGURE 2-4

A caricature of Merlin Mann in the style of da Vinci's "Vetruvian Man" prompts an invitation to a group dedicated to just such parodies and variations.

Vitruvian variations Share This

Group Pool Discussion 13 Members Map Join This Group

Group Pool (73 photos | Only members can add to the pool. [Join?](#))

From [Funkmania](#) From [graham_wa](#) From [bluemooddream](#) From [aknacer](#) From [Miss Advantage](#) From [Kscologist](#)

From [shaman_artist](#) From [shaman_artist](#) From [shaman_artist](#) From [shaman_artist](#) From [shaman_artist](#) From [shaman_artist](#)

[More](#)

Discussion (0 posts | Only members can post. [Join?](#))

No topics have been posted yet.

About Vitruvian variations

A collection of (self)portraits and other photos inspired by Da Vinci's drawing The Vitruvian Man.

Additional Information

- This is a public group.
- This group allows safe:
 - Photos
 - Screenshots
 - Art or illustration

FIGURE 2-5

The Vitruvian variations group showcases a series of images with a common theme.

Palimpsest

In a talk that Matt “blackbeltjones” Jones gave at Adaptive Path’s MX week in 2008, he recommended the metaphor of the palimpsest (<http://bit.ly/1OhbUNY>) as a “model for social tools,” while speaking of Dopplr, a (now-defunct) social network for frequent travelers:

Our content itself gets smarter as it aggregates our thoughts about it.... I think the palimpsest as a model for social tools is a powerful one.

Of course they originated from the scarcity of media, something we don’t exactly suffer [from]. But thinking about the medium as something that accretes messages in the way they did helps me.

I also just like saying it. Palimpsest!

We like saying it, too!

Literally, a *palimpsest* is a manuscript (this being an ancient term, it might be papyrus or parchment) that has been overwritten at least once, with the earlier text only partially erased and obscured. Thus, the layers of the preceding meaning are still slightly visible through or “behind” the most current layer. The word has also been used as a metaphor to describe any place that reveals its own history.

Kenneth G. Wilson defined it in *The Columbia Guide to Standard American English* as “a piece of writing that has been erased one or more times and written over, so that it is layers deep. It then provides a metaphor for complicated reading or deciphering or simply for penetrating to truth through layers of matter overlying it. The metaphor is not so much about mystery or age as it is about layers of meaning.”

OK, so what does it mean, then? Well, it means providing your users with ways to annotate, add meaning, add metadata, reformat, re-create, and change the environment you’ve designed for them, while still leaving traces of the earlier contexts.

Figure 2-6 shows Flickr Commons, which is a great example of this (also borrowed from Matt).

flickr[®] Signed in as [designingsocialinterfaces](#) Help Sign Out

Home You Organize Contacts Groups Explore Search The Commons Search



The Commons
Your opportunity to contribute to describing the world's public photo collections.

Welcome!

The key goals of The Commons on Flickr are to firstly show you hidden treasures in the world's public photography archives, and secondly to show how your input and knowledge can help make these collections even richer.

You're invited to help describe the photographs you discover in The Commons on Flickr, either by adding tags or leaving comments.*

Participating Institutions so far...



[FAQ](#) | [Rights Statement](#)

A Commons Sampler [Try a search](#) | [View by tag](#)

FIGURE 2-6

The Commons at Flickr provides a way for members of the community to annotate (by adding tags or comments to) photos from various museums and libraries (beginning with the Library of Congress), thus adding successive layers of meaning to the digitized artifacts from these collections.

Toward the Digital Palimpsest

The historical form of the palimpsest as a model for social tools is a powerful one.

Of course, it originated from the scarcity of media, when shortages of writing material meant continual reuse. This is something we don't exactly suffer from. Nevertheless, thinking about the Web through the lens of this ancient medium raises interesting points for me. Doing so points to a future in which our content itself becomes smarter as it aggregates our thoughts about it.

Layering of information on information—metadata—is of course nothing new. But the participative nature of doing so is.

As recent publications by Clay Shirky and David Weinberger point out, everybody is annotating everything with everything else. Also, advances in mobile and locative technology point to the turning of the world around us into a palimpsest.

So, what can we learn from the ancient analog form of the palimpsest and its affordances?

For instance, look at maps from the collection of the National Maritime Museum, in Greenwich, England, near my home, where successive explorers annotated new opportunities, theories, and obstacles on the same document taken on several expeditions over the course of several years.

From this, we could make the analogy that a successful digital palimpsest would require a permanent URL, which could be passed around and around without fear of fragmenting the knowledge accreting. Of course, there are not just positive lessons to be taken from the form. It takes a very liberal view of knowledge to say that everything that accretes on the palimpsest has the same value.

Those who examine historical versions of these palimpsests find something both in the form and the content, each layered over the other through tens or hundreds of years. Often the most valuable information is seen as worthless only a very short period of time later and written over, lost until modern conservation techniques can rediscover it.

The digital palimpsest inhabits a publish-everything, filter-later world, in which we follow the dictums of one of the fathers of the Internet, John Postel: be conservative about what you put out and be liberal about what you accept. Understanding and filtering are key skills in reading palimpsests, both physical and ancient or modern and digital.

Work by Martin Wattenberg and Fernanda Viégas, including the beautiful and useful history flow (http://www.research.ibm.com/visual/projects/history_flow/), which depicts change over time within Wikipedia, points to the role information visualization will play in decoding our future palimpsests.

Recent announcements from Google on its “Wave” technology point to the substrate of the Web becoming one of real-time collaboration in the creation of content and meaning. That this is done through accretion of messages and media, rather than the publishing of pages, indicates that Google Wave might be the first full, real-time instantiation of the digital palimpsest.

Moreover, in the future it won’t just be *everybody* annotating everything. *Everything* will be annotating everything, too.

Physical sensors will account for 20 percent of nonvideo Internet traffic by 2012, or so industry analyst Gartner predicts. Nonhuman chatter—the sense-memory of billions of things—will join the thoughts of millions of people.

Our environments, the objects within them, and ourselves will become palimpsests for us to participate in creating.

**MATT JONES, INTERACTION DESIGN DIRECTOR,
GOOGLE CREATIVE LAB**

Talk Like a Person!

(I was originally going to call this section “Speak in Human Voice,” but then I decided to follow my own advice. I mean, really, who talks that way? “Talk like a person!” I think is closer to the mark.)

When many of us began putting together personal sites, art projects, and other creative or informal objects starting in the 1990s, the air of informality online was palpable. However, when business came online a bit later in the decade, many of the first business-oriented websites reproduced the remote, inanimate, almost robotic corporate voice you tend to find in annual reports and catalog copy.

Even there, the more savvy enterprises appreciated the value of communicating to potential customers in a human voice. The corporation has always been a mask that disguises the human nature of the people who do the actual work of the business. Revealing the humanity of the people at the other end of the wire has a softening and welcoming effect.

Sure, there are still times when great formality and even perhaps distance are useful, but in an age when authority emerges from collaboration rather than being handed down from on high, the remote, formal, stylized tone of printed communications is continually in the process of giving way to a more natural, conversational tone.

Of course, it's easy to say "talk like a person," but what kind of person? Well, how about the type of person you hope will become involved with your product? Model the sort of tone and personality you're aiming to recruit.

This is all the more true in the context of social environments. If an app does not communicate from the get-go that it is populated, and written by, ordinary human beings, how will people ever feel comfortable there? The antiseptic air of a hospital or the bureaucratic formality of the Department of Motor Vehicles is no environment for fostering connections, relationships, or collaboration.

Keep in mind, as well, that the writing on your site or in your application is a key part of the user interface. Call it UI copy, nomenclature, and labels if you like, but it's as much a part of the interface as the buttons, windows, and sliders.

So, communicate with your participants in a human voice. But how? Getting this wrong is often creepy, verging on ghoulish, like an unctuous marketer pitching you a product or service at an event you thought was going to be "just a party." The bottom line is *authenticity*. Would you really say that? Can you read it out loud without cringing? Does it *sound* like your kind of people?

This looks like a job for some patterns.

Conversation

The easiest way to talk like a person (in the UI copy of your product) is to adopt a conversational tone, as demonstrated in Figure 2-7.

- **Don't upload content that is illegal or prohibited.**
If we find you doing that, your account will be deleted and we'll take appropriate action, which may include reporting you to the authorities.
- **Don't vent your frustrations, rant, or bore the brains out of other members.**
Flickr is not a venue for you to harass, abuse, impersonate, or intimidate others. If we receive a valid complaint about your conduct, we'll send you a warning or terminate your account.
- **Don't be creepy.**
You know the guy. Don't be that guy.

FIGURE 2-7

Use the language of contemporary speech, not that of textbooks, tax forms, or street signs.

WHAT

People reading impersonal text on a screen will remain disengaged.

USE WHEN

Use this pattern when writing copy for a social product, including instructions, errors, and other messages coming from the system itself and addressed to the reader, visitor, or member.

HOW

Resist the urge to write like a grad student or a bureaucrat. Ask yourself if that's really how you talk. Read any copy out loud, and strike out anything that feels awkward to say. Try speaking the text out loud to another person to see how it feels in your mouth, hear how it sounds aloud, and observe how the other person responds.

Despite what your English teacher might have told you, it's OK to use contractions, to split infinitives, and even to start sentences with conjunctions. Just make sure it feels natural.

SPECIAL CASES

Be careful to avoid obscure slang unless you have already established confidence in the minds of your users to the extent that they are willing to rely on context and gist to follow your meaning.

Don't mistake being cute for being real.

WHY

A conversational tone provides an opportunity for your product’s visitor to respond as if really being spoken to by another person. This receptive state of mind permits the reader to enter into a dialogue with the product and reinforces the feeling that the product is made by people, not machines.

EXAMPLES

Flickr’s terms of service epitomize this plainspoken approach, particularly the “Don’t be that guy” comment.

Self-Deprecating Error Message

Error messages should always put the blame squarely on the shoulders of the product’s owners and not on those of the visitor, as illustrated in Figure 2-8.



FIGURE 2-8

Self-deprecating or just cute?

WHAT

Error messages written in a negative or even neutral tone can sound accusatory, suggesting that the visitor has misread instructions, filled out a form incorrectly, or otherwise screwed up. Being blamed for an error by a computer is off-putting.

USE WHEN

Use this pattern when writing the copy for error messages. You were planning to write those messages, right? You weren’t going to forget about them (yielding helpful dialog boxes that say something like “Error 41”), right? You weren’t going to expect your engineers to write them (yielding helpful dialog boxes that say something like “Error 41: Error 41 has occurred”), were you?

HOW

Writing in a *conversational tone*, explain to the extent possible what has gone wrong, why, and what to do next, if anything. Be sure to express the error in terms of a failure on the part of the system. Even if the cause of the error is the user's failure to comply with an instruction, assume that the instructions were unclear or that the entry form didn't provide sufficient guidance.

Don't blame the user for the error. Take the blame, apologize, and move forward.

SPECIAL CASES

Saying "Oops" is one way to mimic a very human way of noticing a problem and taking responsibility at the same time. However, you never really want to hear your pilot, mechanic, or surgeon say "Oops." It's equally true that for apps dealing with sensitive personal information or circumstances (such as, for example, medical or financial contexts), a more formal tone might be appropriate to avoid the appearance of flippancy. Even in a formal or sensitive situation, it's equally important to avoid blaming the victim when a problem occurs.

EXAMPLES

Figure 2-9 demonstrates how Snapchat (<http://snapchat.com>) takes responsibility ("We couldn't find what you were looking for") when a search turns up no results.



FIGURE 2-9
Snapchat doesn't make the user feel bad when a search fails.

Ask Questions

One of the most common structures for a human conversation or dialogue is the format of question and answer (Figures 2-10 and 2-11). Since the days of the oldest mailing lists, Usenet, and Gopher, frequently asked question lists (FAQs) have sought to answer a person's questions with either the collected wisdom of the community or the answers from some authority.

FIGURE 2-10

Twitter asks you a question to get you started, currently “What’s happening?”

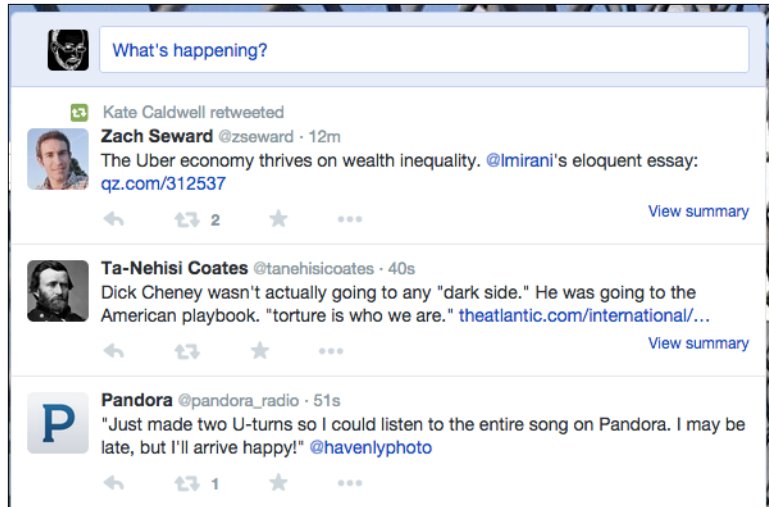
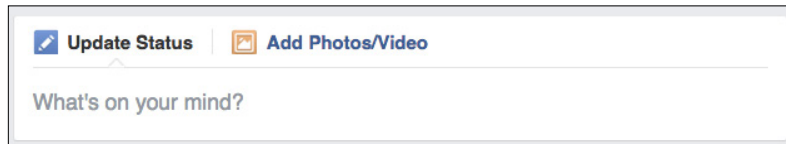


FIGURE 2-11

Facebook prompts you by asking “What’s on your mind?”



People naturally have questions and ask them, either silently while seeking an answer or directly if they perceive an opportunity to do so (in an inviting interface or in the context of a welcoming group of helpful, experienced community members).

But, this pattern is about how you, as the voice of your product, should ask questions of your users.

WHAT

It’s very easy to arrive at a screen or context online and not be sure what to do, how to proceed, what to say, what to type. A blank space can be very intimidating. (You should have seen my flossweat when I started writing this chapter.)

An empty or silent screen can leave the visitor unsure of how to proceed.

USE WHEN

Use this pattern when writing explanatory copy, help text, and labels on potential but currently unpopulated features in the user’s interface.

HOW

Ask questions. Pose suggestions in the form of inviting questions. Write copy in an inquisitive way so that the visitor feels compelled to reply with an answer.

WHY

Questions invite responses, and asking them is a way of inviting participation.

EXAMPLES

Twitter asks you, “What are you doing?” Some people get hung up on whether or not to take this literally, but the point is that Twitter asked. It prompted. It’s starting the conversation. It’s inviting you to respond.

No Joking Around

It’s often been said that sarcasm and irony don’t translate well into email (or ASCII communication in general). Hence, the proliferation of smilies and other emoticons, and now emoji, which are a huge global phenomenon. By using these, you can soften the impact of stark words or cue the reader that you might have been kidding around and not intending to give offense.

By the same token, it’s nearly impossible to tell jokes in interface copy because a sense of humor is a unique thing in each person. What strikes one as funny might strike another as vulgar, inappropriate, boring, or tedious, and if the product has an international audience, differences in culture only exacerbate the potential problems.

Resist the urge to tell jokes or to be facetious in your copy.

WHAT

People appreciate humor and ice-breaking witticisms, but unserious text in a UI is as likely to confuse people as amuse them.

USE WHEN

Apply this pattern when tempted to crack jokes in your copy.

HOW

Strike out any out-and-out jokes. This is not to say that you can’t be witty or make sly allusions to shared cultural references. However, very few people can tell a joke well, especially to an invisible audience.

SPECIAL CASES

A niche product catering to a community with a well-worn stock of traditional witticisms can probably offer jokes in that same vein safely without the risk of alienating or confusing potential members.

WHY

Because humor strikes so many people in different ways and because it's nearly impossible to anticipate exactly who will end up reading the copy, it's best to eliminate outright jokes to avoid giving offense or creating unnecessary friction.

Let your users tell each other their own jokes.

Don't Break Email!

If you're using email as a broadcast medium—to send reminders or notifications, for example—and not enabling people to reply to the messages they receive, that's lame. There's no reason why you can't handle replies properly, forwarding them as further notifications to the correct recipients. This balances your interest in hosting and facilitating communication among members, and between your service and your customers, with your users' interest in being able to respond to email messages using their existing habits and customs.

For example, at one time email messages sent from 37 Signals' Basecamp product were one-way only, labeled with a warning message to the tune of “do not reply.” It got wise, though, and as long as you reply above a certain line, it takes your reply and adds it to the comment thread on Basecamp, as shown in Figure 2-12, which serves its interests (keeping the conversation on the site) and yours (being able to click Reply like a normal human being).

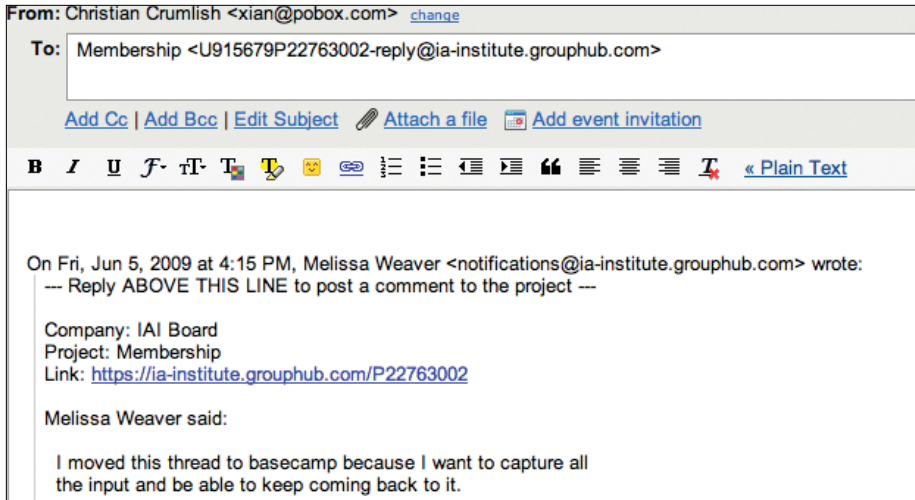


FIGURE 2-12

It's quite possible to use email as a reengagement and contact medium for your application without frustrating your users when they rely on their experience and attempt to respond to email messages, just to drive more clicks on your pages.

Be Open

Another broad principle I'd like to plant now in the back of your mind is that of openness. Being open is all the rage these days, but it means many things to many people. It can mean radical transparency, the use of open source software, exposing platform hooks, crowdsourcing, and more. In Chapter 17, we discuss several approaches to openness that we believe are essential to the effective design and development of social environments online, but for the discussion here, just keep in mind the question, "How could this interface be improved if we made it more open?" while designing your experiences.

Learn from Games

We'll talk a little bit later about the fascinating intersection between game design and social design that's opening up new possibilities for social experiences in game environments and introducing playful elements to social interfaces. An application doesn't need to literally be a game or be presented as a game to employ many of the same design techniques that make games fun to play.

It's no coincidence that Ludicorp's first product was something called Game Neverending (its second was Flickr, which owes at least some of its success to the almost addictive game-like quality of its user interfaces). This pattern has played out again in another company founded by Flickr cofounder Stewart Butterfield, Tiny Speck, which also started out with an engaging multiuser game (Speck) but eventually pivoted to a work-chat service called Slack.

Even in the enterprise, interfaces don't need to be dry and tedious. Think about how to delight your users and encourage them to engage with one another.

Games are among the oldest "social interfaces." The rules and tokens of a game provide a set of affordances and an environment in which people interact. In fact, people will make up their own games with whatever elements they find handy. Many of the "memes" that spread via apps and sites such as Tumblr and Reddit, SnapChat, and YikYak ("Which Buffy Character Are You," "37 Things You Didn't Know About My Cat," or "iPod Shuffle Ouija") utilize built-in posting, commenting, and polling features, which isn't to say that you couldn't encourage your users to invent games for one another by giving them generative tools with which to do so.

Cargo Cult Anti-Pattern

The original cargo cults were people overawed by more advanced technology (in this case World War II-era aviation artifacts) who began imitating the forms of what they saw (wooden radio towers, torchlit runways, counterfeit uniforms) in hopes of bringing the benefit ("cargo") that they had witnessed flowing from these same rituals and objects in the past. In their worst misapplication, design patterns can lapse into a sort of cargo cult, in which past structures and layouts and flows are imitated and reproduced with no real understanding of how or why they worked in their original context. A superficial but ubiquitous example of this is the proliferation of startups whose domain names featured a common word with a "schwa" vowel dropped from the final syllable, as if it were the spelling of Flickr that made it so initially successful (see Figures 2-13 and 2-14).

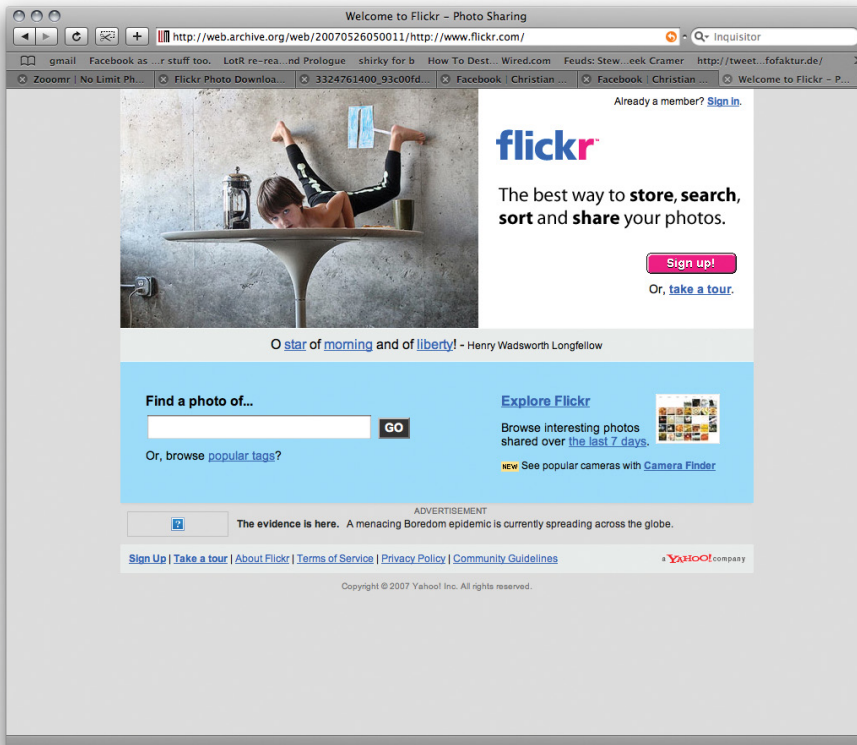


FIGURE 2-13

Flickr still has its original slogan (or something rather close), whereas Zoomr has dropped its very similar one.



FIGURE 2-14

Zoomr imitated the way Flickr dropped the “schwa” vowel from the end of its source word. Its tagline was once also very close to Flickr’s tagline, and much of the source markup was remarkably similar, as well. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, they say, but it helps if you understand what you’re imitating and why.

Another more recent example of cargo cult design has been the way seemingly every mobile app in the valley imitated the left-side drawer global navigation pattern after Facebook embraced it, only to be left in the dust several iterations later when Facebook’s own testing showed that the earlier interface pattern of a primary navigation strip at the bottom of the mobile screen worked much better.

Haight-Ashbury Anti-Pattern

In the 1960s, for a brief time a counterculture community flourished in San Francisco in an affordable sunny neighborhood named at the time for an intersection in its midst, the corner of Haight and Ashbury. Now-legendary rock bands such as Jefferson Airplane and Grateful Dead took up residence there. Free food, free concerts, and free love brought successive waves of dropouts and seekers, and the neighborhood became one big party.

Then came the media-powered “Summer of Love” and the popularity of the neighborhood went into overdrive, hitchhikers and runaways filled the streets, hustlers and pushers and pimps preyed on the newcomers and the clueless, and eventually the original founders of the scene moved north across the Golden Gate Bridge to Marin County.

I have seen a very similar pattern play out repeatedly with new social services. In the early days they can feel like a utopia of sorts: a small friendly community powered by charismatic individuals (or in the case of tech, influencers like the ubiquitous early adopter Robert Scoble). The folks who join these communities in their early days often find themselves surrounded by likeminded, well-meaning folks. Lifelong friendships are forged.

Around this time the founders of the hot app of the moment figure they’ve got it made. The product is growing and popular. All the “cool kids” are using the service and inviting new people. What could go wrong?

Well, just as the hippie collapse played out in the Haight, a social product can just as easily become overloaded, dangerous, corrupt, and finally abandoned, yet another flash-in-the-pan ghost town in the annals of Internet history.

Nobody would turn down a burst of initial popularity to get past the “cold start” problem of launching a new social service, but beware of viral popularity for its own sake, because this does not always lead to sustainable communities.

As one of our reviewers, Laura Klein, noted, “I see the cool kids fleeing more as the products go mainstream. And frankly, if they don’t go mainstream, they just die. So, what’s the correct middle ground?” It’s an apt question and answering it makes us feel a bit like goldilocks. It’s a balancing act. Hype and traffic are great, but that’s why you need to look at deeper engagement metrics, to discern return traffic from SEO, to discover your community leaders and evangelists, and to not succumb to the sugar high of flash-in-the-pan, flavor of the week boomlets.

Lord of the Flies Anti-Pattern

Another thing that can go wrong in even the most successful of social environments is bullying, harassment, and abuse. In William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies*, a set of British schoolboys are stranded on an island and gradually revert to a savage culture of fear, hatred, and victimization.

Social experiences online have an unfortunate tendency to devolve into incivility when set up with no social norms to guide, no accountability, and no safeguards for the vulnerable.

For example, to this day YouTube suffers from its unmoderated approach to comments. It has become a commonplace online to expect YouTube comment threads to resemble open running sewers, much like the similarly unmoderated comments appended to most articles at political websites. (This just in! I'm reliably informed by Laura Klein that a recently introduced downvoting mechanism in Youtube is beginning to help hide the most toxic content, and the vicious cycle might be on its way to being broken, but it will take the Internet years to overcome the ill will and negative momentum there.)

As of this writing, Twitter is under fire for its thus far ineffectual attempts to create a safe space for its own customers. The very openness of the platform makes it easy for individual stalkers or mobs of harassers to target victims and then either drive them off Twitter or otherwise make their lives miserable.

Sadly, left to our own devices, we humans still tend to fall all too easily into hateful and disturbing behavior patterns, which makes it critically important that if you are designing, building, or hosting a social environment online, you must take into account these concerns from the start and provide in your design boundaries, safeguards, limits, and ways to intervene in order to create the sort of world you'd like to see.

Respect the Ethical Dimension

When you are designing experiences for people, or designing frameworks within which people will create their own experiences, there is always an ethical dimension:

- What commitments are you making explicitly or implying when you open your doors for business?
- Are you promising to keep people safe, to keep their information secure, and to respect their privacy?

- Are you willing to bend ethical rules to cheat your way through the cold-start problem and rapidly build your social graph? Balzac once wrote, “The secret of great wealth with no obvious source is some forgotten crime, forgotten because it was done neatly.” Many successful social apps today founded themselves on an original sin, perhaps a spammy viral invitation model or unapproved abuse of new users’ address books. Some companies never lived down the taint, and others seem to have passed some unspoken statute of limitations.

You’ll find that some of the forces that must be balanced to apply many of these patterns involve ethical dilemmas. Is opt-out good enough? Is this disclosure adequate? Is it your responsibility to stop the bullying?

Throughout this book, we’ll call out ethical factors when we see them and encourage you in general to keep an eye out for them yourselves.

Further Reading

1. “Are We Building a Better Internet?” on page 572.
2. McConnell, Steve. “Cargo Cult Software Engineering.” <http://www.stevemcconnell.com/ieeesoftware/eic10.htm?>
3. Crumlish, Christian. “Grasping Social Patterns.” <http://www.slideshare.net/xian/grasping-social-patterns>.
4. “Jargon File entry on Cargo Cult Programming.” <http://www.jargon.net/jargonfile/c/cargocultprogramming.html>.
5. “Me vs. You (vs. i).” <http://bit.ly/1DktYpz> (Chris Fahey’s Graphpaper blog).
6. Winer, Dave. “Rule 1.” <http://bit.ly/1OhcJq3>.
7. “User vs. You.” <http://bit.ly/1Dku5RQ> (Chris Fahey’s Graphpaper blog).
8. Wikipedia entry on Cargo Cult Programming. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cargo_cult_programming.
9. “You vs. I.” <http://bit.ly/1DkvhEW> (Chris Fahey’s Graphpaper blog).
10. “Your Web Application as a Text Adventure.” <http://bit.ly/1Dkvsjq> (Michael Buffington, podcast from SXSW 2007).

[*Part II*]

I Am Somebody

THE NOTION OF SELF—SOMETHING long discussed and debated by philosophers, psychologists, and scientists—is now part of the discussion in the user experience design world.

In the social space online, people can declare explicit attributes about themselves and build a rich profile for others to view. Balanced against the reputation a person builds through his actions and words, this profile can give others a sense of who he is. Just by being involved, engaged, and inclusive, people can build a portrait of the self and an identity within the system with which others can interact.

The future of interactive interfaces has been greatly influenced by gaming. Game designers have the liberty to experiment with Darwinian competitive pressures. The ideas they come up with and prove out in the market are setting expectations for a large number of people who might eventually become (or might already be) your users. Gaming techniques have infiltrated even the most benign applications, and understanding their mechanics will help you understand how better to motivate people and give clues for designing in reputation, competition, and social proof.

The next few chapters discuss in depth the patterns and considerations for providing the framework within which a person can engage with a service, build his identity (real or otherwise), assert himself so that others can connect and interact with him, and develop a rich reputation that is built out of his activity within the system.

You're Invited!

The table was a large one, but the three were all crowded together at one corner of it: "No room! No room!" they cried out when they saw Alice coming. "There's plenty of room!" said Alice indignantly, and she sat down in a large arm-chair at one end of the table.

"Have some wine," the March Hare said in an encouraging tone. Alice looked all round the table, but there was nothing on it but tea. "I don't see any wine," she remarked.

"There isn't any," said the March Hare. "Then it wasn't very civil of you to offer it," said Alice angrily.

"It wasn't very civil of you to sit down without being invited," said the March Hare.

"I didn't know it was your table," said Alice; "it's laid for a great many more than three."

"Your hair wants cutting," said the Hatter. He had been looking at Alice for some time with great curiosity, and this was his first speech.

"You should learn not to make personal remarks," Alice said with some severity; "it's very rude."

LEWIS CARROLL, "A MAD TEA PARTY," CHAPTER VII; ALICE IN WONDERLAND

Engagement

I RECENTLY HELD A PARTY TO CELEBRATE MY BIRTHDAY. In planning the party, I needed to decide who was invited as well as the theme and events of the party itself. I had limited time in which to plan, and because this was a personal celebration, I wanted it limited to friends

and family—I didn't necessarily want to have a blowout party and invite everyone I have ever known. When I had confirmed the guest list, I sent out invitations. A couple of times between the initial planning and the actual party, I sent out reminder updates to increase the anticipation of the event.

When the night of the party arrived, I spent my time greeting people as they entered my home and then mixing through the crowd to ensure that my guests felt welcome and that they were having a good time. As host, it was part of my responsibility to check in, to mingle, to make sure the house was welcoming, and to keep the food and drinks stocked.

Starting a site that is social or has social components is not really that different from planning and hosting a party. You need to think about who's invited, whether they can invite other people, and what is going to happen after they are there. When people come to the site, you need to greet them and welcome them in a friendly manner and make them feel as if they are important and have value to add to the community. If they don't know the others there, you need to make introductions or make it easy for people to introduce themselves. At that point, they need to feel as if they can mingle and have interesting conversations, even if they hadn't known one another before arriving.

Don't forget the cold-start issue, either. Early adopters like to come in and poke around—test the waters, as it were. They will show up and sign up for every new thing as it comes along. Like the homesteaders of old, they come in, lay the groundwork of a community, and either stay to become old-timers or move on if it's not to their liking. Preparing for these types of users often goes beyond the simple interactions of signing up and has implications in how you welcome your users, how and when you encourage them to bring their friends along, and how easy that process is to set up.

The first steps in the process of encouraging people to come in and participate set the tone of their whole experience. How you follow up and welcome your users can make their first impressions favorable or not. People will share their first impressions with others, and that can affect the growth of your site and your brand if they are not favorable.

Think about the processes you have in place to allow your users to participate and become engaged in your community. How complex or easy does your registration need to be? What barriers are you willing

to put in place between your site and what your users want to do? What barriers can you remove? What's the bare minimum to get started? How much personal information is stored, and what privacy controls do you need to have in place to help people feel secure about their activity and contributions?

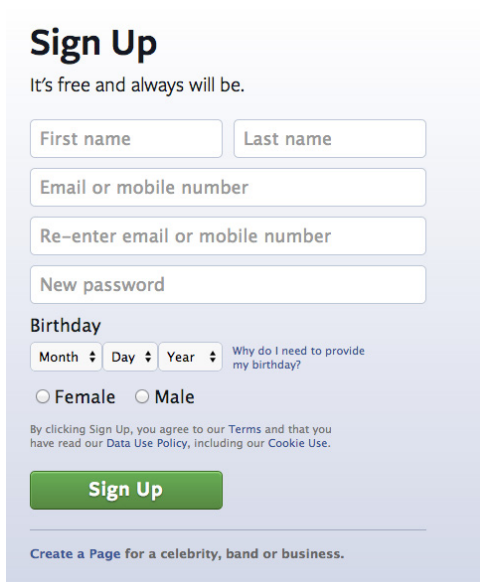
How will you engage early adopters? These people might be incredibly influential in spreading the word about your service. Will you have a private or open beta? What's the value of one over the other? Are there levels of engagement, a lifecycle that users go through during which features are progressively disclosed? How do you reengage users who might be spending less time on your site than when they were newly engaged?

This collection of patterns addresses these questions with best practices for how to handle many of the options that affect the user's entrée to a community, his overall participation lifecycle, and privacy options.

Sign-Up or Registration

What

A user wants to access parts of a site or application that require creating or saving personal information. A user wants to contribute content to the site's community and have it attributed and saved for later. (See Figures 3-1 and 3-2.)



The image shows a registration form titled "Sign Up" with the subtext "It's free and always will be." The form includes several input fields: "First name" and "Last name" (two separate boxes), "Email or mobile number", "Re-enter email or mobile number", and "New password". Below these is a "Birthday" section with dropdown menus for "Month", "Day", and "Year", and a link "Why do I need to provide my birthday?". There are radio buttons for "Female" and "Male". At the bottom, there is a green "Sign Up" button and a link "Create a Page for a celebrity, band or business."

FIGURE 3-1
Facebook's (<http://facebook.com>) registration screen collects enough information to provide value.

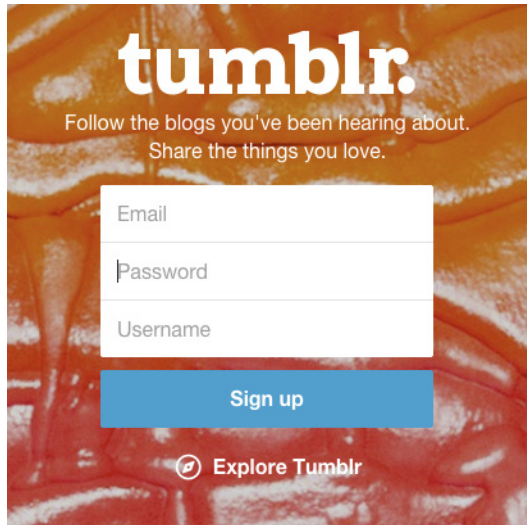


FIGURE 3-2
Tumblr's (<http://www.tumblr.com>) registration is an example of barebones data collection just to get the user started.

Use when

- Features require leaving personal or private information, and privacy and security are a concern.
- Financial transactions require remembering billing, shipping, and transaction information.
- A user wants to participate—leaving comments, blogging, posting to message boards, posting photos, building a personal network—and this participation needs to be attributed and/or associated with the user for purposes of building community or reputation, or building up a personal profile or knowledge base.

How

- Collect the bare minimum of information needed that still allows your user to participate in the site, as illustrated in Figure 3-3. This is often an email address—used as the login—and a password. Consider whether registration is even needed.
- Collect other information only as necessary for a compelling experience. Ask yourself if the data you are about to collect can be requested in another part of the site at another time (Figure 3-3).

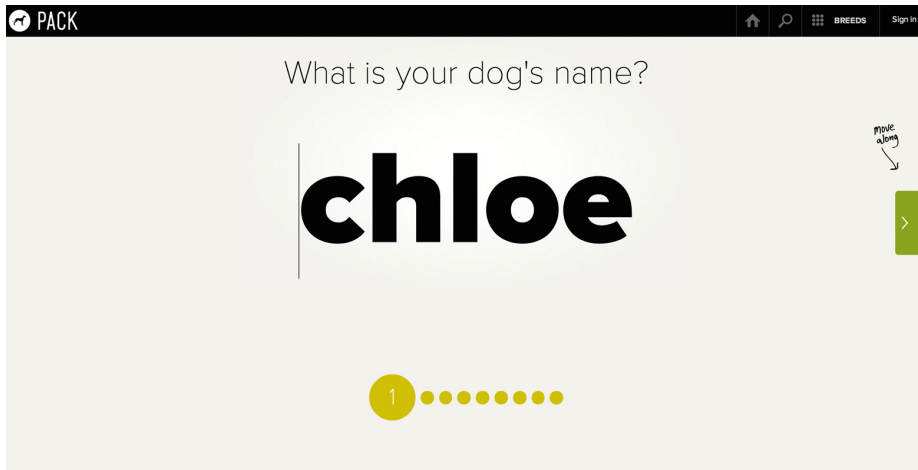


FIGURE 3-3

The Pack (<http://packdog.com>) starts the profile creation process for your dog before requiring you to sign up. It's not until the third screen that you are asked to create a set of authentication credentials. After you're through the process, you have created an account and a customized profile for your dog.

- Provide explanations about what each piece of information requested will provide in terms of user benefits. For example:
 - A zip code or other location information provides location-relevant restaurants and stores.
 - A mobile phone number makes delivery of content to a phone possible as well as delivery of content from a phone to a web-based account.
- Require registration at the last possible moment in the users' process of exploring the site, such as when they want to save a video that they have created.
- In mobile experiences, when using on-screen keyboards, use a custom keypad to give the customer extra security and an easier way to enter information. For example, include the @ symbol and (.) when you ask for an email address, as shown in Figure 3-4.

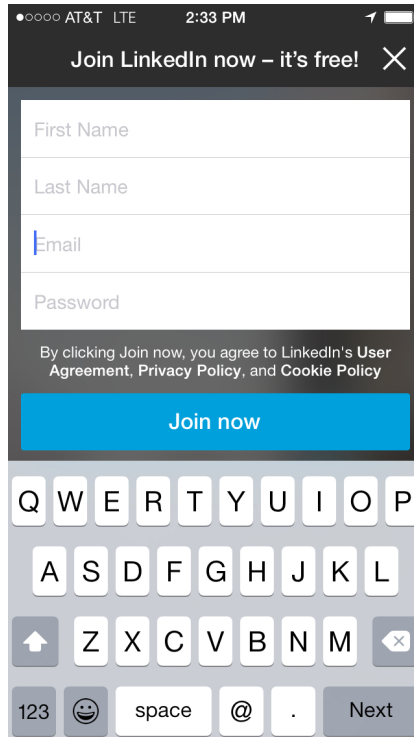


FIGURE 3-4

When the user taps into a field asking for an email address, the keyboard changes to include the “@” symbol and (.) for easy data entry without having to shift between keyboards (LinkedIn iOS application).

- After registration, deliver the users back to the task they were in before they were sidetracked. If they were coming from a tour or exploration process, put them in the most logical spot that encourages them to get started.
- Avoid gradual engagement solutions that simply distribute the various input fields in a sign-up form across multiple pages. It’s a good possibility that this will reduce efficiency and not delight anyone.*
- Allow the creation of a unique identifier by accepting email addresses, which are unique pieces of data that can be verified with the user.
- Don’t force the user to try to create a unique name that isn’t an email address. Unless she is an early adopter on your site, the odds that the name she wants—often her first name—is available grows smaller over time (as in Figure 3-5). At best, this will only annoy your users; at worst, it will cause abandonment and ill will.

* Wroblewski, Luke. *Web Form Design: Filling in the Blanks*. Brooklyn, NY: Rosenfeld Media, 2008:206.

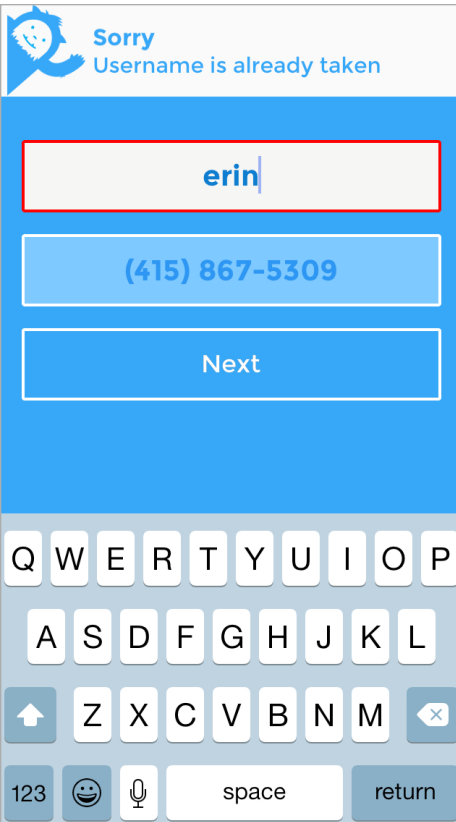


FIGURE 3-5

Sign-up error message on PIP. This error was generated because the namespace is full. The user would have more success if the system used the mobile phone number as the unique identifier and allowed users to keep their own name (PIP iOS application).

- Configure so that you can reflect back to the user a nonunique nickname and for communication between the system and user.
- Clearly label what elements are required for a username and password. Are capital letters and numbers required? Are alternate characters not allowed? A minimum of 6 characters or a maximum of 15? Indicate this up front, and don't wait to present this information in an error message. Jared Spool calls this designing defensively. Clearly stating expectations at the outset will prevent interruptions and ensure a more successful sign-up experience.
- Provide feedback as the user fills out the form, as depicted in Figure 3-6. Examples include a checkbox as a field is filled out correctly (e.g., a fully realized email address) or a password strength meter to indicate the security potential of a password.

Join Twitter today.

erin malone ✓

erin@designingsocialinterfaces.com ✓

..... ✓

Username

Suggestions: erin21269529 | erin73622165 | erin41587830 |
erin29708727 | erin55612857

Tailor Twitter based on my recent website visits. [Learn more.](#)

Sign up

By signing up, you agree to the [Terms of Service](#) and [Privacy Policy](#), including [Cookie Use](#). Others will be able to find you by email or phone number when provided.

FIGURE 3-6

Twitter's registration form shows checks when sections are correctly completed. Because their system requires a unique username, the system also makes username suggestions based on the real name entered in the first field (<http://www.twitter.com>).

- As users type a password, use a short delay to show the character they just entered before converting it to a star or bullet. Another option is to keep the password in plain text for visual validation during the registration process and only obscure it during login.
- Provide inline, contextual error messages that validate dates and data formation or check on username availability before the user clicks the Submit button (see Figure 3-7). This will allay user irritation and result in less drop-off in completions.

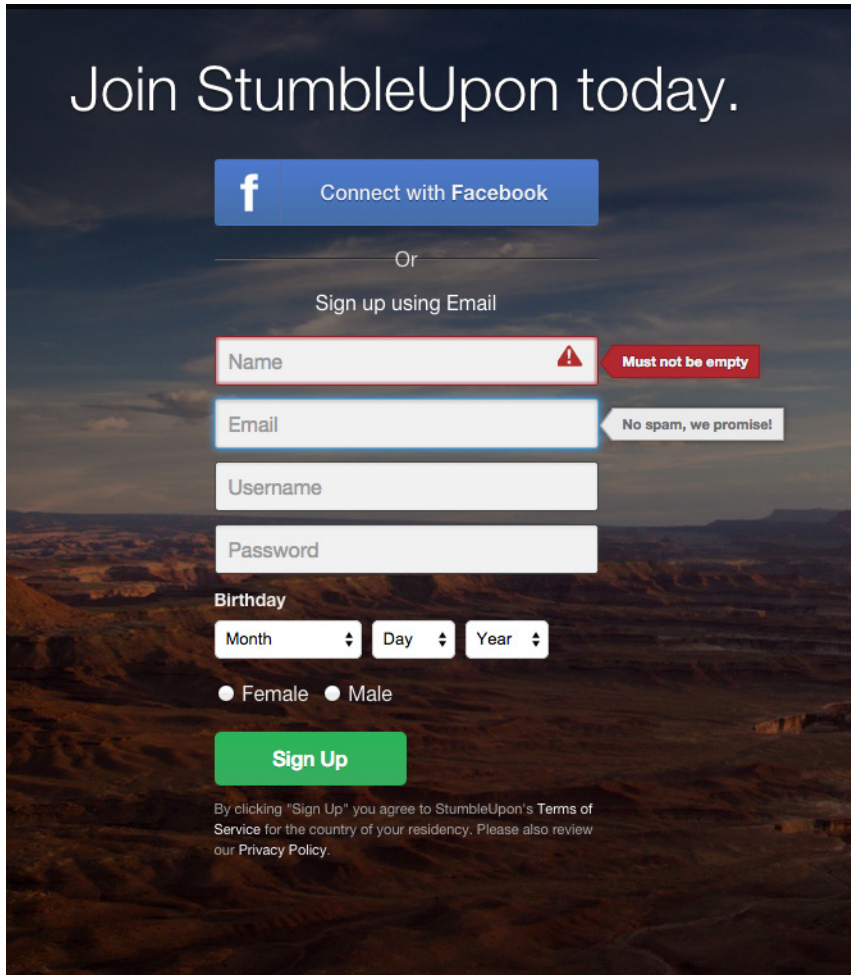


FIGURE 3-7

StumbleUpon's registration form provides inline error messaging when something is not right with the field entry. The form uses both error alerts if something is wrong and general messaging when tabbing into the field to help educate users about the data usage or formatting (<http://www.stumbleupon.com>).

- Ensure that the level of security required for the password matches the level of security required for the data the user will be creating or saving. Saving a recipe is very different from paying a bill at a bank. The expectations for site security and the type of password used are very different, and you should adjust accordingly.

- Only include a CAPTCHA if absolutely necessary. CAPTCHAs are used to “prove” that the person registering for the service is indeed a person, not a robot. Unfortunately, nefarious people have figured out how to get around this by using cheap labor to read captchas and create accounts for the purposes of sending spam and other types of attacks. CAPTCHAs also require a workaround for accessibility and are often very hard to read, so make absolutely sure that you require adding this extra burden to your users.
- In mobile experiences, when showing multiple fields, include a Next, Previous, and Done capability or a specific keyboard with which the customer can move from one field to another without having to leave the keyboard area.
- If you require a second level of authentication (also called Two-Factor Authentication, 2-Step Verification, or Multifactor Authentication), let your user know as soon as you need a second security question or PIN. Make sure that you let them know how the extra security will keep their information safe.
- Consider skipping the entire registration form and allow users to sign up with one of the OAuth (<http://oauth.net>) enabled services such as Google, Microsoft, Twitter, or Facebook Connect (<http://developers.facebook.com/connect.php>).

Why

Registration is often an interruption for users when they are in the middle of some other process. It’s a known and accepted evil when personal data or user-generated content needs to be stored, but that doesn’t mean sites should take advantage of the interruption to collect a life story and the user’s firstborn.

Users will give what they believe is necessary in exchange for a good experience. If more information than a unique identifier and password is needed, it is important to be very clear why that information is necessary and what value it will bring to the user. Registration is a barter with users, and they will abandon the process and your site if the value isn’t clearly articulated or seen as high enough (see Figure 3-8).

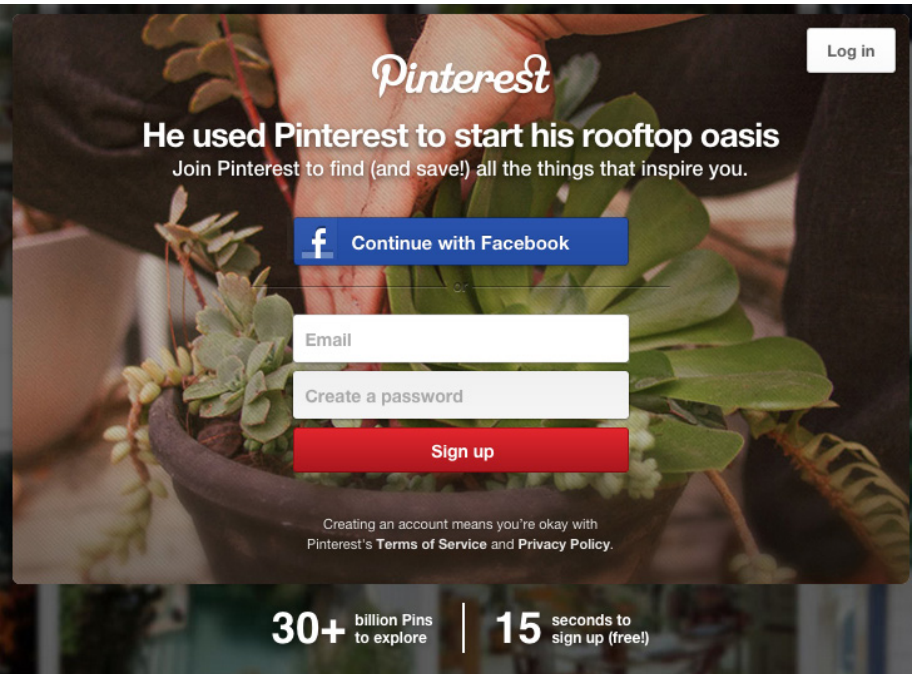


FIGURE 3-8

Sign-up screen from Pinterest. It's super simple and offers information showing why signing up is valuable (i.e., 30+ billion Pins to explore) (<http://www.pinterest.com>).

Accessibility

The sign-in form should be easily navigable via the keyboard, with the Submit button triggered by the Return key.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Sign In” on page 68

“PIN”

“Two-Factor Authentication”

“Fingerprint or Bio”

“Sign-In Continuity” on page 77

“Sign Out” on page 79

“Terms of Service” on page 306

AS SEEN ON

Tumblr (<http://www.tumblr.com>)

Twitter (<http://www.twitter.com>)

Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>)

PIP (<http://letspip.com/>)

LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com>)

Pinterest (<http://www.pinterest.com>)

Sign In

What

The user wants to access her personalized information or an application that is stored on the host site (Figure 3-9).

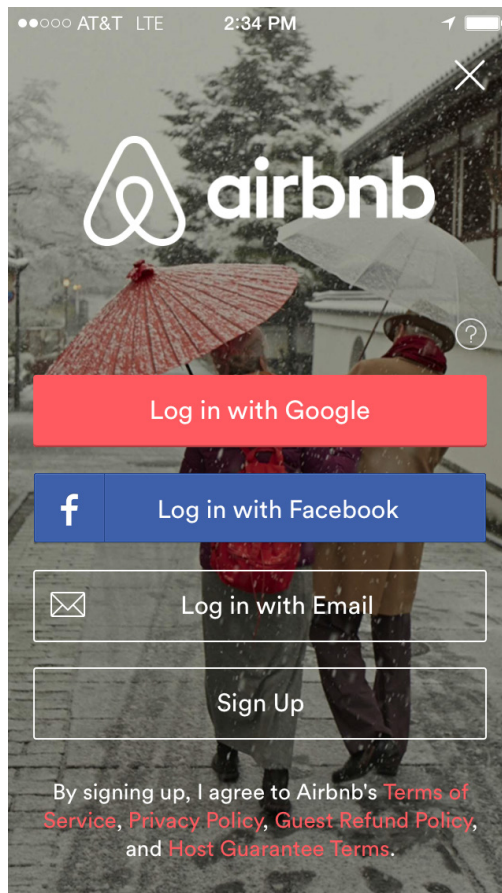


FIGURE 3-9

Top-level login screen in the Airbnb app. Notice that the user can choose between Facebook, Google, or their own email for signing in (Airbnb iOS application)..

Use when

- Personal data needs to be stored or when there is customization or personalization unique to the particular user.
- The site is a repository for user-generated content and the submissions or files need to be identified and/or managed by the author.
- There are security or privacy concerns, and the user's data needs to be protected.

Don't require the user to log in if it isn't really necessary. Just because you want to know who is on your site doesn't mean that's a good reason to put up the barrier to your users.

How

- Provide a clearly labeled Sign In button, as illustrated in Figure 3-10. Don't use the label Login. Remember you are speaking like a real person.

The image shows a user interface for signing in. At the top, there are two buttons: "Sign in" and "Create an account". Below these is a light blue message bar with an information icon and the text "Please sign in to continue." The main sign-in area has a "Skype Name" label and an input field, with a link "Forgotten your Skype Name?". Below that is a "Password" label and another input field, with a link "Forgotten your password?". To the right, under "Alternatively, sign in with", there are icons for "Microsoft account" (with subtext "A Messenger, Hotmail or Outlook.com account.") and "Facebook". At the bottom left of the sign-in area is a green "Sign me in" button.

FIGURE 3-10

Sign-in module from Skype.com (<http://skype.com>).

- Provide an input field for the username.
 - This should be a unique identifier. Many sites use an email address, as shown in Figure 3-11, which alleviates the name-space problem that will happen as a site scales.

Sign In or Create An Account

Email

Password

Keep me logged in

[Forgot password?](#)

Sign In

FIGURE 3-11

Sign-in widget from Instapaper.com (<http://www.instapaper.com>).

- To avoid unnecessary errors, clearly label what type of username is required for the field (Figure 3-12). Many users often utilize a variety of login names, and typically they can forget which one is used. This can result in their being locked out, frustrated, or abandoning the site.

Sign up

Enter username

Mobile Number

Next

FIGURE 3-12

The login screen from the PIP mobile application clearly indicates “username” versus email address for signing in (PIP iOS application).

- Provide an input field for the password or PIN.
- Provide a clear way to retrieve the username in case the user forgets it.
- Provide a clear way to retrieve or reset the password or PIN in case the user forgets it.
- If appropriate, allow the user to stay logged in to the site for an extended amount of time. This is often presented with a checkbox and text that clearly lets the user know how long he will remain logged in. Don't forget to set the right expectations of what will be remembered. Is it the name and password, or just the name only? Be clear.
- Options such as “Keep me signed in for 2 weeks” or “Remember me on this computer” should be opt-in. This protects against accidentally allowing another person into the account if the user's computer is shared.
- Allow users to stay logged in on mobile devices and use the inherent device authentication as the primary security. If a second level of authentication is needed, consider a PIN or sending a text message for the user to enter to access their information.
- In the enterprise situations, integrate authentication with Lightweight Directory Access Protocol (LDAP) and other corporate systems so that there is one identity wherever possible. Keep people signed in to their applications whenever they are inside the firewall and have authenticated successfully.
- After the user successfully logs in, the site should reflect back in some way this status. This is often presented by showing the user's name (login or nickname) and a Sign Out option.
- Provide a way to log out after logged in.
- If the user does not have an account, provide easy access to signing up for the site, without distracting the user who just wants to log in.
- Delay the log-in requirement until the last possible moment—for example, when the user needs access to private information or needs to save data.

Why

Having users log in to your site allows them to save information and content for later use. Registered and logged-in users are more valuable to your business because you will generally have more information about them (both direct information, and indirect information gleaned through their behavior and interactions).

Requiring users to log in to do certain tasks—leaving comments, posting photos or videos, participating in a conversation—forces them to be responsible for their participation. They build up a reputation and a body of work, and others know who they are by their actions and participation.

Accessibility

The login form should be easily navigable via the keyboard, with the Sign-In button being triggered by the Return key.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Sign-In Continuity” on page 77

“Sign-Up or Registration” on page 59

“Sign Out” on page 79

AS SEEN ON

Amazon.com (<http://www.amazon.com>)

Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>)

Google Reader (<http://google.com/reader>)

LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com>)

Photobucket (<http://www.photobucket.com>)

TripIt (<http://www.tripit.com>)

Twitter (<http://www.twitter.com>)

Yahoo! (<http://www.yahoo.com>)

YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com>)

Two-Factor Authentication

What

A user wants extra security for their information.

Use when

- You need extra security to safeguard sensitive information (see Figure 3-13).
- You know a device, like a cell phone or security token, will be with a person the majority of the time.
- In enterprise situations to allow employees access to corporate social tools outside of the office firewall.

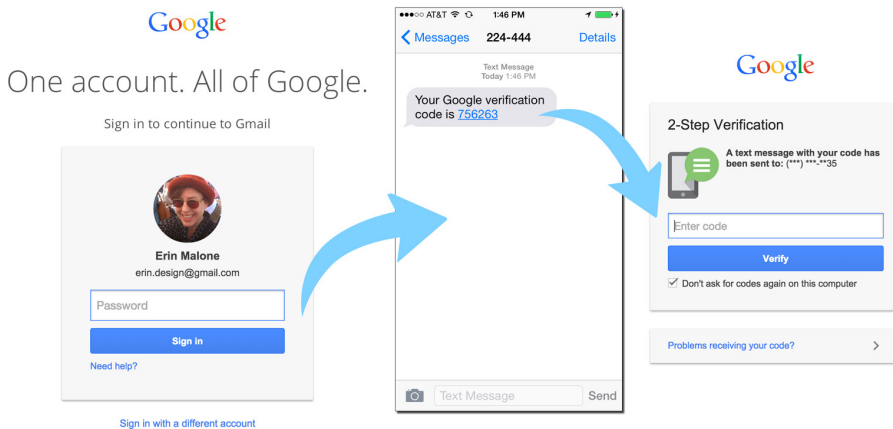


FIGURE 3-13

You can set up two-factor authentication between the Web and a mobile phone to access Google accounts.

How

Offer the user the ability to activate two-factor or two-step authentication if it makes sense during the sign-up process or in settings.

If using SMS or text message, after a user has entered her login credentials, send her a text with a PIN to enter (Figure 3-13).

Provide an entry field for the texted PIN or PIN from a token.

Give the user a way to send herself another text if she needs it.

In the corporate instance, the PIN can be generated from an RSA token or from a piece of software that is bound to the user's identity credentials. Either way the PIN generated should be unique.

Why

There are occasions when extra security is needed to protect identity, corporate social conversations, and shared files. The ability to activate or even require two-factor authentication helps keep out data thieves and keeps information more secure than a simple username and password.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Sign In” on page 68

“PIN”

AS SEEN ON

Gmail (<http://www.gmail.com>)

PIN

What

A user wants easy access to his data without having to do full account authentication every time.

Use when

- You want a shortcut to access the application (see Figure 3-14).
- An application will be accessed multiple times over a short period of time.
- You need second-level authentication in mobile applications.

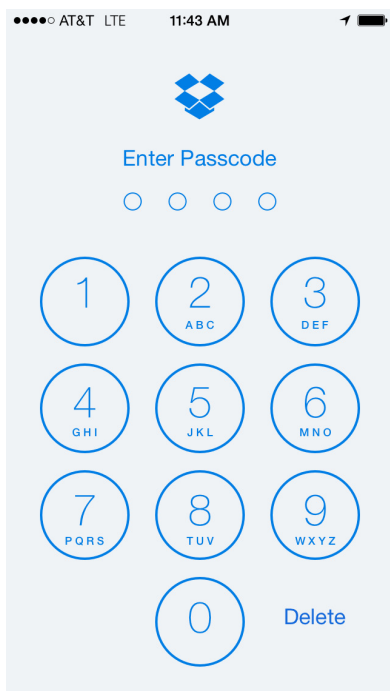


FIGURE 3-14

Dropbox allows users to set up a passcode (PIN) for signing in on the fly Dropbox passcode entry screen (Dropbox iOS application).

How

Offer the user the ability to set up a PIN during sign up.

Tie the PIN to another piece of unique data for verification, such as the user's mobile phone number.

Allow the user to set up or change the PIN in the application settings.

The PIN should be at least four numerical digits and easily typed using one hand on mobile devices.

In certain corporate situations or higher security situations involving financial data, consider a six-digit or longer code.

When an application is accessed, after initial setup, show the PIN screen rather than the Sign In screen.

Offer the user the numerical keyboard automatically, rather than having him navigate to the numbers in the standard keyboard.

After entering the PIN, you should take the user directly to the main screen of the application.

Why

Because personal mobile devices have built-in security so that users can lock them, taking advantage of this facilitates easier access to the social features in your application by reducing authentication friction wherever possible.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Sign In” on page 68

“Two-Level or Multifactor Authentication”

AS SEEN ON

Dropbox (<http://www.dropbox.com>)

Fingerprint/Bio

What

The latest security options are bio authentication techniques using fingerprint scanning to access both the phone itself and applications on the device, as demonstrated in Figure 3-15.

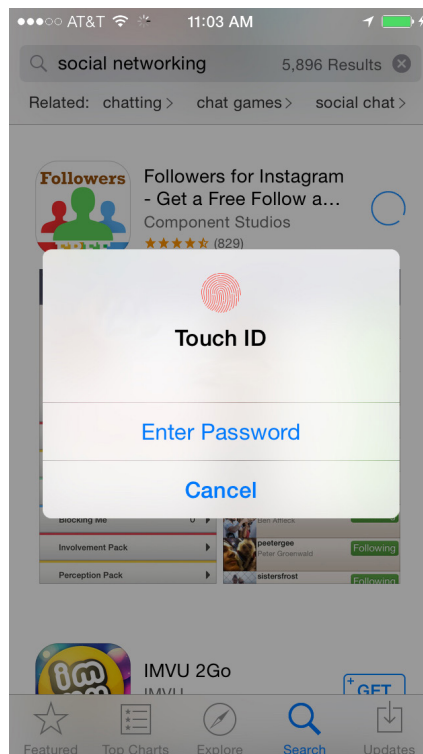


FIGURE 3-15

With Apple’s App Store, users can validate purchases by using their fingerprint (Touch ID).

Use when

- You want to allow access to your site or application via a unique fingerprint.
- Instead of a PIN or username/password combination for signing in.

How

- Offer the option to authenticate via fingerprint sensor when launching the mobile application instead of showing a login screen.
- When the user has successfully authenticated, take her to the main screen of the application.

Why

Bio options for authentication offer extra security to a device and applications because they are uniquely tied to a specific individual and are harder to hack.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Sign In” on page 68

“Sign Out” on page 79

“Sign-Up or Registration” on page 59

AS SEEN ON

Apple App Store

Sign-In Continuity

What

A user who has an account but is not currently logged in wants to participate by contributing something.

Use when

Use this pattern when authentication is required for participation in a community. Forms of participation include (but are not limited to) leaving comments, voting, ratings, tags, posts to blogs or forums, and so on.

How

- When the user attempts to comment (or take similar action), remind her of the need to login in first and deliver her to the login flow.
- When the user has successfully logged in, return her to the context she was in when she was about to comment or take similar action, as depicted in Figure 3-16.
- When handling the submission of information, preserve any data that has been entered prior to the login procedure.

FIGURE 3-16

Amazon prompts for login only when needed, and when the user is logged in, delivers her back to her original task (<http://www.amazon.com>).

The screenshot shows the Amazon.com interface for the product 'The Hunger Games: Catching Fire [HD]'. The page features a navigation bar at the top with the Amazon logo, search bar, and account options. Below the navigation bar, there are sections for 'Customer Reviews', 'Details', and 'The most helpful favorable review'. The 'Customer Reviews' section shows a star rating of 4.5 out of 5, with a 'Create your own review' button circled in red. A blue arrow points from this button to the 'Sign In' prompt in the 'Sign In Help' section. The 'Sign In' prompt asks for the user's email address and password, and offers a 'Sign in using our secure server' button. The 'Sign In Help' section provides links for 'Forgot your password?' and 'Update it here'.

The screenshot shows the Amazon.com 'Sign In' form. The form asks for the user's e-mail address and password, and offers a 'Sign in using our secure server' button. A blue arrow points from the 'Sign in using our secure server' button to the 'Sign In Help' section. The 'Sign In Help' section provides links for 'Forgot your password?' and 'Update it here'.

The screenshot shows the Amazon.com 'Your Reviews' page for the product 'The Hunger Games: Catching Fire [HD]'. The page displays the user's review, a star rating, and a 'Write your review here' text area. A blue arrow points from the 'Write your review here' text area to the 'Sign In' prompt in the 'Sign In Help' section. The 'Sign In' prompt asks for the user's email address and password, and offers a 'Sign in using our secure server' button. The 'Sign In Help' section provides links for 'Forgot your password?' and 'Update it here'.

Why

It's important that the login requirement does not present an undue barrier to participation for the user.

Special cases

If security concerns (such as cross-site scripting issues and possible cross-domain issues) require an interruption in flow or even that the user be returned to a home page, at least insert an alert message with a clear call to action to resume the moment of participation.

This message might include a link to the last known location, a pre-populated form, or a message indicating a redirect in x seconds.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Sign In” on page 68

“Sign Out” on page 79

“Sign-Up or Registration” on page 59

AS SEEN ON

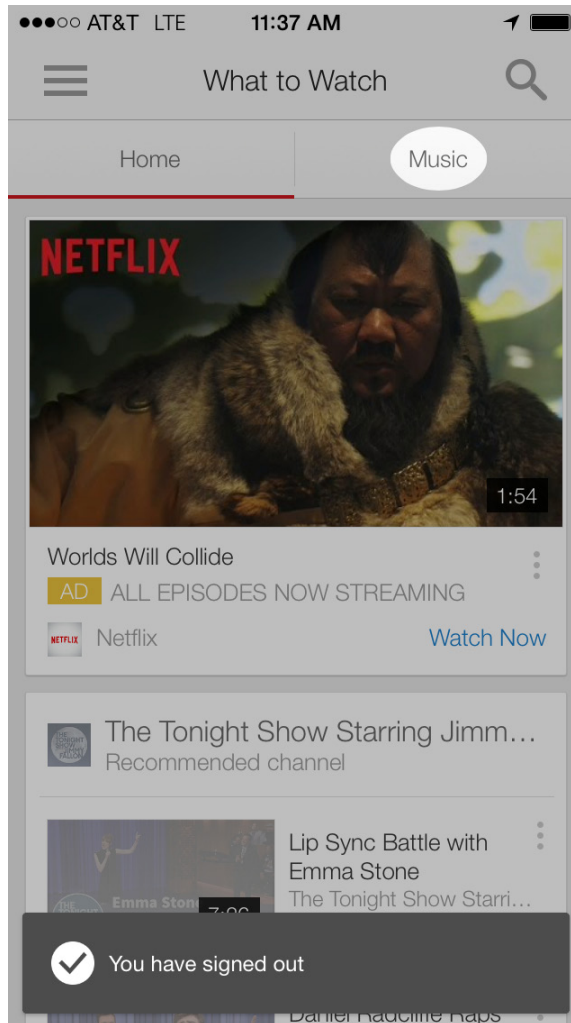
Amazon (<http://www.amazon.com>)

Sign Out

What

The user wants to log out of the system, to end a session, or become anonymous (Figure 3-17).

FIGURE 3-17
Sign-out indicator on
the mobile version of
YouTube (YouTube iOS
application).



Use when

- A user wants to end his session.
- A user wants to become anonymous.
- A user is on a public computer and needs to preserve the privacy and security of his personal data and contributions.
- The user has logged out and you want to continue his relationship with your site. For example, you want to give him ideas for where to go next and information about new features.

How

- Consider providing a landing page or alert overlay that clearly indicates that the user is no longer logged in.
- Offer clear options for features to explore, even if he is signed out or for when he returns.
- Provide the ability to easily log in again.
- Keep the page light in terms of content and performance size in order to mitigate frustration and end the session on a positive experience.

Why

When a user logs out of a service, it isn't clear what his next intentions are. Sites often will throw a user back to the home page after he is logged out, but this can be overwhelming and doesn't always clearly indicate whether the logout process succeeded.

Providing a Sign Out landing page that clearly indicates the logout's success will let the user know that he has been successful.

This page is also an opportunity for communication about new or unexplored features as part of a reengagement strategy.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Reengagement” on page 103

“Sign In” on page 68

AS SEEN ON

YouTube mobile

The Usage Lifecycle

The usage lifecycle, illustrated in Figure 3-18, is a simple idea, made up of several steps that illustrate a general progression people go through when using software.

First, people hear about software in some way, perhaps from a colleague or friend. After that, they decide to give it a try and sign up or register for it. Then, they go through the crucial step of using it for the first time. Finally, they fall into a pattern of ongoing use (or not using it at all).

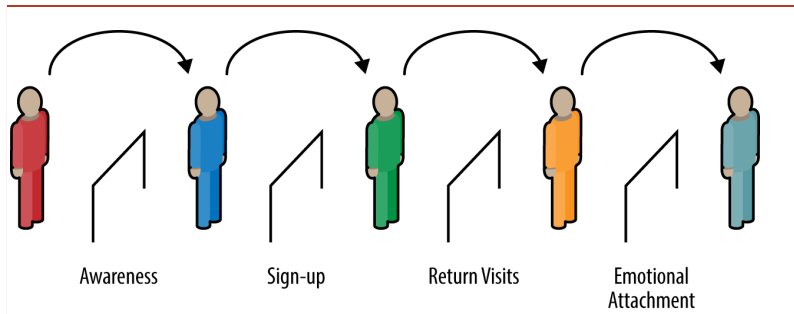


FIGURE 3-18

The usage lifecycle as defined by Josh Porter in *Designing for the Social Web*.

By looking at your software in terms of the usage lifecycle, we recognize that each step in the lifecycle has very particular design challenges on which we can focus our efforts.

For example, people who have heard about software often have questions about it. What are the questions people ask about your software? Are you listening and writing them down, embedding them on your website and within your application, and preempting new customers who will undoubtedly have the same questions? Or, alternatively, is there a way to short-circuit the sign-up process, a notorious part of the lifecycle? Can we get people using the software before they sign up for it?

The usage lifecycle isn't rocket science, but it's a good framework to keep in mind throughout design. It can help you to design contextual help within your application or assist in putting together materials for enabling people to learn about and get started using your software.

If we're lucky, people will move through this lifecycle relatively quickly and with confidence. If that happens, they'll be much more likely to share their enthusiasm with others. This is the ultimate goal: a virtuous cycle of sharing.

**JOSH PORTER, BOKARDO DESIGN AND AUTHOR OF
DESIGNING FOR THE SOCIAL WEB (NEW RIDERS)**

Invitations

Invitations—both sending and acting upon them after receipt—are core to the viral nature of social web experiences.

Receive Invitation

What

A user receives an invitation from a friend or connection to join a site, as shown in Figures 3-19 and 3-20.

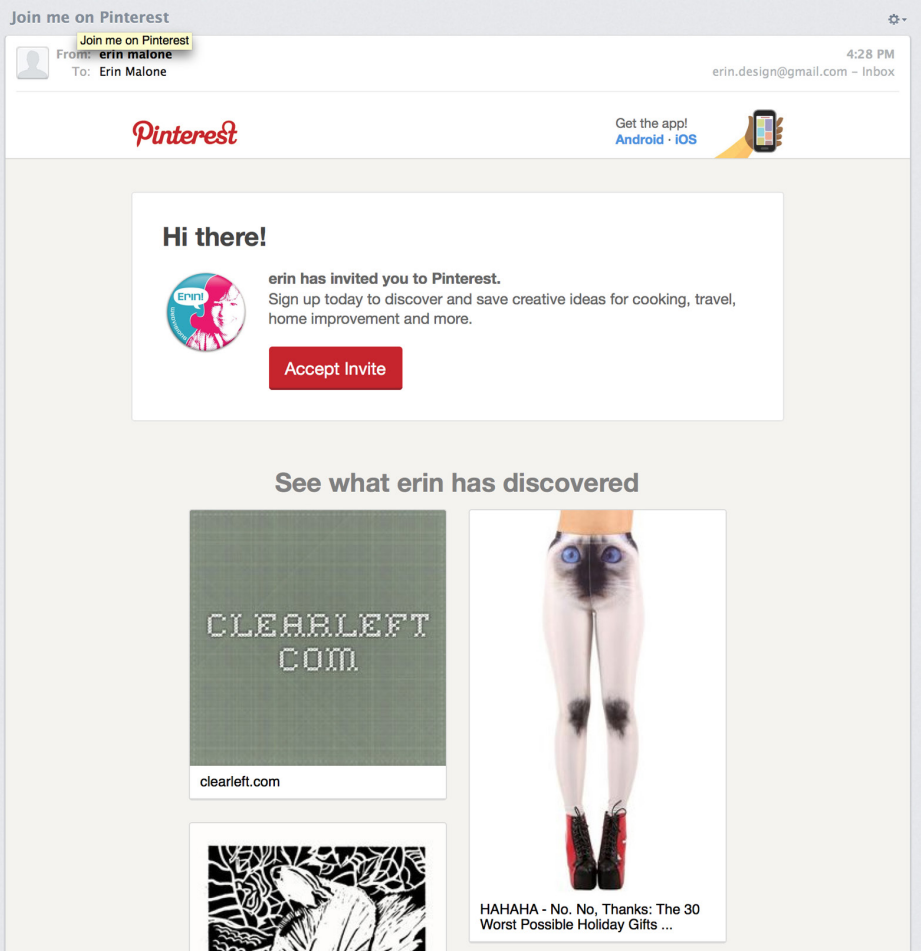


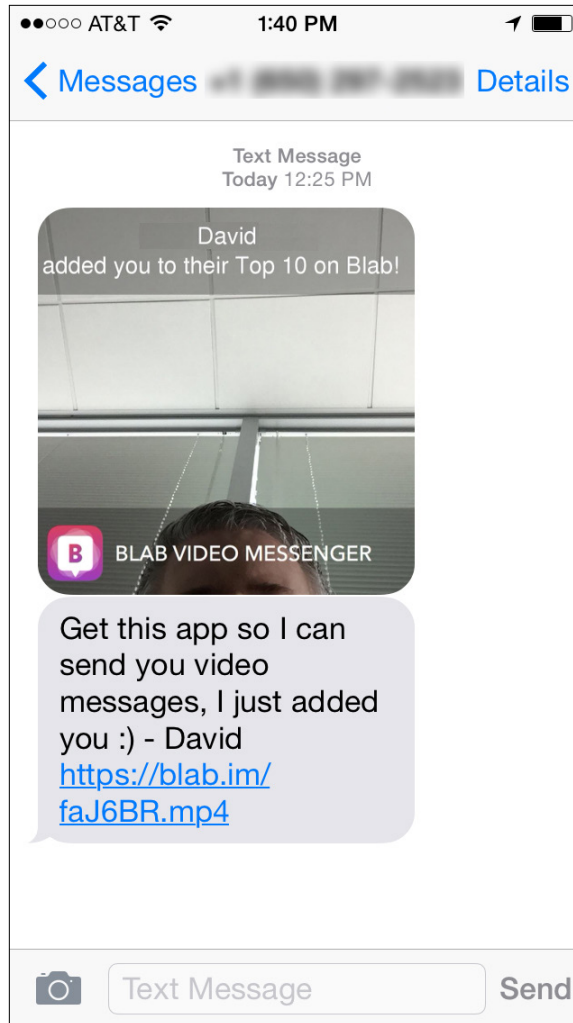
FIGURE 3-19

An invitation to join Pinterest (<http://www.pinterest.com>), which not only includes a large Call to Action to join, but gives some hints to the types of content being saved and shared by the invitee.

FIGURE 3-20

An invitation to Blab Video Messenger, sent via text message.

Inviting friends to an app via text could be problematic due to text and data charges (Blab Video *iOS application*).



Use when

- You want to enhance the user experience by building a network of user connections.
- Growth of the service is dependent on friends of friends.
- You want to supplement traditional user acquisition with user-based referrals.

How

- The invitation should have personal messaging from the sender.
- The sender should be clearly identified to the recipient.
- The benefits of joining and participating should be clearly articulated to the recipient.
- A very clear “Call to Action” button or link should be available for the recipient to easily step directly into the site to try it out.

Why

Having a formal invitation in place for your users to send to their friends makes it possible for you to combine a controlled marketing message from your site with a personal message from the user. This process also guarantees a consistent call to action for viral growth.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Send Invitation” on page 85

AS SEEN ON

Ello (<http://www.ello.com>)

Blab Video Messenger mobile application

Send Invitation


What

A user sends an invitation to a friend or group of friends, asking to join in a site experience, as illustrated in Figure 3-21.

Invite whoever's missing ✕

Ask your friends to join you on Pinterest.

Facebook	Gmail	Yahoo
----------	-------	-------


[Connect with Gmail](#)

[Send Invite](#)

Just so you know: We never email your contacts without your say so.

FIGURE 3-21

Pinterest (<http://www.pinterest.com>) lets users invite friends from Facebook and using email addresses.

Use when

- You want to enhance the user experience by having a network of connections.
- Growth of the service is dependent on friends of friends.

- You want to supplement traditional user acquisition with user-based referrals.
- A user has participated in the site enough to have formed an opinion of its value and can then recommend it to a friend.

Don't use this pattern directly after registration, when the user hasn't actually participated in the site. When presenting the option to invite others, do so after enough interaction with your site that the user actually knows what she is referring.

How

- Use an in-context email form.
- Provide the user with a sample message that showcases the benefits of joining the service.
- Make the prefilled content editable and allow the user to personalize the invitation.
- Allow users to invite others via access to their address books.
- Provide a mechanism that gives users the ability to send copies of the message to themselves.
- Provide a mechanism to bring contacts and email addresses over from other social services. Use a standard accepted technology, such as OAuth, rather than the password anti-pattern (see the section “The Password Anti-Pattern” on page XX).
- Don't force a user to invite others to the site before she has had a chance to try out the features.
- Do make it easy for a new user to find the “invite friends” link, as demonstrated in Figure 3-22.
- Don't spam a user's address book or contact list from other sites.
- On mobile, take advantage of the fact that contact lists are built into the phone and take advantage of that access to find friends.

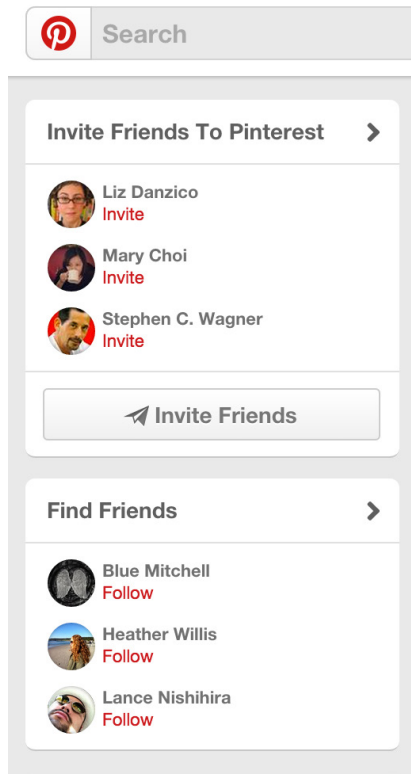


FIGURE 3-22

Pinterest (<http://www.pinterest.com>) offers the ability to Find Friends and Invite Friends in a sidebar on the main page, giving users easy access to the tools to build their network.

Special cases

If the use of the site and its features is heavily dependent on a group of people interacting, the need to allow a user to bring friends along, through invitations or bulk registering, will override the recommendation of encouraging use before inviting friends.

Why

Providing users with the ability to invite their friends to your site is part of the viral nature of a social site. Making tools and system interactions available that allow your users to be good netizens will enhance the overall experience and your site's reputation in the long run.

RELATED PATTERNS

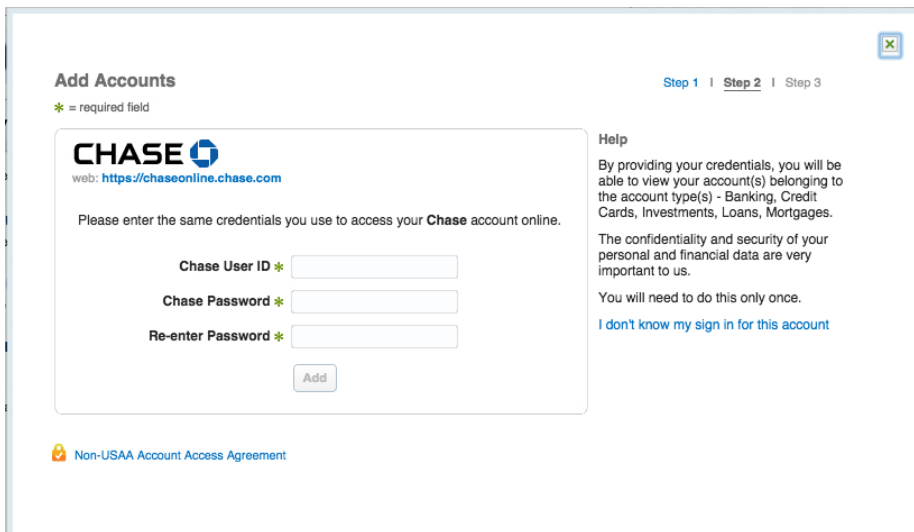
“Receive Invitation” on page 83

AS SEEN ON

Pinterest (<http://www.pinterest.com>)

The Password Anti-Pattern

Just what is the password anti-pattern, and why is it an issue? On many social sites, to combat the cold-start situation in which a user joins and has no friends, the site might ask a person to find his friends on the site by comparing known data pulled in from another service (such as the user's online address book). The site might ask the user to open up access to all his various online address books so that it can match names and email addresses to current customers and then offer the new user a list of friends on the service for the purposes of making connections. In other cases, a site aggregates data from various other accounts and asks the user to connect the accounts, as shown in Figure 3-23.



The screenshot shows a web form titled "Add Accounts" with a progress indicator showing "Step 2" of three steps. A legend indicates that an asterisk (*) denotes a required field. The form features the Chase logo and the URL "https://chaseonline.chase.com". Below the logo, it instructs the user to "Please enter the same credentials you use to access your Chase account online." There are three input fields: "Chase User ID", "Chase Password", and "Re-enter Password", each followed by an asterisk. An "Add" button is positioned below the "Re-enter Password" field. To the right of the form is a "Help" section with text explaining that providing credentials allows the user to view account information and that confidentiality and security are important. A link "I don't know my sign in for this account" is also present. At the bottom left, there is a link for "Non-USAA Account Access Agreement".

FIGURE 3-23

A password anti-pattern asking for user credentials for another bank account, as seen on USAA (<http://www.usaa.com>).

Sites implement this because it's easy. The problem with this interaction is that the site is asking the user to supply a username and password for another service. Many sites never intend to do anything beyond that one-time data grab and promise not to use the name and password for anything but that, but there is really no way for a user to trust the site or know that the site owners are being truthful. The end goal of this solution is to make it easy and painless for a person to find his friends, aggregate data, and become more quickly engaged. Unfortunately, there are phishing scammers and account hackers who

have created sites or services that “appear” trustworthy but are really just grabbing a user’s account for nefarious purposes. Additionally, this practice violates the terms of service for many of the sites that are being accessed.

The password anti-pattern teaches users to give their login credentials away to a stranger and sets them up to be more easily phished across the Internet. People get used to the practice and eventually don’t think twice about giving this information to a new site in exchange for some cool new promise. This is especially dangerous with banking information, for which giving away login credentials can financially ruin a person.

A safer alternative is to use services such as OAuth, OpenID, or one of the identity connection APIs from Facebook, Twitter, Yahoo!, or Google to officially authorize access to the user’s data on the other site.

OAuth is “[a]n open protocol to allow secure API authorization in a simple and standard method from desktop and web applications.” In other words, it is an open technology that allows sites to access a user’s data in a safe way that doesn’t require the user to throw names and passwords all over the Internet. The actual access happens on the third-party site where the data is stored and under its control. Most of the large Internet companies have all agreed to support OAuth, so there should be no reason to perpetuate this anti-pattern, and, in fact, it is becoming harder and harder to find.

Ultimately, users should have access to their data and should be allowed to bring it from one site to another—whether it’s their connections, their social graph, or their contributed data, such as photos or videos. Social sites, which need connections to enhance the user’s experience, should adopt safe authentication interactions that both facilitate users accessing their data *and* protect them by teaching better Net behavior for keeping their passwords safe.

Authorize

What

The user wants to participate on a site without starting from scratch. She would like to bring her data and files over from another site, as shown in Figure 3-24.

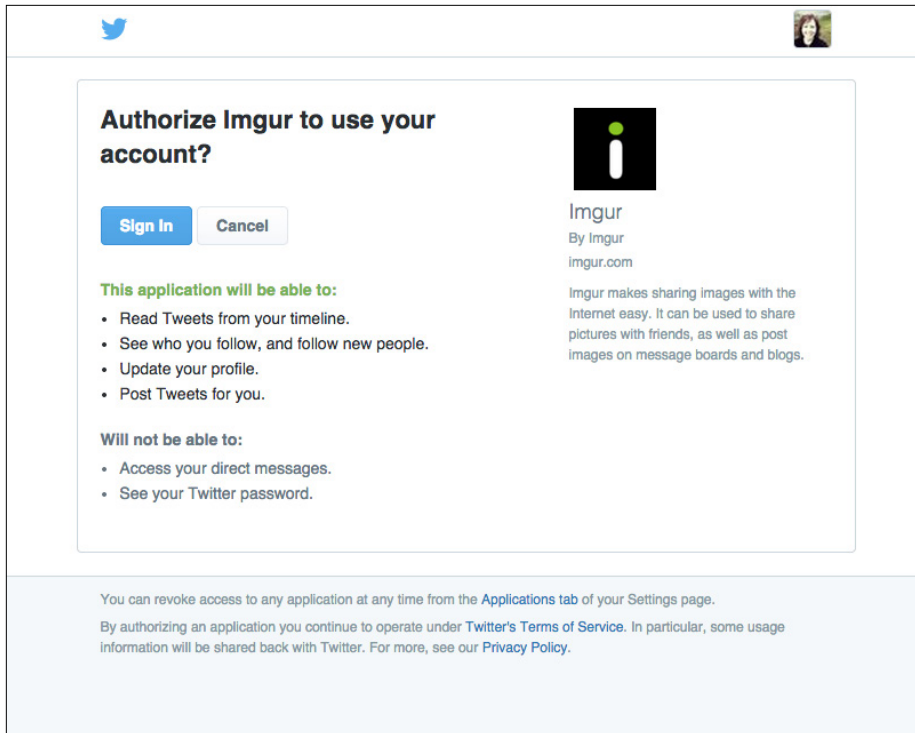


FIGURE 3-24

An authorization screen on Twitter (<http://www.twitter.com>) lets the Imgur application access Twitter authentication and profile information.

Use when

- Features on your site are enhanced or expanded by accessing data and files from another site (Site A in the upcoming example).
- User-generated content or data on your site has the potential to enhance or enable other sites in which your users might be participating (Site B in the upcoming example).

How

Successful authentication requires cooperation from two sites: one with features and functionality enhanced by a user's data (Site A), and the other with that user's data and/or files to share (Site B).

SITE A

- Before automatically using the password anti-pattern (see “The Password Anti-Pattern” on page 89) to access a user’s data, check to see whether the other site is using OAuth. If so, tap into that protocol to facilitate the data transaction.
- Site A should ask the user what data she would like to access.
- Show possible choices, such as Twitter (<http://www.twitter.com>); LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com>) for general identity; flickr (<http://flickr.com>), Photobucket (<http://photobucket.com>), smugmug.com (<http://smugmug.com>), and so on for photos; or Yahoo! Address Book, Plaxo.com (<http://plaxo.com>), Google, and so forth for contacts.
- After the user selects the site where her data resides, Site A should send the user to that site to grant access.
- Information about how the data will be used should be presented on Site A.

SITE B

- Use OAuth to facilitate the authorization process.
- Site A will send its user to Site B. The user logs in to his account, and Site B should present a screen that asks if he really wants to share the data with Site A.
- Upon agreement, the user is sent back to Site A, and the data is now available in that experience.
- Information about how Site A will use the permissions granted should be clearly presented to the user on Site B.
- Provide a mechanism for the user to cancel the authorization at any point.
- Provide an easy way for the user to revoke permissions from Site A.

Why

Using an authorization flow and protocol such as OAuth makes it possible for a user to give access among sites without exposing her username and password. This process is the preferred method of allowing data-sharing, rather than using the password anti-pattern.

RELATED PATTERNS

“The Password Anti-Pattern” on page 89

AS SEEN ON

Imgur (<http://www.imgur.com>)

Twitter (<http://www.twitter.com>)

Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>)

Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com>)

Private Beta

What

A user is eager to try out a site even before it's fully ready for the general public.

Use when

- You want a limited group of users to help you test and popularize your first release, such as that shown in Figure 3-25.

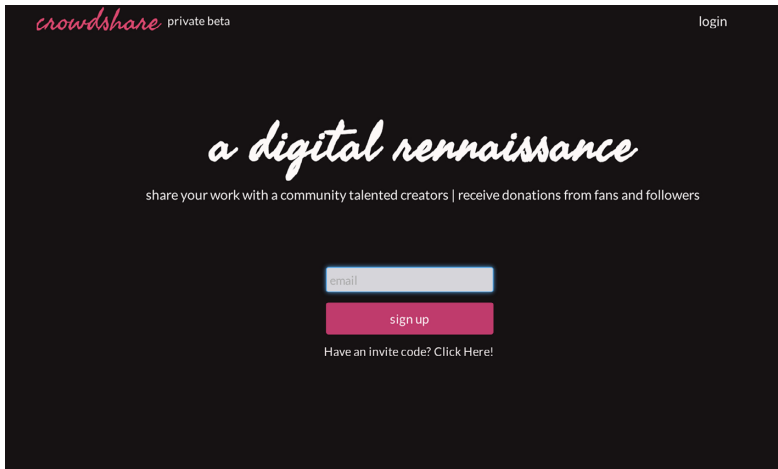


FIGURE 3-25

A common technique for growing a private beta is to allow people sign up directly from the home page. Another technique is to give each new user a set number of invitations so that the service grows a little at a time through referrals (<http://crowdshare.io>).

- You want to allow a small user list the opportunity to invite N new users to grow your site virally, but in a controlled fashion.

How

- Clearly indicate that the site is in private beta.
- Offer a list of features and benefits or a tour of the product to let the user know what he is signing up for.
- When requiring a user to sign up to receive information about the beta or an invitation to join at the next release:
 - Provide an email address field for sign-up.
 - Provide a username field for sign-up.
 - Show a confirmation page to notify the user that the sign-up request was received, and indicate a timeframe for when he might expect a response or invitation to join the site.
 - Send a confirmation email to the address provided, to verify the address and remind the user that he signed up to receive an invitation to join the beta at a future date.
- When allowing users to invite a limited number of others to the private beta:
 - Clearly indicate how many invitations the user can send in total.
 - Keep a count of how many invitations the user has sent out or has left from the total, and put this in a visible location.
 - Provide a way for the user to add a custom message to the invitation.
 - Clearly articulate feature highlights and benefits to the potential invitee.

Why

A private beta can give you the opportunity to test-drive social features with a small group of people before opening the doors to the public. Starting off in a private beta also makes it possible for you to seed areas of the site with friends and family in order to avoid the cold-start issue. Additionally, the exclusivity of a private beta can encourage hype and desire for the service, and increase the requests for accounts.

Special cases

It used to be that beta was a period of time when real users would be asked to try the site out—to find bugs at a larger scale that might not have shown up with smaller test groups—and then the product would move quickly to General Availability (GA) release, where the public at large would have access.

In today's world of rapid minimum viable products (MVPs), lean development, and the ability to quickly launch applications on the Web and on smartphones, we are seeing fewer and fewer sites display the beta flag and then never remove it. (See Figures 3-26 through 3-28.)

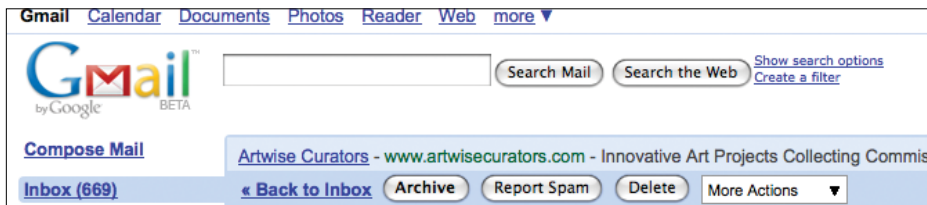


FIGURE 3-26

Gmail was in beta from 2004 until at least 2009, when version 1 of this book was first published.

Share your photos instantly!



- No downloads
- Drag and drop
- Easy to use

Get started now...

Choose your screen name

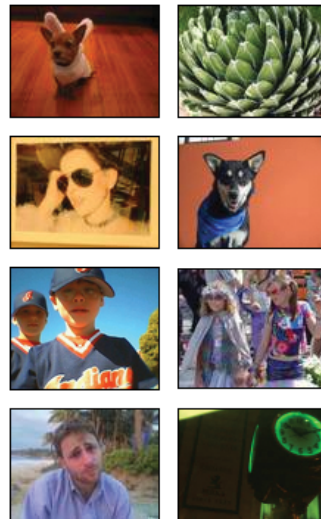
(It's free and quick to sign up!)

Already a member? [Log in here.](#)

Features include...

- upload from your phone
- per-photo privacy
- public & private groups
- live drag 'n' drop sharing
- post photos to any blog

Editor's picks...



→ [See more photos](#)

In the News...

"...Flickr makes [sharing photos] far easier..."
- [Guardian Unlimited](#)

"...cutting-edge real-time photo sharing..."
- [PC World](#)

"...pretty darn cool and super-easy to use..."
- [TechTV](#)

→ [Read our latest email newsletter](#)



Brought to you by [ludicorp](#)

FIGURE 3-27

The Flickr home page (<http://flickr.com>) from May 2004; it was in beta for a couple of years.)

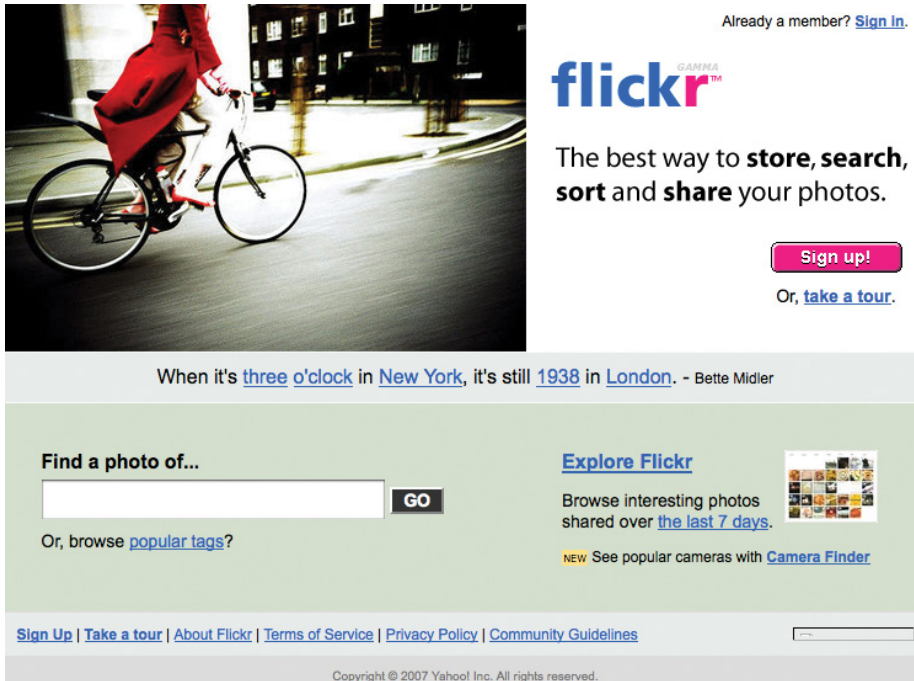


FIGURE 3-28

The Flickr home page from January 2007. It briefly moved into “gamma” in late 2006/early 2007 and for a while afterward put “loves you” where “beta” and “gamma” had been.)

The perpetual beta generally does a disservice to users and to the process of software development. Beta has certain implications about quality and the site’s point in the lifecycle of development. Keeping the beta flag for a lengthy period of time tells your users that the site is buggy and that you may not be spending time working through bugs to a full GA release. After a while, that message implies that you don’t care to improve the site, which could have the adverse effect of driving users away—because if you don’t care, why should they?

AS SEEN ON

Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com>)

Gmail (<http://mail.google.com>)

Crowdshare (<http://www.crowdshare.io>)

Are You Making These Four Common User Onboarding Mistakes?

Getting people to sign up for your software is tough. It requires a lot of time, energy, and money, yet many companies are losing most of those hard-won users immediately after their first-run experience. Don't let your company be one of them!

Let's take a look at some all-too-common user onboarding mistakes that might be damaging your business.

1. Counting on the interface to explain the value of your product

There's a phenomenon in the software business called the "aha moment." It's the moment when the value of your product becomes crystal clear to the user. They say, "Oh, okay, I get it now!" Unfortunately, this "aha moment" comes too late for many products as the users are required to fiddle around in the interface in order to understand the value of the product as a whole.

Getting users to figure out your product's value by learning its interface is like getting people to follow a recipe when they don't have the slightest idea what they're cooking.

You don't start with instructions to knead dough and simmer sauce and hope it turns into a pizza—accomplishing anything of significance requires setting the proper context beforehand. In this case, that context is how much their lives will be improved with your product in it.

Getting users to "aha!" before they sign up stacks the deck in your favor twice over. First, it orients all their following actions in a meaningful, informed direction, and second, it adds a tremendous amount of motivation to getting there—much more than relying on curiosity alone. Getting the light bulbs to go off before sign-up not only results in many more people understanding your product, it results in more substantial first experiences, as well.

Bonus tip: Not sure how to unlock the "aha moment" ahead of time? Contact a potential customer and try to convince him to begin using your product using only the material on your marketing site. If that alone isn't enough to convince him, remember what else you had to say to seal the deal, and add it to your copy accordingly.

2. Not knowing which actions lead to conversion

Of course, inspiring an “aha” doesn’t do you much good unless users actually get to experience that amazingness firsthand. Even though an “aha” might indicate that people understand the improvement you provide, getting them to a “wow moment” means that they’ve actually experienced the improvement themselves. To confirm people are really receiving the improvement your marketing site promises, you need to track success rates.

When companies begin to measure activity, many find that around 50 percent of users who sign up for their product log in only once and then never come back. That’s a sobering realization—you invest so much in acquiring new users, only to lose half of them immediately after their very first visit. How can you slow down this hemorrhaging?

Josh Elman of Greylock Partners addresses it this way: he looks at the last 20 people who have successfully converted into customers and traces each of their actions, step by step, to see what brought them to the conversion point. By understanding which actions lead to conversions, you will better be able to nudge users toward that end goal.

The emphasis shouldn’t be on getting new users to click around and familiarize themselves with the interface; rather, it should be on helping them complete meaningful tasks that lead to mutual success.

You know your user onboarding is really working not when it gets new users activated, but when it gets new users coming back.

Bonus tip: In addition to tracking how many users successfully complete each key step in the journey, also measure how long it takes them to get there. Time is precious and never more so than during a user’s first few minutes with your product!

3. Killing momentum within the “first sitting”

It’s best to think about the first-run experience in terms of helping users improve their lives (as opposed to just getting them to complete the tasks you laid out). New users didn’t sign up for your product because they were super excited about learning what all those buttons in your UI mean; they signed up because they were interested in the value that you promised to deliver. Your aim with the first-run experience should be to give them a taste of that value by guiding them as seamlessly as possible toward their first small win.

That small win should be something related to the overall improvement your product provides. Giving new users a real taste of the sweet life you provide—even a small one—will make them much more likely to come back.

When you know what you want to lead your users to during their first-run experience, it's time to remove everything that hinders them from getting there. Note all the actions that the user must take to get to the small win, and trim down anything that can be done later. Onboarding is not a time to throw a bunch of things at the wall to see what sticks. If you're not very sure that the conversion trade-off that comes from asking for accessory data like phone numbers or their business's employee count is worth it, adopting a "when in doubt, throw it out" mentality is highly recommended.

Prize your users' attention as the extremely scarce resource that it is.

For example, if you can possibly get along without confirming their email address, even briefly, by all means avoid nose-diving all that precious momentum into the chaos of their inbox before they've even had a chance to do anything significant in your application.

Keep in mind that this is not the same as "make it short and unmemorable." Lumosity recently shared a study in which they found that slowing things down and asking users to reflect on the experience they were about to have made people more invested and thus more likely to stick around. Of course, they'd never have known that without tracking conversion rates—one more reason to do so!

Bonus tip: Another momentum-killer that often flies under the radar is poor site performance. Every time your pages take too long to load, it's yet another opportunity for your new users to fire up Twitter or go brew that cup of coffee they've been craving. Keep them locked in with zippy response times, or at the very least by communicating that your site is working away on their behalf.

4. Failing to celebrate success with the user

It feels great to cross out an item on a to-do list, doesn't it? Now think of how satisfying it is to knock everything off the to-do list, crumple up the entire completed list, throw it in the trash can, and look up to the skies in a super-hero pose! Why not let your users experience the same thing when they get to their first quick win?

I find it odd that in many cases, when a user defies the odds and makes it all the way to logging their first real victory in someone's app, the company isn't there to celebrate. The moment a user completes an important task is a great opportunity for you to forge a positive emotional connection between them and your company.

Let your users know that they are doing great by acknowledging their progress and giving them a figurative high-five!

I call these design opportunities “success states,” and I see opportunities for them all over. Get ahead of the curve by finding the “fist pump” moments in your own user experience and crafting something that makes them concrete. They don’t need to be grandiose gestures, either—even a well-timed “Nice job!” can do wonders.

SAMUEL HULICK, USERONBOARD (ESSAY ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED ON THE HELP SCOUT BLOG)

Welcome Area

What

A user registers for a new service and needs to have a sense of what can be done at the site and how to get started (Figure 3-29).

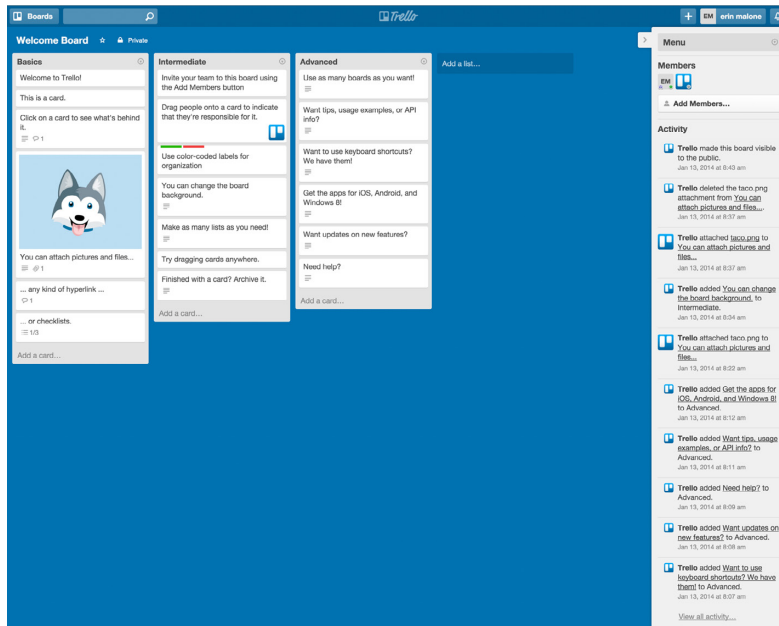


FIGURE 3-29

Trello's (<http://www.trello.com>) new user welcome area is a Welcome Board. It uses the actual product to teach new users techniques and strategies for using the product.

Use when

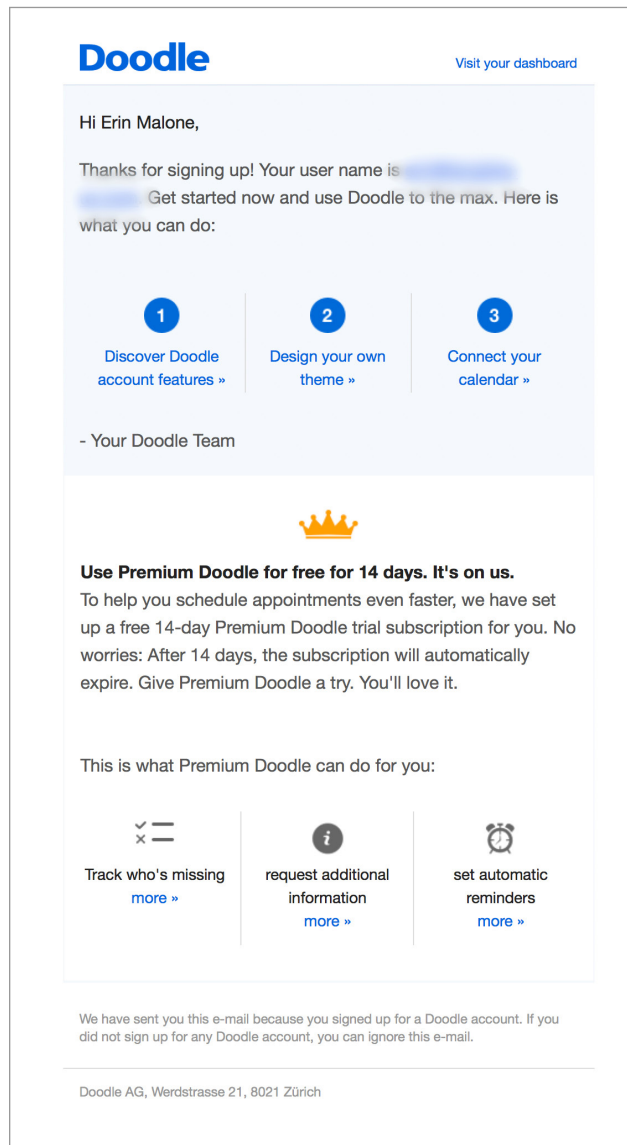
- A new user first accesses your site.
- You want to acquaint the user with important or useful features.

How

- Provide the new user with a warm and gracious welcome to your site and services. This can be a special welcome screen directly following registration for the service or a special email highlighting features, as in Figure 3-30. Consider sending a welcome email in addition to the start screen so that the user has a quick reference of features.

FIGURE 3-30

The Doodle email sent to users shortly after registering on Doodle (<http://doodle.com>) highlights some key features of the service and promotes their subscription level by offering new users the premium version free for their first few days.



- Provide a mechanism for the user to easily move off of the welcome area and into the full features of the site.
- Treat your new users as you would guests in your home. If possible, welcome them personally and check in periodically (without being annoying).
- Use the welcome area to highlight the choices a user can make to get started on the service and what she might do first, as shown in Figure 3-29.
- Consider offering tours of key scenarios from the welcome area, but don't force the user to go through them.
- Don't overwhelm the user with a lot of pop-over bubbles or other intrusive UI elements.
- Don't dumb down the site language just because the user is new to your site. Keep your welcome language friendly and clear. Don't assume that the new user is an Internet novice, but don't assume she is an expert, either.

Why

Providing a welcome area or start space is akin to orientation for a new job or college, or giving your friends a tour of your home the first time they visit. The more welcoming you are (in a light-handed fashion, of course), the more your users will feel comfortable and *want* to spend time on your site.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Reengagement” on page 103

AS SEEN ON

Trello (<http://www.trello.com> and Trello mobile application)

Doodle (<http://doodle.com>)

Reengagement

What

A user participates in your community and then stops or forgets about your offerings. (See Figure 3-31 and Figure 3-32.)

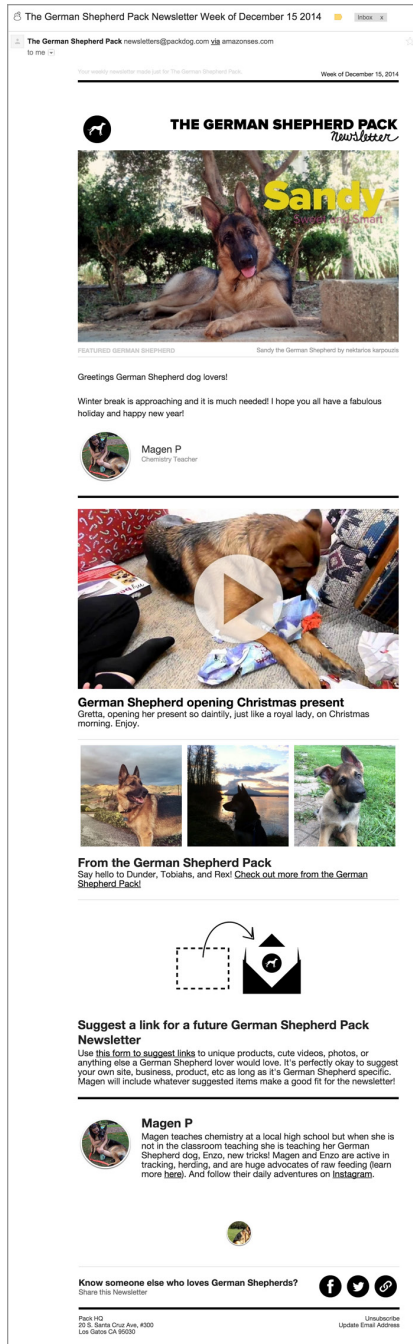


FIGURE 3-31 Pack (<http://packdog.com>) sends out a graphically formatted newsletter to users on a periodic basis. The mail promotes newly shared images on the site and includes calls to action to encourage participation.

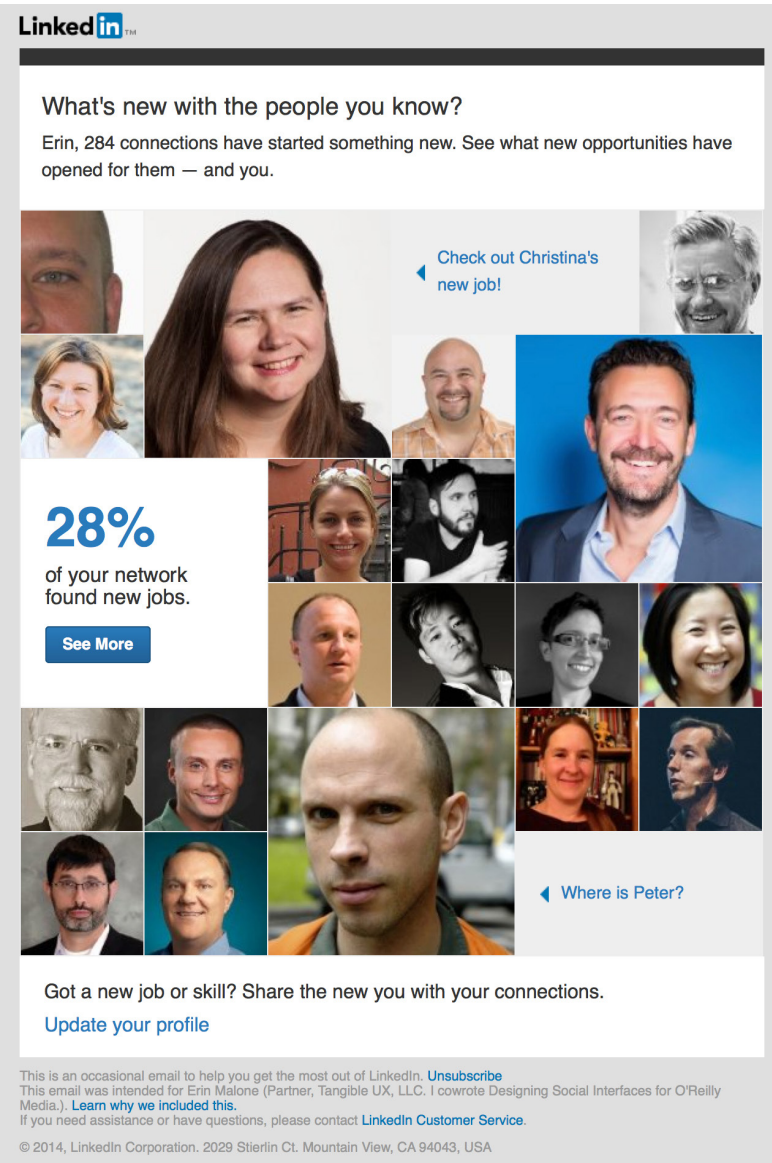


FIGURE 3-32

LinkedIn (<http://linkedin.com>) sends out announcements promoting changes in your community. They include recent statistics from across the user's network. The mail also reminds the user to update his own profile, thereby encouraging others in their network to come back to the service, as well.

Use when

- You want to entice users back to your site.
- You want to inform users of new features.

How

- Provide a way for your users to opt in to email correspondence from your site when they initially sign up.
- Plan an ongoing schedule for outgoing email.
- Emails should highlight key features and/or new features, as depicted in Figure 3-33.

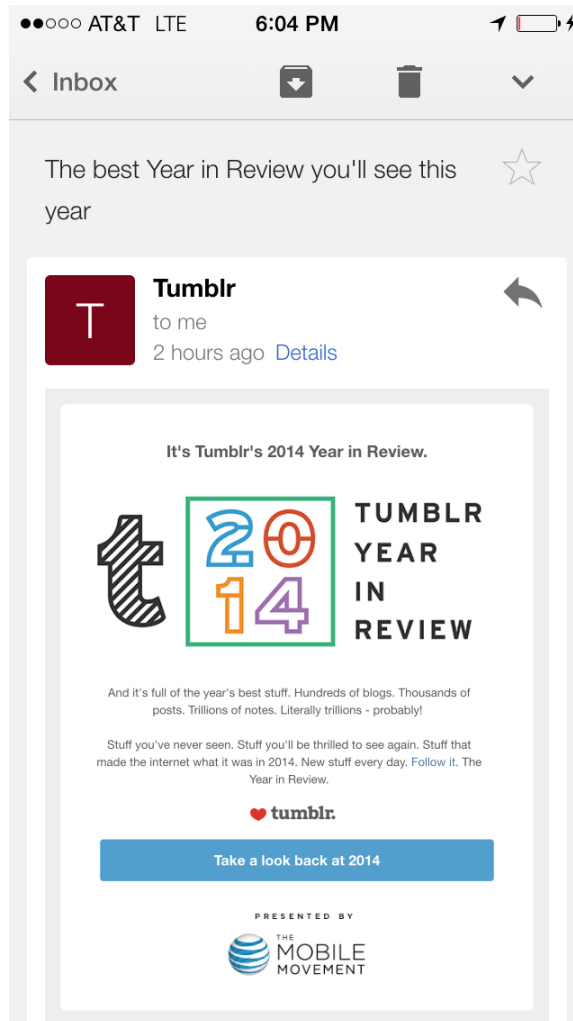


FIGURE 3-33

Tumblr sent out a Year in Review teaser at the end of the year, featuring posts and sites of interest and popularity. The email is intended to bring users back to the site and to encourage exploration.

- If your user hasn't been to your site for a long period of time, send email that entices him back to the site, but only if he agreed to receive email. If the site has features that are based on relationships, share a piece of public data from the user's friends to let him know what he is missing.
- Develop a set of rules for how long a user must be absent before you send a reengagement email.
- The email should contain a very clear call to action.
- There should be a limited amount of messages included in each email.
- Don't send too many emails too often, or you will have the reverse effect: keeping the user away from your site.
- In the corporate environment, there might be some tools that are optional for users but are quite useful for collaborative work. Consider an appropriate level of email reminders or promoting on the intranet.

Why

It goes without saying that you want to create a compelling service that your users will return to day after day. But, there are times when you want to let users know about new features or new ways of using the service in order to reenergize them or remind them of why they signed up in the first place.

Reengagement of your users should be an ongoing effort. In most cases, reengagement efforts are done through email campaigns sent out on a regular basis. On mobile devices, regular notifications can bring users back into the application but need to be short, snappy, and to the point. Emails are usually varied and highlight features or recent activities by the user's network on the site. Surprising and fun messages, such as Snack's daily texts (Figure 3-34), bring users back to the application.

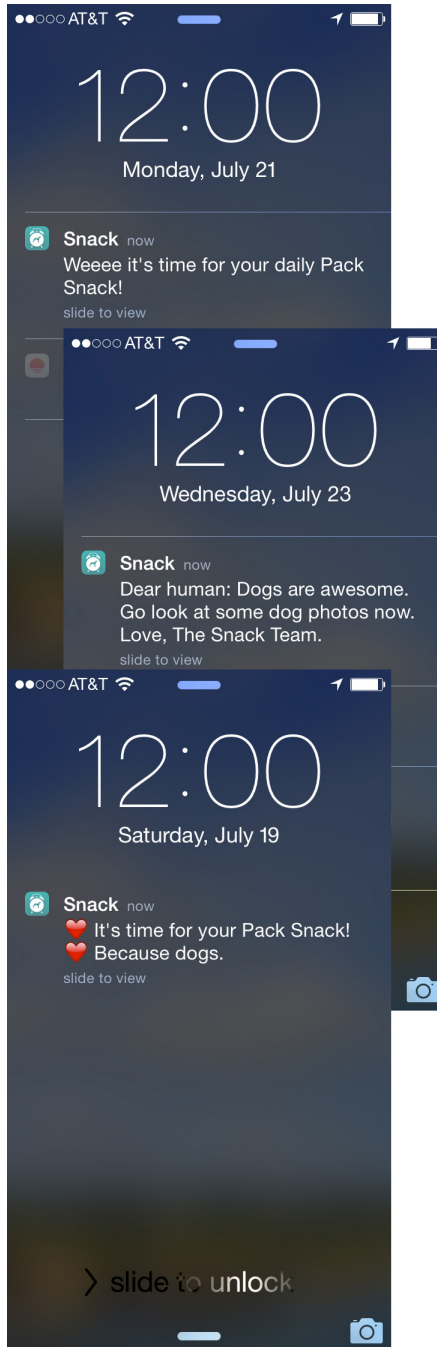


FIGURE 3-34

Daily text notifications entice users back to the application for Snack. The texts are light and funny and entirely appropriate to the flavor and brand of the application (Snack iOS application).

RELATED PATTERNS

“Welcome Area” on page 101

Further Reading

1. Spool, Jared M. “8 More Design Mistakes with Account Sign-in.” http://www.uie.com/articles/account_design_mistakes_part2/.
2. Spool, Jared M. “Account Sign-in: 8 Design Mistakes to Avoid.” http://www.uie.com/articles/account_design_mistakes/.
3. Porter, Joshua. “Design for Sign Up: How to Motivate People to Sign Up for Your Web App.” <http://www.peachpit.com/articles/article.aspx?p=1216150>.
4. Hulick, Samuel. “The Elements of User Onboarding.” <https://www.useronboard.com/training/>.
5. “Go With the Flow, Lessons on Onboarding and Virality.” Presentation by Erin Malone to BayChi, December 2010. <http://bit.ly/1HxByvi>.
6. Information about Facebook Connect. <http://developers.facebook.com/connect.php>.
7. Information about OAuth. <http://oauth.net>.
8. Wroblewski, Luke. *Web Form Design: Filling in the Blank*. Brooklyn, NY: Rosenfeld Media, 2008.
9. “What is OpenID?” <http://openid.net/what/>.

Where's the Rest of Me?

We all perform. It's what we do for each other all the time, deliberately or unintentionally. It's a way of telling about ourselves in the hope of being recognized as what we'd like to be.

RICHARD AVEDON

THE CORE AROUND WHICH social sites revolve is people—who they are, how you know them, what they are contributing. People and their presentations of self and their contributions make for a rich and intertwined community. Without understanding who you are, your friends won't know you. Potential connections won't trust what you say or be encouraged to connect to you. You won't be able to recognize your friends in the crowd of participants, and you won't necessarily trust new people if you don't have some way of formulating a picture of who they are.

The work that goes into defining themselves as well as building connections is often a significant hurdle for users who want to try a new site. Thus, having a well-established identity and network on one site is a considerable deterrent for switching to other sites. Help your users by automating as much as possible; aggregating activity such as comments or reviews and presenting user status streams of connections creates a rich and interesting default without requiring much work from your users.

There is a growing belief that a person's identity belongs to him and not to the software or service in which the data has been created. The proliferation of socially enabled sites that do not interoperate means

people must re-create themselves at each and every site they go to. In some cases, this isn't an issue, because the context of the community often dictates what persona to present. But for many users, the facets of themselves that they would like to present to others just aren't significantly different from site to site.

The success of Facebook Connect—allowing people to use a single set of authentication credentials for multiple sites and applications—has been so huge in part because of shared identity information which encompasses the rich data set that describes a person and by which other people come to know that person.

The collection of patterns in this chapter addresses the various interfaces that present personal and activity information about a person to others. They make up the components that might be considered a user's brand: the image that he projects to others that then creates a perception of him. This includes the profile, the personalization of that profile; how a user's contributions are attributed to him and what control is available for that; the avatar; what information is private; where a user can manage all these pieces of information; and the personal dashboard, where a person see what's happening across his network of connections. The profile should be mixed together with attribution presentation, contact cards, and other public information to create a personal and rich people-centric experience.

The profile and the presentation of a person, whether automated through activity or customized by the individual, is how you get to know someone; it gives your users the opportunity to express whichever side of themselves they are comfortable sharing with the world.

Identity

User identity and the ability to control its presentation is a core element of building a social website. The ability to create and manage an identity within the context of the site is the foundation upon which the rest—contributions, relationships, reputations—is built. It's about people and who they portray themselves to be.

When thinking about these topics, be aware that providing the ability for users to define their names is just step one in helping them craft their identities. As discussed in “Sign-up or Registration” in “Sign-up or Registration”, allowing the user to create a nickname (rather than

be saddled with some horrid identifier he got because the namespace was full) is one of the best design decisions you can make. Wouldn't you rather be known as "jack of all design" rather than "jack089"?

There are several other items that make up an identity for the user. These include "Profile," "Avatars," "Reflectors," and "Attribution." Associated with these patterns are a user's reputation and his connections.

When deciding what to pull together, be aware that you don't need every piece, and that you can start with some elements and add others as needed.

Here are some points to consider across all the patterns in this chapter:

- Let your users be expressive where it matters. For example, Figure 4-1 shows how profiles on About are much more expressive and reflect its more personal approach, whereas profiles on LinkedIn are barely customizable and reflect the professional nature of the interactions (Figure 4-2).

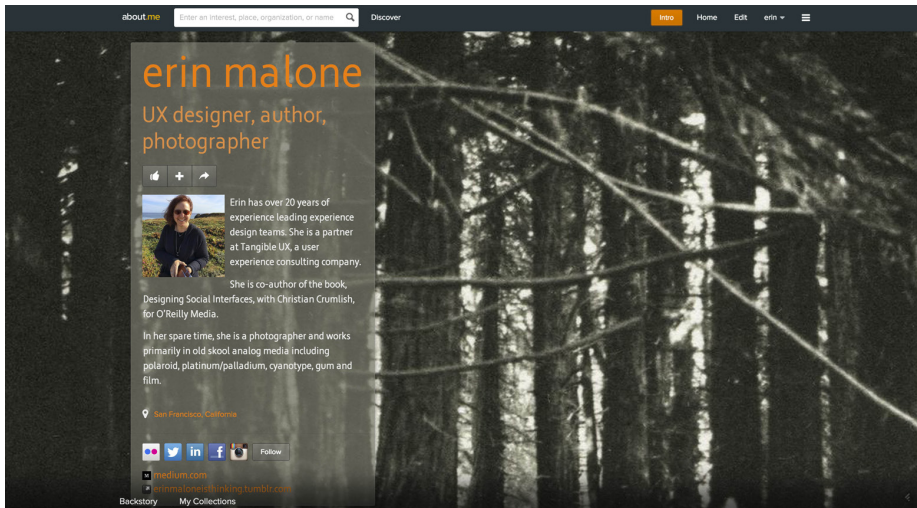


FIGURE 4-1
A customized About profile (<http://about.me>).

Erin Malone 1st

Partner, Tangible UX, LLC. I cowrote Designing Social Interfaces for O'Reilly Media.

San Francisco Bay Area | Computer Software

Current erin malone photography, Tangible UX, Wisegate
 Previous Yahoo!, Boxes and Arrows, America Online
 Education Rochester Institute of Technology

Send a message 500+ connections

www.linkedin.com/in/erinmalone/en Contact Info

Background

Experience

owner
 erin malone photography
 2006 – Present (9 years) | San Francisco Bay Area

fine art photographer specializing in landscapes, cityscapes and abstracts. I work with plastic cameras, pinhole and in alternative processes. currently expanding my work to include some street photography and still life. view my work at <http://www.erinmalone.com>

Owner
 Tangible UX tangible
 July 2008 – Present (6 years 8 months)

Tangible UX (or Tangible) is a user experience consulting firm for Fortune 500, mid-market and start-up companies. Our clients span a wide range of industries, including Communications, Education, Finance, Media, Entertainment and Technology industries. We specialize in helping our clients create intuitive, branded user experiences for sophisticated applications and large corporate websites across desktop, handheld, mobile, and stand-alone devices.

Advisor
 Wisegate W UX
 2010 – Present (5 years)

CoAuthor
 Designing Social Interfaces
 2008 – Present (7 years)

Editor in Chief, Publisher
 Without Lenses
 October 2006 – Present (8 years 5 months)

Editor in chief, publisher and author of the online magazine focused on lensless photography.

Senior Director, Yahoo! Developer Network
 Yahoo! YAHOO!
 November 2007 – July 2008 (9 months)

Manage user experience design and technical documentation for the Yahoo! Developer Network (YDN). Includes oversight for interaction design, visual design and research for the YUI Library, YDN Case Studies, the YDN website and the public Pattern Library.

▼ 1 recommendation

People Also Viewed

Christian Crumlish
 makes stuff that works, runs product and design teams

Erik Gibb
 Principal Designer at e.g. chromatic llc

Bruce Charonnet
 Principal, Tangible UX, LLC

Christina Wodtke
 Curious Human

Kiersten Lammerding
 Lead UX Designer at Telenav

Luke Wroblewski
 Product at Google, Author, Speaker, Advisor

Micah Alpern
 Product & User Experience Leader

Puja Verma
 Staff Interaction Designer at Tangible UX

Brooke Thompson
 Senior Director, User Experience at @WalmartLabs

James Young
 Principal Tangible UX

FIGURE 4-2
 One of the author's LinkedIn profiles (<http://www.linkedin.com>).

- Give users control over how to present themselves. Users should own their actions and have a reputation attached to their identities, but the option to stay anonymous should be offered in some instances.

- Let your users decide who sees what parts of their profiles, as demonstrated in Figure 4-3. Give enough control and permissioned access. Do my friends see my birth date, or does everyone? If it's everyone, be prepared for a lot of fake data.

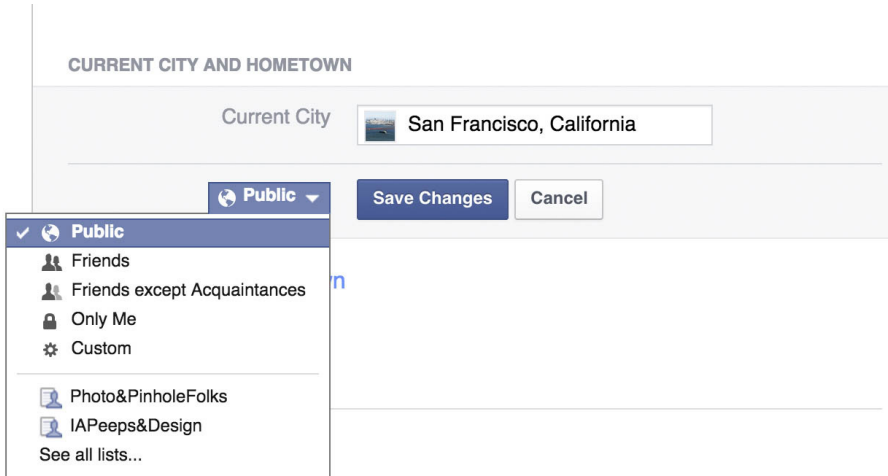


FIGURE 4-3

The privacy settings on Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>) for parts of a profile.

- Be clear on reflecting back to users what they see as editors/owners versus how others see them. The dating sites have this idea down to a science, but on many other websites, who sees what isn't clearly articulated.
- Clearly communicate the privacy policies around the information users add as part of their profile; for example, which items will be seen or not, and which will be used anonymously in aggregation as part of the business data.
- Having robust identity solutions won't alleviate sock puppets (see "Sock Puppets" on page 375) and alternate identities that people might create.

Tripartite Identity Pattern

One of the most misunderstood patterns in social media design is that of user identity management. Product designers often confuse the many different roles required by various user identifiers. This confusion is compounded by using older online services, such as Yahoo!, eBay, and America Online, as canonical references. These services established their identity models based on engineering-centric requirements long before we had a more subtle understanding of user requirements for social media. By conjoining the requirements of engineering (establishing sessions, retrieving database records, etc.) with the user's requirements of recognizability and self-expression, many older identity models actually discourage user participation. For example, Yahoo! found that users consistently listed that the fear of spammers farming their email address was their number one reason for abandoning the generation of user-created content, such as restaurant reviews and message board postings. This ultimately led to a very expensive and radical reengineering of the Yahoo identity model.

Consistently I've found that a *tripartite identity model* best fits most online services and should be forward-compatible with current identity-sharing methods and future proposals.

The three components of user identity are the *account* identifier, the *login* identifier, and the *public* identifier.

Account identifier (DB Key)

From an engineering point of view, there is always one database key—one way to access a user's record and one way to refer to them in cookies and potentially in URLs. In a real sense, the account identifier is the closest thing the company has to a user. It must be unique and permanent. Typically this is represented by a very large random number and is not under the user's control in any way. In fact, from the user's point of view, this identifier should be invisible or at the very least inert; there should be no inherent public capabilities associated with this identifier. For example, it should not be an email address, accepted as a login name, or displayed as a public name or as a status in an instant messenger address.

Login identifier(s) (Session Authentication)

Login identifiers are necessary to create valid sessions associated with an account identifier. Logins are the user's method of granting access to his privileged information on the service. Typically, these are represented by unique and validated name/password pairs. Note that the service need not generate its own unique namespace for login identifiers, but may adopt identifiers from other providers.

For example, many services accept email addresses as login identifiers, usually after verifying that the user is in control of that address. Increasingly, more sophisticated capability-based identities are accepted, such as OpenID and Facebook Connect, which provide login credentials without constantly asking for a name and password.

By separating the login identifier from the account identifier, it is much easier to allow the user to customize his login as the situation changes. Because the account identifier need never change, data migration issues are mitigated. Likewise, separating the login identifier from public identifiers protects the user from those who would crack their accounts. Finally, a service could provide the opportunity to attach multiple different login identifiers to a single account, thus allowing the service to aggregate information gathered from multiple identity suppliers.

Public identifier(s) (Social Identity)

Unlike the technically required account and login identifiers, the public identifier represents how the user wants to be perceived by other users on the service. Think of it like clothing or the name by which people know you. By definition, it does not possess the technical requirement to be 100 percent unique. There are many John Smiths of the world, thousands of them on Amazon.com (<http://amazon.com>), hundreds of them write reviews, and everything seems to work out fine.

Online, a user's public identifier is usually a compound object: a photo, a nickname, and perhaps age, gender, and location. It provides sufficient information for any viewer to quickly interpret personal context. Public identifiers are usually linked to a detailed user profile, where further identity differentiation is available: "Is this the same John Smith from New York who also wrote the review of *The Great Gatsby* that I like so much?" or "Is this the Mary Jones I went to college with?"

A sufficiently diverse service might want to offer multiple public identifiers when a specific context requires it. For example, when playing wild-west poker, a user might prefer to present the public identity of a rough-and-tumble outlaw or a saloon girl without having that imagery associated with his or her movie reviews.

F. RANDALL FARMER, ROSENFELD MEDIA

Profile

The profile is one of the core pieces of a social offering. It becomes the face of the user in your system. Profiles can be an expressive place for users to create a “voice” or “image” of how they want to be seen in the context of your site. Depending on the nature of your site, they can be a hub around which relationships and activities revolve. In many services, profiles are often an aggregate representation of all the activity of a user and her friends.

What

Users want a central, public location from which they can display all the relevant content and information about themselves to others—both those they know and those they don’t (Figure 4-4).

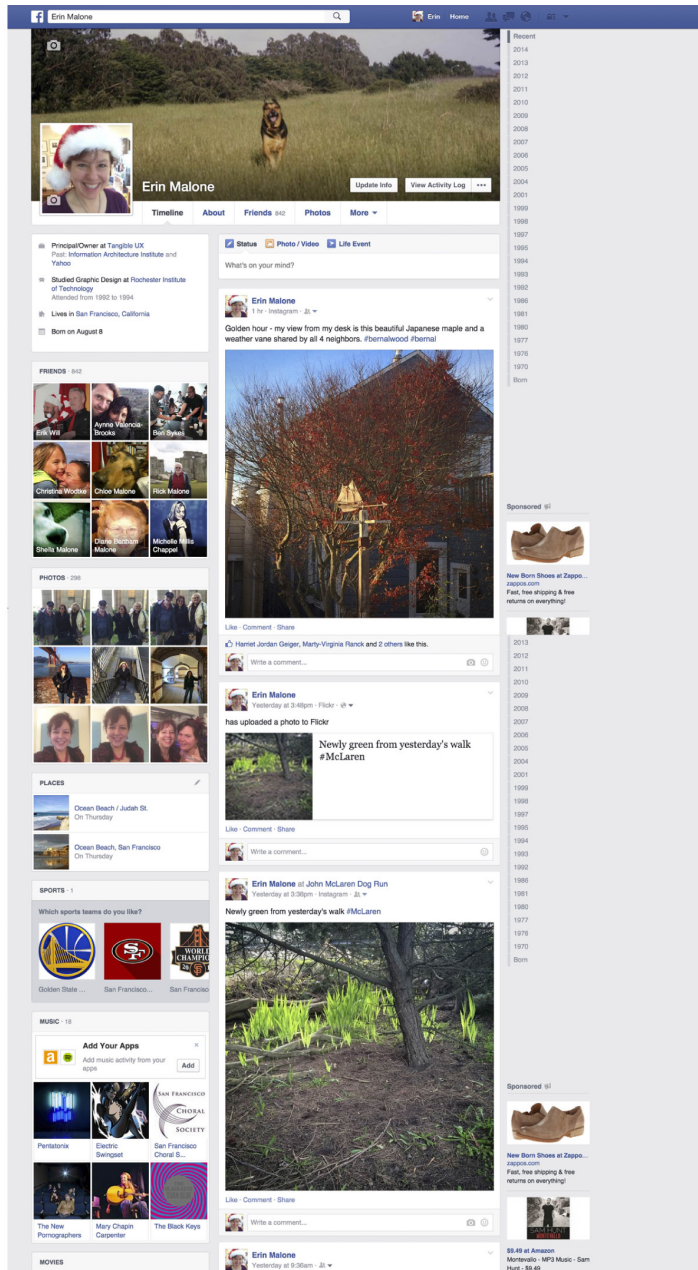
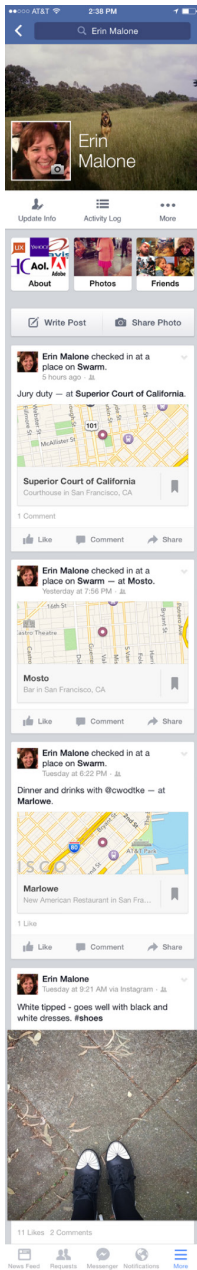


FIGURE 4-4

One of the author's profile on Facebook, for both mobile and web (Facebook iOS application and <http://www.facebook.com>).

Use when

- Your site/app encourages a lot of user-generated content and you want one place to show a specific user’s contribution.
- Your service encourages relationship building.
- You want to provide users with a means to look up another user to learn more about her.
- You want to give users the ability to express their personalities.
- You want users to share information about themselves with others.
- You want to present a user’s activity stream (such as status alerts) from site and/or Internet activity.

How

CORE PROFILE

- Provide the user with the tools to customize his display name or provide a nickname option.
- Consider collecting both a first and last name, but also accommodate a display name, which can be a handle, a nickname, or the user’s name. Let it be his choice. The full name is shared with connections, which then disambiguates who a person might be, especially if his associated image is an icon or an avatar.
- Don’t make the display name the same as the user login. Doing this gives phishers and other nefarious persons half of a user’s login information. You should provide a safe place for people to connect, and guarding their login and personal information is critical.
- Give users options to select which items they want seen by the public and which they want to keep private or just between “friends,” as shown in Figure 4-5.

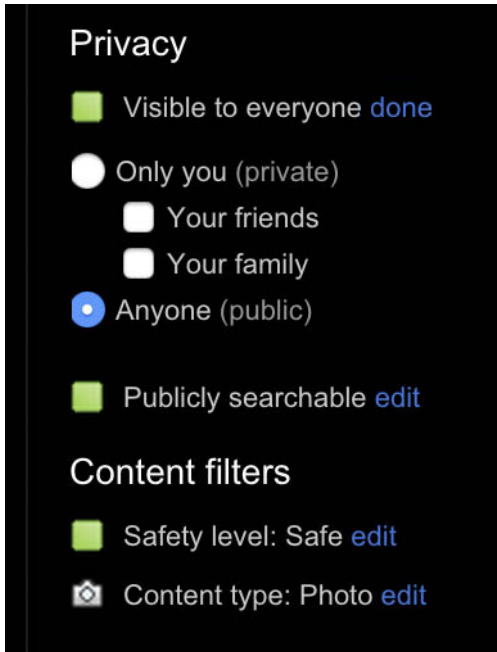


FIGURE 4-5

Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com>) gives users the options to designate what is seen by whom when an item is uploaded.

- Give users the opportunity to customize portions of the profile. The profile is a form of self-expression. About profiles represent one extreme of this. LinkedIn and Facebook profiles are much more rigid in their customization, restricting it to text, an image, and the user's activity to differentiate and define a person's personality.
- Don't force the user to publicly display all her information.
- Collect only the amount of information necessary for meaningful relationships or community activities. Don't force the user to fill in all fields or data sections in order for the profile to be displayed.
- Give the user the ability to upload one or more of her images, such as shown in Figure 4-6).

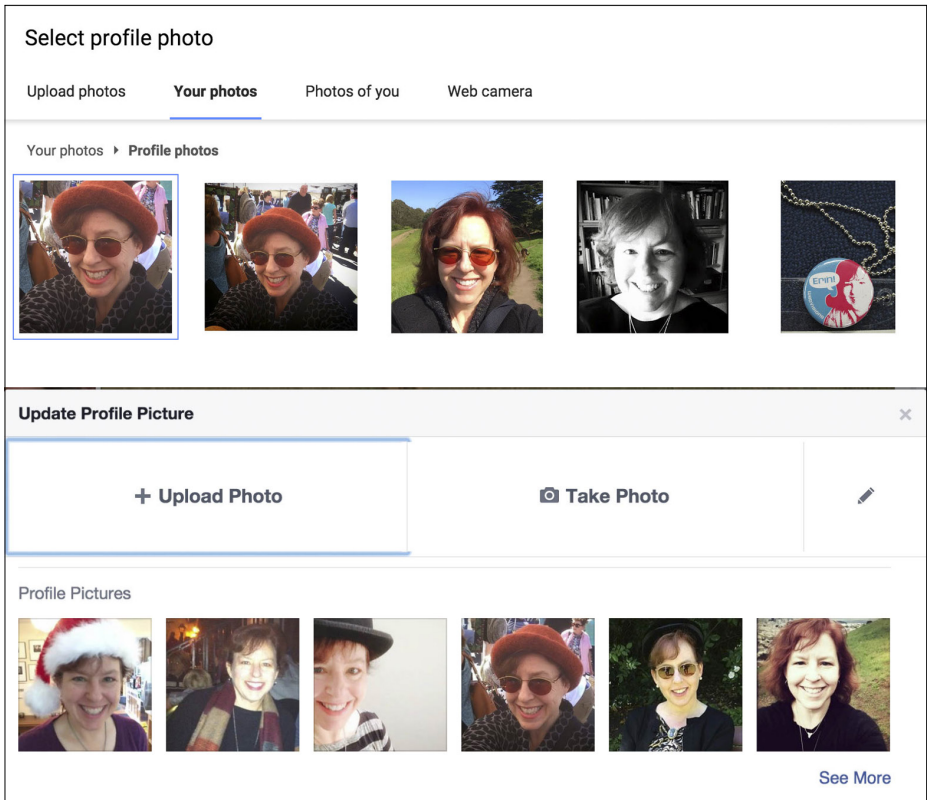


FIGURE 4-6

With both Google+ and Facebook, users can upload multiple images to use for the profile. The user can swap them in and out whenever she pleases quite easily (<http://plus.google.com> and <http://www.facebook.com>).

- Provide a view into the profile as a user’s network will see it.
- Provide a view into the profile as the public—not connections—will see it.

Profile preferences and updating

- Profile preferences should be readily available to the user who owns the profile. If the user is logged in, present a large, easy-to-find link to edit the profile.
- One of the tough decisions to make is whether any elements of the profile are tied to the account and not editable.

- The data fields selected for the profile should be individually editable, with as many elements as possible pulled in automatically (if applicable). Data for the profile is often gathered by presenting a series of questions and then filling out a series of forms and free-text fields.
- Collect information for the profile data entries through site activity if possible.
- Always provide a mechanism for the user to go back and change information later, but don't force profile completion if this is unnecessary to the core site experience.
- Encourage profile completion by giving users clues that indicate how complete their profiles are or by using defaults (e.g., a default avatar) that encourages customization, but don't force completion if it isn't necessary for a good user experience.
- If possible, give the user the ability to migrate profile content, a profile image, nickname, and core personal information from other services using the OpenSocial API.
- Use WYSIWYG + lightweight edit links, as depicted in Figure 4-7.



FIGURE 4-7

LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com>) has light inline-edit controls, seen only by the profile owner, on each module of the profile.

- Wherever applicable, the profile page displayed to the user should be as close as possible to what the consumers of the profile will see. The owner of the profile should be able to get an accurate sense of what others will see without the need to preview the profile.
- The differences between the consumer’s view and the owner’s view are typically limited to additional “Edit” links that point to forms for updating content.
- Profiles that include a lot of permissioned content might include permissions indicators for denoting public versus permissioned versus private content. Robust profiles also might include controls for inline editing as well as drag-and-drop handles that appear on hover.
- When the owner of the profile selects a link to his profile, load the profile page in Edit mode, not Preview mode.
- Don’t overload the profile page with content management options for the content owner.
- Do provide a separate “control panel” for the owner to manage his content.
- Do provide a separate Updates/Status Consumption Environment so that the owner of the relationships can keep tabs on the content generated by related people.

Private information

- Some of the information that might be collected in an account profile is private, such as a phone number or email address.
- Ensure that information tied to the account, such as passwords, password retrieval questions, credit card information, and other financial and personal information, stays in a private area that is accessible to only the account holder.
- Keep private information in an Account area, separated from the Profile display.
- Offer the option to make private information public to only those people in the closest circles of connections, such as family or close friends (see Figures 4-8 and 4-9).

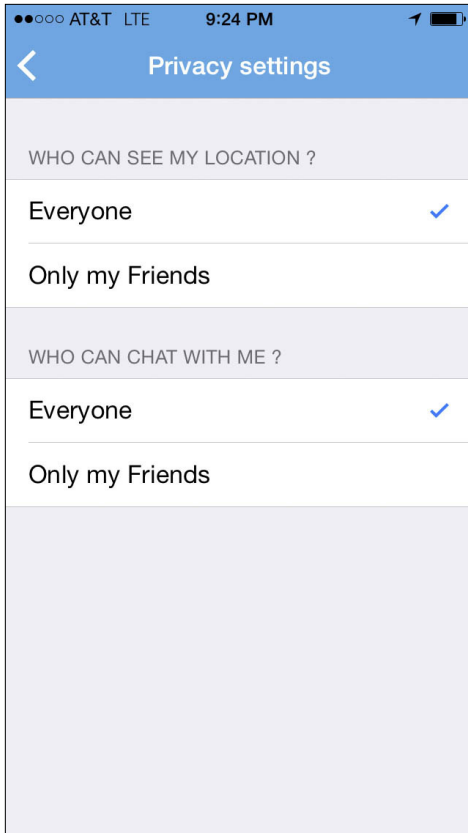


FIGURE 4-8 Privacy settings in Blobix. Users can adjust both location and contact capabilities (Blobix iOS application).

First name	Erin	Public 
Last name	Malone	Public 
Gender	Female	Public 

FIGURE 4-9 Privacy settings in Skype are display only. The system informs the user as to who can see which pieces of information but doesn't actually allow the user to change the setting. This is especially disturbing when the system defaults some private information to public display.

Profile decorating

Many sites that revolve around the profile, such as About (Figure 4-10), encourage profile decorating as part of the profile owner's personal expression. Self-expression is a key component of the experience and has a direct impact on the perception of the creator, as much as any other type of content she might upload. Even experiences such as LinkedIn and Twitter have included the ability to add background images to personalize and differentiate the profile, although none of them affords as much customization as the MySpace of old.

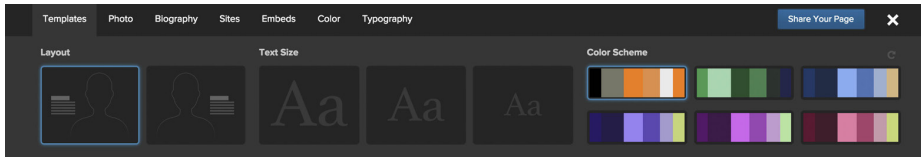


FIGURE 4-10

The profile on About offers users the option to add colors, images, and full-screen background images (<http://about.me>).

- Contrast this to more task-oriented sites such as LinkedIn or Facebook, for which the content and interactions among people are considered primary, and the interface exists mainly as a means to house these. When developing a profile system, think about what is important to your users, their goals on your site, and how important the profile and self-expression might be in that context.
- To encourage adoption, offer easily applied skins; that is, the ability to upload background images and custom layout options.
- For more personalized profiles or for a younger audience, offer add-ons such as stickers, mini-avatars, furniture, or props for expanded expression opportunities.
- Give advanced users the means to do more customization, such as CSS and HTML, but be willing to have a wide variety of quality in the system.
- Provide users with a way to add different content modules or applications on an à la carte basis.

Profile claiming

- Some sites might automatically create a bare-bones profile for a person and then allow that user to claim ownership of it.
- An unverified or unclaimed profile may exist for a user through several methods (comment contribution, a friend's invitation, etc.).
- Users leaving anonymous comments or other anonymous content might want to eventually claim ownership of that content to build their reputations as contributors.
- Users may have skeletal profiles made for them when their friends join the site and invite them to participate.
- Provide a way for an invited user or owner of anonymous content to easily claim her profile or aggregated content. Dropping an encoded cookie is one way to facilitate later retrieval of anonymous content.
- Verification of some data string (such as a verified email address) can pair a premade profile with the intended user.
- Regardless of the technical method for allowing this, make sure it's easy, unobtrusive, and not creepy. A few years ago, Yahoo! released a profile experiment called Mash, where users could make profiles for their friends and then invite them to come claim the profile. Many people didn't understand why there was already content on "their" profile page and why people other than themselves could edit it. It was a fun experiment if you "got it," but confusing and creepy for everyone else.

Faceted identity

Users are quite skilled at slicing their identities up depending on the context of interaction. For example, who you are in your family is different than the slice of yourself you present at the office. Online it's no different. See Figures 4-11, 4-12, and 4-13.

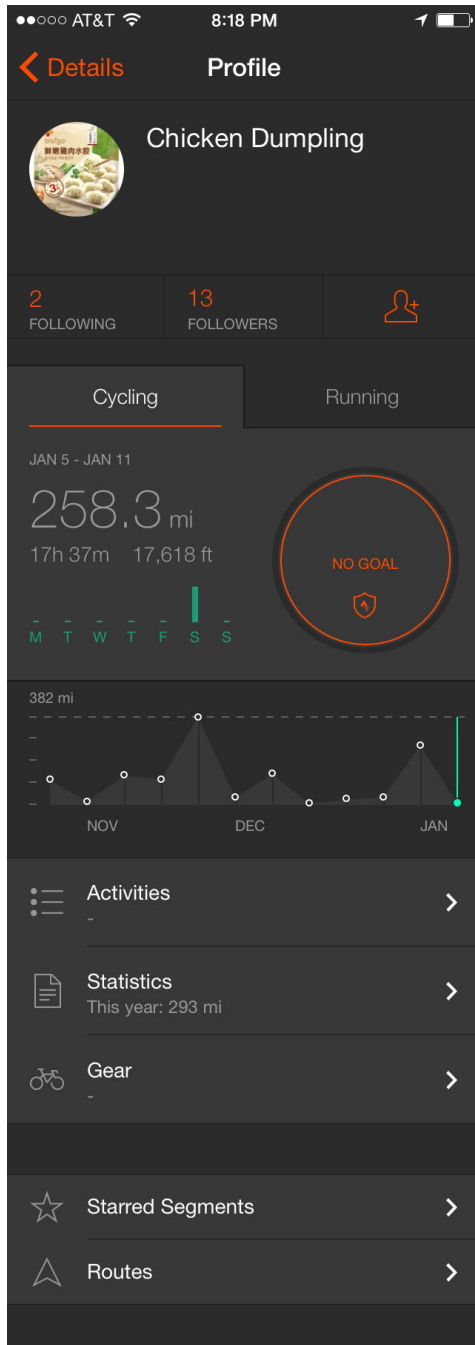


FIGURE 4-11
A sports-contextual profile on Strava mobile application (Strava iOS application).

Erin Malone's Profile (edit profile)



details Female, San Francisco, CA (0 mi)
activity Joined in September 2008, last active this month

367 ratings (3.88 avg)
 14 reviews
 more photos (0)

Erin's favorite books remove



Create a 'favorites' shelf | Feature a different shelf | More...

Erin's Bookshelves

read (1054) to-read (182) fantasy (35) sci-fi (8)
 currently-reading (19) stephen-king (87) mystery (30)

Cloud | Stats | More...

Erin is Currently Reading

Erin Malone is currently reading
Dark Places
 by Gillian Flynn (Goodreads Author)
 bookshelves: currently-reading
 Jan 10, 2015 10:50AM · comment

Want to Read
 Rate this book
 ★★★★★

Erin Malone is currently reading
The Art of Asking; or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Let People Help
 by Amanda Palmer (Goodreads Author)
 bookshelves: currently-reading
 Jan 09, 2015 06:21PM · comment

Currently R...
 Rate this book
 ★★★★★

Erin Malone is currently reading
Season Of The Harvest (Harvest Trilogy, #1)
 by Michael R. Hicks (Goodreads Author)
 bookshelves: currently-reading
 Dec 17, 2014 10:48AM · comment

Currently R...
 Rate this book
 ★★★★★

Erin's Recent Updates 758

Erin Malone is currently reading
Dark Places
 by Gillian Flynn (Goodreads Author)

Jan 10, 2015 10:50AM · like · comment

Erin Malone started reading
The Art of Asking; or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Let People Help
 by Amanda Palmer (Goodreads Author)

Currently R...
 Rate this book
 ★★★★★

Shine.
 Discover the software that makes you a great presenter

Prezi
 TRY PREZI FREE

Erin's Friends (27)

- Brad Lauster**
67 books | 115 friends
- Alex**
19 books | 23 friends
- Micah**
294 books | 101 friends
- MI**
114 books | 8 friends
- Christian**
29 books | 117 friends
- Ryan**
328 books | 91 friends
- Joshua Kaufman**
16 books | 291 friends
- Livia**
74 books | 27 friends

More friends...

People Erin is Following

- 16 people are following Erin**

sponsored books

The Eye-Dancers: YA Sci-fi/Fantasy \$0.00
 She drew them in through the

FIGURE 4-12
 A books-contextual profile on goodreads.com (<http://goodreads.com>).

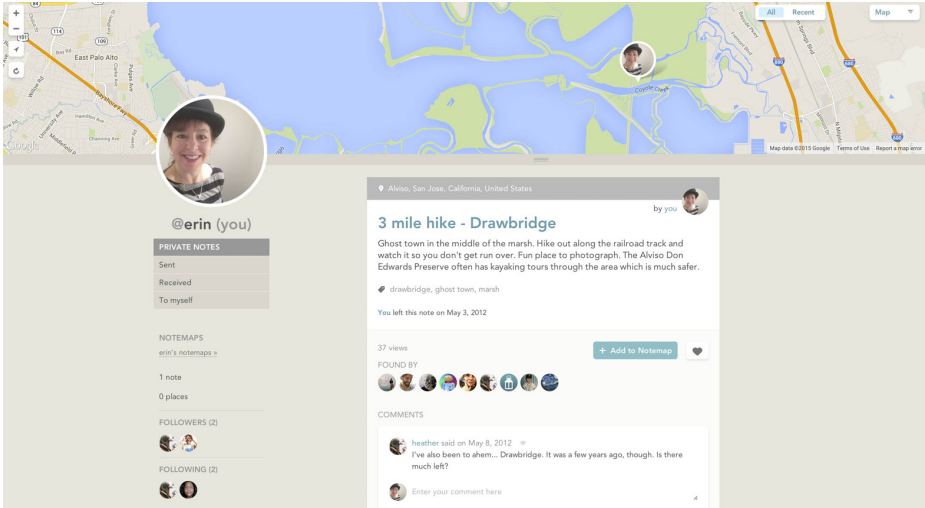


FIGURE 4-13

And finally, a location-contextual profile on Findery (<http://www.findery.com>).

- Consider the context of your experience and cater the profile to it.
- Whenever possible, keep the core user identity information consistent—username, gender, location—through the use of a central design solution. All other information should be collected or automatically aggregated based on the activities of the site.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Use the emerging common profile/identity fields as defined in the OpenSocial spec (<http://bit.ly/1Jo9hK6>). Select the data items that are meaningful to your context and disregard the rest, but be consistent in the field labels and how the information is stored. This will ensure future portability for your users and will make it possible for you to import data from other sources when a user joins. The goal is to let the user bring her data (where applicable) with her around the Internet rather than forcing her to rebuild a profile every time she signs up for something new.

CONSIDERATIONS

The type of information collected and presented shapes a picture of the user and sets a tone for your site. For example, LinkedIn collects professional information about current and past work experience (refer back to Figure 4-2). Profiles are supplemented by the addition of recommendations from other users and applications from third-party developers.

Facebook has a series of free-form fields, but as Figure 4-14 illustrates, it also has a robust section of past school attendance. Given that Facebook started as a university social network, this is appropriate. It has since expanded its profile to also include work experience and applications from third-party developers.

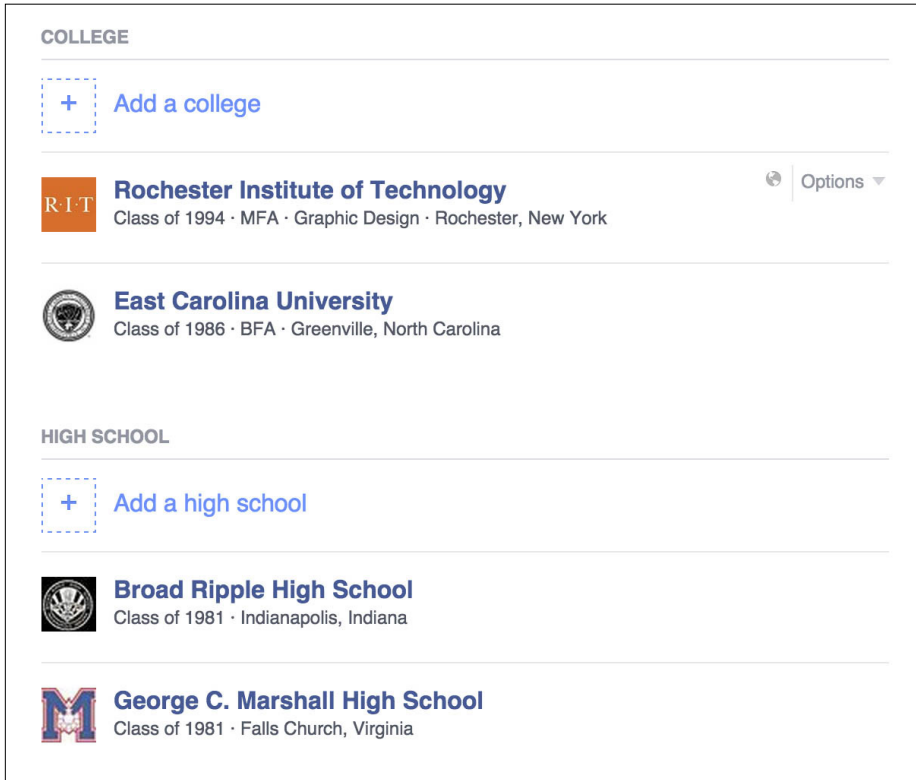


FIGURE 4-14

Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>) has a robust area for collecting school information. School affiliation is one of the ways that Facebook creates networks of people with similar backgrounds.

Dating profiles such as Tinder, OkCupid, HowAboutWe, and others revolve around the profile, so the information collected about the user's marital status, the types of relationships the user is seeking, and interests such as music and video are appropriate in this context (see Figures 4-15 and 4-16).

FIGURE 4-15

OkCupid's profile asks for a series of things related to dating, including demographic details looking for sexual orientation, relationship status, and other things that would not be appropriate in other contexts (<http://www.okcupid.com> and OKCupid iOS application).

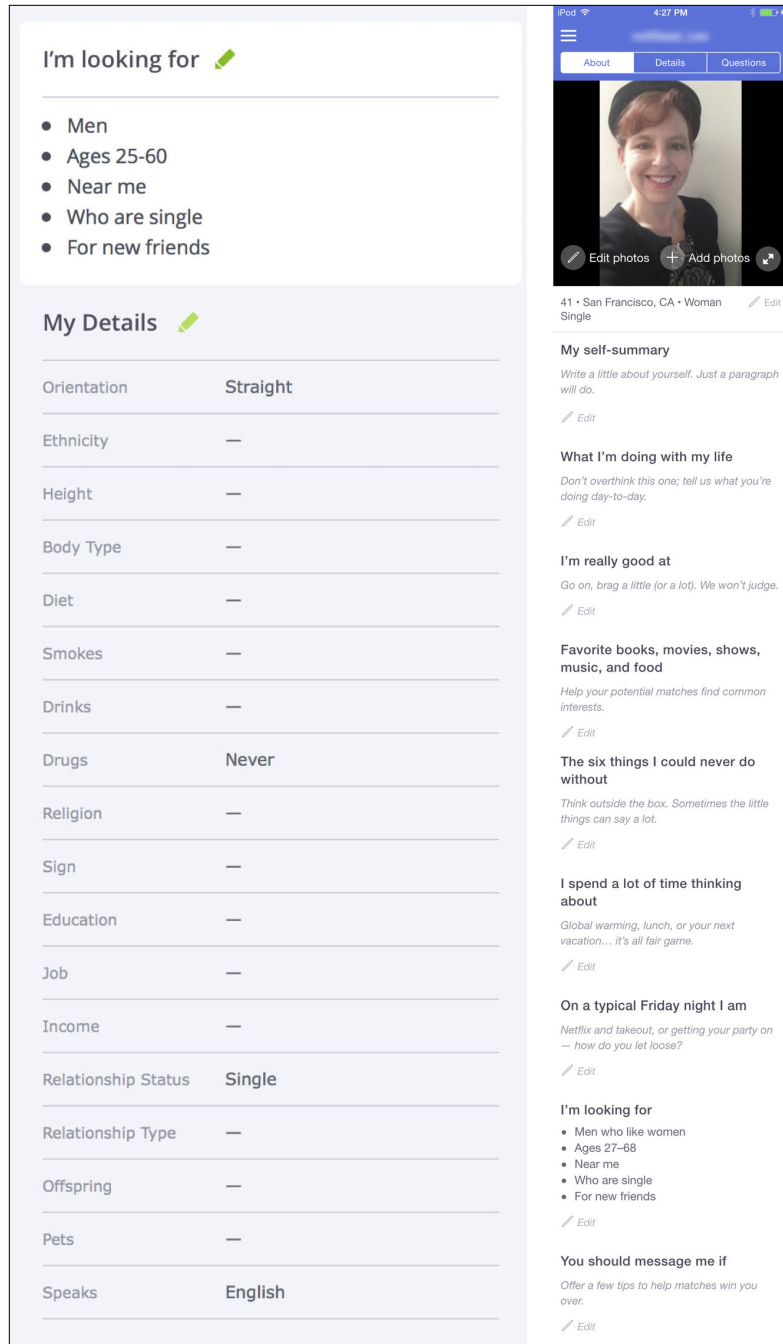




FIGURE 4-16 How About We, another dating service, asks for similar information but displays it in an entirely different manner (HowAboutWe iOS application).

Each of these social networks uses specific profile data to give users an idea of its social emphasis and the community that exists on the site.

OPEN QUESTIONS

As the various entities such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Google put forward open standards for the profile and a user's identity, making a decision about which protocol to adopt becomes increasingly important. Most of the large players in the space have adopted and are participating in the OpenSocial standard. Following this standard, or being compatible with it, will make your users' data more accessible to them in the long run.

Making a decision to go against the emerging standards might be interesting to you in the short term, but it might have negative ramifications in the long run as more and more users of services demand the ability to carry their data back and forth between sites.

Why

A central profile for your service is the hub around which relationships and other activities can revolve. Carefully selecting the data fields that make sense for your site will ensure that the profile has meaningful context to your users. Providing customizing features will encourage personalization and ownership of the profile and the site, which in turn supports longer-term usage.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Attribution” on page 148

“Identity Cards or Contact Cards” on page 144

AS SEEN ON

Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>)

LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com>)

OkCupid (<http://www.okcupid.com> and OkCupid mobile application)

HowAboutWe (<http://www.howaboutwe.com> and HowAboutWe mobile application)


Strava mobile application

GoodReads (<http://www.goodreads.com>)


Testimonials (or Personal Recommendations)

Testimonials are endorsements that can provide information about a person or about aspects of the person's interests or skills, such as those shown in Figure 4-17. This can help round out a profile and provide alternative perspectives.

Recommendations Received (1) ▾ Given (12)

 Erin, would you like to recommend James?
[Recommend James ▸](#)

Owner
Tangible UX, LLC

 **Richard Heggem**
Senior Sales & Business Development Executive

“ I think the thing I appreciate most about James is his intuitive 6th sense about web design and navigation. He always has a wealth of ideas that I've found we can ignore, but usually to our detriment. He is straight up, honest, insightful and always a pleasure to work with.

January 27, 2006, Richard was James's client

FIGURE 4-17

Testimonials or Recommendations in LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com>) are presented in the profile and can help shape the perception of that person.

What

A person is interested in what others think about him or his work and wants others to see this as supporting his own information and skillset.

Use when

- You want to provide users with means to provide endorsements for other people in their networks.
- You want to share information from other people about a person in his profile.

How

- Provide a module in the profile for presentation of testimonials or recommendations.
- Offer the tools for people from the user's network to write a testimonial or recommendation for the user.
- Present a clear call to action when a person is viewing a profile that is not her own. Both Flickr and LinkedIn provide links to the main body of the profile in a secondary column of information.
- Consider allowing the testimonial writer to select how she knows this person, as illustrated in Figure 4-18.

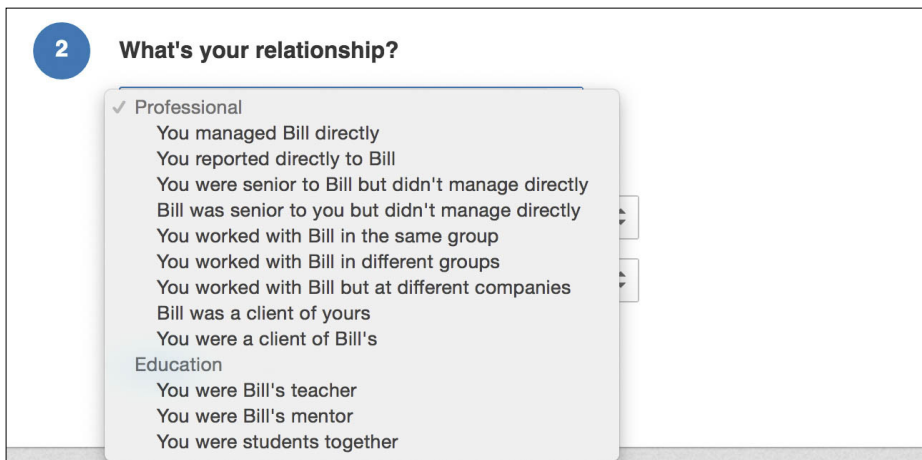


FIGURE 4-18

LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com>) asks how the writer knows the person in order to give context to the recommendation.

- Provide a method for the person being written about to approve the testimonial or recommendation before it is published. After all, the profile belongs to the user, and she should be in control of the content presented.
- Clearly articulate to the writer that the recommendation must be approved before being published. This will deter people who want to be nasty or rude or who are trying to spam the profile.

- Provide attribution for the testimonial or recommendation and link that back to the writer’s own profile. This will help lend credibility to the recommendation.
- Consider presenting on the user’s profile the recommendations that she has written for others.
- Consider presenting on the user’s dashboard (see “Personal Dashboard” on page 137) a block or module showing recent recommendations or testimonials written by people in the user’s network. This could also be presented in an activity stream (see “Activity Streams” on page 175).
- Consider a light-weight alternative for users to present their perspective of others. LinkedIn offers a feature called “Endorsements,” and much like Ratings or Tagging, the investment for a user to leave feedback is low and is an easy way to encourage engagement in the service.

Why

Letting users provide an endorsement for people in their network makes it possible for them to share positive information about that person in a more permanent and meaningful way than a comment or more temporary flag of approval. For professional-leaning sites such as LinkedIn, recommendations provide profile viewers with information about the person from a variety of perspectives, which can help in making hiring or business decisions.

AS SEEN ON

About (<http://www.about.me>)

LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com>)

Personal Dashboard

What

The user wants to check in to see status updates from her friends, current activity from her network, comments from friends on recent posts, and other happenings from across her network (Figure 4-19).

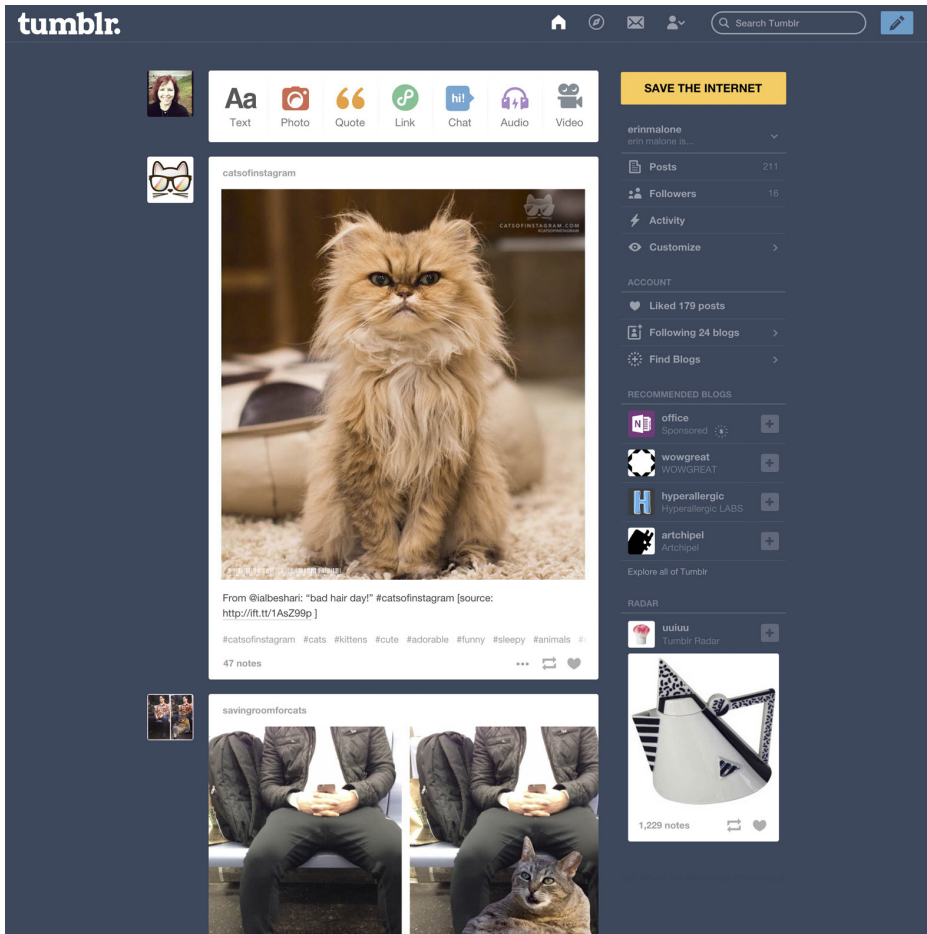


FIGURE 4-19

On Tumblr (<http://www.tumblr.com>), after a user is logged in, the home page is a personal dashboard, providing access to recent activity from friend and most other site features.

Use when

- The experience of the site revolves around the activities of people and their networks, regardless of whether the activity takes place on the network.
- You want a companion to the public profile.
- You want to encourage repeat usage.

How

- Provide access to other features and applications from the personal dashboard, as demonstrated in Figure 4-20.

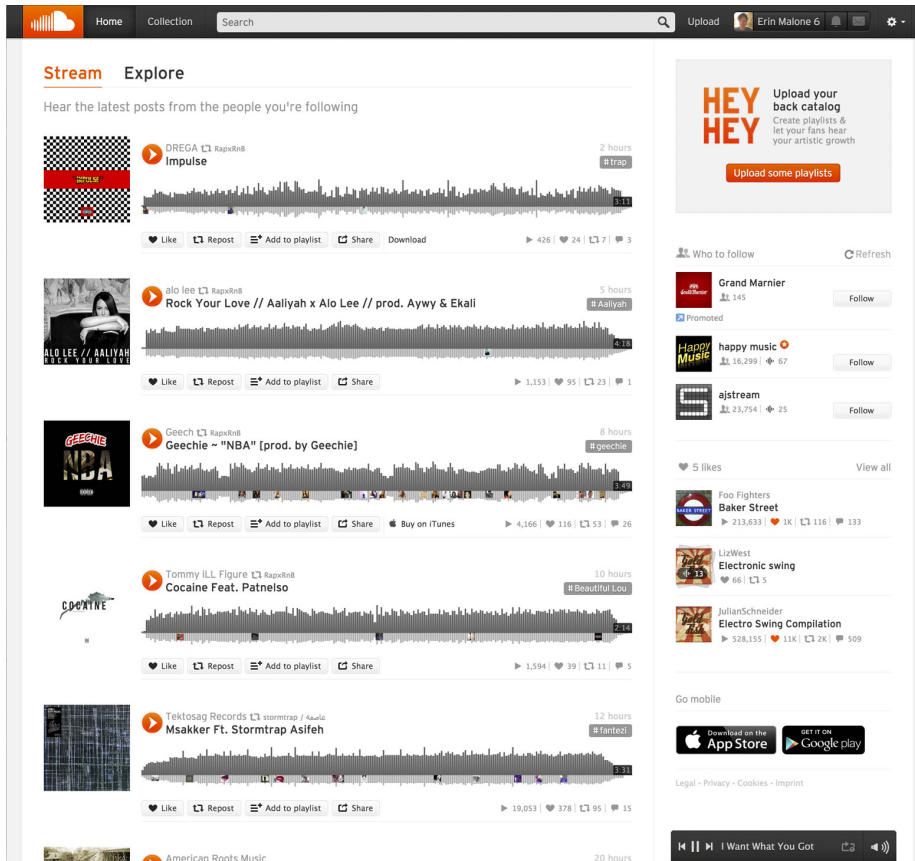


FIGURE 4-20

SoundCloud's (<http://www.soundcloud.com>) signed-in home page shows recent posts from people I follow, makes recommendations for new people to follow, and shows the latest streams I have liked.

- Provide a way for users to select what elements they want displayed in their dashboards. Give them a reason to come back repeatedly.
- Don't hide important social aspects to make room for editorial or advertising.
- Give users the ability to supplement their network's onsite activity updates with RSS feeds of other activity from other sites.

- Provide the ability to create a status update directly in the dashboard if status is an important part of the site.
- Provide easy access to the profiles of people in the user’s network.
- Provide easy access to the user’s own profile for review and editing.

Why

The Personal Dashboard is the companion to the Profile. The dashboard should contain information and access to activities that the user wants to participate in on an ongoing basis. From the dashboard, she should be able to click into her friends’ profiles to get more information about them and their interests. For sites like Facebook, Twitter, and even the activity site MeetUp, the dashboard is the user’s version of the home page for the site and revolves around recent activity of all kinds.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Profile” on page 118

AS SEEN ON

Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>)

Twitter (<http://www.twitter.com> and Twitter mobile application)

MeetUp (<http://www.meetup.com>)

SoundCloud (<http://www.soundcloud.com>)

Reflectors

What

A user needs to be able to edit the public identity he is participating under when viewing his profile or creating content (Figure 4-21).

Use when

- A user may participate and need a persistent way to get to her public profile.
- A user is about to participate and wants to change the display of her attribution.
- To help clarify and confirm to a user that he is actually logged in.

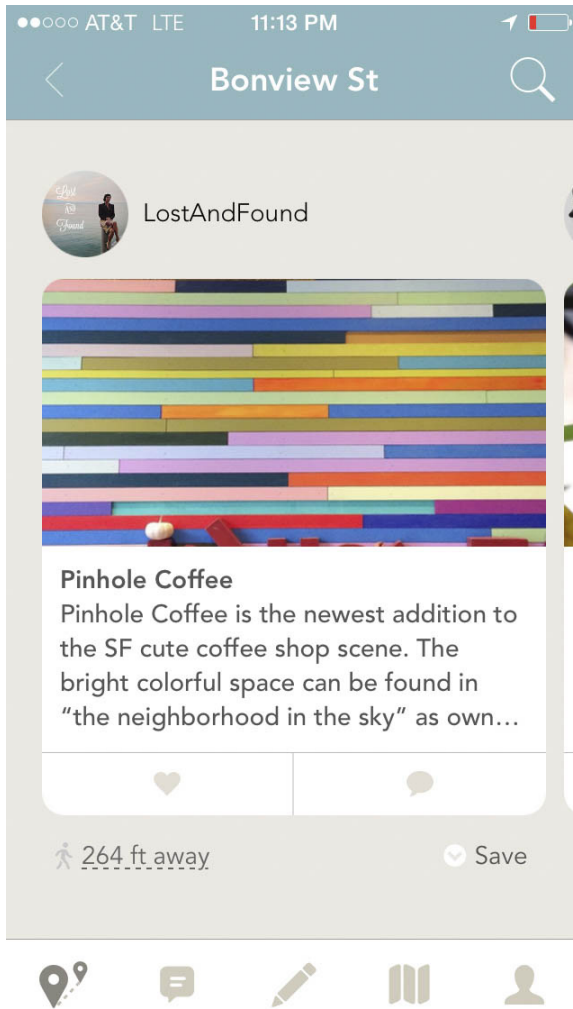


FIGURE 4-21
A simple identity reflector on Findery lets the user know how others will see the attribution on a piece of content (Findery iOS application).

How

- Reflect the user’s current public identity back to him.
- Present a link to view the public profile (if any) for the current context. If a contextual profile is not applicable, present a link to the user’s primary public profile.
- Limit the identity information to the display name and display image. There is no need to show age, gender, location, or contextual identity information back to the owner/user. Save that data for the public view.

EDITING THE DISPLAY NAME

- Provide an easy way to change the display of how the user will be seen (Figure 4-22).

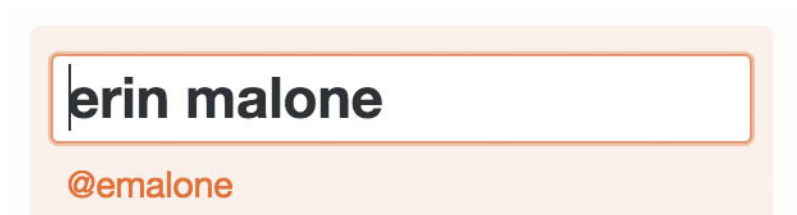


FIGURE 4-22

With Twitter (<http://www.twitter.com>), users can change the display name on the profile whenever they want. However, it doesn't allow changing the @ name that is associated with the account identity.

- To reduce identity theft and spam, encourage the use of a display name that does not expose an authentication ID or email address.
- Provide the means to post in a “publicly anonymous” way to reduce the need for additional, separate identities.
- In contexts that require it, provide a way for a user to post using an alternate, separate identity.
- Place the control at the bottom of a content submission form so that users focus first on their contributions (not on whether they need to change their identities).

EDITING THE DISPLAY IMAGE

- Present a link that gives the user the ability to edit and change out his display image, as depicted in Figure 4-23.
- Present a window that displays the set of images belonging to the user. Use a floating window to keep the user in context.
- Give the user the option to select one of his existing images (or avatar) or let him add a new image, as presented in Figure 4-24.

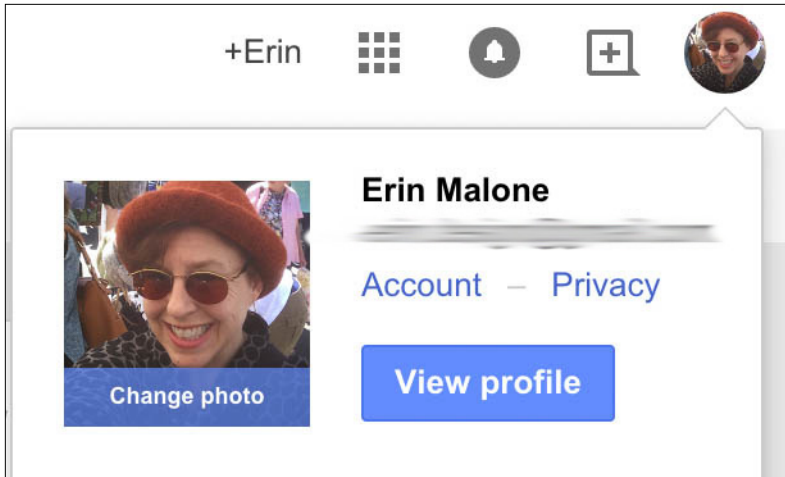


FIGURE 4-23

A simple overlay, in Google's Chrome browser, with which the user can change the image associated with the display name.

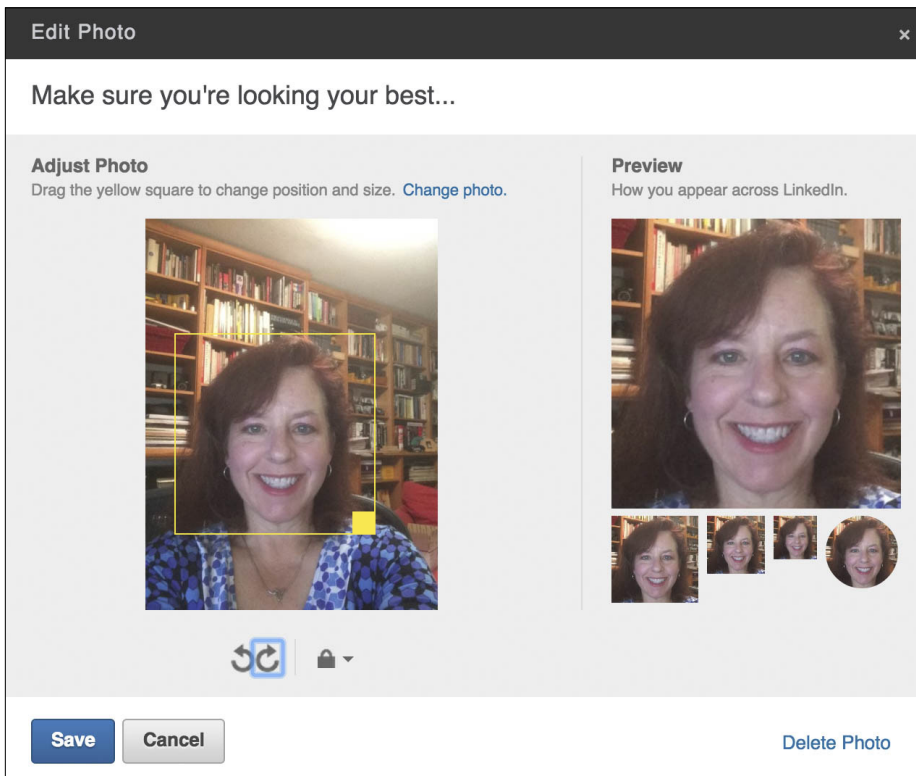


FIGURE 4-24

LinkedIn has an inline photo cropper overlay that gives users the ability to adjust the placement of the image within the square presentation.

- On sites with multiple contexts (MeetUp for example), let the user decide whether the new image should be used in all contexts or just the current context.

WHY

Reflecting back the name and image with which a user is currently associated affords control over that person's identity. There might be specific nicknames or a preferred identity in certain contexts that a person wants to use. Giving the user an opportunity to see how she will be seen gives peace of mind as well as a sense of control and ownership on the site, which in turn encourages more participation.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Identity Cards or Contact Cards,” described next

“Profile” on page 118

AS SEEN ON

LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com>)

MeetUp (<http://www.meetup.com>)

Tumblr (<http://www.tumblr.com>)

Identity Cards or Contact Cards

What

A user needs to get more information about another participant in an online community without interrupting his current task. The needed information might include identity information (to aid in recognition and to help the user relate to the participant) or reputation information (to help the user make decisions regarding trust). (See Figures 4-25 and 4-26.)

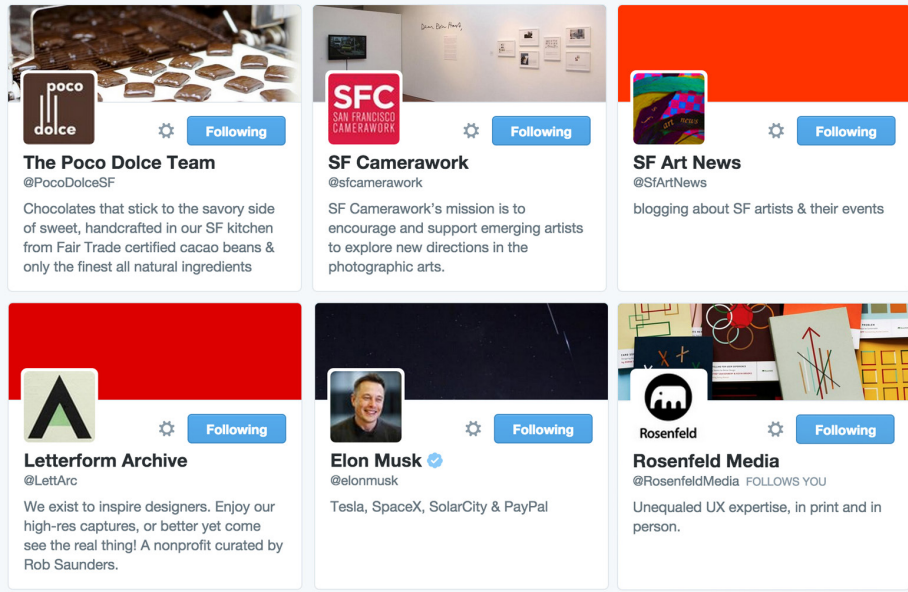


FIGURE 4-25
A contact card as used on Twitter.

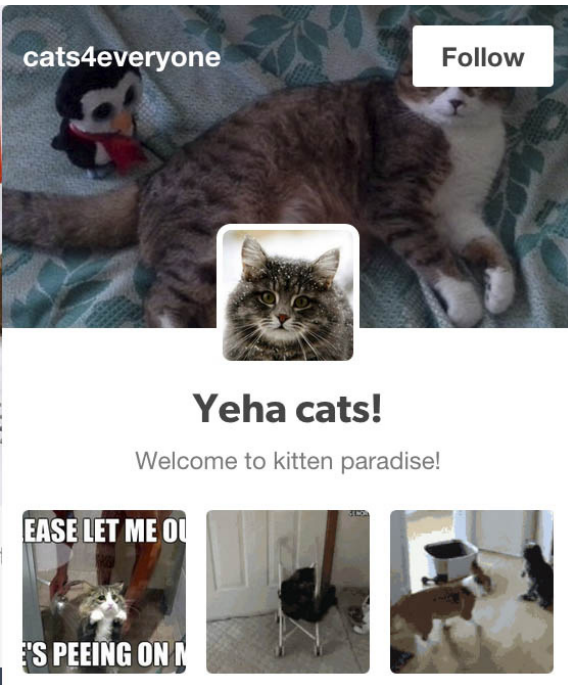


FIGURE 4-26
A contact card as used on Tumblr.

Use when

- A user's display image or display name is shown.
- Additional information about the participants is desired (in context) without adding clutter to the screen.

How

- Open a small panel when the user hovers over a target's display name or image.
- Present a larger version of the user's display image, the user's full display name, and other pertinent information that the target chooses to share with the community (real name, age, gender, location).
- Present a Relationship Reflector, as shown in Figures 4-27 and 4-28.

FIGURE 4-27

Google+ indicates whether a user is one of your connections and, if not, gives the +Add call to action right there. The reflector also shows how many connections you have in common.

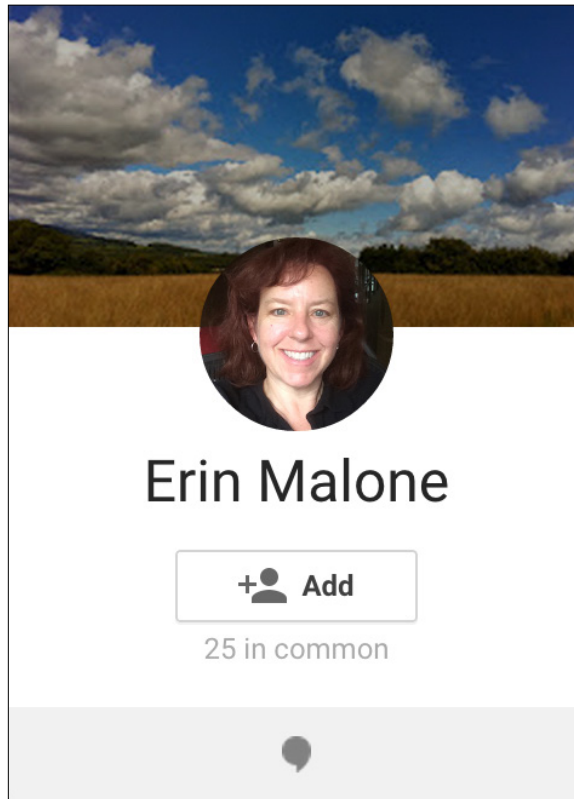




FIGURE 4-28

Facebook indicates latest relationship activity, how many connections in common, and if they are already a friend, just being followed, or both.

- Provide the ability to subscribe to, follow, connect to, unsubscribe, or block the user from this panel.
- Optionally extend the previously described ability with contextual identity information, such as reputation information, connections in common, or links to new participation in the current context.

Why

- Identity cards or badges make it possible for the user to interact with another participant in an online community in a predictable manner and in context.
- They provide the means to reduce identity-related clutter on the screen.
- When ID cards are used, Presence Indicators, Reputation Emblems, and Relationship Reflectors can be tucked away but easily accessible. Truncated nicknames can be expanded. Block links can be made less salient. Small or tiny (and often illegible) display images can be shown at a more recognizable size to better humanize an online community and increase positive participation.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Attribution” on page 148

“Profile” on page 118

“Reflectors” on page 140

AS SEEN ON

Twitter (<http://www.twitter.com>)

Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>)

Tumblr (<http://www.tumblr.com>)

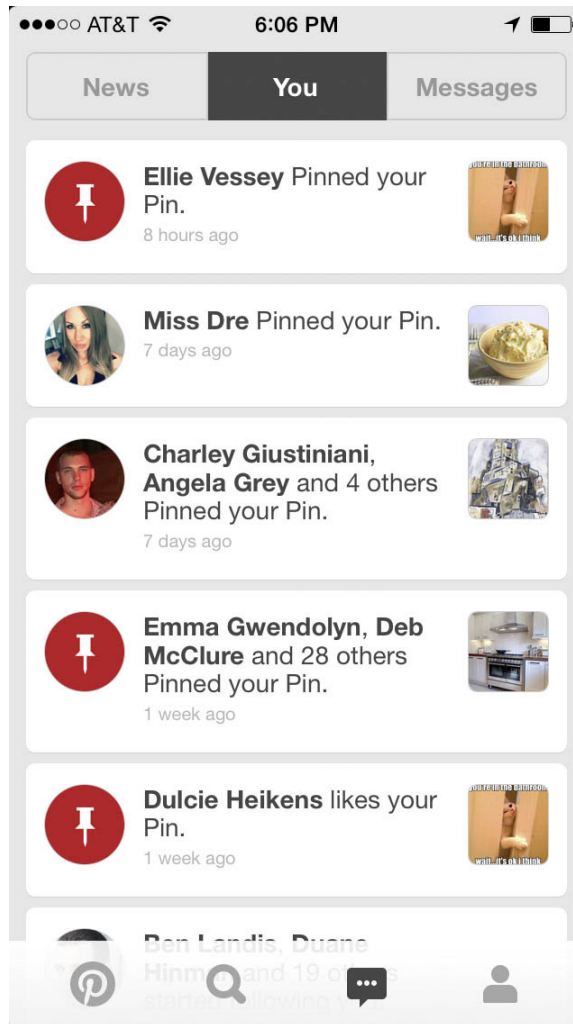
Google+ (<https://plus.google.com>)

Attribution

What

A content consumer needs to understand the source of a contribution, and the source of a contribution needs to receive proper credit for his post, as illustrated in Figure 4-29. A user needs to assign her public identity when contributing content or joining an online community.

FIGURE 4-29
Attribution for activity—items pinned, likes, and other activity—on Pinterest.



Use when

Use this pattern when contributing content, joining a community, or editing a public profile.

How

FOR THE CONTENT CONSUMER

- List the author's display name and display image (if space and performance permits) in close proximity to the title (or summary) of the post, as shown in Figure 4-30.

A Day with Edward Tufte

(Top 10 Takeaways on giving presentations and visualizing content)



Ashley Whitlatch

Feb 14 8 min read



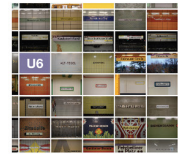
Berlin Subway Station Signage

Berlin has an extensive subway network—10 lines, 170 stations, 151.7 km kilometers of rail. The network transports 507 million passagers...



Ramzi Rizk

Feb 15 5 min read



The Maker Movement Is About the Economy, Stupid

By Congressman Mark Takano



Mark Takano

Feb 13 5 min read



Start to Finish: Photographing Antarctica

How I turned the unique photo-op of a flipped iceberg into viral photos.



In Vantage, by Alex Cornell

Feb 11 1 min read



FIGURE 4-30

Attribution with an avatar accompanying the headline and brief description of articles on Medium (<http://medium.com>).

- Link the display name and display image to the most contextually relevant user profile. If a contextual profile is not available, link the name and image to the user’s primary profile.

FOR THE CONTENT CREATOR

- Reflect back the user’s current public identity and give her the ability to update it prior to submitting content or joining a community.

Why

Attribution of content helps keep people honest and owning their words and actions. The reflection back to the author, showing how he will be presented, confirms what his audience will see and the content consumer can identify people in their network, their friends, or experts and associate that with a level of credibility and expertise associated to that specific user.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Identity Cards or Contact Cards” on page 144

“Reflectors” on page 140

AS SEEN ON

Tumblr (<http://www.tumblr.com>)

Reddit (<http://www.reddit.com>)

Yelp (<http://www.yelp.com>)

Pinterest (<http://www.pinterest.com>)

Medium (<http://www.medium.com>)

Avatars

Avatar is both a generic name for a visual representation of a user online and a product name for animated/cartoon or 3D renderings and drawings that represent a user online. In the December 2, 2008 issue of the *New York Observer*, Gillian Reagan writes:

Profile pictures—or avatars, in online parlance—show people at our thinnest, handsomest, most fun (some call these our best “MySpace angles”). But increasingly—as more than half the country use social media regularly, according to marketing research firm IDC—the entertainment value of these sites is segueing into

something more serious; social networks can help snag a job interview, a date or even the No. 1 spot in the Oval Office. And as the sites get more important in our professional lives, so does the avatar. It's the image that sums up who we are online.

What

A user wants to have a visual representation of herself as part of her online identity, as is demonstrated in Figure 4-31.

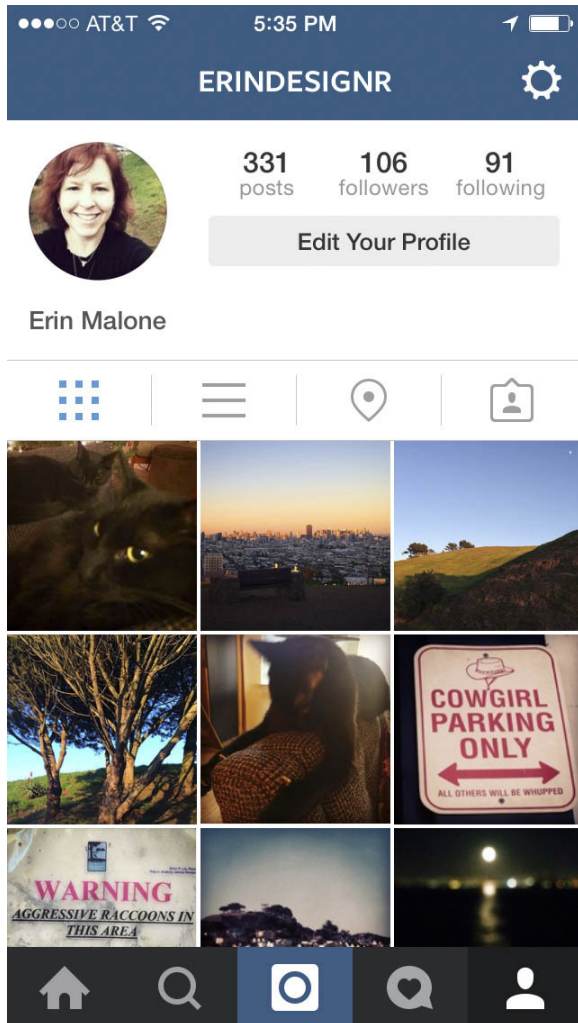


FIGURE 4-31
A profile on Instagram showing an avatar as a visual identifier (Instagram iOS application).

Use when

Use this pattern when the user wants to have a visual associated with her identity.

How

- Provide a mechanism for the user to upload any kind of image as an avatar. This can be a small portrait, an icon, or an illustration that the user believes is representative.
- Provide an option to upload a larger image—400×400 pixels—and automatically resize for smaller uses. Many services use an image that is 60×60 pixels inline, but a larger image—100×100 pixels or 400×400 pixels—can be used on the profile (see Figure 4-32). Resize the image for use in contact lists and mobile screens. These are often much smaller than what is used on the Web.

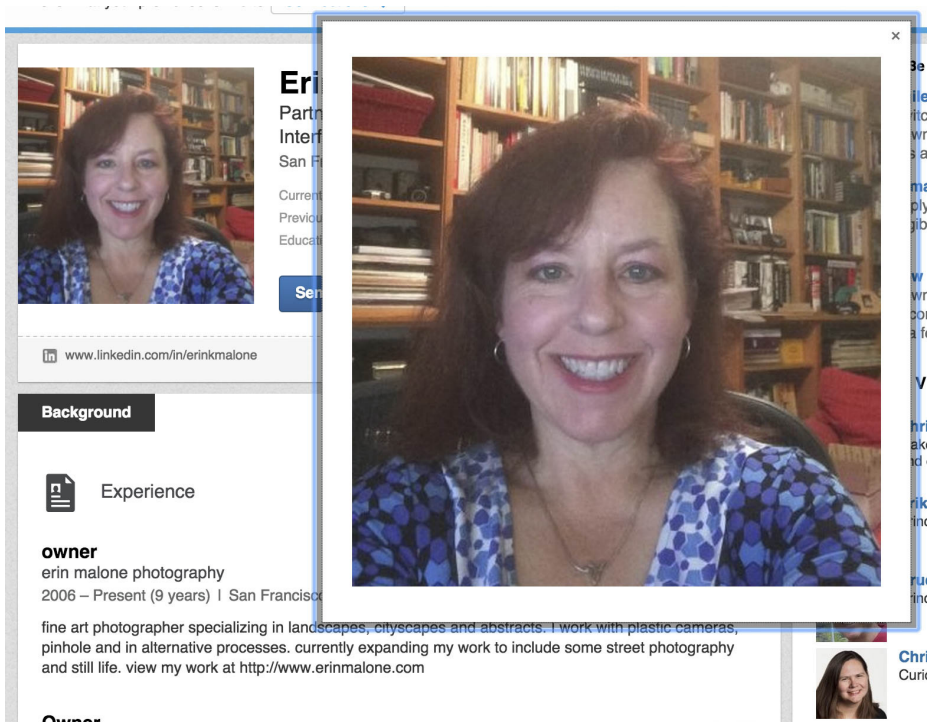


FIGURE 4-32

Avatars as used on LinkedIn. Various sizes are used in different parts of the interface. The largest image is used on the profile, whereas smaller square images are used in lists and round versions are used to show relationship connections.

- Avatars (the illustrated representations) allow for a degree of anonymity (Figure 4-33), but do reduce the perceived credibility of the poster in many cases.

Choose a picture and name

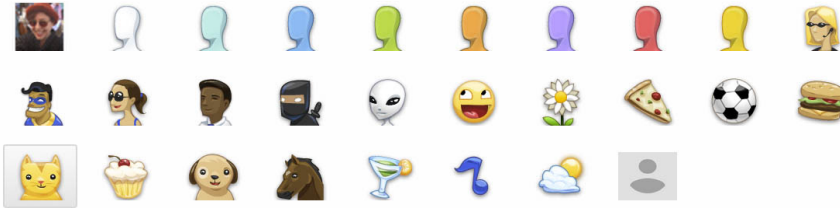


FIGURE 4-33

Cartoon-style avatar as used on Google chrome and in Google Chat.

DEFAULT IMAGE

- If the user has not designated a display image for the current context, use a “Not Pictured” image as the default avatar, such as is shown in Figure 4-34. This encourages the user to customize so that he has an identity that is unique from other users.

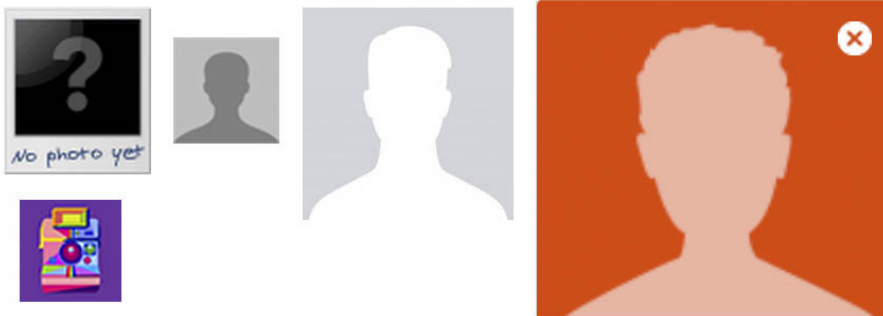


FIGURE 4-34

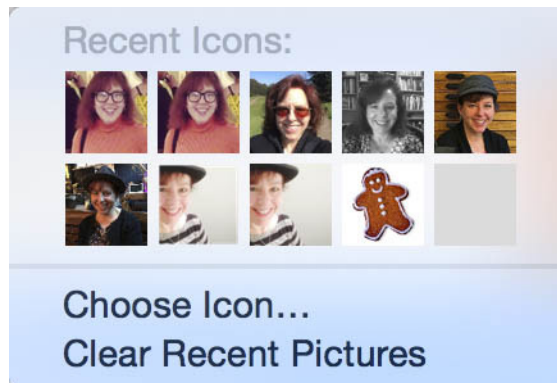
“Not Pictured” icons as used on Meetup, Facebook, Google+, and Flickr.

MULTIPLE AVATARS

- Give the user the ability to upload multiple avatars and to change the presentation through the edit capabilities on the profile or identity card in context of use. (See “Editing the display image” in “Reflectors” in “Reflectors.”)
- Google+, Facebook, MeetUp, and other services’ identity cards and reflectors make it possible for users to upload multiple images. The instant messenger software Adium lets the user select the current image from up to 10 recent icons, as depicted in Figure 4-35. In other cases, when users want to change their avatars, they upload another image and overwrite the previous one.

FIGURE 4-35

With Adium, the user can select his image from the 10 most recently used images.



- Consider giving the user the ability to upload and store multiple images for later selection.

MOOD EXPRESSIONS

- Include a way for users to attach a special status message or emoticon to supplement their avatars by indicating a particular mood (Figure 4-36).
- Consider when to use mood expressions versus a status message associated with the profile image.

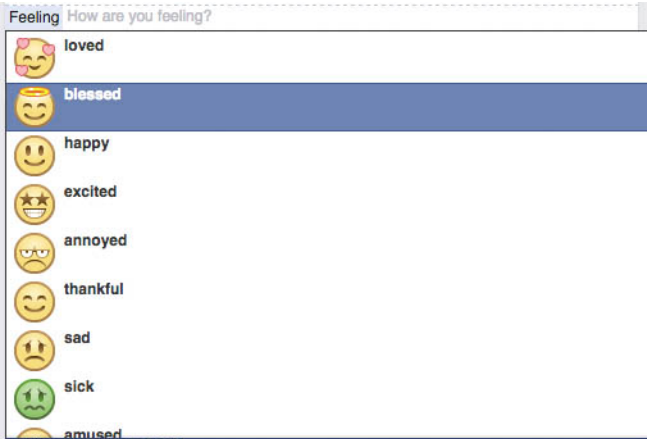


FIGURE 4-36

Facebook users can attach a mood and emoticon to their status when posting.

Why

By providing a method for users to upload images, you encourage them to build up real identities. The avatar or image gives users a way to associate a likeness and a reputation with the person.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Identity Cards or Contact Cards” on page 144

“Reflectors” on page 140

AS SEEN ON

Google+ (<http://plus.google.com>)

Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>)

Instagram mobile application

Adium application

Portable Identity

Since as far back as 2001, there has been talk about developing a global and portable identity, and the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) developed some principles toward defining that effort. Over the past several years, this has been slow in coming about due to conflicting business concerns, a fractured marketplace, and the open movement focused on other initiatives. Thus, in the vacuum of a true viable central solution, the idea has succumbed to the ease of using Facebook Connect or Twitter’s auth solution.

The W3C working group has published a set of specifications laying the groundwork of a truly portable identity system as owned by users rather than having identity data locked into a single company. You can view these specifications at <http://bit.ly/1SNhwQD>.

At this point, though, people still must decide which service to sign up with and which data to move or enter contextually, and the number of services and systems hosting pieces of a single person's identity is dizzying. Ultimately, people will use whatever seems easiest, even if it isn't the safest or isn't the most agnostic in terms of the business providing the service, all in exchange for speed in populating their data and jumpstarting their experience.

Further Reading

1. Grohol, John M. "Anonymity and Online Community: Identity Matters." <http://www.alistapart.com/articles/identitymatters>.
2. Wenger, Etienne. *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge University Press, 1999.
3. boyd, danah. (MS thesis) "Faceted Id/entity: Managing representation in a digital world." <http://smg.media.mit.edu/papers/danah/danahThesis.pdf>.
4. Lardinois, Frederic. "Facebook Continues to Dominate Social Logins." January 27, 2015. <http://tcrn.ch/1Joc9qi>.
5. Donath, Judith S. "Identity and Deception in the Virtual Community." <http://bit.ly/1Joc9Xv>.
6. Schneider, Tim and Michael Zimmer. "Identity and Identification in a Networked World." <http://bit.ly/1JoccTd>.
7. Internet Protocol Identity Community Group, <https://www.w3.org/community/ipid/>.
8. Hinchman, Lewis P. *Memory, Identity, Community: The Idea of Narrative in the Human Sciences*. (SUNY Series in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences). State University of New York Press, 1997.
9. "No More Put A Skirt On It." <http://bit.ly/1DHpVOz>.
10. Gergen, Kenneth. *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*. Basic Books, 2000.

11. Mishler, Elliot G. *Storylines: Craftartists' Narratives of Identity*. Harvard University Press, 2004.
12. Reagan, Gillian. "Superstar Avatars." <http://bit.ly/1DHq0Si>.
13. Wagner, Kurt. "Users Log in with Facebook Instead of Creating New Accounts Online." October 29, 2013. <http://on.mash.to/1JocpWh>.
14. The W3C Open Social Web Working Group, <http://bit.ly/1Jo9hK6>.
15. WebID Community Group, <https://www.w3.org/community/webid/>.

Here We Are Now

It's impossible to move, to live, to operate at any level without leaving traces, bits, seemingly meaningless fragments of personal information.

WILLIAM GIBSON

HOW DO YOU KNOW SOMEONE IS PRESENT? In class, they used to call roll and each person would respond with “here” or “yo” (coincidentally a hot “phatic” presence app from the past year) or sometimes just “present.” (Phatic communication is used purely as a social lubricant and without much semantic content, such as “how do you do?” or, in German, the ubiquitous *bitte*). Usually you can just look around. But, how about when someone is standing behind you and he clears his throat, not because he’s feeling hoarse but as a way of letting you know he’s standing there, so he won’t startle you?

In the real world, we are tuned to all sorts of indications of who is present (either in the immediate moment or the recent stretch of time) and who is absent. If you see an unmown lawn, it might mean no one’s been home for a while, or it could mean that the homeowner is an iconoclast at war with the neighborhood association, but if you notice a pile of uncollected newspapers on the stoop, that’s a pretty good sign of absence. Likewise, if the curtains are open and they were closed earlier or a light is on that was dark before, that’s another sign that someone’s there.

Graffiti showing a nose peeking above a wall with the legend “Kilroy was here” can also imply that someone has been by, perhaps recently.

In his fantastic anthropology weblog, CultureBy (<http://cultureby.com/2007/12/status-casting.html>), Grant McCracken has written about statuscasting (broadcasting your status; we'll get to that soon) as "phatic" communication:

When we status-cast, we're a little like animals. As I argued in my post on the "puzzle of exhaust data" I suggested that one way to think about exhaust data was to treat it as phatic communication. (In humans and other animals, phatic communication consists of non-verbal gestures and small, sub-linguistic noises. Murmurs, shouts, groans, all of these are phatic.) We can say that tiny posts on Twitter are phatic, too. You may not care that I am "feeding my cat." But knowing this tells you I exist, my location, my condition, my, er, status. Twitter data are not "exhaust data" precisely because they serve this locational purpose.

In an earlier blog post, he discusses how static messages "stack nicely":

The phatic messages "stack" nicely, each message presupposing and building on its predecessor. These messages are: 1. I exist. 2. I'm ok. 3. You exist. 4. You're ok. 5. The channel is open. 6. The network exists. 7. The network is active. 8. The network is flowing. When I use Twitter or Facebook to say that I am entertaining my cat, no one, I'm pretty, sure gives a good God damn that I am entertaining my cat. But they are reminded that they have someone called Grant McCracken who exists in their network. This is not nothing. Facebook sustains social knowledge and networks that begin in conferences and then fade almost immediately until a couple of months later we have a hard time attaching a face to that business card still banging around in our briefcase. A "newsflash" about my cat helps the network node called Grant McCracken from blinking out.

So, although we might not be able to be fully present across all sensory channels when we're physically remote (hence, the concept of *telepresence* or *online presence*), we do have a growing set of tools and traditions for simulating or modeling presence in the online world, as illustrated in Figure 5-1. For many of us, the first encounter with these sorts of presence indicators occurs in instant message or other real-time communication applications.

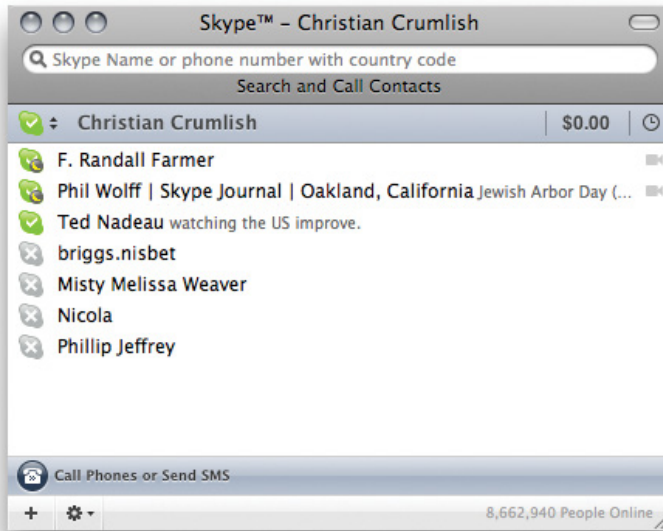


FIGURE 5-1

What are the tools that make remote or partial presence possible (not just indicators of availability but mindfulness, attention, and responsiveness)?

Taken together, these various modes of remote presence contribute to what is now often called the *real-time web* (or the *living web*, or the *live web*): the aspect of online social behavior that is updated constantly as each individual takes an action and a record of it is shared with some public listening in (or found soon thereafter via social search).

A Brief History of Online Presence

Talking about presence online can be confusing because the term has been applied to a spectrum of meanings, including at least the following three:

- There's the old concept of a presence as a persistent "place" online where a business or project can be found—a sort of euphemism for a website (e.g., "We need an online presence," "We need to improve our online presence"). This was often said in a keeping-up-with-the-Joneses sense at the turn of the millennium. (This sense is largely handled by the identity patterns discussed in Chapter 3.)
- The human equivalent of this is the interesting bit, because it relates to the sense in which a blog, for instance, or even a series of posts to a social product such as Facebook, can create an ongoing

sense of a person, and its state of currency can help to create the sense that the blogger is actively “present” in that space and can be found there.

- Next, there is presence in the sense that instant messenger (IM) and Twitter theorists discuss it. IM programs have an online presence indicator that conveys to the entire world or to a user’s connections (or, typically, to those from whom the user is not hiding) that one is currently online and available for communication; this is *present* not in a physical sense but in an availability sense. This is synchronous, real-time presence, to be distinguished from the asynchronous sense of either of the previous two definitions. Here, we also get statuscasting (so, beyond “Available,” there begins to be free-form choices—often with limited character counts—for indicating what we’re doing or how we’re feeling at the moment), and thus the phatic communication others have written about: at times “meaningless” bits of communication designed more to signal presence, connection, and attention (as in Figure 5-2).

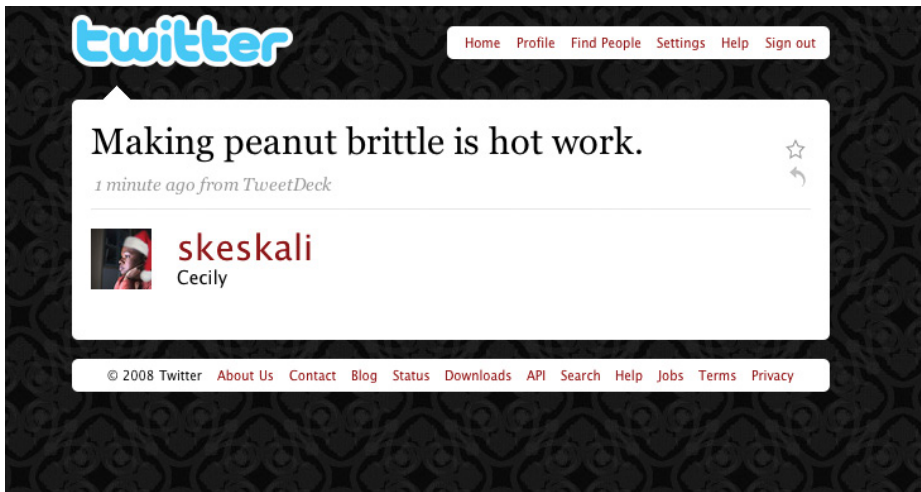


FIGURE 5-2

Some statuscasting might seem trivial. It can sometimes be the equivalent of (nonverbal) phatic communication, the sounds and grunts of acknowledgment we make to remind one another that we exist. Somehow, though, my mental image of Cecily making peanut brittle makes me feel that I know her a little better than I did before.

We're mainly talking about this last sense in this book, and to a lesser extent the second one. To bring this back down to earth a bit from the realm of philosophy, we can say that presence is a prerequisite for real-time (or minimal-lag) communication, and that it can itself be used as a medium for phatic communication.

The Future of Presence

In his Telepocalypse blog (<http://bit.ly/1eVKvFi>), Martin Geddes wrote:

It is very easy when talking about presence to get sucked into thinking about IM icons, and the messaging of comings and goings using protocols like SIMPLE. But go take a look at the work of Media Lab Europe in Dublin. They have flower pots that bloom according to the availability of your special other. Tables that remember what was on them. Then there are the haptic (touchy feely) instant messages, the time-smearred entrance lobby webcam, and so on. Presence isn't just about smiley icons.

Presence Actions and Facets

The fundamental components of displaying interactive “presence” online has tended to break down into two facets: status and availability.

Availability shows other people whether the user might be open to direct contact in real time

Status might take numerous forms and is a way of updating other people about some aspect of the user's life at the time they were prompted to check in.

The primary principle to keep in mind when designing presence interfaces is to maximize opportunities for your users to declare themselves present to one another (similar to leaving footprints or other human traces). Practically speaking, this breaks down into a few actions that the user or system can take:

- Publishing presence information
- Displaying current presence status
- Displaying a timeline of recent presence items
- Maintaining a history (partial or complete) of past presence declarations

- Providing users with a way to subscribe to presence updates
- Providing users with a way to filter presence updates

There are a number of different aspects or facets of status, beyond availability, that can be included in an update, including but not necessarily limited to the following:

- Current activity
- Mood
- Environment
- Location
- Device status (on/off)
- Other (system-, device-, or user-defined facets)

Finally, there's the public with whom a user's availability, status, mood, location, and so on are shared, referred to in the old instant-messenger context as their "buddy list."

Availability is the bottom line for online presence, as demonstrated in Figure 5-3. If you're available, that's fairly straightforward. It means, ostensibly, that it's alright for others to contact you (interrupt you) in real time. Unavailability can take several flavors (away, busy, or idle). These facets originated in the context of messenger and chat applications, but they map fairly consistently to other persistent presence indicators.

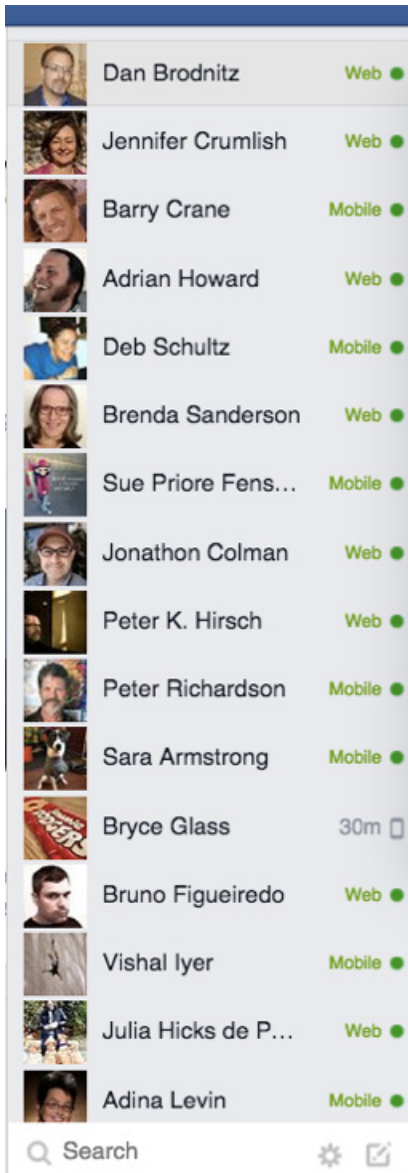













FIGURE 5-3

Perhaps the most fundamental bit of presence information is available versus unavailable.

Richer options for status are possible (beyond simply available or not). Many applications with presence features give the user the ability to either manually enter a status update (generally, what she's currently doing) or have some application or object update her status automatically. Status information usually can be layered on top of availability information, as shown in Figure 5-4.

FIGURE 5-4

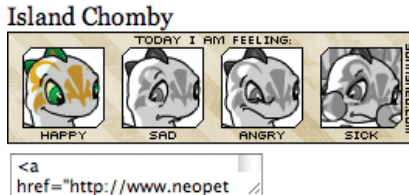
Beyond indicating availability, a presence status update might also indicate the activity in which the user is currently engaged.

Name	Status
 Hasan Tariq	☆ Online
 Hélder Mendes	☆ Online
 Jay Strauss	☆ Online
 Jay Zaveri	☆ Online
 Jim Routh	☆ Away
 Jon Hadden	☆ Away
 Justin Copeland	☆ Away
 Kim Bieler	☆ Oh boy!
 kishore emmadi	☆ Away
 lily keber	☆ Away
 Livia Labate	☆ Unpacking all the things! Just...

With a mood selector such as the one shown in Figure 5-5, the user can indicate how she currently feels (something otherwise rather difficult to discern through cold mechanical interfaces). Beware of trying to supply a complete taxonomy of human emotions. The chances are good that you'll overcomplicate things.

FIGURE 5-5

A mood vocabulary can be free-form or based on a controlled list. Neopets offers four standard moods: happy, sad, angry, and sick.



Identifying your current location, either to other people or to applications, enables geographical information such as proximity and physical availability to come into play (see Chapter 16). Location information can be entered manually or detected automatically using services such as GPS, mobile phone cell towers, or by polling a geographical information broker.

Twitter users developed their own folk syntax for location that uses “L:” as a prefix, followed by latitude and longitude information or place names. This came about before the service added the option to share location information automatically when posting.

Availability

This pattern is also known as “Who’s Here Now?”

The interface pattern for managing and displaying availability may also be referred to as *online presence indicators* (OPIs). As Figures 5-6 and 5-7 show, they provide a way for users to display to other people (either the public or their contacts, depending on the rules of the system) when they are available for contact and when they are not.

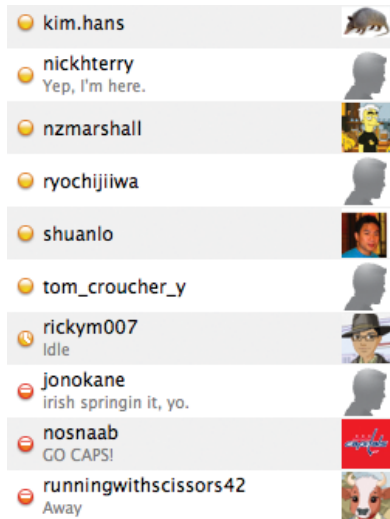
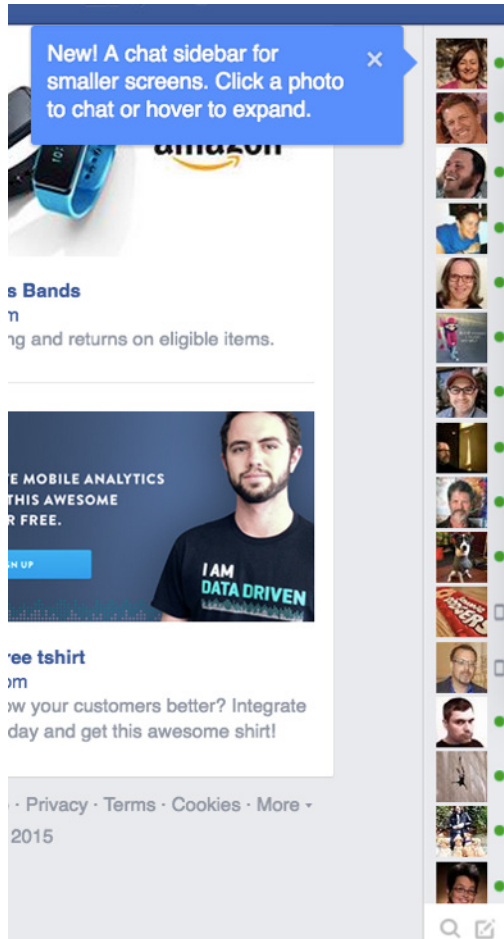


FIGURE 5-6

A small set of icons can indicate at a glance who is available, who is idle, and who is away.

FIGURE 5-7

A simpler model might show just a subset of your contacts and indicate which are currently active, as in this Facebook module.



What

Users need to see who else is online, available, and open to contact.

Use when

- A person wants to determine whether his friend is online.
- A person wants to see who is available for contact.
- A person wants to see whether his friend is available for communication.
- A person wants to show his contacts that he is busy.

How

There are really two approaches. The prevailing approach to this pattern today is to show availability automatically, although this can have negative consequences for people who want to preserve their privacy or are actively hoping to avoid certain people.

The older pattern, established in first-generation IM apps, gives people the option to visually identify themselves in one of three possible states, “Available,” “Busy,” or “Offline” (these are explained further in Table 5-1). Additionally, if technically feasible, the client can identify the user as “Idle” if she is away from the computer for a set period of time.

TABLE 5-1. Common availability statuses and their meanings

STATUS	MEANING
Available	The user is logged in and available for contact. If the Busy and Idle states are unavailable, the OPI defaults to this state, more broadly defined as the Online state. An application might permit the user to reveal availability manually, or it might be set to display “Available” whenever the user logs in.
Busy	The user is logged in but has declared herself as Busy. Busy refers to two separate contexts that, in turn, relate to the diametrically opposed impetuses for IMing: focused intent and serendipity. One refers to actual busy-ness, requesting that others abide by those associated social mores (e.g., if a user sees someone set to “Do Not Disturb,” he knows that person is contactable, but will contact her only when necessary). The other refers to a form of explicit idleness that explains a user’s potential delay in response, which otherwise might not be adequately conveyed by the Idle state described next (e.g., “Stepped Out,” “Not at My Desk,” “Out to Lunch”). Setting your status as Busy bears no functional significance and serves only as a social announcement.
Idle	The user is logged in, but the client observes that no keyboard or mouse activity has happened within a set period of time. The user has the option to override this setting, thereby always appearing as either Available or Busy.
Offline	The user is not logged in or has logged in as “Invisible.”

Adopt a set of consistent icons for these three states (or four, if you include “Idle”). Studies show that traffic-light colors (red, green, amber) don’t map well to these choices, even though they are widely used among IM applications. This is mainly because although Available can be easily mapped to Go (green), three of the states (Busy, Offline, and Idle) are all equivalent to Stop (red), and none of them map particularly well to Slow Down/Proceed with Caution (amber).

This pattern does persist with some newer products, as well, such as WhatsApp, which is shown in Figure 5-8.

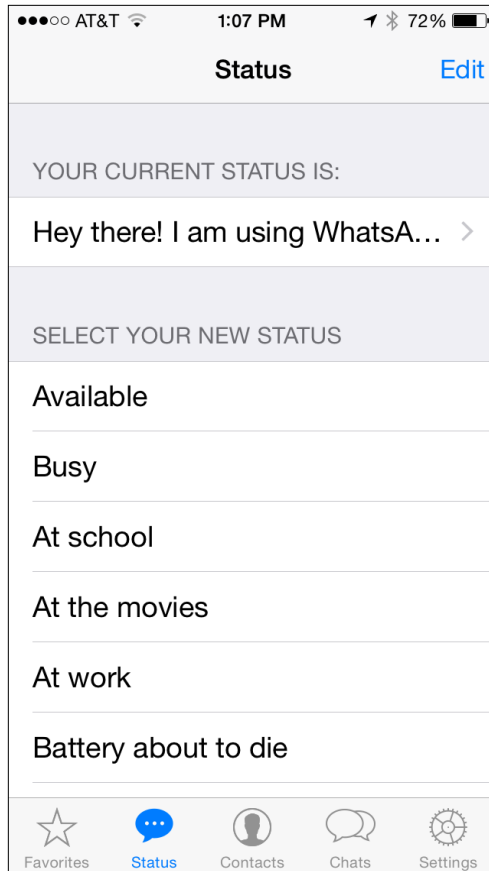


FIGURE 5-8 WhatsApp offers a range of availability choices, including the “traditional” options such as Available and Busy, but also other practical status choices such as “Battery about to die.”

STEALTH MODE

An automated system that is too transparent or honest can put users in awkward situations, such as when they wish to be available to only some of their contacts. Therefore, you might find it useful to provide a stealth mode—the ability to sign in as “Invisible” and hence not reveal oneself automatically upon connecting to the application.

Yahoo! Messenger, for example, provides granular selectivity by which you can appear Invisible only to specific people, using this procedure:

1. While pressing the Control (Ctrl) key, click the name of the contact to whom you want to remain Invisible to highlight the contact.
2. On the menu that opens, select Stealth Settings.
3. Click Permanently Offline.

The specified contact will thereafter never see you as online unless you change this setting. To remind you, the contact's name appears in italics in your Messenger List. (Messenger offers a similar feature for whole groups.)

On the other hand, Facebook currently provides no such blanket stealth mode. It does allow users to turn off chat for one or more users and to go “offline” while connected, one session at a time, but the overwhelming desire to make sure people connect here is overriding any customer desire to be stealthy online, leading to all sorts of user workarounds, such as the complex solution described on this blog (<http://bit.ly/1Jo9hK6>) that involves creating custom lists and using the existing feature set.

Why

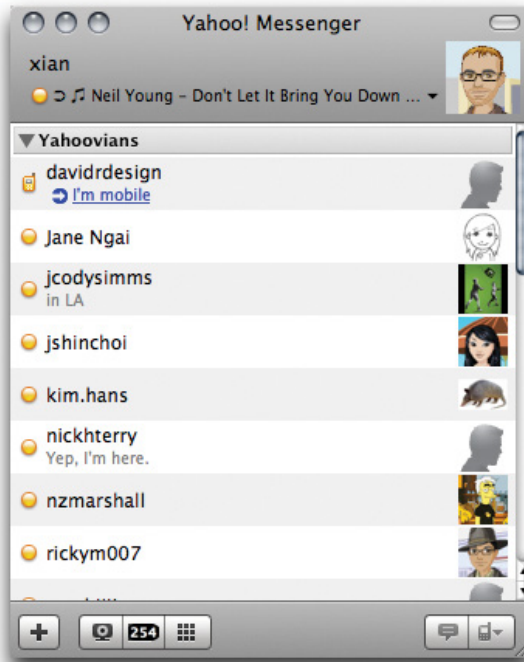
Revealing availability is the fundamental building block of online presence. Providing your users with simple ways to do this fosters the sense of presence and availability that helps a social system feel inhabited by real people with realistic comings and goings.

ENVIRONMENT

An indication of what music the user is currently listening to is the most common environment report in presence updates. This can be used to give the flavor of the person's environment, and doubles as a potential talking point. The user can manually fill in a “what I'm listening to” field or a status field for this purpose, or she can set an application to read what music is currently playing from the operating system or device, as demonstrated in Figure 5-9. The process of uploading this information to an ongoing stream is referred to as “scrobbling” (as popularized by Last.fm).

FIGURE 5-9

An application can automatically detect the current song playing in an application such as iTunes and assign its identifying information as the user's current status. Often, a musical note symbol serves as a clue to the user's friends that the information wasn't entered manually and is in fact song data.



Buddy List

What

The user wants a distinct list of people she knows (friends, contacts, coworkers, family) to communicate with in real time (Figure 5-10). The term “buddy list” is now somewhat outmoded and associated primarily with legacy IM apps, but the notion remains under other names, such as “friends.”

Use when

Use this pattern when offering just-in-time communications, such as instant messaging.

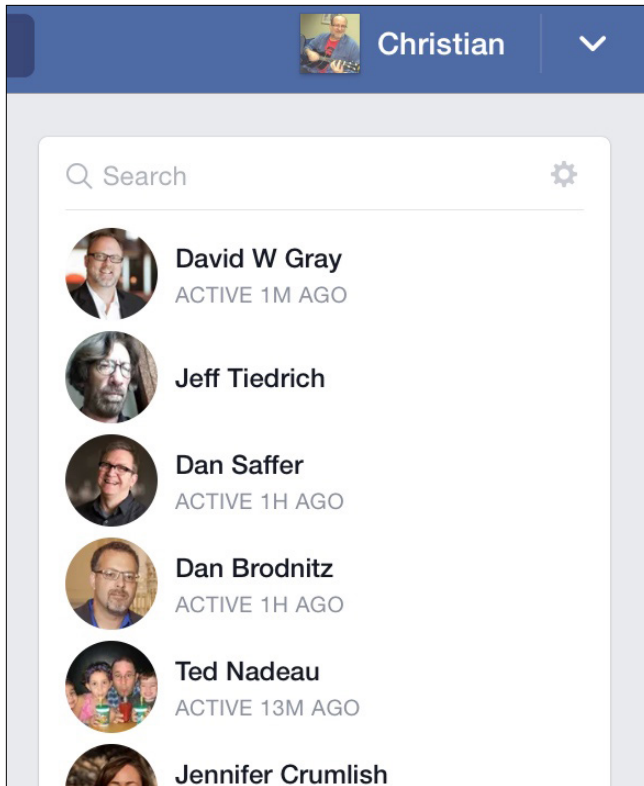


FIGURE 5-10 Facebook is showing me some of the folks I engage with frequently as well as their activity status.

How

- Indicate which users are currently online (see “Presence Actions and Facets” on page 163).
- Indicate which users are offline.
- Indicate when a user is online but might be busy and not taking messages.
- Consider indicating when a user is idle, which often indicates that the user is not at the computer or is engaged in another task.
- Provide a way for users to organize their buddies into meaningful groupings, such as friends, family, golf buddies, work colleagues, and so on.
- Consider giving users a means to create on-the-fly group chats through the selection of multiple people in a buddy list.

Why

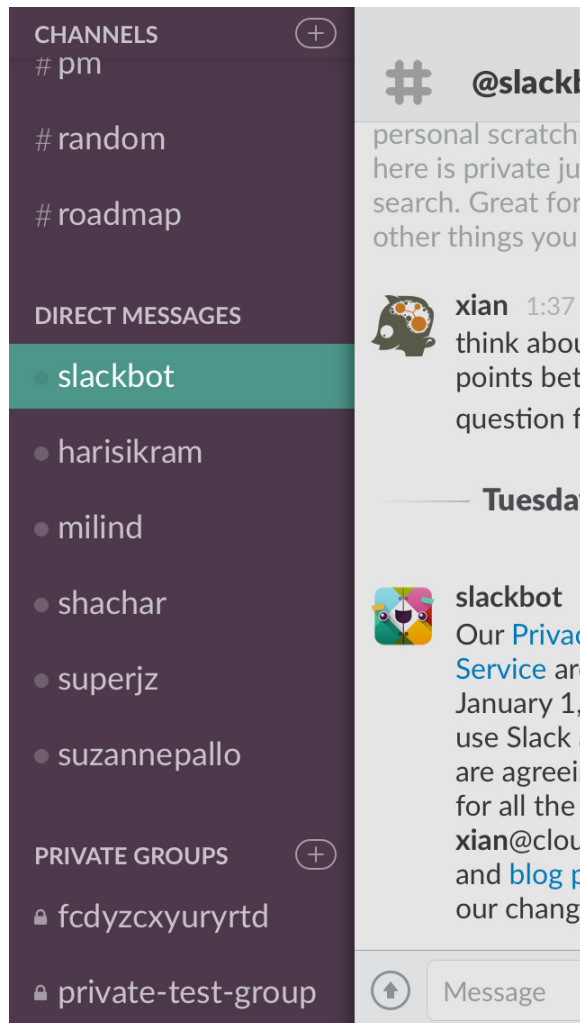
Real-time communications and the buddy list to support them add an immediate and real-life component to what are often asynchronous online experiences.

EXAMPLES

Slack, a consumer enterprise communication app built on IRC patterns shows you people you've interacted with along with their online status (Figure 5-11).

FIGURE 5-11

Those dots would be green if any of my buddies were available right now in Slack.



RELATED PATTERNS

“Adding Friends” on page 437

“Many Publics” on page 275

“Private Conversation” on page 366

AS SEEN ON

Facebook and Facebook Messenger

Slack (<http://www.slackhq.com>)

Skype (<http://www.skype.com>)

AIM (<http://www.aim.com>)

Yahoo! Messenger (<http://messenger.yahoo.com>)

Activity Streams

When status updates first emerged in the context of instant messenger programs, they were inherently fleeting, temporally tied to the immediate moment and then discarded. It really doesn't make that much sense to keep an infinite log of Available, Busy, Idle, Offline, and so on for the life of the user or the application. However, as other status-capturing interfaces have evolved, the idea of at least maintaining a stream of recent history and then possibly mixing status reports with other snapshots of online activity has taken hold as a way of displaying presence.

There is still an element of the ephemeral in this. You'd rarely thumb through days and days of old status updates to find what a specific person was doing or thinking or listening to at some arbitrary point in the past (at least if you're not a stalker). Yet, there's really nothing to stop these sorts of feeds of personal status updates from being stored, permalinked, catalogued, indexed, made searchable, and so on, even if presence affordances are geared more naturally toward the present moment and the recent past.

You'll need to think about persistence of old status updates. Are you committing to keeping them findable forever or just for the last few days? Will you give your users a way to download or archive status data, or even transport it to another system? These cumulative activity updates can paint a persistent portrait of a person online.

You can view a person's activity stream as the sum total of observable behaviors he is engaging with online or within your system. This might include status updates, but it can also include any number of other recordable activities that can be captured via RSS feeds or by polling or scraping activity feeds across a wide variety of services. This might also be a mix of services within your system or network, or might combine services across the public Internet.

Figure 5-12 illustrates that an activity stream (or feed) can therefore consist of an aggregation of updates and activities that together can create a much richer sense of what the user has been doing, thinking about, and saying in the recent past.

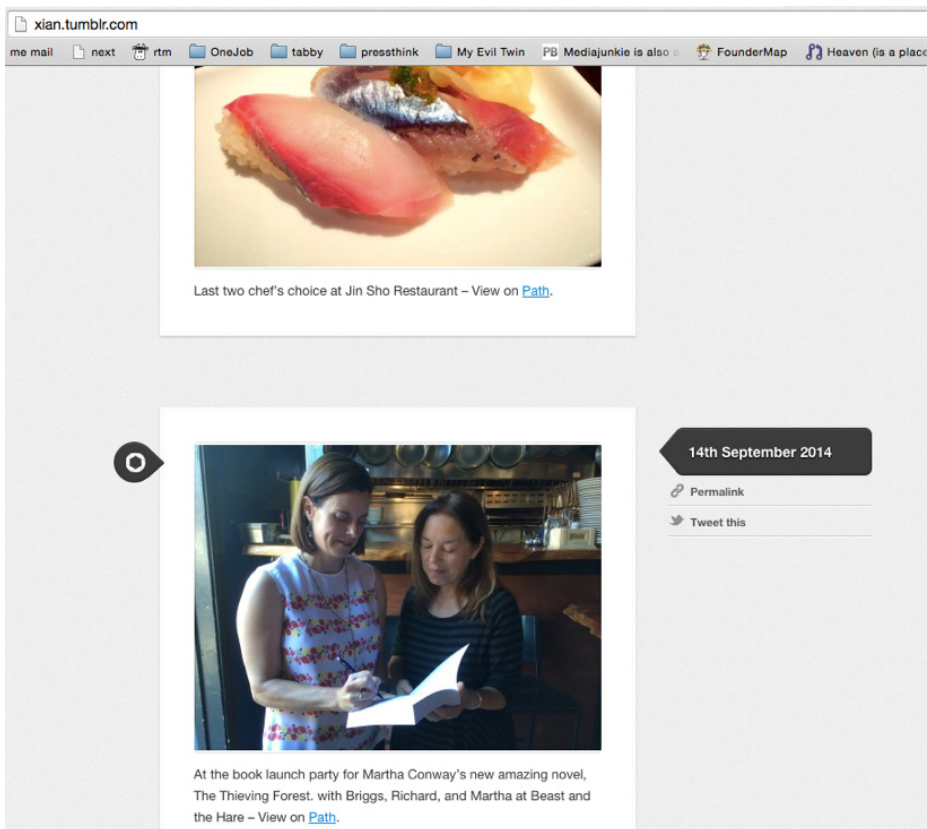


FIGURE 5-12

When aggregating actions and behaviors across a number of different services, an activity stream of vitality updates can paint a more complete picture of a person's day or recent activities for his followers.

When presenting an activity stream to your users, consider whether to offer a single type of update (such as status messages) or a mixture of multiple forms of activity (links, posted media, songs listened to, and so on). If mingling multiple types of activity, think about how your users might want to isolate a single context.

RebelMouse, for example, offers an easy way to comingle a lot of your online activity into a single broadsheet-like design, but this can also present an incoherent or just plain useless experience for anyone beyond the person generating all that sharing content (Figure 5-13).

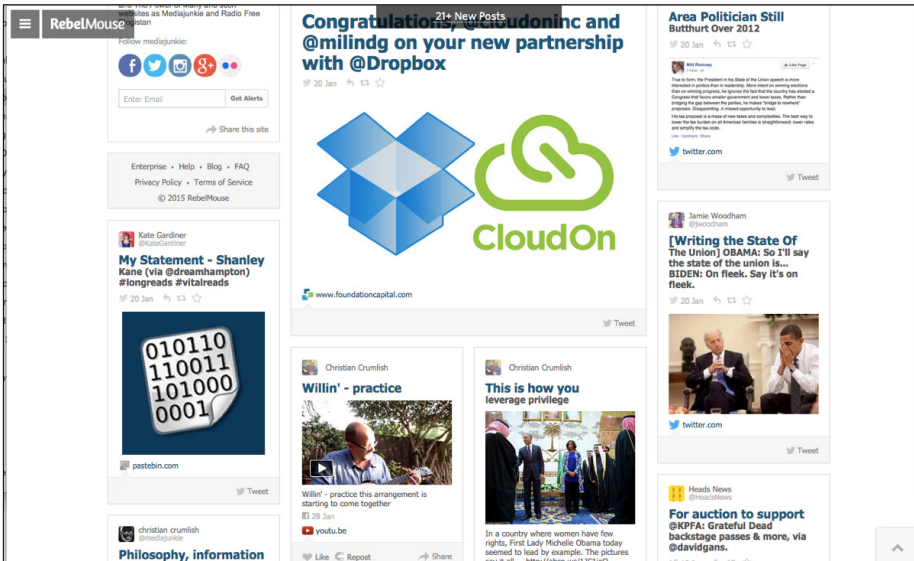


FIGURE 5-13

When curated well, an aggregated activity feed can be as rich as a publication, but automated tools can also lead to a messy feel.

Statuscasting

Statuscasting is the custom of broadcasting an ongoing stream of status updates to the public or to a set of contacts or followers. Similar in concept to IM status updates, statuscasting incorporates the idea of the ongoing feed that users can browse into the past. It does not necessarily indicate availability at any given point, but does imply it, in the sense that if you see a recent status update from a friend, you might conclude that she is available for contact.

There can be some value in cross-feeding status updates from one system to another. Twitter users, for example, can have their status updates on Twitter become their status messages in their IM clients (or vice versa). Likewise, posts to Twitter might be broadcast into another service, such as Facebook or Friendfeed or Yahoo! Updates. Be careful how you enable this kind of connection, however, because the original context can be stripped away, and the updates might not make sense or work well in the new context. For example, Away, Idle, and Available are 80 percent or more of all IM statuses.

Statuscasting tools such as Twitter (see Figure 5-14) lend themselves to inventive variations and uses. If you give people a box to type into and a button to press, they will discover their own uses for it.



FIGURE 5-14

Twitter used to ask the user to answer the question “What are you doing?” in 140 characters or less. The current “What’s happening?” if a bit more vague still invites you to paint a picture of your moment-to-moment thoughts and experiences.

In addition to displaying a single person’s statuscast feed, it’s common to provide a way to see a collection of people (everybody or just the user’s friends) and their most recent updates. These kinds of interfaces might benefit from offering the user an easy way to filter or sort, especially when one person is dominating the combined feed with a stream of constant updates.

What

Statuscasting (also known as *Microblogging* or *Updates*) is a way for users to create short posts. These are often aggregated into a stream and can consist of text, pictures, or video.

Users want to see what their friends have been doing presented in a convenient format. Additionally, applications derive an advertising benefit from being able to share with the public or a controlled audience what their users have been doing. These updates can serve as reminders to other users about what is possible within the system.

Use when

You can produce and consume updates in nearly every imaginable context: across a single application or network, across the Web, on mobile devices, and so on. You can also display them in a context-sensitive manner, presenting information that is relevant to what a user is currently consuming. Here are additional possibilities:

- Use as a light alternative to blogging.
- Use when you want to allow conversations and real-time updates but don't need the synchronous conversations of instant messaging.

How

Updates aim to provide users with delightful, personally relevant, timely content that engages them, helps them connect with others and participate in one another's lives, and encourages their participation in the service.

To accomplish this, create syndicated digests of user activity from content-producing sources and third-party products, and make them available to content consuming properties and other sites.

A sophisticated vitality system will learn about the user's preferences by tracking clickthrough, so if the items in the stream start with a "good enough" guess, they can improve through iterative refinement of the weighted algorithm that selects items. The experience for an ordinary user, then, is to be shown updates presented more or less as "things we think you'd want to see based on who you are and where you are in the product."

Updates tend to follow the form of subject, verb, and object, with an optional indirect option, as discussed in Chris Messina’s presentation on open activity streams (<http://bit.ly/1gndq5X>). Thus, here are some possible implementations:

- The basic interface for microblogging is a text field, with a clearly marked character count limit and a Submit button. For alternatives to text (such as video and photos), clearly indicate the size and time limits.
- Provide a method for viewing after posted. Both an author view and a community view should be available.

Why

Sometimes, all you need to do is say a few words or share a short thought. Microblogging addresses that need without the heavy-duty interface or overhead of blogs.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Blogging” on page 292


“Comments” on page 339

“Public Conversation” on page 363

Managing Incoming Updates

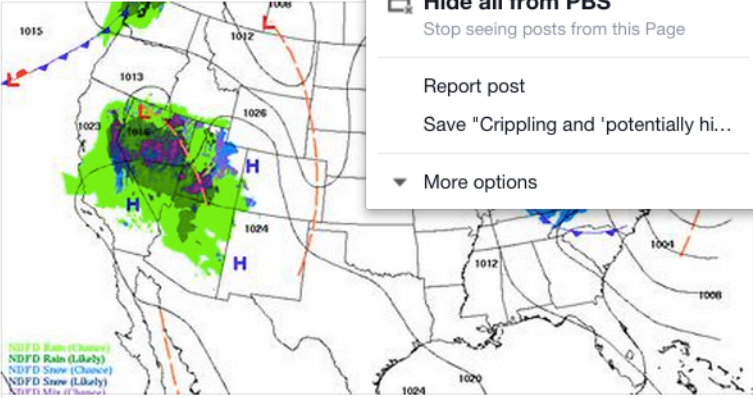
As users begin to rely on a feed of updates for news of their friends’ doings online and clues to interesting bookmarked or recommended items, it is important to give them tools for fine-tuning the feed. Some refinement comes from the ability to add or remove sources (following or friending versus leaving or unfriending), but finer-grained options can involve the ability to ask for more or less of a certain type of content or items from a specific person, as depicted in Figure 5-15.

David Jay Clark commented on this.



David Jay Clark
January 25 at 4:56pm · 🌐

I know those in upstate NY might say




Crippling and 'potentially historic' blizzard to slam Northeast


A crippling and potentially historic winter storm was approaching a large swath of the northeastern United States Sunday, which officials and forecasters warned...

PBS.ORG

[Like](#) · [Comment](#) · [Share](#)

✕ **I don't want to see this**
See fewer posts like this

 **Unfollow David**
Stop seeing posts but stay friends

 **Hide all from PBS**
Stop seeing posts from this Page

Report post

Save "Crippling and 'potentially hi..."

▼ More options

FIGURE 5-15

In this case, I have nothing against poor David Jay, but I have simply heard enough about the darn blizzard already. Notice the other options Facebook currently offers to help me influence the sorts of stories it shows me.

You can offer consider offering additional responsive choices for managing items (such as reporting abusive content) on the same menu because the triggering item is so compact.

In an aggregated feed, it can be easy to lose track of items as they are rapidly supplanted by newer updates, so offering your users a way to filter the feed to only show items from a single source or to hide one or more sources can help them to cut through the noise.

Keep Company

Technology can be cold and impersonal. When the concept of a “ghost in the machine” first arose, it was used to deride Descartes mind-body dualism, ridiculing the idea that the body is a simple meaty mechanism and the spirit is some ghostly presence that imbues it with humanity. Dualism has fallen out of fashion in philosophical circles, but the truth is that in today’s online social systems, there is a fundamental duality baked right in. The machinery connects us, but without the human presences (the ghosts), it is simply a tangle of wires and electronic impulses.

In the real world, we like to know that there are other people around, coming and going, adding to the life of a place. An abandoned building is scary, but one that has signs of life can be much warmer and more welcoming. There are a number of ways to communicate this sense of life in a social interface.

Ambient Intimacy

Ambient intimacy is about being able to keep in touch with people with a level of regularity and intimacy that you wouldn’t usually have access to, because time and space conspire to make it impossible.

Ambient describes the lightness, the atmospheric, nondirectional, and distributed nature of the communication. These are communications that are one-to-many: they’re not quite broadcast and yet not exactly conversational. They flood over a somewhat defined space. Within that space is intimacy—the closeness, familiarity, and warmth that this kind of communication can create. There is an ever-present network of friends available wherever you can access the Internet—or even just send a text message.

With Flickr, I can see what friends are eating for lunch, how they’ve redecorated their bedroom, and their latest haircut. Twitter informs me when they’re hungry, what technology is currently frustrating them, who they’re having drinks with tonight.

Who cares? Who wants this level of detail? Isn’t this all just annoying noise? There are certainly many people who think this, but they tend to be not so noisy themselves. It seems to me that there are lots of people for whom being social is very much a “real-life” activity, and technology is just about getting things done.

There are a lot of us, though, who find great value in this ongoing noise. It helps us to know people who would otherwise be just acquaintances. It makes us feel closer to people we care for but in whose lives we're not able to participate as closely as we'd like.

Knowing these details creates intimacy. (It also saves a lot of time when you finally do get to catch up with these people in real life!) It's not so much about meaning; it's just about being in touch.

As Ian Curry at Frog Design writes:

It's basically blogging reduced to what the Russian linguist Mikhail Bakhtin called "the phatic function." Like saying "what's up?" as you pass someone in the hall when you have no intention of finding out what is actually up, the phatic function is communication simply to indicate that communication can occur. It made me think of the light, low-content text message circles Mizuko Ito described existing among Japanese teens—it's not so important what gets said as that it's nice to stay in contact with people. These light exchanges typify the kind of communication that arises among people who are saturated with other forms of communication.

This is not an effect or an activity that is new or that is inherently connected to new social tools. Much the same was observed in a Japanese ethnographic research study into the use of camera phones by young people undertaken by Mizuko Ito and Daisuke Okabe, who found the following:

[M]essaging can be a way of maintaining ongoing background awareness of others, and of keeping multiple channels of communication open... many of the messages we saw exchanged included messages that informants described as "insignificant" or "not urgent." Some examples of messages in this category are communications such as "I'm just walking up the hill now," "I'm tired," "I guess I'll take a bath now," "just bought a new pair of shoes," "groan, I just work up with a hangover," or "the episode today totally sucked, didn't it?"

On its own, a Twitter or a Facebook status update can seem trivial and meaningless, but to examine an update in isolation is to miss the point of the social system that is at play here. These apparently trivial updates are really critical to maintaining connection with a network of often loose ties. This network can give rich social rewards to those who participate; however, more and more participants are finding that the rewards extend beyond just being social and discovering that the connectedness and serendipity of ambient intimacy can bring great professional gains, as well.

These days, ambient intimacy plays many roles in my life: it has stopped me from missing an important international flight and helped me keep sane while at home with a small baby. It is my outsourced tech support resource, my recommendation engine, my news filter. With Twitter, I can virtually attend conferences I can't get to but in which I have an interest. Most valuable of all, it has afforded me the ability to create, maintain, and even build professional and personal relationships with people in my field whose work I admire and from whom I have been able to learn and develop as a professional.

So, although the question might be “what are you doing?” and perhaps you don't really care, know that there is much more going on here than just a status update. It's a whole new way of being connected, and its power shouldn't be underestimated.

**LEISA REICHEL, USER EXPERIENCE CONSULTANT,
DISAMBIGUITY LTD.**

Signs of Life

The easiest way to communicate to your returning visitors the liveliness of your social environment is to present them with a summary of recent activities upon login, ideally those of people to whom they're connected. For new users it might still be worthwhile to show them examples of recent activities, perhaps anonymizing the identities of the users to preserve their privacy. This is what LinkedIn does, and it doubles as a reminder to the user of the range of activities she can engage in within the service (Figure 5-16).

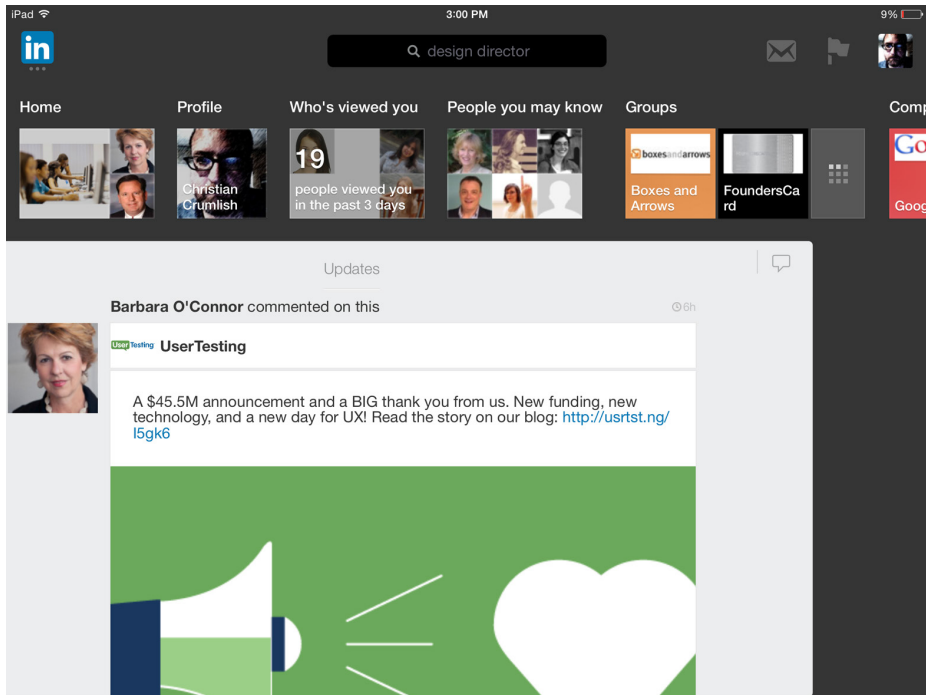


FIGURE 5-16

LinkedIn displays a series of clusters reporting on recent activities in the user's network, giving a sense of the health and, yes, vitality of the network.

User Gallery

Another technique for signaling the transient presence of other visitors is a grid of faces or avatars, as you see in Skype (Figure 5-17).

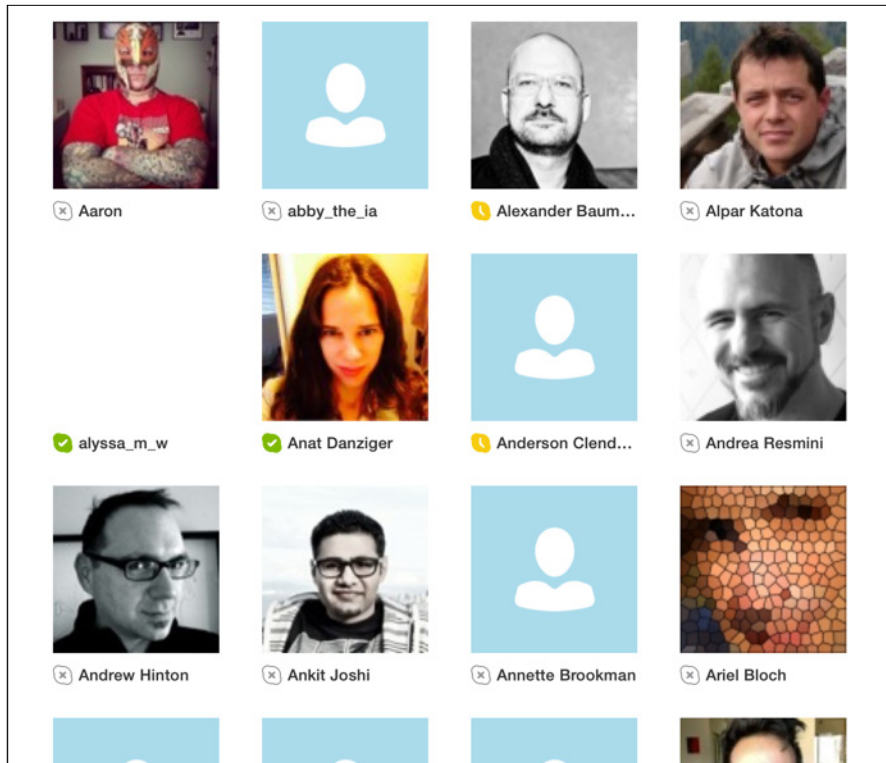


FIGURE 5-17

Skype tries to show you faces but also shows you a lot of dummy avatars.

Yahoo! designer Bryce Glass once said:

We had ... a simple JavaScript insert on any page on the intranet that would display a widget showing the last n employees who'd visited the page. Though ultimately killed by legal [over privacy concerns], it was extremely useful for establishing peoples' presence "at" your design document, product requirements document, etc. (Did the team really review your spec? How recently? Who were the holdouts?)

Further Reading

1. Activity Streams, <http://activitystrea.ms> (extension to the Atom spec)
2. CultureBy, <http://www.cultureby.com>

Would You Buy a Used Car from This Person?

What is reputation? It's the general opinion (judgment) (more technically, a social evaluation) of (and by) the public (or a group or a person) toward an entity (person, a group of people, or an organization or brand or object)—as distinct and different from the background (others)—concerning the likelihood of the entity to behave in a certain way in the future [under certain circumstances]. It is a ubiquitous, spontaneous and highly efficient mechanism of social control.

TED NADEAU, REPUTATION 2.0 (<http://www.slideshare.net/ted.nadeau/sxsw-2007-reputation-20>)

REMEMBER HOW YOU FELT BEFORE THE FIRST DAY AT A NEW SCHOOL? Maybe it was frightening, the fear of the unknown, a new social environment with invisible rules and, for better or worse, a clean slate. Maybe it was exciting, a chance to reinvent yourself. Until it turns out your enemy from summer camp arrived just before you, talking behind your back and tainting your reputation before you even had a chance to make your first impression.

What? This has never happened to you? Nevermind... maybe I'm flashing back to high school.

Reputation online is another one of those social problem spaces that models the real world, connects to the real world, and in some ways simply extends the real world. One's reputation online might not be

precisely the same thing as one’s “real world” reputation, but the principles are similar. Reputation is largely a matter of context. Are you known to be a certain way in your family, another among your fellow congregants, a third on the dance floor, a fourth on the mailing list, and yet another to total strangers via Google?

Including reputation metrics and services in your social interface is somewhat less ambitious than trying to measure people’s real-world reputations or even trying to capture their online, virtual reputations. You can simply focus on the communities you are fostering in your application, the values you are trying to instill in the environment, the behaviors you wish to encourage, and the types of people you want to engage ever more deeply in your social environment.

Still, this is no small task, and a large part of it is determining the sorts of reputation patterns that you want to apply, because they all come with consequences and side effects. (Implementing a reputation platform is also an ambitious engineering task, beyond the scope of this book, but ably described in *Building Web Reputation Systems* by F. Randall Farmer and Bryce Glass [O’Reilly].)

Reputation Influences Behavior

A person participating in a social structure expects to develop a reputation and hopes for insight into the reputations of others, but each designed model of participation and reputation embodies its own set of biases and incentive structures. Balancing these forces determines in large measure the success or failure of a social system.

Note that we are talking here about “people reputation” and not “object reputation.” We’re talking “she’s really helpful,” not “huge appetizers but too much salt.”

There is a virtuous cycle of activity—contribution and consumption—and each action feeds the reputation engine. As users contribute and are active on your service—sharing, writing reviews, collecting, publishing and so on, they are creating content for others in the community to consume and rank through reading, voting, and rating. This gives information about quality to the site or application which in turn rewards and incentivizes these contributors to keep contributing.

Fundamentally, a reputation system involves tracking desirable behavior and then recognizing it publicly. So, any well-designed reputation system is going to start with an inventory of desirable behaviors. Do

you want to ensure that people try out a certain feature, strive for higher-quality contributions, or log endless hours responding to others? Just as managers say, “You can’t manage what you can’t measure,” the same applies to reputation. You can’t acknowledge what you aren’t tracking.

When defining desirable behaviors, be sure to think about the individuals, the groups, and the site itself. The pact you make with users to feed the reputation system involves a tradeoff: they reward good content, they share opinions with their network, they downgrade bad content, they become subject matter experts, and they share their tastes with an expectation that the site will adapt. This behavior makes it possible for you to adapt and personalize as they become more engaged; it gives you the ability to feature high-rated items creating experts, and power a recommendations algorithm.

Note that a functioning reputation system requires stable, persistent identities (as discussed in Chapter 3).

Competitive Spectrum

The first decision you need to make about developing your reputation system is to determine how competitive or cooperative a culture you would like to cultivate on your site. This determination will help you to select the appropriate reputation patterns to apply. What kind of community are you building? Tough or nurturing? What role do you want reputation to play there? Hard-edged and unforgiving, gentle and caring, or somewhere in between?

What

When a new or existing community requires a reputation system, the designer must pay careful attention to the degree of *competitiveness* the community ought to exhibit. Haphazardly introducing competitive incentives into noncompetitive contexts can create problems and might cause a schism within the community.

Use when

Use this pattern when choosing the type of reputation system to design for a community.

How

The chart in Figure 6-1 attempts to describe a community in terms of its “competitiveness.” This is a broad term, but here it is used to describe a combination of things: the *individual goals* of community members, and to what degree those goals coexist peacefully or conflict; the *actions* that community members engage in, and to what degree those actions might impinge on the experiences of other community members; and to what degree *person-to-person* comparisons or contests are desired.

FIGURE 6-1. The Competitiveness Spectrum helps you choose reputation patterns appropriate to the tone and culture of your community.

CARING	COLLABORATIVE	CORDIAL	COMPETITIVE	COMBATIVE
GOALS				
Members are motivated by <i>helping</i> other members—giving advice, solace or comfort	Member goals are largely shared ones. Members work together to achieve those goals.	Members have their own intrinsic motivations, but these goals need not conflict with other members’ goals.	Members share the same goals, but must compete against one another to achieve them.	Members share opposing goals: for one member to achieve these goals, others must necessarily be <i>denied</i> their own.
USE REPUTATION TO...				
Identify senior members of good standing so that others can find them for advice and guidance.	Identify community members with a proven track record of being trustworthy partners.	Show a member’s history of <i>participation</i> , that others might get a general sense for their interests, identity, and values.	Show a member’s level of <i>accomplishment</i> , that others might acknowledge (and admire) their level of performance.	Show a member’s history of accomplishments, including other members’ victories and defeats against them. Reputation is used to establish bragging rights.
REPRESENT REPUTATION WITH...				
Accept volunteers (of good standing) from the community to wear an <i>Identifying Label</i> : “Helpful” or “Forum Leader.” New members can trust these folks to help initiate them into the community.	Use <i>Named Levels</i> to communicate members’ history and standing; members with higher ranks should be trusted more easily than newbies.	Consider Statistical Evidence to highlight a member’s contributions. Just show the facts and let the community decide their worth. Optionally, <i>Top X</i> designations can highlight members with numerous valued contributions.	Allow easy comparisons between members with <i>Numbered Levels</i> . Provide mini-motivations by awarding <i>Collectible Achievements</i> .	Let a member track her own progress by assigning <i>Point Values</i> to different actions. <i>Rank</i> members against one another, displaying winners and losers.

This “Competitiveness Spectrum” is admittedly subjective, and it would not be surprising to find many examples for which this model does not hold up exactly as illustrated. The trick is to have *any* kind of framework to start from, not to have a definitive and comprehensive model.

Depending on the relative level of competitiveness present in your community, we’ll recommend appropriate reputation patterns.

Why

- The proper level of competitiveness, or lack thereof, can encourage and incite your users do more of what you want (contribute and participate) rather than just passively consume.

Levels

Clearly defined levels of accomplishment provide an explicit measurement of reputation, capturing and sharing an empirical assessment of the individual’s reputation in the social structure. Levels are typically named or numbered. Named levels generally have an explicit rank order, such as shown in Figure 6-2, so in a sense both variations can be viewed as numbered levels.

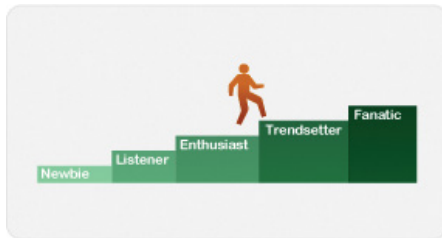


FIGURE 6-2

One form of reputation is a ranking system that characterizes your level of experience or accomplishment.

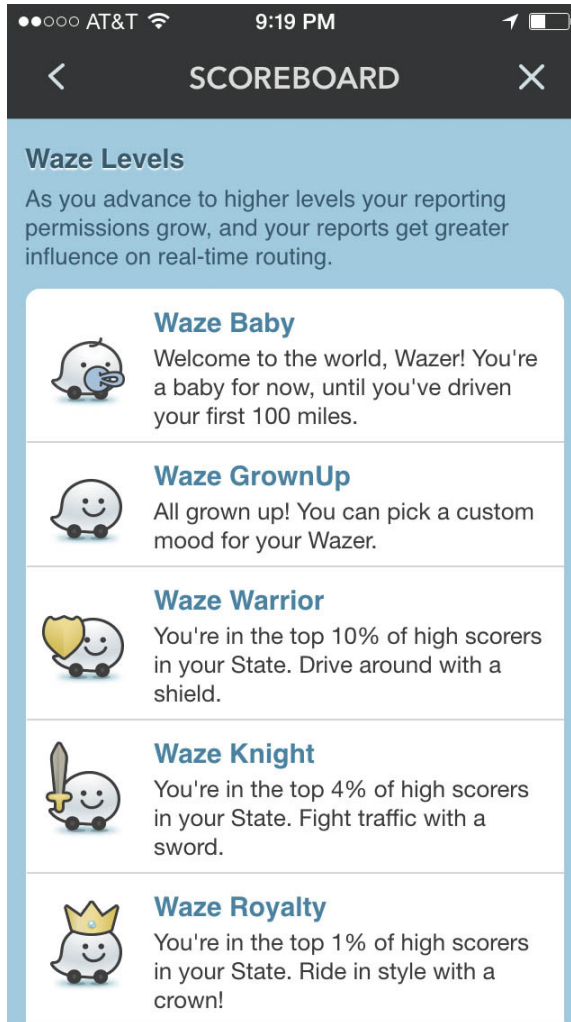
Named Levels

What

Participants in a community need some way to gauge their own personal development within that community: how far they’ve progressed, or how deeply they’ve interacted with the community or its offerings. Additionally, these same measures can be used to compare members, to understand who has more or less experience in the community (as long as a high degree of comparability is not desired), which, as Figure 6-3 demonstrates, is exactly what traffic and navigation app Waze does.

FIGURE 6-3

Waze mobile GPS application uses crowdsourced information to let drivers know about accidents or police on the road. Participation is rewarded with a variety of named levels based on points accrued (Waze iOS application).



Use when

You want consumers to be able to discover and identify high-quality contributors.

The community is competitive, but not highly competitive. Although named levels can have a competitive edge to them (my Wookiee beats your Jawa!), they are perceived as less competitive than some other patterns (e.g., “Rankings,” “Points,” and “Numbered Levels”), perhaps because they are less empirical in nature.

You want your users to be able to track their individual growth in the community, and suggest ways that they can attain the next level in the hierarchy.

How

Define a family of reputations on a progressive continuum. Each level that is achieved is higher than the one before it. Levels are given unique names, which can give them a fun and approachable quality. Quick comparisons between levels, however, become slightly more difficult (see Figure 6-4).



FIGURE 6-4

Levels on Untappd are based on quantity of beer consumed. The amounts required for each level are not actually exposed until the user reaches that level (Untappd iOS application).

If you're giving a level a unique name, make sure that there is some correlation to the number associated with it so users understand how one "levels-up" (see Figure 6-5).




 Announcer	Shared a link to a question that was visited by 25 unique IP addresses	60 awarded
 Booster	Shared a link to a question that was visited by 300 unique IP addresses	4 awarded
 Publicist	Shared a link to a question that was visited by 1000 unique IP addresses	

FIGURE 6-5

At Stack Overflow's Academia community, dozens of labels are available for participation—sharing links, asking questions, answering questions, general participation, or moderation. In each bucket, there are levels at which increased participation rewards the user with the next level label. The most prestigious, requiring the most work or activity is difficult to achieve. (<http://academia.stackexchange.com/>)

Recommendations

Consider a generic but universally understandable set of names for your property. For example, Gold, Silver, and Bronze levels are generally well understood. These might be appropriate in sports contexts, or, more generally, any context for which clarity and understanding of the level hierarchy are more important than fun, context-specific names. Or, consider thematically named levels, using a fun and “natural” set of names that enhances the experience. (For example, a *Star Wars* community might use the names of creatures or concepts from that universe.) For cases in which a significant number of users have already achieved the highest possible level, you might consider adding levels at the upper end of the scale. It is not recommended, however, that you add “interstitial” levels, or levels between already existing ones. In general, add levels sparingly, if at all: you risk losing the trust of the community with too many or when you make seemingly arbitrary changes to your reputation system.

Considerations

Selecting a good set of thematically appropriate names can be more difficult than it seems. Don't expect your users to intuitively know that one name indicates a more senior level than any other. In our *Star Wars* example, "Jedi" trumps "Padawan," but does "Bounty Hunter" win over "Podracer"? Also, the more specific to a context your chosen names are, the greater the risk that you'll alienate or confuse a visitor who's not yet attuned to that community. Avoid even slightly offensive names for levels (e.g., "Music Hotshot!" or "Photo Flyguy!"). These might be learnable with appropriate supporting material, but remember that reputations are also a form of self-expression, and the odds are good that a sizable portion of your community won't want to be identified with frivolous, insulting, or just goofy-sounding labels. Ambiguous level names like these tested very poorly with some of our users.

RELATED PATTERN

"Profile" on page 118

AS SEEN ON

Waze mobile application

Numbered Levels

Implicit within a named level system of ranks is a linear order of the levels. This means that all levels are inherently numerical or can be represented numerically, as depicted in Figure 6-6. A design decision you must make is whether you want to expose the numbers in the interface or leave them hidden.

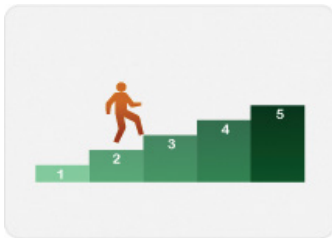


FIGURE 6-6

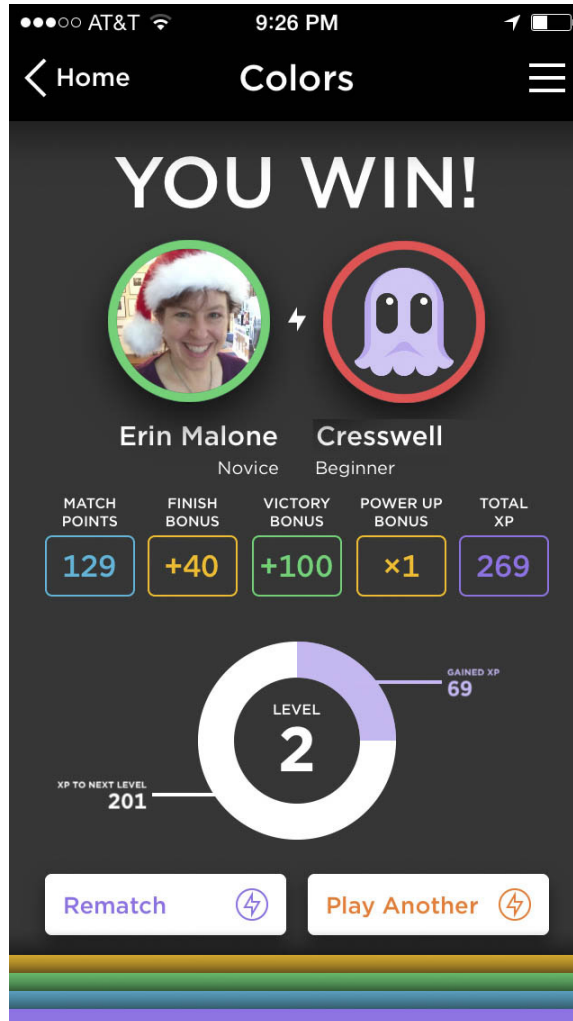
Although less engaging, explicitly numbered levels make comparisons between people very simple.

What

Participants in a community need some way to gauge their own personal development within that community: how far they've progressed, or how deeply they've interacted with the community or its offerings. Additionally, you can use these same measures to compare members and understand who has more or less experience in the community, as shown in Figure 6-7, with the labels under the user's name in the application QuizUp.

FIGURE 6-7

QuizUp matches players together and identifies levels by name to the contestants as well as the numbered level to the player in order to understand how many points are needed to make the next level and what their past accrual earned them (QuizUp iOS application).



Use when

You want to provide your users with a way to track their individual growth in the community.

A large (or open-ended) number of levels is desirable. For example, in *World of Warcraft* users can advance to Level 70.

You also want to make it easy to compare users. (At a glance, Level 1 is more junior than Level 5.)

You're trying to encourage a more competitive community spirit.

How

Establish a family of reputations on a progressive continuum. Each level achieved is higher than the one before it. Levels are referred to by their number, which makes comparisons between levels very straightforward and easy to do. (Numbered levels, however, can be perceived as cold and impersonal.)

RECOMMENDATIONS

In most cases, numbered level systems should go no higher than 10 or so. A strong point of these systems is that you can add to them at a later date with minimal fuss. If, for example, too great a percentage of your community begins to achieve the upper limits of the system (see the upcoming section “Exclusivity”), consider “opening up” new, higher levels for top achievers to attain. Be careful to not do this too frequently, though; otherwise, community members might perceive that you're just dangling an unattainable carrot in front of them.

CONSIDERATIONS

In user testing, we've seen some strong reactions to numbered levels from folks who associate this type of system with “being graded” or assessed. Others noted that numbers just “seem impersonal and kind of cold.” Be careful about noting lower-leveled users in information-dense contexts such as lists, because there will be many of them. For example, in a search results page showing user-generated content, don't fill a table column by noting all of the Level 1 and 2 contributors. Instead, consider calling out only the most remarkable level holders in the community (“Level 10 Contributor!”).

EXCLUSIVITY

Exclusivity in the Numbered Levels pattern relates to the distribution of reputations across the available levels. Ideally, from the high end of the register to the low, your numbered levels should follow a power-law distribution. (For a good general discussion of power laws in a social web context, see Clay Shirky’s “Power Laws, Weblogs, and Inequality” at http://www.shirky.com/writings/powerlaw_weblog.html.)

AS SEEN ON

Untappd (<http://www.untappd.com> and Untappd mobile)

Academia (<http://academia.stackexchange.com/>)

QuizUp mobile application

Labels

Not all reputation designations are linear or ordinal. They don’t all constitute ranks or steps on a ladder. You can offer labels to reward achievements, participation in activities, or other qualitative measurements of status, such as is demonstrated in Figure 6-8.

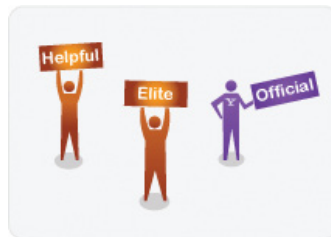


FIGURE 6-8

Labels help identify distinctive people in your community.

What

Community members need to identify other, “noteworthy” members of the community who have distinguished themselves in some way. As Figure 6-9 depicts, perhaps they’ve excelled at one particular skill that the community values; perhaps they are official representatives for the community or an affiliated organization; or perhaps they have volunteered to be a helpful resource for others in the community.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful

★★★★★ **Very effective for handling hot cookware**

By [J. Chambers](#) [HALL OF FAME](#) [TOP 10 REVIEWER](#) on December 31, 2014

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful

★★★★★ **Lets me pick and choose from a large variety of techniques**

By [Ali Julia](#) [#1 REVIEWER](#) [#1 HALL OF FAME](#) on January 11, 2015

FIGURE 6-9

Amazon (<http://www.amazon.com>) recognizes reviewers who have made it into the Hall of Fame as well as the level of reviewer by attaching labels as part of the attribution for the user. There are several labels possible, with some being temporal and some being based on achieving levels.

Use when

You have identified some desirable behaviors for your community that you'd like to promote.

You want to allow users to volunteer for a “role” or responsibility within the community.

You need a reputation to reflect that a user has been vetted or validated, either by your organization or a trusted third party. The community's culture can occupy any point along the Competitiveness Spectrum.

How

Define one or more families of reputations that are not sequential in nature. Each reputation is crafted to identify and reward particular behaviors or qualities within a community. Labels are helpful for consumers in identifying more-experienced contributors who possess these qualities (e.g., “Helpful” guides or “Elite” reviewers). These labels are not particularly useful for comparing one reputation-holder to another.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Reputation holders may accrue more than one “Identifying Label” at a time. These labels may also require a user to apply for or accept the reputation before it is publicly displayed.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Avatars” on page 151

“Identity Cards or Contact Cards” on page 144

“Profile” on page 118

AS SEEN ON

Academia (<http://academia.stackexchange.com>)

Amazon (<http://www.amazon.com>)

Awards

Awards can help identify worthy community members and provide incentives for positive behavior. They can be given by the host community or from one peer to another and displayed on a profile or user card.

Collectible Achievements

Some participants in communities respond to opportunities to earn or win awards that they can collect and display to other community members.

What

How can you encourage your participants to engage more deeply, strive to accomplish great things (whether cooperatively or competitively), or, for that matter, show up at a focus group? How can your members show off their accomplishments to one another, preen, and earn respect? Figure 6-10 demonstrates the system that cycling and running application, Strava, uses.

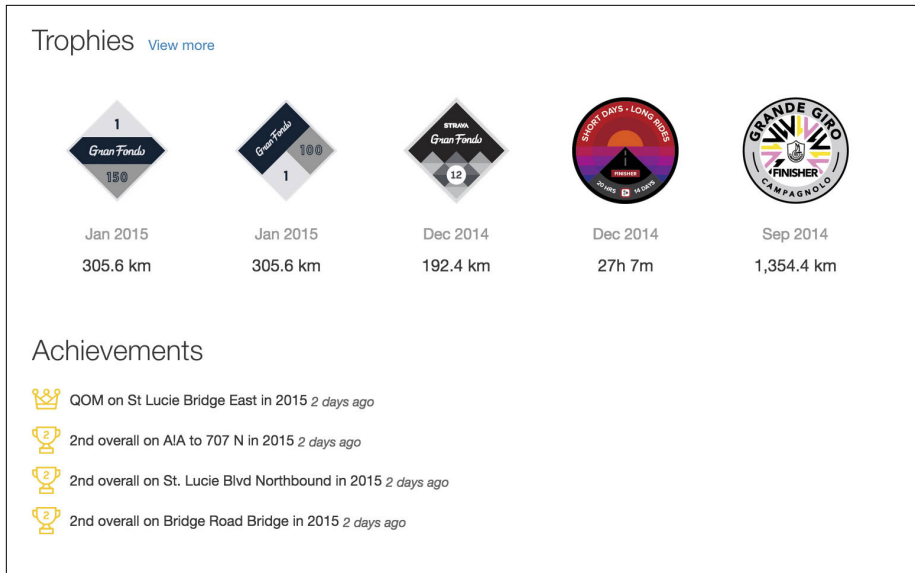


FIGURE 6-10

The cycling and running application, Strava (<http://www.strava.com>), showcases both collected trophies earned for finishing athletic challenges as well as personal achievements on the user's profile.

Use when

You want to take advantage of your users' compulsive natures. They might seem silly or trivial, but collectible achievements can have an addictive quality when done correctly, and can compel your users to explore parts of your offering that otherwise might not appeal to them.

You want to encourage the community to try out all aspects of your offering. For instance, if you'd like to encourage more trades in a fantasy sports context, consider rewarding users with an achievement upon the completion of their tenth successful trade. ("Successful" is key here; make sure to introduce and enforce some notion of quality in the achievement.)

You want to encourage and reward offline participation in challenges and community activities. Mobile applications make it possible for people to track offline participation in group activities and competitive challenges, and presenting awards, trophies, and other achievements online closes the online/offline loop.

How

Provide some boon or reward to users for attaining certain goals within the community. Make them a consistent family, or program, of collectibles. Enhance their fun appeal by fetishizing them in some way: develop attractive trophies, icons, or “gamepieces” to represent each achievement, and give users a way to save them and put them on display. Provide a healthy mix of difficulties: make some achievements very easy and quick (low-hanging fruit) while ensuring that others require time and effort to conquer, and perhaps “unlock” new achievements as easier ones are accomplished.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Achievements, like most reputation mechanisms, should encourage quality participation over mere repetitious activity. So, don’t reward a user’s “20th game played.” Rather, you should reward “20 wins in one season.” It might be useful to develop a number of “first time” achievements (e.g., “First to review” [see Figure 6-11], “First Recipe Written,” “First Comment Received”). Make these achievements not as valuable as others that are more difficult, and don’t continue to reward the same behavior. These “first” achievements are useful for encouraging people to try new and novel features, but don’t reward them for gaming those features repeatedly. List the available achievements for your product so that users will know which ones are available to them. Also, indicate the ones they’ve achieved already. Keep some achievements “locked” or grayed-out until their display has been earned.



FIGURE 6-11

Yelp (<http://www.yelp.com>) offers a “First to review” achievement for the first person to write a review about a business.

Collectible achievements should not be confused with points, although you could intermix the two (for example, award a certain number of points for each achievement earned).

EXCLUSIVITY

Feel free to be fairly generous with collectible achievements; every member of your community should have easy access to some. But, also keep some rarer achievements in short supply, and make those more difficult to obtain.

TEMPORALITY

Yelp describes its Elite Squad as “our way of recognizing some of our most active and influential members, both on and off the site.” As Figure 6-12 shows, though, Elite status is also temporal in nature, and is earned on a yearly basis.

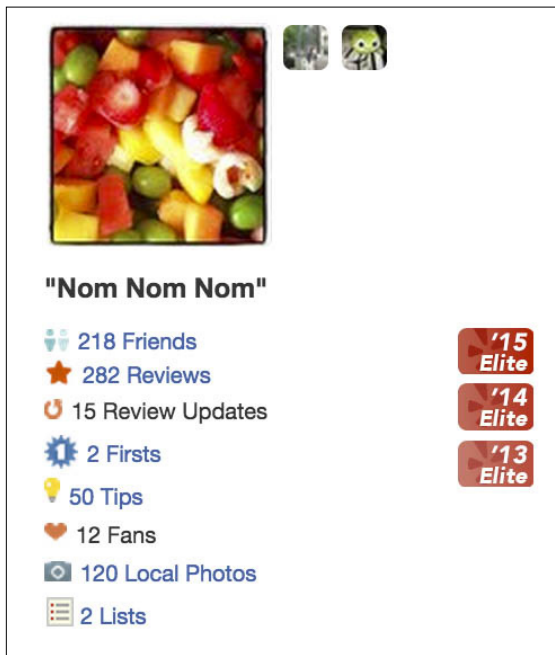


FIGURE 6-12

In addition to peer-to-peer awards, Yelp offers a temporal Elite status that is specific to a calendar year.

RELATED PATTERN

“Profile” on page 118

AS SEEN ON

Yelp (<http://www.yelp.com>)

Strava (<http://www.strava.com> and Strava mobile)

Peer-to-Peer Awards

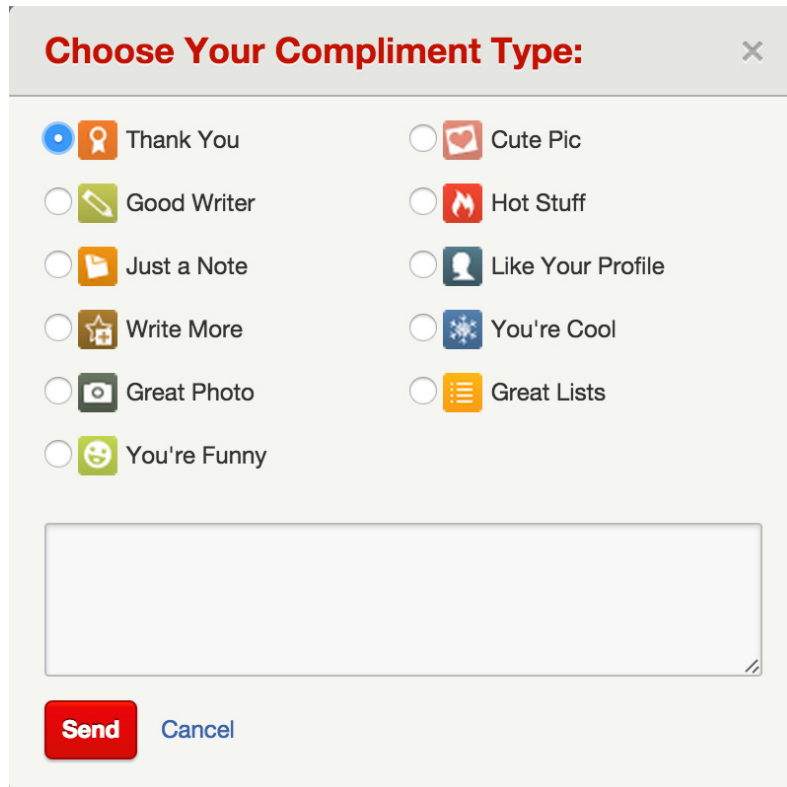
The state does not need to maintain a monopoly on the ability to hand out medals. Let the chamber of commerce and the Elks have their own awards, too. Let the tyke make a World's Greatest Granddad coffee mug on the pottery wheel. Giving your users the ability to share compliments by bestowing awards on one another offers another opportunity for social “grooming” behavior and the reinforcement of weak ties (giving someone a prize is less of a commitment than inviting him into your private group, for example).

What

People enjoy giving and receiving compliments and will use existing message board and guestbook features for this purpose in a pinch, but the entire system can benefit if these kinds of gestures are made and supported more formally, such as that offered by Yelp and shown in Figures 6-13 and 6-14.

FIGURE 6-13

Yelp offers a large list of categories for its Compliments feature, but users seem comfortable choosing among them.



The image shows a dialog box titled "Choose Your Compliment Type:" with a close button (X) in the top right corner. The dialog contains a list of ten compliment categories, each with a radio button and an icon:

- Thank You (person icon)
- Good Writer (pencil icon)
- Just a Note (notepad icon)
- Write More (star icon)
- Great Photo (camera icon)
- You're Funny (smiley face icon)
- Cute Pic (heart icon)
- Hot Stuff (flame icon)
- Like Your Profile (person icon)
- You're Cool (snowflake icon)
- Great Lists (list icon)

Below the list is a large empty text input field. At the bottom of the dialog are two buttons: a red "Send" button and a blue "Cancel" button.



FIGURE 6-14

Yelp compliments are a kind of award that any user can give to another to be displayed on the recipient's profile and user card.

Use when

Use this pattern when you're trying to foster more collaborative and cooperative peer-to-peer relationships.

How

- In the context of participatory activities (such as posting content, giving feedback, writing reviews, etc.) and in the context of a user's profile, provide an interface through which a fellow site member can select a type of award and then customize it by either adding a note or otherwise decorating or labeling it.
- Optionally, permit the recipient of the award to approve it before it is displayed.
- Display the award in a gallery on the recipient's profile.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Although you might be tempted to offer an ever-longer list of award categories or types, experiment with a smaller, more focused list of roughly five to seven categories. This way, you can avoid overwhelming your users with too many arbitrary options.

CONSIDERATIONS

Users might feel obligated to reciprocate awards, and although there's nothing inherently wrong with mutual backscratching, indiscriminate award-giving can feel like a form of spam if it creates a sense of obligation in the recipient. Provide your users with guidelines and establish forgiving social norms (for instance, that there really is no expectation of reciprocation) to mitigate some of the social behavior patterns that will otherwise assert themselves if unchecked.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Give Gift” on page 272

“Profile” on page 118

“Testimonials (or Personal Recommendations)” on page 135

AS SEEN ON

Yelp (<http://www.yelp.com>)

Rankings

Rankings, like levels, enable clear comparisons. Unlike levels, rankings are oriented toward listing the highest, the top, and the best in each category. Rankings are measured in terms of accumulated points. As with numbered levels, you can display points explicitly or keep them hidden as a driver of position.

Points

Points provide an almost infinitely scaleable process for comparing people based on their accumulated scores.

What

In some communities, participants want a tangible measurement of their accomplishments for personal satisfaction and to make comparisons with other competitors, as Figure 6-15 illustrates by stack ranking point awards.

Use when

Use this pattern when the community is *highly competitive* and the activities that users engage in are competitive in nature (e.g., play-versus-player contests or coaching a fantasy football team).

Points are generally discouraged in social sites, except in cases where the fundamental and primary purpose of the community is competition, such as fantasy sports or games.

Specifically, don't use this pattern when:

- The activities that users engage in are *not* competitive in nature (e.g., writing recipes or sharing photos).
- Awarding points might demean or devalue the activity that they're meant to reward. By pinning an arbitrary incentive value to an activity, you might unintentionally replace a user's satisfying, intrinsic motivation with a petty, extrinsic one.

How

Maintain and display a cumulative count of the number of points that a user has earned within a community. The points generally come from performing one of a number of activities on the site.

Points are best awarded to congratulate performance rather than merely to acknowledge activity.

You also might want to account for *social points*, driven by actions that others in the community take toward a community member. When possible, these social points should reflect a measure of quality (e.g., giving a “thumbs up” rating to a well-written comment) rather than a generic or rote activity (e.g., awarding a number of points for each friend added in a social network).

FIGURE 6-15

With Wikia, contributors can earn points, which also translate into earned badges. Members are compared via a Leaderboard where points are displayed to spur competition and community expertise.

Achievements

What are Achievements? hide

You can earn badges on this wiki by editing pages, uploading photos and leaving comments. Each badge earns you points - the more points you get, the higher up the leaderboard you go! You'll find the badges you've earned on your [user profile page](#).

What are badges worth?

Bronze  **Silver**  **Gold** 

Leaderboard

Rank	Member	Points	Most recently earned
1 	 Wilc0	7,030 POINTS	 Sangheili
2	 Karl-591	7,020 POINTS	 Wiki Planner
3	 Haloprov	5,580 POINTS	 Wiki Expert
4	 Evodvi	4,680 POINTS	 Designer
5 	 T3CHNOCIDE	4,530 POINTS	 Curator
6	 Vektor0	3,970 POINTS	 Lucky Edit
7	 GodzillaMaster	3,830 POINTS	 Lucky Edit
8	 Zeta1127,89thLegion	3,580 POINTS	 Wiki Expert
9	 Sgt D Grif	3,380 POINTS	 General
10	 Bravadostock	3,320 POINTS	 Wiki Expert
11	 Ultra Force	2,930 POINTS	 Curator
12	 Road Cone	2,830 POINTS	 Miner
13	 MasterChiefDragonWarrior	2,630 POINTS	 Wiki Planner
14	 Circulating Peace	2,530 POINTS	 Wiki Expert
15	 Jedijam91	2,380 POINTS	 Miner
16	 Vidmas7er	2,320 POINTS	 Lucky Edit
17	 Commando Trooper	2,260 POINTS	 Lucky Edit

RECOMMENDATIONS

Consider points as a supplement to some other reputation pattern, where the points themselves are not the primary indicator of reputation. Rather, they just give users a sense for their levels of achievement and indicate progress toward the next reputation milestone; for example, “Dwalin is a Level 8 Dwarf (342)”.

Points should reward performance (e.g., winning a game against an opponent) rather than activity (e.g., 10 points for every message posted). Points that reward activity can lead users to perform that activity again and again with no regard for the quality of their contributions. The gaming world even has a term for this: *grinding* ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grind_\(gaming\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grind_(gaming))).

In some communities, participants want a tangible measurement of their accomplishments for personal satisfaction and to make comparisons with other competitors.

One exception to the performance recommendation: points can be a useful reward of activity the first time a user performs an action (e.g., “You completed your profile! Here are 20 points”). These “first time” awards are hard to game, and can encourage users to explore new areas of your offering.

EXAMPLES



Seller: simply_beautiful_2012 (60 ★)
—
Seller: love.sell.cutestuff (236 ★)
—
Seller: sandi0091 (1603 ★)
—
Seller: the-vault-silver (233768 ★)
—
Seller: silverbybali (1025 ★)
—

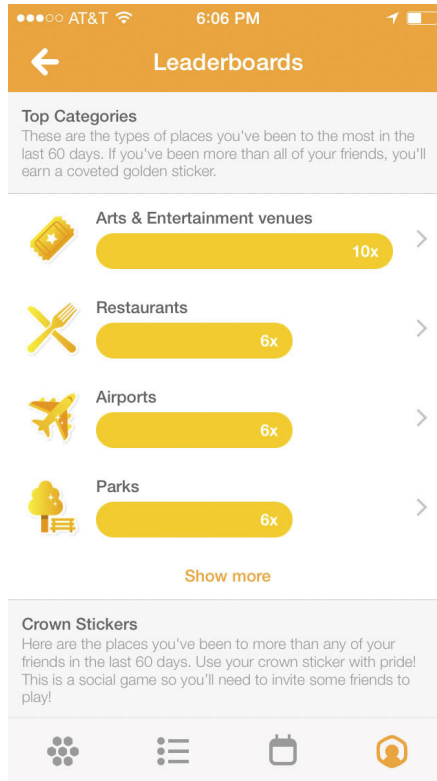
FIGURE 6-16

eBay’s Feedback Score (<http://ebay.to/1H6nLrX>) is based on the number of successful transactions that a seller or buyer has completed.

Xbox Live’s GamerScore (<http://bit.ly/1U2oUdh>) is a measure that corresponds to the number of points accumulated by an Xbox Live player. And as Figure 6-17 illustrates, eBay’s Feedback Score feature lists the number of successful transactions.

FIGURE 6-17

Swarm's leaderboard shows the top location types that the user has visited and presents them against each other (Swarm iOS application).



AS SEEN ON

eBay (<http://www.ebay.com>)

Civilization wikia (<http://civilization.wikia.com>)

Leaderboard

In highly competitive communities, a leaderboard can spur on ever-fiercer efforts to reach the top.

What

In highly competitive communities that use a ranking system, users might want to know who are the very best performers in a category, or overall, as various applications such as Swarm (Figure 6-18), Waze (Figure 6-19), and Strava (Figure 6-20) illustrate with both points, rankings, and the ability to see in a specific category, for a snapshot in time or overall.

The screenshot shows the Waze iOS application's SCOREBOARD screen. At the top, there is a status bar with AT&T, signal strength, Wi-Fi, and battery icons, and the time 9:18 PM. Below the status bar is a navigation bar with a back arrow, the title 'SCOREBOARD', and a close 'X' icon. Underneath the navigation bar are three tabs: 'Me', 'Friends' (selected), and 'Everyone'. Below the tabs are four filter buttons: 'Weekly', 'All Time', 'State', and 'All States' (selected). The main content is a table with the following data:

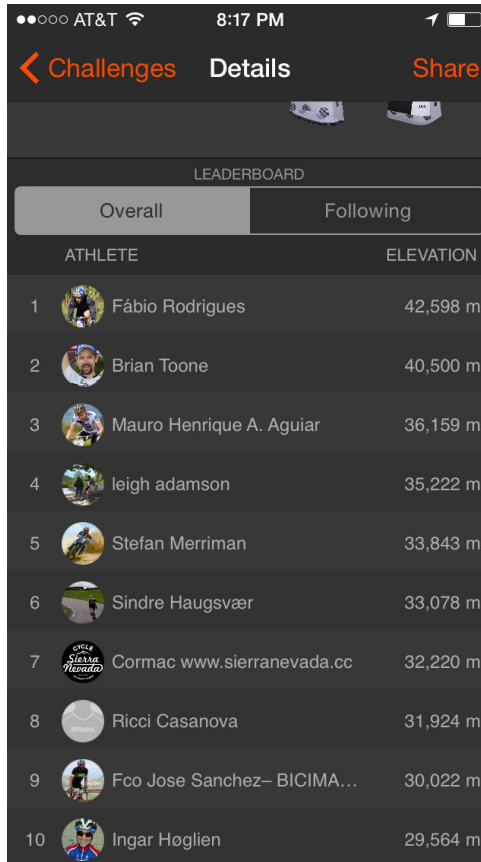
Rank	Name	Points	Change
53649	Sarah Paist Miller	144,419	-
60220	David Hatch	137,408	-
77913	David Rout	122,075	-
244521	Eric Larson	65,076	-
306228	Julie Stanford	55,876	-
332697	Hillary Mickell	52,651	-
340934	Cameron Marlow	51,715	-
462459	Chris Chandler	41,127	-
499652	Nols Myers	38,719	-
688478	Ben Sykes	29,761	-
724214	Laura Alice Watt	28,490	-

FIGURE 6-18

Waze shares rankings of the user's personal network of friends as well as everyone in the system and filters them by week versus all time, and the state the user is located in versus all states (Waze iOS application).

FIGURE 6-19

There is a leaderboard in each challenge on Strava, and users can toggle between everyone and just the people they are following (Strava iOS application).



Use when

- The community is highly competitive, and the activities that users engage in are competitive in nature (e.g., player-versus-player contests or coaching a fantasy football team).
- You want to enable player-to-player comparisons, or permit users to definitively settle “Who is better?” arguments.

Do not use this pattern when the activities that users engage in are not competitive in nature (e.g., writing recipes or sharing photos).

How

Display user rankings in a *leaderboard*. A leaderboard is a list showing a fixed number of top competitors, ranked by score from highest to lowest.

Provide multiple views of a leaderboard, including all-time standings (overall rankings) and weekly or daily standings (latest movers in the community). Typically, the all-time view will be more stable (sometimes downright stagnant), so consider making the “latest movers” view the default one for the leaderboard (see Figure 6-19).

Also consider the easy ability to filter a leaderboard—perhaps showing only a user and her contacts or friends and their relative standings, without the extra noise of the larger community.

In “Is Harriet Klausner for real?” (<http://bit.ly/1U2tVCG>), Joshua Porter discusses Amazon’s “#1 Reviewer” and her phenomenal (unbelievable?) review rate that averages seven books a day in an apparent effort to stay at the top of the reviewer leaderboards:

Klausner is apparently trying to game the system so she keeps her position. In a world where building social tools like this is becoming more common every day, Klausner is diluting the value of her reviews just for personal gain. While nobody is going to get too upset over less-than-helpful reviews, the larger, longer effect is that if she’s merely writing them to keep her spot, she’s not writing them for the right reason. Amazon’s social design should incentivize her to write valuable reviews, not allow her to write them without value.

So, remember, any number you track and display, any metric, becomes a score. People will treat them as points and work to accumulate them, and some people will game the system, seeking the numerical reward over whatever the “spirit” of the service is.

AS SEEN ON

Swarm mobile

Waze mobile

Strava (<http://www.strava.com> and Strava mobile)

Leaderboards Considered Harmful

It's still too early to speak in absolutes about the design of social media sites, but one fact *is* becoming abundantly clear: ranking the members of your community—and pitting them one-against-the-other in a competitive fashion—is typically a bad idea. Like the fabled *djinni* of yore, leaderboards on your site promise riches (comparisons! incentives! user engagement!!) but often lead to undesired consequences.

So why do we use them? The typical thought process goes something like this: there's an activity on your site that you'd like to promote; a number of people engaged in that activity who should be recognized; and a whole bunch of other people who need a kick in the pants to jump in. Leaderboards seem like the perfect solution. Active contributors will get their recognition: placement at the top of the ranks. The also-rans will be incentivized to emulate leaders and climb the boards.

And that activity you're trying to promote? Usage should swell with all those earnest, motivated users plugging away, right? It's the classic win-win-win scenario! In practice, employing this pattern has rarely been this straightforward. Here are but a few reasons why leaderboards are hard to get right.

WHAT DO YOU MEASURE?

Many leaderboards make the mistake of basing standings *only on what is easy to measure*. Unfortunately, what's easy to measure oftentimes tells you nothing at all about what is good. Leaderboards tend to fare well in very competitive contexts, because there's a convenient correlation between measurability and quality. (It's called “performance”—number of wins versus losses within overall attempts.)

But how do you measure quality in a user-generated video community? Or a site for ratings and reviews? It should have very little to do with the quantities of simple activity that a person generates (the number of times an action is repeated, a comment is given, or a review is posted). Yet, these types of things—discrete, countable, and objective—are exactly what leaderboards excel at.

WHATEVER YOU *DO* MEASURE WILL BE TAKEN WAY TOO SERIOUSLY

Even if you succeed in leavening your leaderboard with metrics for quality (perhaps you weigh community votes or count “send-to-a-friend” actions), be aware that—because the leaderboard singles these factors out for praise and reward—your community will hold these things in high esteem, as well. Leaderboards have this amazing “Code of Hammurabi” effect on community values: what’s written becomes the law of the land. And, you’ll likely notice this effect in the things that people do—and won’t do—on your site. So tread carefully. Are you really that much smarter than your community that you alone should dictate the makeup of its character?

IF IT LOOKS LIKE A LEADERBOARD, AND QUACKS LIKE A LEADERBOARD...

Even sites that don’t display overt leaderboards can veer too closely into the “comparative statistics” realm. Consider Twitter and its prominent display of community members’ statistics (Figure 6-20).



FIGURE 6-20

How else will you know if you’re winning?

The problem doesn’t lie with the existence of the stats, but perhaps in the prominence of their display. It gives Twitter the appearance of a community that values popularity and the sheer size of your social network above all else. Is it any wonder, then, that a whole host of community-created leaderboards have sprung up to allow just such comparisons? Twitterholic, Twitterrank, Favrd, and a number of others are the natural extension of this value-by-numbers approach.

LEADERBOARDS ARE POWERFUL AND CAPRICIOUS

In the earliest days of Orkut (Google's also-ran entry into social networking), the property managers featured a harmless little widget at the top of the site—a country-counter, showing members' geographical origins. Cute, right? Harmless, certainly. Google had no way of knowing, however, that the *entire population of Brazil* would make it a point of national pride to push their country to the top of that list! Brazilian blogger Naitze Teng writes: “Communities dedicated to raising the number of Brazilians on Orkut were following the numbers closely, planning gatherings and flash mobs to coincide with the inevitable. When it was reported that Brazilians had outnumbered Americans registered on Orkut, parties...were thrown in celebration” (<http://www.popmatters.com/columns/teng/060629.shtml>).

Today, Brazil maintains its number one position on Orkut (as of this writing, 51 percent of Orkut users are Brazilian, and the United States and India are tied for a distant second with 17 percent apiece; see <http://www.orkut.com/Main#MembersAll.aspx>). Orkut is—basically—a Brazilian social network. Which is not a bad “problem” for Google to have, but is probably never an outcome it would have expected from such a simple, small, and insignificant thing as a leaderboard widget.

CUI BONO?

This might be the most insidious artifact of a leaderboard community: the very presence of a leaderboard changes the community dynamic and calls into question the motivations of everyone for any action each individual might take! If that sounds a bit extreme, consider Twitter: friend counts and followers have become the coins of that realm, and when I get a notification of a new follower...? Well, I'm more apt to believe that it's just someone fishing around for a reciprocal “follow.” It's sad, but true. And this is a site that itself has never officially featured a leaderboard. Twitter merely made the statistics known and provided an API to get at them, and in doing so, it may have let the djinni out of the bottle.

BRYCE GLASS, COAUTHOR, *BUILDING WEB REPUTATION SYSTEMS* (O'REILLY) (<http://buildingreputation.com>)

Top X

One way to cast the net of rewards more widely in a ranking system is to identify people as belonging to the Top 10, Top 25, Top 50, Top 100, and so on. This provides a sort of logarithmic ranking scale, which is less specific than “being number one” but still offers comparative

awards to top performers (see Figure 6-21). The music charts in the old-school record industry work this way (Top 10 hit!, America’s Top 40!, in the Top 100 “with a bullet!”).



FIGURE 6-21

If you can’t be number one, maybe you can get into the top 100.

What

Participants in some communities welcome the challenge of striving to enter the top tier of competitors.

Use when

You want to encourage top contributors to continue to provide high-quality content (and continue to serve as examples of valued community behaviors to the rest of the community). You want to motivate heavy (but not yet *top*) contributors to increase the quality and frequency of their contributions.

Do not use this pattern when:

- Introducing an “elite” designation could produce an unwanted community divide (for example, in a community whose spirit is more about collaboration or nurturing its members).
- The context for the reputation would be unclear. For example “Top 10 Shopper” on Y! Shopping is confusing and doesn’t provide any useful interpretation, but “Top 10 Reviewer in Books” is better; it’s more specific and lets consumers know this person’s area of experience.

How

Group together contributors numerically into “buckets” of performance, and acknowledge top performers for their superior achievements. Top 10, 50, and 100 are some commonly used groupings. Consider providing some additional award for the number one contributor in the community: an especially ornate badge, or even a blog announcement on those rare occasions when the top slot changes hands.

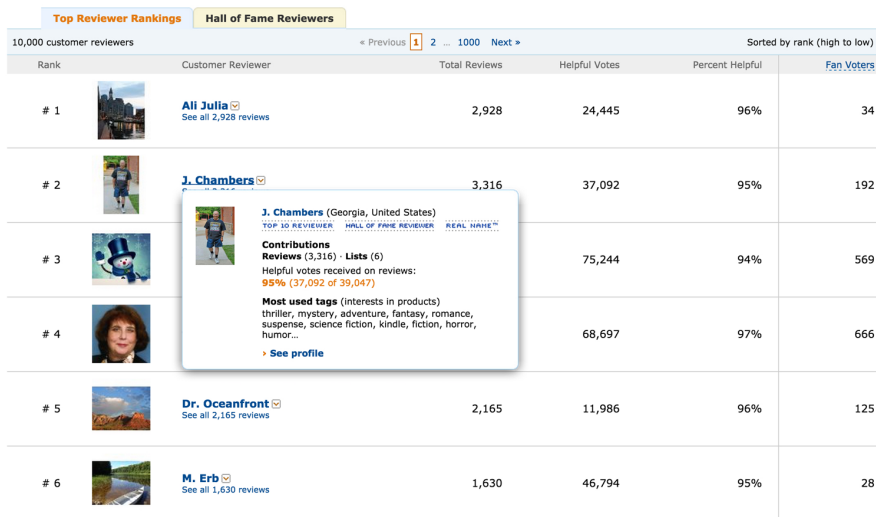
EXCLUSIVITY

The exclusivity (basically “how many of these should be awarded?”) of this reputation type is somewhat self-explanatory: there would be 10 community members in the Top 10, and 90 more within the Top 100. Consider, however, the upper threshold that you’re prepared to reward. You might want to go no higher than a Top 100 designation, for example, regardless of the actual size of your community. In comparative studies, we’ve heard several users state that “Top 1,000” badges are silly or seem frivolous. (“They’re just givin’ ‘em away” is a typical reaction.)

Amazon’s Top Reviewers (<http://amzn.to/1H6oARw>) program is long standing and much emulated. In its original incarnation, however, questions abounded about the motivations (and ethics; see <http://slate.me/1H6oCZN>) of contributors at the highest levels of the leaderboard. Amazon ultimately responded by changing the rules for the list and maintaining a smaller nod to the “classic” leaderboard rankings (see Figure 6-22).

Amazon’s Top Customer Reviewers

Our top reviewers have helped millions of their fellow customers make informed purchase decisions on Amazon.com with their consistently helpful, high-quality reviews. The Top Reviewer Rankings showcase our best contributors at the moment, while the Hall of Fame honors those who have been highly ranked in previous years. Take a minute to explore the reviews written by these customers. They will inspire you. ([Learn more](#))












Rank	Customer Reviewer	Total Reviews	Helpful Votes	Percent Helpful	Fan Voters
# 1	 Ali Julia  See all 2,928 reviews	2,928	24,445	96%	34
# 2	 J. Chambers 	3,316	37,092	95%	192
# 3	 J. Chambers (Georgia, United States) <small>TOP 10 REVIEWER HALL OF FAME REVIEWER REAL NAME™</small> Contributions Reviews (3,316) · Lists (6) Helpful votes received on reviews: 98% (37,092 of 39,047) Most used tags (interests in products) thriller, mystery, adventure, fantasy, romance, suspense, science fiction, kindle, fiction, horror, humor... See profile	75,244	94%	569	
# 4	 Dr. Oceanfront  See all 2,165 reviews	2,165	11,986	96%	125
# 6	 M. Erb  See all 1,630 reviews	1,630	46,794	95%	28

FIGURE 6-22

Amazon’s list of top customer reviewers displays a number of criteria used to determine the displayed rank. Hovering on a reviewer’s icon displays a user card, in this case showing some labels, including the Top 10 Reviewer honor.

The FBI's 10 Most Wanted List (<http://www.fbi.gov/wanted/topten/>; Figure 6-23) almost never came to be. When it was suggested, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover was worried that criminals would be motivated to commit more spectacular crimes! It has been a long-running and successful program, however.

Wanted by the FBI

[Home](#) • [Most Wanted](#) • [Ten Most Wanted](#)

Ten Most Wanted

The FBI is offering rewards for information leading to the apprehension of the Ten Most Wanted Fugitives. Select the images of suspects to display more information.

[Facts on the Program](#) | [Historical Photos of Each Top Tenner](#) | [60th Anniversary Booklet](#)



FIGURE 6-23

The FBI's top 10 list of infamous fugitives can help clarify your thinking about how incentives work for a Top X list.

AS SEEN ON

Amazon (<http://www.amazon.com>)

The FBI website (<http://www.fbi.gov>)

Tools for Monitoring Reputation

Finally, it's worth noting that if you are going to impose a reputation system on your users, you owe it to them to provide clear information about the standards by which they are being judged, the criteria for ranking, and their current standing in any system (as well as prospects for upcoming recognition). In the wider world of the Internet, users are becoming more aware of the need for monitoring their reputation as exposed by search engines, incoming links, evidence of participation in social networks (including ill-advised college-party photos on Facebook that might need to be scrubbed after you “befriend” your boss there), and so on. Monitoring can be as simple as creating alerts, such as those shown in Figure 6-24 or using more sophisticated tools.

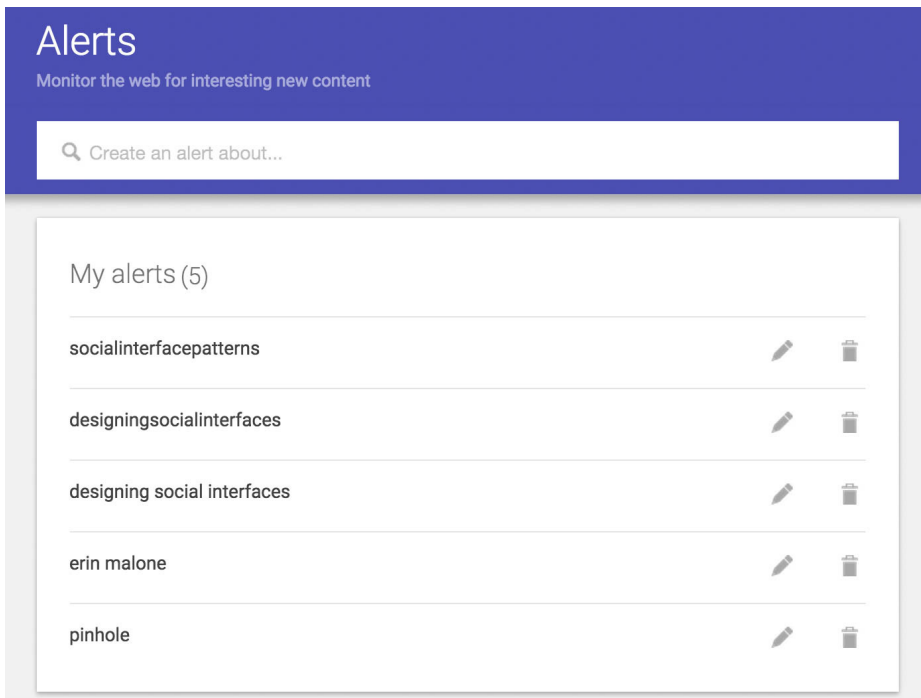


FIGURE 6-24

The most basic tools, such as Google Alerts, can monitor what's happening in real time with specific topics or people.

A host of social-media monitoring and reputation tools are now available for people to monitor their reputation across services, although most cater to businesses looking to manage their brand in social media. You can use these tools to track and monitor reputation and trust relationships, as shown in Figure 6-25.

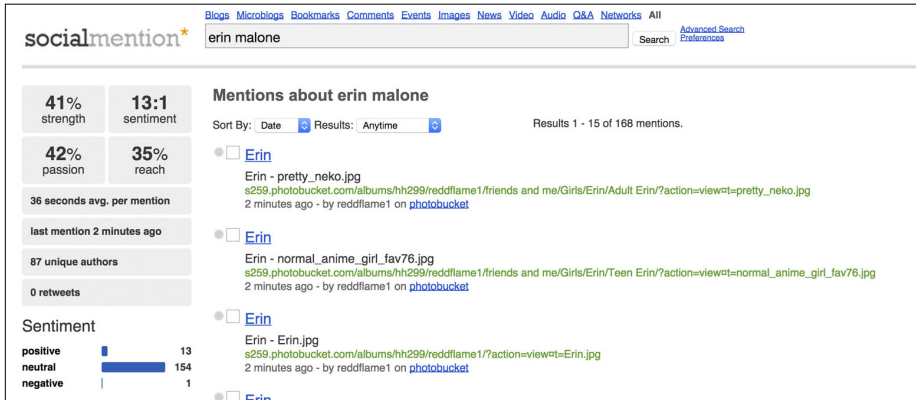


FIGURE 6-25

A well-regarded standalone reputation maintenance service could be used as a utility and plugged into your social platform if you don't want to develop your own custom solution. There are no clear winners in this space yet or UI conventions for disambiguating between people with the same name or for which services are collected. SocialMention—a free service mixes people with the same name into the same results score, making it less than useful for someone wanting to understand their reach and influence.

Friend Ranking

One of the emerging patterns we were seeing in 2009 was a game driven approach to inviting your users to compare their friends across a variety of axes (Figure 6-26). This type of application, embedded within a social service had a short life due to the awkward factor of the public results.

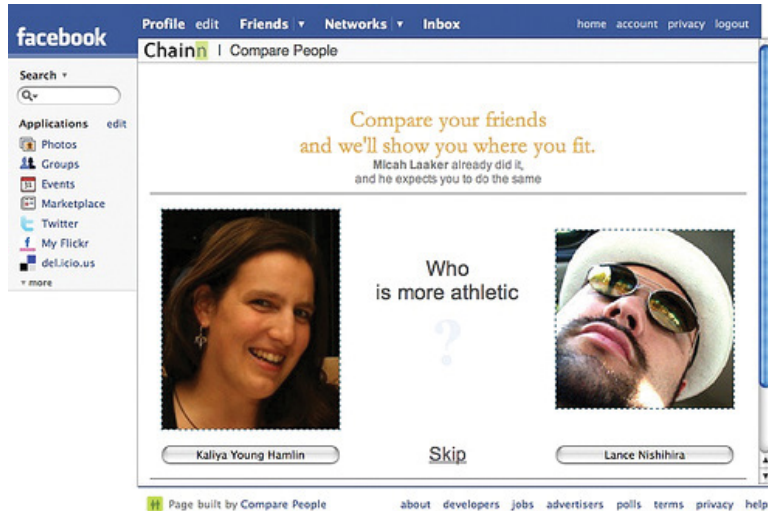


FIGURE 6-26

Being asked to compare your friends and acquaintances (who may themselves come from widely differing facets of your life) can feel rather awkward. It can just as easily become a compelling game-like experience, conceptually descended from the HotOrNot-type services that appeared in the 1990s.

By itself, a widget that asks people to compare friends doesn't get you much, but if you can accumulate a data store with a rich web of crowd-sourced comparisons, you can begin calculating some, well, rankings, and publish or display them in an attempt to spur further engagement with your service.

There are several tools utilizing data made available with the APIs from the big services (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and others) to show comparisons between people based on the analysis of words in posts, frequency of posts, and other publicly available information, as depicted in Figure 6-27.

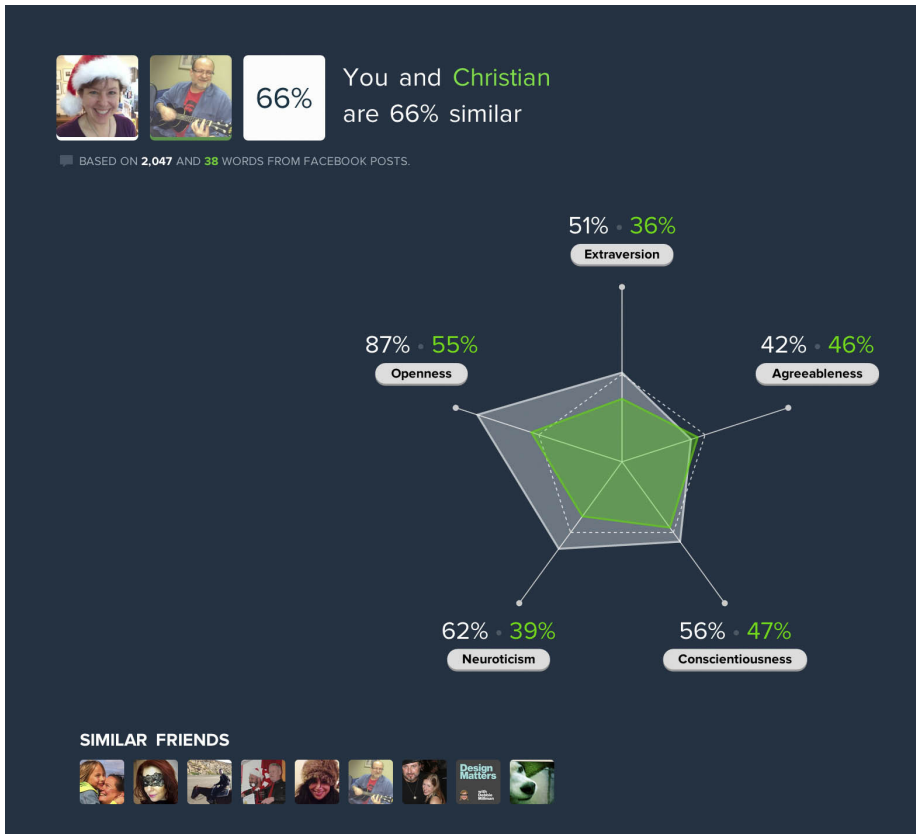


FIGURE 6-27

Christian and I compared on key axes shows how similar and different we are, based on Facebook posts. The tool from Five Labs also shows similar friends based on this comparison.

For the Win

Gaming has become big business in the context of social networks, reaching more than 150 million players on Facebook alone. The merging of social interactions with games is not a new phenomenon. Multiplayer games have always had social aspects to them—forming groups, chat and conversations among players, points and leaderboards, and player reputation, to name a few features.

Gamification (the addition of gaming techniques to increase engagement and activity within a site or application) has been a controversial topic and the trend has grown to the point at which it seems as if everyone wants to add badges and points to their site in the hopes of driving repeat usage.

There has naturally been backlash to this phenomenon and over the last several years, we have seen sites that began with badges slowly remove them when they turn out to not be the silver bullet promised.

Designers need to carefully consider their context, each specific gaming technique in combination with other social patterns and the behaviors they are looking to encourage.

The core set of gaming interactions are described by Amy Jo Kim as *Game Mechanics*. Specifically, they are:

Collecting

Players can create collections of things. This gives the user bragging rights for those who complete the entire collection or find everything there is to find in the game (see “Collecting” on page 233).

Points

Most games have a points system built in, and points can be awarded by the system or other players. Points are usually presented in a leaderboard fashion and drive behavior. They can punctuate key parts of the experience through unlocking new features or giving rewards when certain levels are attained (see “Leaderboard” on page 211, and “Rankings” on page 207).

Feedback

From other players, feedback drives engagement and enjoyment in the group play (see “Soliciting Feedback” on page 317, “Comments” on page 339, “Public Conversation” on page 363, and “Private Conversation” on page 366).

Exchanges

These are the structured social interactions, such as gifting. Most experiences have both implicit and explicit exchanges built in to the game (see “Give Gift” on page 272, the Sharing patterns in Chapter 8, and “Comments” on page 339).

Customization

This makes it possible for users to express themselves and create unique identities associated with their personas within the game. This can be the interface or their characters within the interface (see “Profile” on page 118 and “Avatars” on page 151).

These elements of games can be quite successful to making games social, but they are also powerful key principles and patterns for general social experiences. Ensuring that your experiences utilize aspects of these patterns together with a compelling social object or reason for participating will help create a fun and engaging platform for your users.

You get a double hit of social engagement when games are embedded into the social networking experience, as illustrated in Figure 6-28. They are an entertainment alternative to television and make it possible for users to engage in fun ways with their network that go beyond comments, sharing photos, and poking (see Figure 6-28).

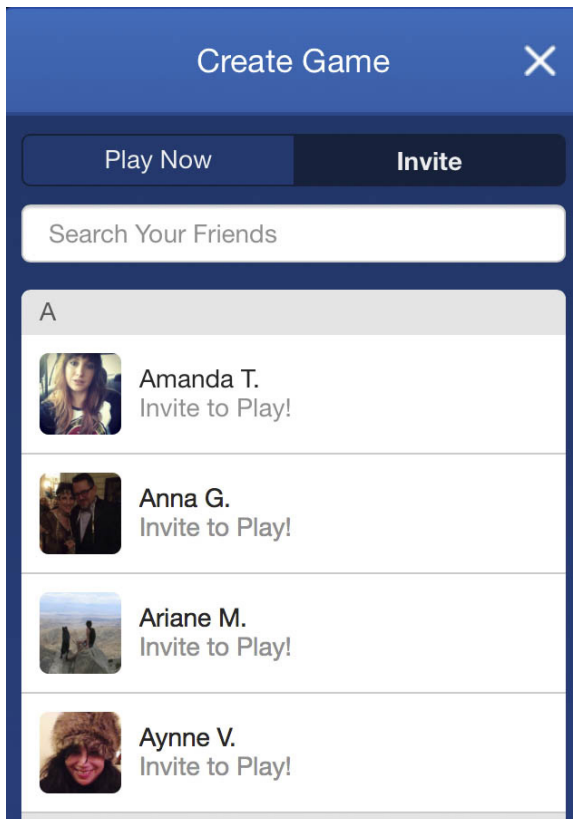


FIGURE 6-28

Games embedded into Facebook enable people to pull in their existing network into the gameplay.

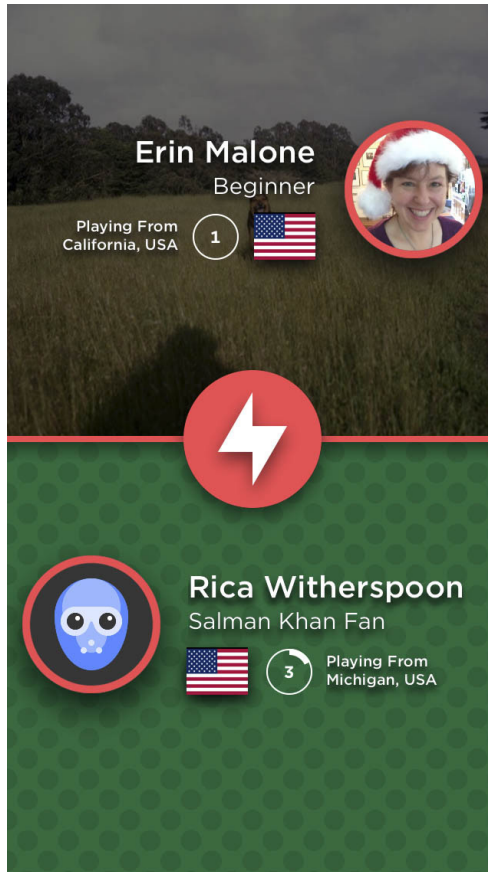


FIGURE 6-29

Social games app QuizUp lets you play with other random people or with your network of friends.

Social Games

Although most games are social, in that they are played with others, and many are played with groups of people and involve chat and other social tools, “social games” take advantage of the platform of the social network for distribution, viral spread, and collaborative game play. Social games are very popular and appeal to all demographics. There is tremendous growth in game use on social networks by women and older people. Social games have an advantage over traditional video games in that they are much more available and approachable and you can play them anywhere you have a computer or an Internet-enabled mobile device. The barrier to entry is lower, and these new casual users are more likely to play a game on Facebook than install an unknown gaming application on their computer.

CONSIDERATIONS

Developing games within an existing social environment should build upon the tools and experiences that already exist in the host environment. Utilize the user's existing network of friends, and use that to your advantage to promote and spread your game virally. But make sure to do it in a nice way that doesn't spam the person's network (see "Send Invitation" on page 85). There has been game fatigue across Facebook as social games have grown and been promoted to the point of being considered "Feed Spam."

Don't require users to create a new login. Most people have status and reputation built upon their identity—take advantage of that, but be respectful of appropriate context.

Share rewards and points notifications within the activity stream if there is one, and notify users when something cool happens, like one of their friends reaching a new level or beating a bunch of other friends in a game.

Provide a chat or threaded comment experience that can be woven into the regular part of the host site or filtered out of the host site. If you build on what already exists and provide a framework for users that they already know how to use, they will become engaged or even addicted to the games you provide.

In general, use any and all social tools already available to craft a social gaming experience within your platform.

Further Reading

1. Farmer, Randy and Bryce Glass. *Building Web Reputation Systems*. O'Reilly Media, 2010.
2. Porter, Joshua. "Is Harriet Klausner for real?" <http://bit.ly/1U2tVCG>.
3. "Putting the Fun in Functional: Applying Game Mechanics to Social Media." A presentation by Amy Jo Kim for Startup2Startup Gathering, 2009. <http://bit.ly/1U2tTuI>.

Objects of My Desire

PEOPLE CONGREGATE AND PARTICIPATE on social sites and applications for reasons that are as varied and wide as the interests of all the people participating. Most people are drawn to an experience based on their particular interests, in hopes of learning more or meeting others like themselves. They can be looking for information, or they might have information to share. They have a passion—such as making hand-crafted jewelry or taking landscape photographs—and at some point, they will want to share that with other people.

As a social experience designer, you should begin by defining the type of activity that you want to encourage in your space. Do you want people to collect or share? Are you interested in user contributions, such as comments or reviews, or curated information that you control? Or, do you want to create a framework around a specialized type of user-generated object that will then be the center of a social ecosystem, such as photos, or items for sale, or PowerPoint presentations?

Some of the earliest social networking sites to gain traction (SixDegrees, Friendster) ran into a “Now what?” wall. After a user had signed up, filled out a profile, found friends, and made connections, there wasn’t really much of anything to do there. The sites lacked a model of a social object, without which there are no activities besides trying to create a scale model of one’s own real-life social graph.

After you have a handle on the type of activity you want to foster and its associated subactivities, it is important to define the type of social object around which this activity will revolve. It will also be important to define who is responsible for providing the social object—the site or its users.

The term *social object* first appeared in a blog post by Jyri Engeström on April 13, 2005. Jyri, the cofounder of several social applications (later acquired by larger companies) and now an Entrepreneur in Residence at TrueVentures VC firm, wrote the following:

Social networks consist of people who are connected by a shared object. That's why many sociologists, especially activity theorists, actor-network theorists and post-ANT people prefer to talk about "socio-material networks," or just "activities" or "practices" (as I do) instead of social networks.... Flickr, for example, has turned photos into objects of sociality. On del.icio.us the objects are the URLs. EVDB, Upcoming.org (<http://upcoming.org>), and evnt focus on events as objects.

The concept has been further refined to encourage site builders to define the nouns and the verbs of the site, the verbs being what people do with the social objects around which the site is built. These can be “actions” such as play, read, view, share, collect, display, comment on, and annotate. You get the idea. Social is then further layered into the experience by making objects shareable, which we’ll cover in detail in [Chapter 8](#).

JP Rangaswami posits this metaphor about social objects:

You can have a conversation without a social object. You cannot have a social object without a conversation. It is the conversation that makes the object “social.”

Conversations grow around social objects, much like pearls grow around microscopic dust. Social objects are about growth, they are “live.” If you try and “inject” a social object into a conversation, then what you get, at best, is a cultured pearl. That’s what mass media did. Mass media tried to farm conversations. And created cultured pearls. Social objects are natural, not artificial.

A successful social object is one that has layer upon layer of conversation created around it; as the number of participants increases, social objects enjoy network effects. Social objects are about participation and participants.

When designing your social interfaces, ask yourself what social objects belong in the architecture and how you are going to support them. What activities are you going to make possible that enable people to engage with one another around these social objects? The patterns in the next several chapters address activities and behaviors that revolve around a social object. We also introduce patterns that provide a framework for creating or delivering user-generated social objects.

Hunters Gather

Collecting can be a way of achieving personal identity and a nurturing hobby to make one feel good, safe and loved. Collecting can provide a method of predictability and bring a sense of security to one's life. When people collect they have a sense of belonging to something, days look brighter and they feel more important.

SHELDON S. GREENBERG

Collecting

ONE OF THE INHERENT HUMAN ACTIVITIES IS COLLECTING. Whether it's photographs to remind one of an experience, or physical objects such as stamps, books, or figurines of owls, most people collect something. This behavior has translated easily into online spaces.

People will share what they find or have collected, and, like a trophy case in the home, they will display those collections for others to see, envy, and borrow. Eventually they have conversations around them.

Collecting can be divided into a few related activities: Saving, marking Favorites, Tagging, and Displaying. Saving and Favorites are similar in that the user action involves saving a URL or visual pointer to an item on a website or in a content pool in the cloud. The difference lies in whether the host site (the repository) is also the owner of the content being saved. Favorites are generally markers for content on the site hosting the item, whereas Saving involves being able to save anything from anywhere to a third-party site or widget. An additional distinction that can be made between Saving and Favoriting is how integral

the collection is to the site. In many cases, Favorites are an associated action but not the core activity: think SlideShare or Etsy or Flickr, where Favorites allow users to mark things they especially like from across the site and collect them in their profiles, but the core activity is posting and sharing photos or presentations. To continue this definition, Saving might be the core activity of the service, such as Pocket or EverNote, where the entire service revolves around saving pointers to things of interest from across the Internet.

A companion tool to Collecting is Tagging. Tagging gives people tools for organizing their collections and aids in findability when the person wants to locate a specific object in his collection at a later date.

Displaying takes that collection—whether it’s a group of favorites or items saved—and offers a framework to display to others.

Saving

What

A user wants to save an item for later viewing, sharing, or discussion (see Figure 7-1).

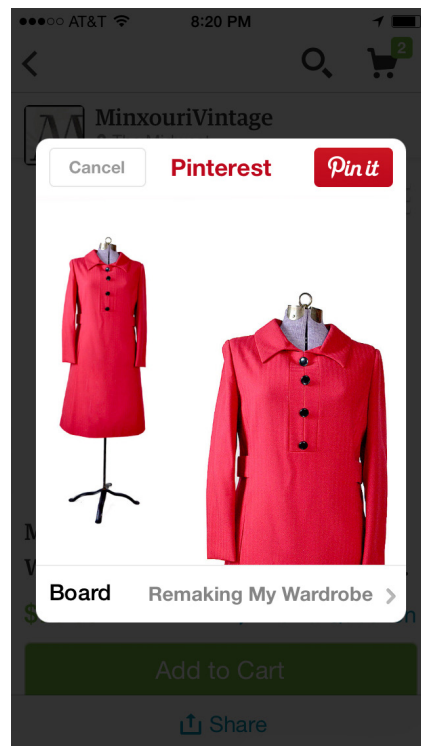


FIGURE 7-1

Pinterest lets users save image bookmarks or “Pins” that are then accessible from anywhere and shareable with others (Pinterest iOS application).

Use when

- You want people to be able to save websites, pages, clippings, photos, videos, or other items in an online environment.
- You want to give people a way to show off, share, or collaborate around a collection of online items.

How

- Provide an easy way for users to save an item of interest.
- Provide a toolbar link or other add-ons that can be added to the browser, as shown in Figure 7-2.

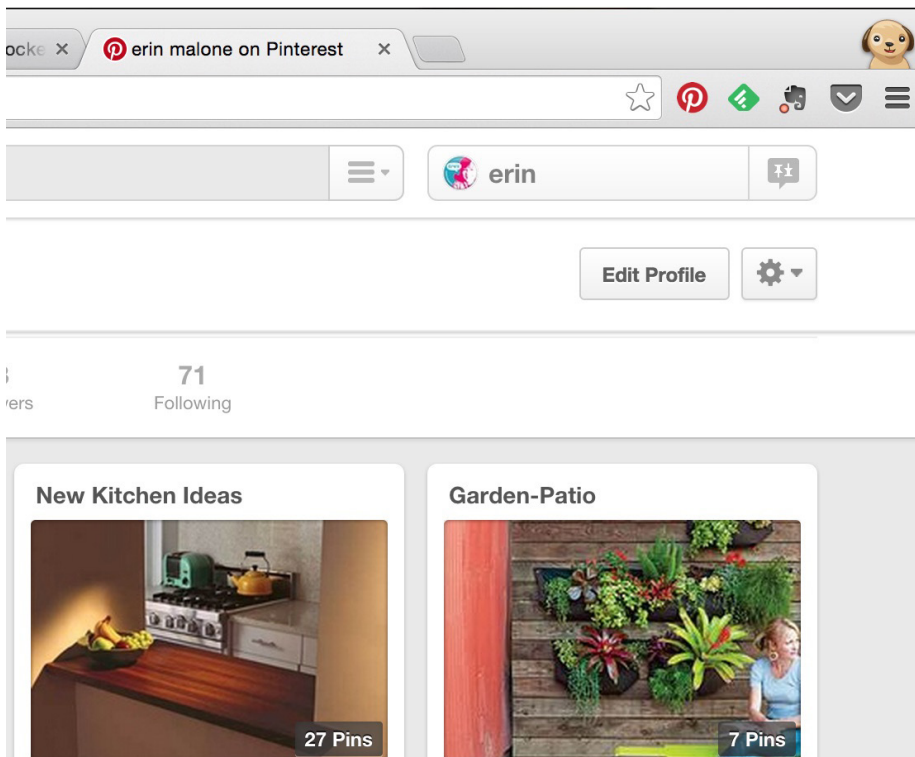


FIGURE 7-2

Most collection type services offer browser extensions and toolbar buttons to easily grab items while surfing the web. This example shows Pinterest, Feedly, Evernote and Pocket installed.

- Offer a mechanism for the user to add tags, a description, or other metadata to the saved item.
- Associate the saved item with the user's name and account.
- When saving, the user should be able to specify whether the item is public or private.
- If other people have saved the item before, offer the associated tags as options.
- Indicate how many people have saved the item.
- Consider including a way for people to form groups around items or collections of items.
- Provide an easy way to add an item to a group at the time of the initial save.

When presenting the collection to the owner:

- Present public and private items.
- Give the owner the means to delete or edit information about the item.
- Present the collection in reverse chronological order or in the order designated by the owner.
- Provide item filtering by tag.
- Provide item filtering by date, month, and year.
- Provide alphabetic item filtering.
- Provide item filtering by type (e.g., website, web page, photo, video, clipping of text, audio clips).

When presenting the collection to others:

- Include an option for public items to be presented to anyone.
- Present items in reverse chronological order or in the order designated by the owner.
- Provide item filtering by tag.
- Provide item filtering by date, month, and year.
- Provide alphabetic item filtering.

- Provide item filtering by type (e.g., website, web page, photo, video, clipping of text, audio clips).
- Include an option for the collection to be followed.
- Give the collection owner a way to see who is following her collection.

CONSIDERATIONS

When saving web pages, there are two options:

Saving a pointer to the original item

When saving a pointer, it points to the most recent public version of the item, as demonstrated in Figure 7-3. This might be different from what the user intended to save if there have been updates or changes to the original page. Additionally, there is also the potential for the item to be deleted or moved, in which case the pointer link will no longer work.

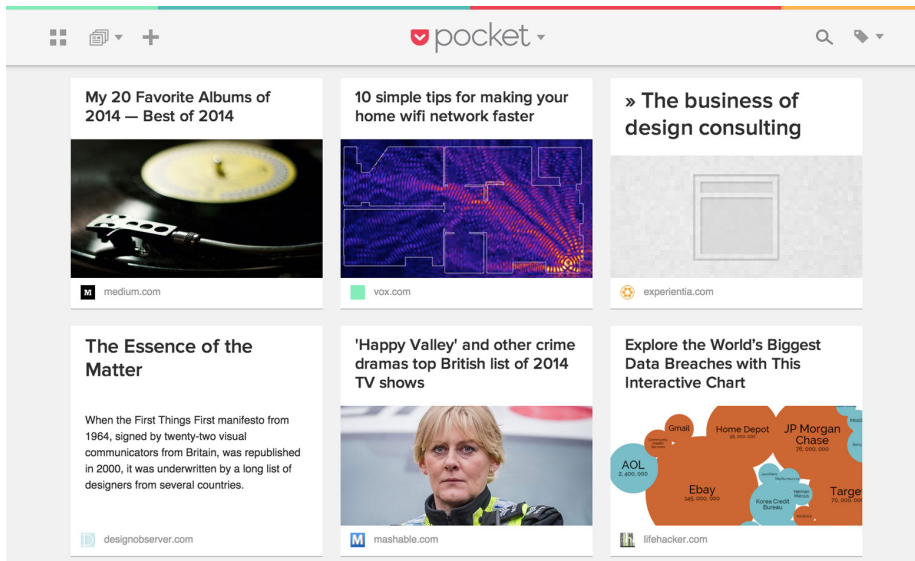


FIGURE 7-3

When saving web pages on Pocket, the system saves a copy of the page and then offers the user a pointer to the page on the live Internet (Pocket iPad application).

Saving a copy of the original item

When saving a copy of the original item, the user is guaranteed to always have access to the item she wanted to save. But, if the user saved a URL to a site such as a blog or a news site, the page saved will not be synchronized with the original site the next time that site is updated.

Clearly indicate which method is being used. When saving a copy, offer a link or pointer to the original “live” item.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Displaying” on page 242

“Favorites” on page 238

AS SEEN ON

Pinterest (<http://www.pinterest.com> and *Pinterest mobile*)

Evernote (<http://evernote.com/> and *Evernote mobile*)

Pocket (<http://www.getpocket.com> and *Pocket mobile*)

Feedly (<http://feedly.com/> and *Feedly mobile*)

GoodReads (<http://www.goodreads.com/>)

LibraryThing(<http://www.librarything.com/>)

Stumble Upon (<http://www.stumbleupon.com>)

Favorites

The concept of Favorites has been around since the early days of AOL. It's only recently, with the active pursuit of user participation, that the idea of “favoriting” an item to be stored on the source website has become commonplace.

What

A user wants to mark an item (person, place, or thing) as a preferred object (see Figures 7-4 through 7-7).

The image shows a SlideShare presentation slide. At the top, there is a blue background with a red and white bird (possibly a cardinal) with a green and yellow patterned vest. The text "Onboarding & Lessons in Virality" is written in white. Below this, the title "Go With The Flow" is displayed in large white letters. Underneath the title, it says "erin malone :: BayChi December 2010" and includes a Twitter icon with the handle "@emalone". A navigation bar at the bottom of the slide contains icons for back, forward, heart (favorites), download, and a page indicator "1 of 84".

BayChi - Go With the Flow = Onboarding and Virality 22,047 views

 erin malone (15 SlideShares) , Principal at Tangible ux
[+ Follow](#)

[in](#) | 5 [f](#) | 3 [t](#) | 9 [g+](#) | 0

FIGURE 7-4

SlideShare (<http://www.slideshare.com>) groups the Favorite call to action with other tools. Favorites are indicated with the heart icon, which was first popularized by AOL.

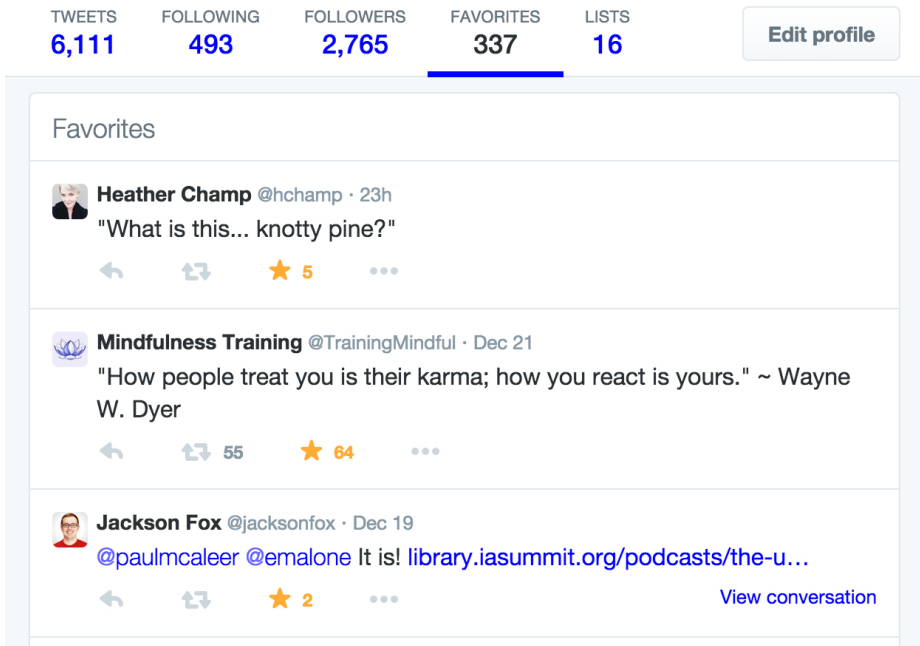


FIGURE 7-5

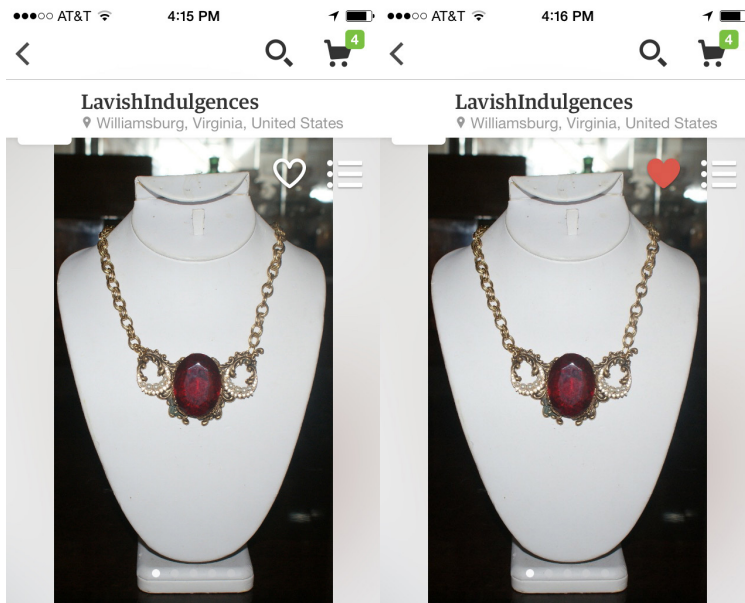
Twitter (<http://www.twitter.com>) uses a star for saving Favorites. When selected, the star fills in and the items are collected in a section called Favorites. The number of people who favorite the tweet is indicated next to the star.

Use when

- You want to let a user create his own list of preferred items.
- You want to use this approach instead of requiring a user to bookmark the item's page.

How

- Give users a way to create a list of favorite objects on your site or application.
- Provide a "Favorite this" link or icon that is in close proximity to each object or sits on the object in an unobtrusive manner. When an object is selected, consider giving users the ability to add tags, their own description, or other metadata that will help them recall the item later.



Vintage Large Red Glass and Moon
Necklace - Eastern Steamwork Co.

Vintage Large Red Glass and Moon
Necklace - Eastern Steamwork Co.

FIGURE 7-6

The icon for making an item a favorite actually sits on the photo on etsy.com (*Etsy mobile application*). After the user has made the item a favorite, the icon changes color, indicating it is now marked as a Favorite and is added to the Favorites list.

- Make favorited items browsable and searchable by keyword or tag.
- Collect favorited items together on their own page for easy access. Associate the collected favorited items with the user’s profile or identity.
- Consider giving users the option to share their collections of favorited items with their friends and connections (see “Collecting” on page 233 and “Displaying” on page 242).
- Do not associate favorites with people, because that can lead to negative community behavior.
- Provide the object creator with a way to see who has “favorited” one of his items.

Why

Providing a means for users to interact with the content on your site supports a sense of ownership by the community and encourages cross-user conversation and interaction, and Favorites is a simple way to do this.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Displaying” on page 242

“Send/Share Icon” on page 260

AS SEEN ON

Twitter (<http://www.twitter.com>)

Etsy (<http://www.etsy.com> and Etsy mobile)

Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com>)

SlideShare (<http://www.slideshare.net>)

YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com>)

Displaying

What

The user has created a collection and wants to display it to other people, as shown in Figure 7-8.

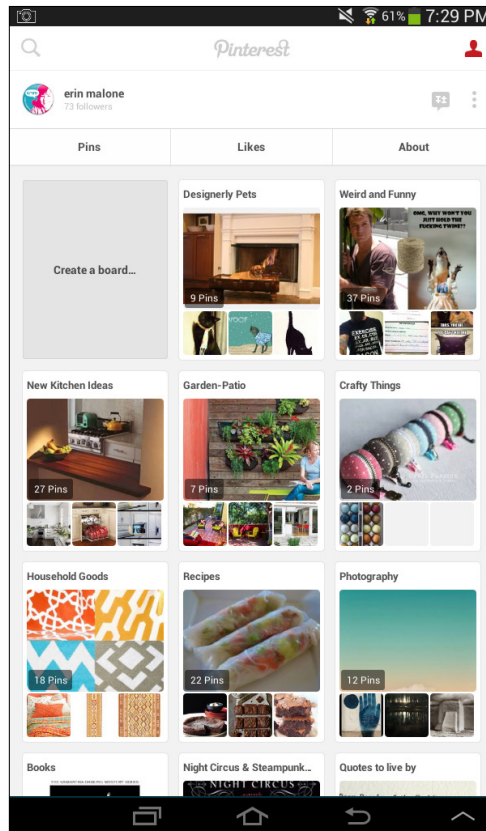


FIGURE 7-8

In Pinterest, you can collect items into sets for viewing (Pinterest Android application).

Use when

- You want to offer opportunities for people to create collections.
- You want to give your users a mechanism to show off their collections outside of the collection's original location.

How

- Include a way for users to create modules or badges that display a portion of their collection, as depicted in Figure 7-9.

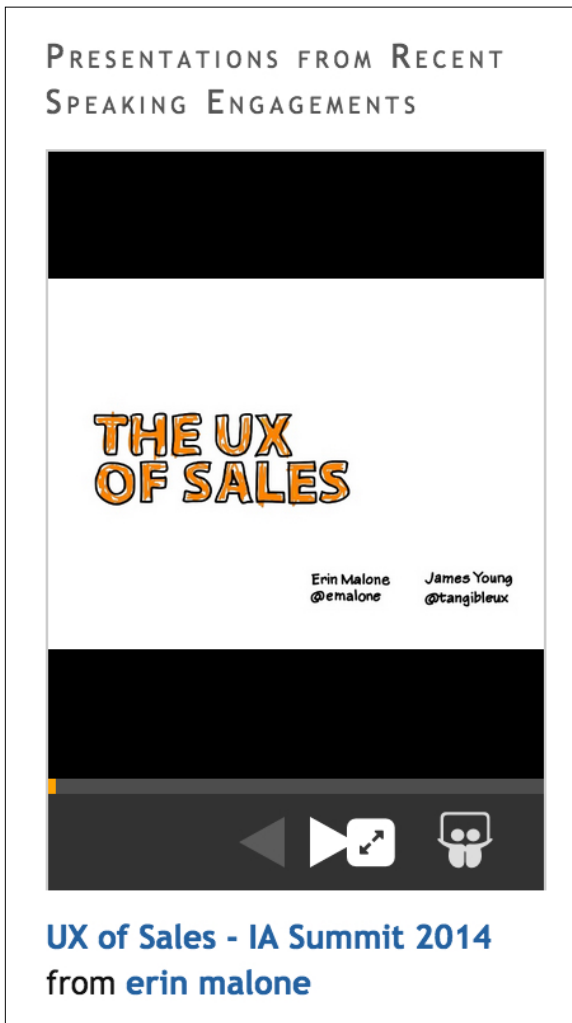


FIGURE 7-9

User-generated content sites such as SlideShare make it possible for content creators to create a badge widget and display their contributions on their own websites.

- Provide users with a URL or embed tag for the collection display that they can add as a module or widget to their personal sites or blogs.
- Consider creating widgets to display collections on the major social networks such as Facebook and LinkedIn.
- Provide a way for the user to select a subset of items to display. Consider limiting the item count, or filter by a tag or date range.
- Items displayed should link back to the originating site. If the item is a URL, link the tags or other metadata back to the parent site (the provider of the widget).

Why

People spend a lot of time collecting, curating, and managing their collections. After these collections are created and curated, owners usually want to display and share them with others.

When connections and friends add comments or rate these collections, or even just view the display, the owner's effort is validated. Additionally, she might be seen as an expert in the area of interest, which enhances her reputation, thereby increasing her likelihood of doing more collecting.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Hosted Modules” on page 567

AS SEEN ON

LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com>)

Facebook (<http://facebook.com>)

Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com>)

SlideShare (<http://www.slideshare.net>)

Add/Subscribe

What

A person wants to subscribe to someone else's content and read it in an environment of the user's own choosing rather than at the source site (see Figure 7-10).

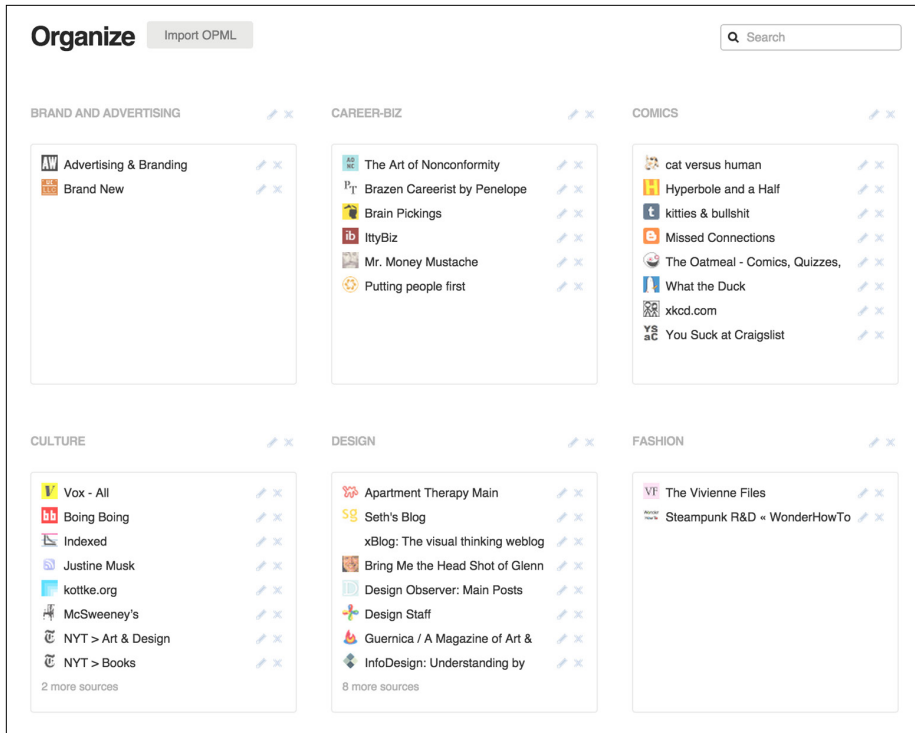


FIGURE 7-10

With Feedly (<http://www.feedly.com>), users can bring in a large amount of subscribed content and organize it in the way that makes sense to them.

Use when

- You want to provide users with the tools to consume content wherever they want.
- You want to give users a way to bring in content from other sources to “mix it up” and provide a more customized experience.

How

- When presenting dynamic content, such as regular blog posts, forums, or photo and activity streams, provide a call to action for subscribing, as demonstrated in Figure 7-11.



FIGURE 7-11

The *NYTimes* (<http://www.nytimes.com>) offers RSS feeds for every category of article offered on its site.

- Use the standard RSS/Subscribe icon.
- When the user selects Add or Subscribe, present options for where she can consume the feed, as shown in Figure 7-12.



FIGURE 7-12

A variety of sources for consuming a subscription are listed at the top of the *NYTimes* RSS Feed selection page.

- Present the URL for the feed so that users can cut and paste it into their favorite feed readers.
- Additionally, offer a range of choices for automatically adding the feed to a list of reader services, such as My Yahoo! or Feedly.

Why

Providing users with a means to consume content where they want encourages readership. Forcing the user to consume only at your source imparts a rigid, monolithic attitude, which ultimately can drive readers away.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Collecting” on page 233

“Favorites” on page 238

AS SEEN ON

The *New York Times* (<http://www.nytimes.com>)

Yahoo! (<http://www.yahoo.com>)

Feedly (<http://www.feedly.com>)

Tagging

What

A user wants to attach his own keyword or set of keywords to an object for organization and later retrieval (see Figure 7-13).

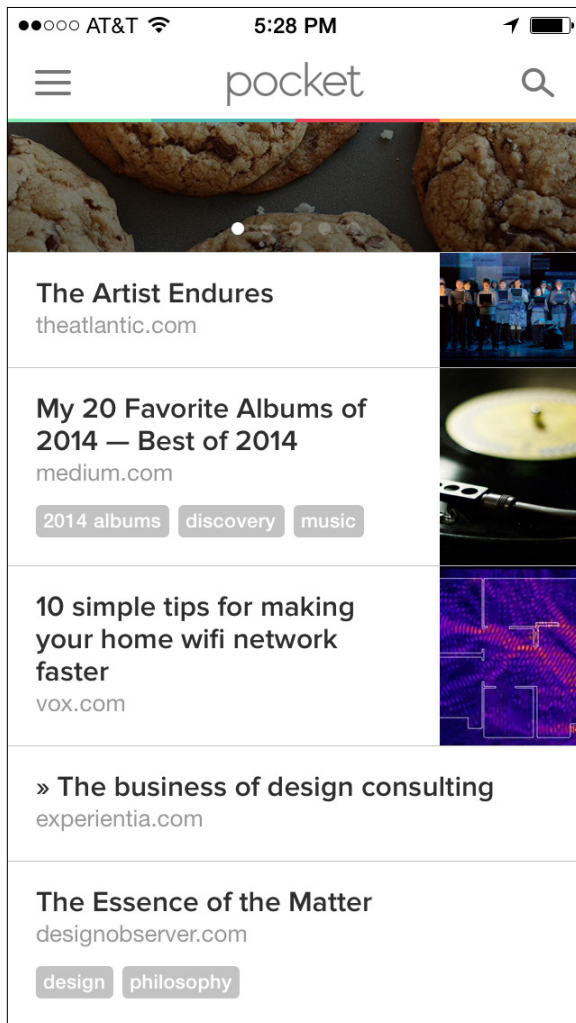


FIGURE 7-13

An article saved into Pocket mobile with tags.

Use when

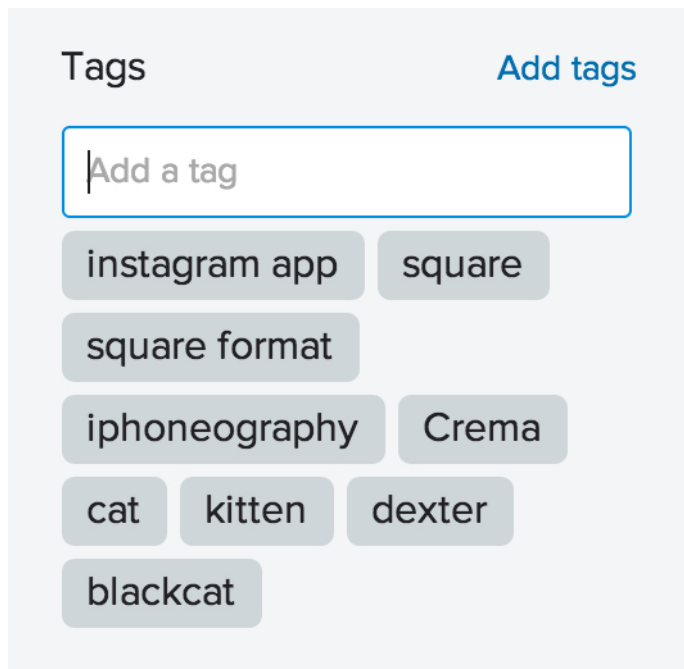
- A user is collecting a large amount of unstructured data, such as photos.
- A user wants to manage a large collection of items, such as books.
- You want to give users a way to blend their labels and keywords with structured metadata.

How

- Include a method for users to add their own tags to an object, as illustrated in Figure 7-14.

FIGURE 7-14

The inline “Add a Tag” mechanism for an object on Flickr (<http://flickr.com>).



- Provide a mechanism for users to delete tags they have associated with an object. This accommodates deletion of duplicates or misspellings.
- Provide very clear instructions for how to separate distinct tags. There are two methods seen most often: comma-delimited and space-delimited (see Figure 7-15 and Figure 7-16). You can use either of these, but be consistent and very clear to the user about which should be used. There is nothing more frustrating than

thinking the delimiter is a comma and entering a multiword tag, only to have it separated out into multiple tags, thereby changing the meaning or intent of the tag, simply because the site uses spaces.

http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/19/magazine/the-s

URL

The Secret Life of Passwords - NYTimes.com

Title

|

Tags ? Separated by comma

Comment 1000

Public

Cancel Save link

FIGURE 7-15

Delicious (<http://delicious.com>) labels the tag field with a note indicating that tags should be comma-separated rather than space-separated.

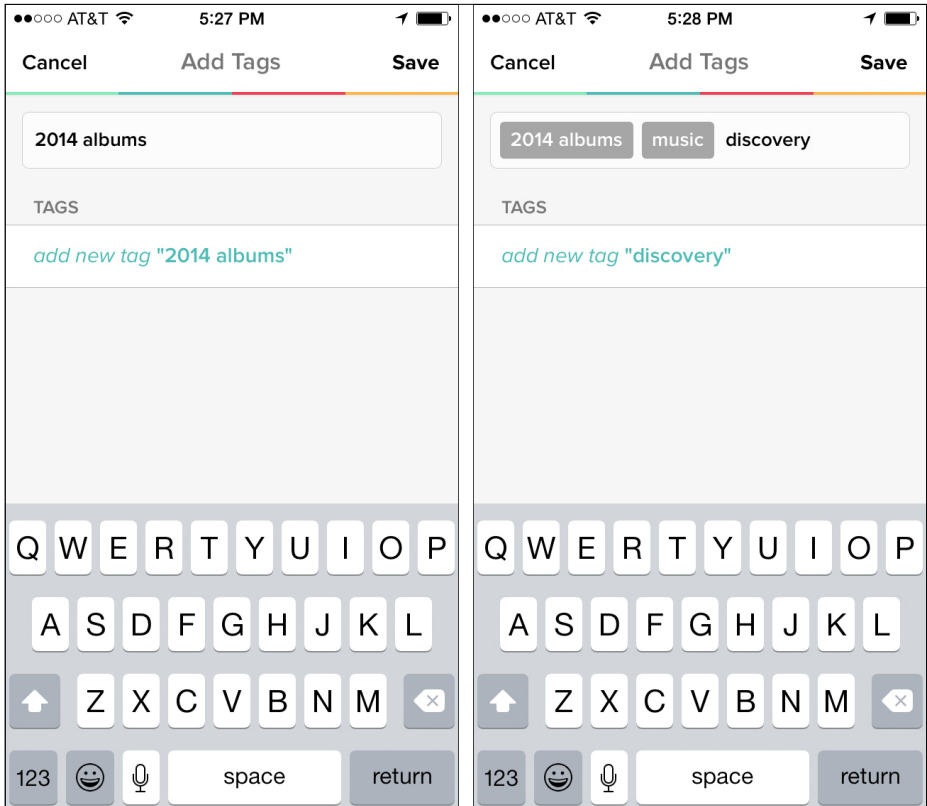


FIGURE 7-16

Pocket (*mobile application*) shows the tag being added in quotes below the text field. When the user taps the “add new tag” line, the text is added into the tag cluster and displayed in a gray box encapsulating the entire tag. This interaction lets users enter phrases as well as single words without worrying about commas or space delimiters.

- For more robust social engagement, make it possible for connections and/or friends to tag objects in a collection.
- Don’t be afraid to mix a controlled vocabulary (defined by the site architects) and user-generated tags.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Adding tagging to objects as a product feature should offer a benefit to the user. Do the tags help her find and manage her collection? Do the tags tighten the circle of community? Tagging as a user activity is more successful when there is a payoff to the users and their friends.

Provide tag hints if the item being tagged is a public item (a news article, a bookmark). Many services share recommended tags or previous tags associated with the object so that the user can select from these or simply add to the collective tag set for the object.

Tags and the ability to add a tag mechanism should be in close proximity to the object being tagged.

The Hashtag

Originally proposed by Chris Messina for use on Twitter, the hashtag (#) is a user hack created to add tags or metadata to content where tagging was not part of the user interface conventions. The hashtag is now used all over the Internet most particularly in microblogging applications and is acknowledged formally and informally depending on the site, service, or application, as is evident in Figure 7-17.



FOX 13 NOW @fox13now · Jan 2
#Duckface, #LOLcat & #Mancrush are among new words added to #OxfordDictionary in #2014. go.fox13now.com/1EWhNPx

FIGURE 7-17

Hashtags use the # symbol before the word in a tweet on Twitter to separate it from the rest of the text. Each tag is clickable and generates a search result of all tweets containing that specific hashtag.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Find with Tags” on page 252

“Tag Cloud” on page 254

AS SEEN ON

Pocket (<http://getpocket.com> and Pocket mobile)

Flipboard (Flipboard mobile)

Foursquare (Foursquare mobile)

Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com>)

Find with Tags

What

A user wants to find a specific object (photo, bookmark, book, article, etc.) through searching or browsing (see Figure 7-18).

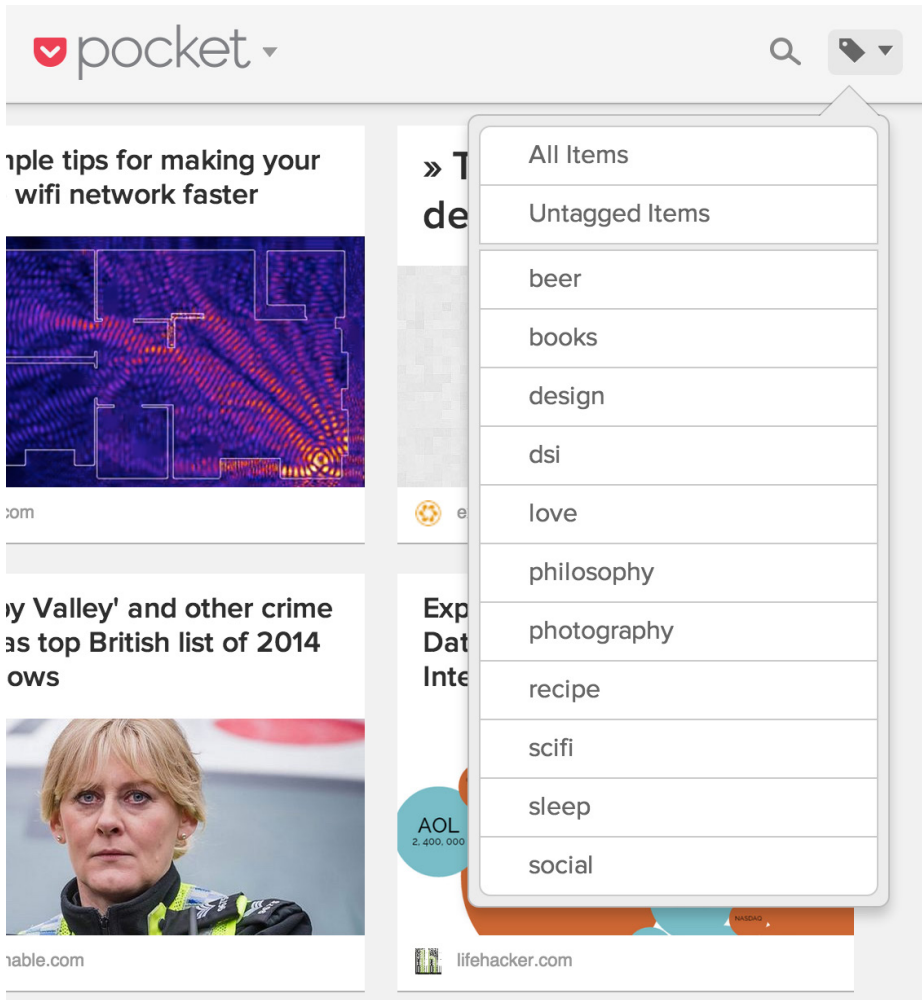


FIGURE 7-18

A dropdown list showing the tags associated with articles on Pocket makes it easy for users to quickly filter to a subset of content (<http://getpocket.com>).

Use when

Use this pattern when there is a large collection of objects to sort through or manipulate.

How

- Provide a keyword search mechanism through the tag database.
- Give the user a way to browse through a list of tags.
- When an object is found, display all the associated tags and provide the user with the means to pivot off one of these other tags to create another search based on the new tag as keyword (see Figure 7-19).
- Accommodate searching for combinations of words.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Objects that have tags associated with them should be findable through a search and browse mechanism using the associated tags.

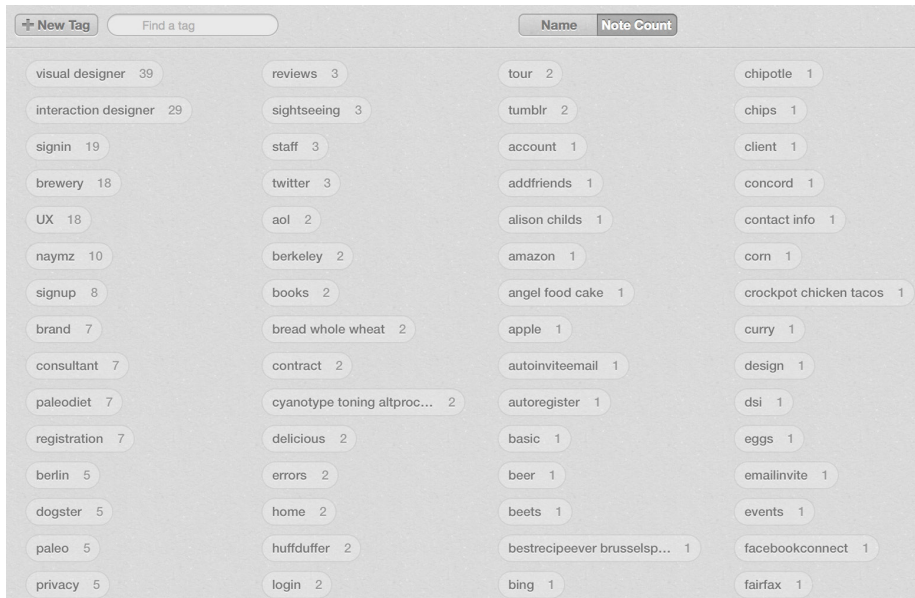


FIGURE 7-19

Browsing tags and find-by-tags in Evernote.

WHY

For large collections of assets, mechanisms for searching for a specific object should be part of the findability philosophy of the site. Searching through tags and using tags as a finding aid lets users employ their own words from their mental models of the item for later retrieval.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Tag Cloud” (up next)

“Tagging” on page 247

AS SEEN ON

Pocket (<http://getpocket.com>)

Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com>)

Evernote (<http://www.evernote.com> and Evernote application)

Tag Cloud

The tag cloud was a neat graphical way of showcasing the type of content in a site and to promote exploratory browsing. Varying sizes of tags to indicate popularity of that tag was cool until it became unwieldy and cumbersome to place on a web page.

Misspellings, duplications in the form of plural versions of tags, and the cost of visual real estate due to the rising amount of user-generated content with associated tags, were all factors leading to the gradual abandonment of tag clouds. Additionally, there was a lack of clarity behind the meaning of tag size (is this more important editorially, or is this tag assigned to more items?), and this inconsistent usage meant that users didn’t really understand them either.

The latest incarnation of the tag cloud is the emergence of using tags or topics to select content areas to follow in a variety of types of applications and services, as depicted in Figure 7-20.

What

A user wants to create a customized view of the content available.

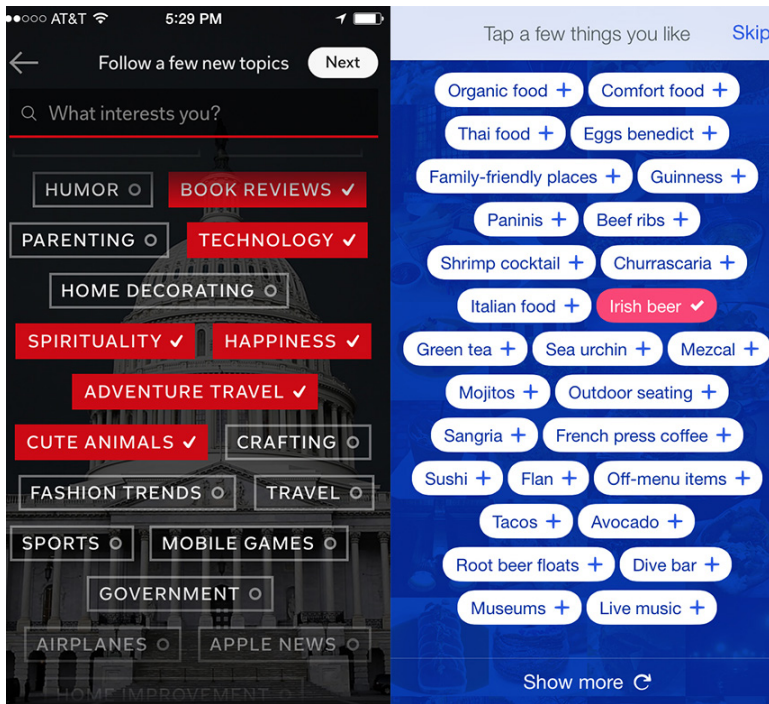


FIGURE 7-20 Both Foursquare and Flipboard in the mobile environments, prompt users to select a variety of topics to help craft their customized experience. The tags or topics are presented in seemingly random order but are most likely ordered by popularity.

Use When

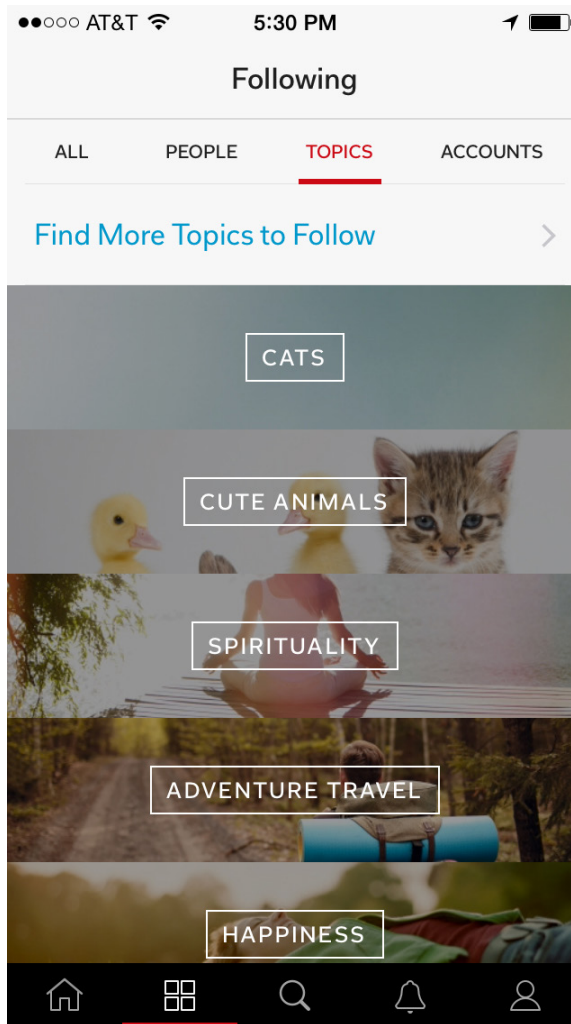
- There are many different pieces of content across multiple dimensions of interest.
- New users want to set up a customized experience right out of the gate.

How

- Consider offering both a controlled vocabulary of topics and user added tags to help define a user's experience.
- Provide users with a way to select topics they are interested in to filter content.
- Highlight the user's selection in some way—either by color or a check or both.
- When the user has made her selection, ensure that the next screen presented is clearly influenced by her previous choices, as demonstrated in Figure 7-21.

FIGURE 7-21

The Topics screen on Flipboard provides easy access to each selected topic, one at a time. The All tab shows highlights across all the topics (Flipboard iOS application).



Offer users a path back to make adjustments to their selections at any time.

Why

Tagging and use of topics help users to easily find content they are interested in and to organize their experience in a custom way, encouraging repeat usage.

AS SEEN ON

Flipboard mobile

Foursquare mobile

Further Reading

1. Graft, Kris. "Analysis: The Psychology Behind Item Collecting And Achievement Hoarding." <http://ubm.io/1LOfU8K>.
2. "A Passion For Stuff: 'Collections Of Nothing.'" <http://n.pr/1LOg1RG> and <http://bit.ly/1LOg5kt>.
3. Smith, Gene. *Tagging: People-powered Metadata for the Social Web*. New Riders Press, 2008.
4. Engstrom, Jyri. "Why some social network services work and others don't Or: the case for object-centered sociality." April 13, 2005. <http://bit.ly/1LOgfbF>.

Share and Share Alike

Friendship marks a life even more deeply than love. Love risks degenerating into obsession, friendship is never anything but sharing.

ELIE WIESEL

SHARING MEANS THAT MORE THAN ONE PERSON CAN SEE, have, do, talk about, or otherwise relate to the same thing, possibly at the same time. In the real world, sharing means allowing someone else to have access to or control over an object that you currently own or control. This involves a degree of sacrifice. Electronic things made of bits can be replicated or reflected with almost no friction, as compared with real objects.

This might mean sharing is generally easier in a virtual space (than, say, in kindergarten, when giving up the G.I. Joe meant losing control over his adventures), but therefore also less meaningful (or less likely to teach us to play well together, as when we learned that we could plan what G.I. Joe would do next *together*)

Tools to Enable Organic “Word of Mouth”

Count me among those not fully comfortable with the word “viral” as a way of describing successful runaway distribution. I understand that it’s the common term marketers and entrepreneurs have learned and are comfortable using, and I don’t want to impose a “correct” lingo on things, but I agree with those who suggest that viral growth isn’t the ideal metaphor for healthy, sustainable positive expansion. (It seems one trope away from concepts like metastasis.)

Call it what you will, though, a primary motivation for enabling and encouraging sharing among your users is so that good ideas, compelling objects, and interesting activities can spread like wildfire. At best, this benefits the creators of the objects as well as those who enjoy participating in the spreading phenomenon.

So, how do we encourage sharing, or even simply enable it? Well, there are already a number of well-established interface elements for doing so.

Some conventions have emerged for providing readers with tools for sharing whatever they're currently experiencing in your product. These tools can be used for several of the patterns in this set, so I'll describe them here first.

Send/Share Icon

What

A *sharing icon* is a small graphical element placed somewhere in the interface with which users can share content and information resources with others, through a variety of communication channels (including social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn, as well as email, SMS, and other newer vectors).

For instance, the Share button in Safari for iOS shown in Figure 8-1 gives the user a way to share content with friends on social networking products Twitter and Facebook, along with other options.

There are numerous ways to add a sharing icon to a flow by including it in the form of a widget, which acts as a bridge between the content of a given product and the backend application platforms supported by the widget, abstracting out the complexity of the application platform from the user application.



FIGURE 8-1

The iOS share button brings up a range of options, including bookmarking and others for true sharing.

Use when

Provide a sharing icon in contexts for which the user may want to directly send a pointer, invite someone to view something, or add a copy of, or a reference to, something to a shared or public space he owns or has access to.

For direct sending, a user might just as well opt to copy and paste a link into an ordinary email message. This meets the user's needs and benefits the community, but the behavior will not be trackable by the system, and thus the system won't be able to learn from this. It's important not to hinder the user, but be aware that if the sharing

widget doesn't provide any utility beyond traditional email, there's little reason for users to adopt it. (With users who aren't technically savvy, however, saving them from having to manipulate URLs and other computeristic text strings can be value enough to warrant use of the widget.)

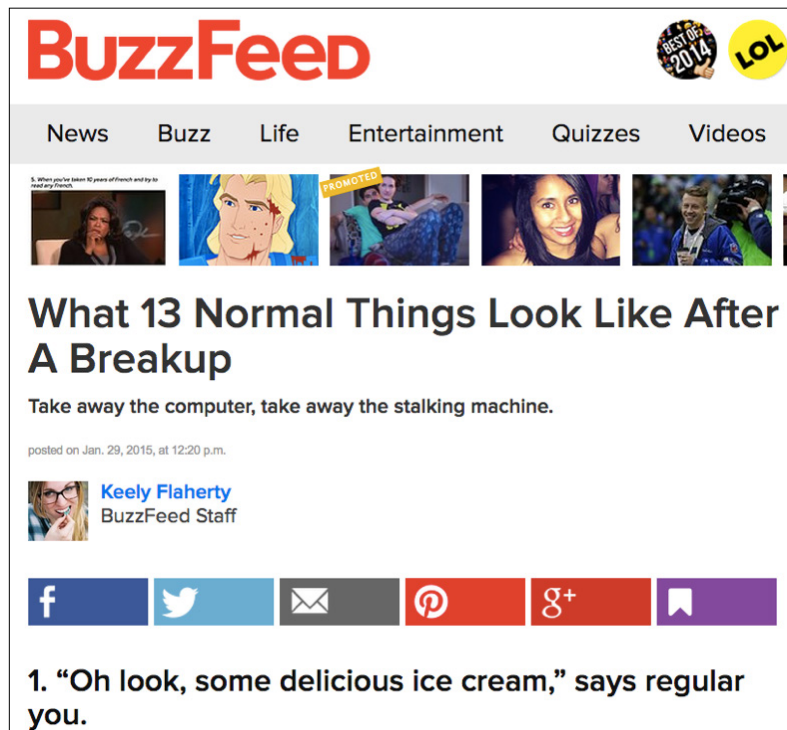
By far, the primary form of sharing is direct sending. Secondary forms of sharing (such as IM, SMS/text message, and Facebook), when included, should be secondary within the sharing drop-down.

When users are logged in, you can prepopulate the sharing form with their information and give them contact-list or address-book access with autocomplete in the recipient field of the form.

How

- Provide a buttons or icons offering one or more ways to share, send, or bookmark the resource, as illustrated in Figure 8-2.

FIGURE 8-2
BuzzFeed makes it hard to miss the sharing options.



- When the user clicks the button, display an overlay form with sending and sharing options (in the case of a single trigger), or with specific options for the type of sharing selected, as shown in Figure 8-3.

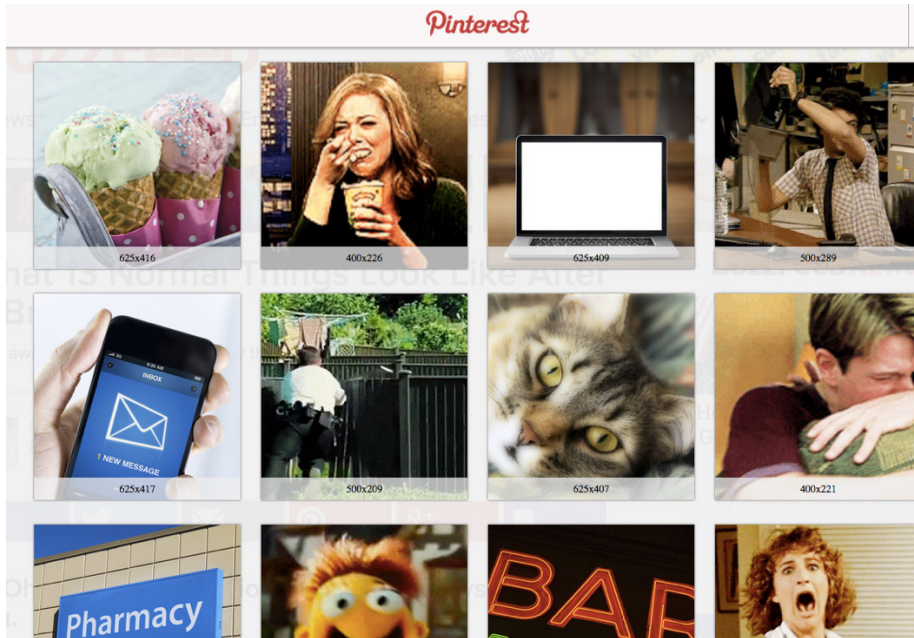


FIGURE 8-3

If you choose Pinterest, for example, every image from the article is made available to you for easy “pinning.”

Users have come to expect these sorts of conveniences for grabbing and sharing content. Remember, everyone is overwhelmed by multiple streams of information and constant reminders to revisit or share or respond to more information. If users see that they can send or share content smoothly and with little effort, they are much more likely to engage in sharing the first time, and then expect to be able to do so instantly and effortlessly from that point on.

As a designer of social experiences, you have several potential avenues for employing a Share This widget:

- You can design and make your own widget, and use it throughout your service and/or encourage others to adopt it, thus driving at least some traffic back to your service.

- You can publish icons, methods, and APIs for adding your service to existing or incumbent widgets (see Chapter 17).
- You can embrace someone else’s widget if you simply want to incorporate its functionality and aren’t using sharing to drive direct participation in your own network or application.

INTERNATIONALIZATION

Different bookmarking and media-sharing applications are popular or dominant in different regions. You can plan ahead for localization when designing a sharing widget by supporting modular swapping in and out of third-party services.

KNOWN ISSUES

As the number of platforms for sharing proliferates, the idea of displaying an array of icons for destinations won’t scale.

Why

Incorporating a Send/Share widget into the template or the browser’s chrome when presenting content or applications, or providing such a widget for others to incorporate into their own interfaces, can help facilitate sharing and interaction on your network. You also can provide this functionality to your users through third-party bookmarking and media-sharing services.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Send This” on page 267

AS SEEN ON

Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>)

Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com>)

Google Reader (<http://www.google.com/reader/>)

Most blog and zine sites everywhere

Bookmarklet

What

A *bookmarklet* is a small computer application, usually written in JavaScript and stored as the URL of a bookmark in a web browser or as a hyperlink on a web page. Bookmarklets are designed to add one-click

functionality to a browser or web page. When clicked, a bookmarklet performs some function, one of a wide variety such as a search query or data extraction, as demonstrated in Figure 8-4. The term is a combination of the terms “bookmark” and “applet.”

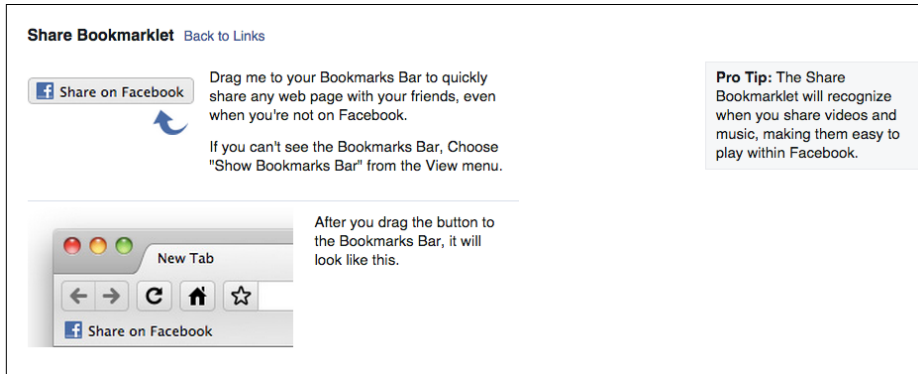


FIGURE 8-4

Facebook invites its users to install a bookmarklet for sharing content on their network from around the Web.

Use when

Bookmarklets work well for dedicated users already in the habit of sharing and looking for more convenient ways to do so, but they may also work for recruiting new sharers, if well presented (otherwise, first-time use of a bookmarklet tends to be rather nonintuitive).

How

The executing script has access to the current page, which it can inspect and change.

A user can carry out “installation of a bookmarklet” by creating a new bookmark and pasting the code into the URL destination field, but more often, you provide the user with a link and encourage him to “drag” it onto his bookmarks toolbar.

One problem with bookmarklets is that they can't be keyboard-accessible (with shortcuts), but they can be made to run on any browser and can even be self-updating.

Why

Bookmarklets make sharing easier, thus reducing the friction for the user and facilitating more activity on the network.

AS SEEN ON

Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>)

Most blog software (such as WordPress, Blogger, and so on)

Activity Streams

Activity Streams (see Chapter 5) are a third interface for sharing, but in this case they are the passive way a user's activities—including posting, bookmarking, sharing, and commenting on things—can be displayed in an ongoing Vitality feed.

Private Sharing

When information resources or digital assets are shared directly with a single user or a named group of users, it can be referred to as Private Sharing, although it might be a matter of sharing with one of “Many Publics.”

Although it's not necessarily a one-to-one relationship (because a user can send the same thing to a list of people), the experience is perceived as direct and point-to-point. This is in contrast with “Public Sharing,” which feels more akin to hanging something up in a common space, such as a corkboard in a break room at work: it can be seen by others who are included in that specific limited public, but no single person has been explicitly invited to look.

Direct (“private”) sharing, however, does imply a direct invitation and can feel more personal. It's important that a social interface have a clear strategy about how to present private sharing versus public sharing. If a user is notified or invited to see or do something as though the invitation were personal and direct when in fact it was a blast to a large, semifiltered list of buddies, this can lead to miscommunication and missed opportunities. If Patton Oswalt really invited me to play a word game with him on Facebook, I'd be flattered and inclined to make some time to do so, but if what really happened is that he (or his intern) accidentally invited everyone on his contact list after installing an application with perhaps a misleading interface, I'm in for a disappointment.

The true common patterns for direct sharing are “Send This” and “Casual Privacy.” The former is analogous to an email message containing a link to a public resource with an optional message, such as “Check out this article I read in *USA Today*.” The latter is similar but involves inviting a person to see one’s own posted object or collection, and frequently follows the Public Sharing pattern as a secondary, promotional step.

See also “Collecting” on page 233 and “Displaying” on page 242.

Send This

What

A user wants to share an object (pointer, media, or application) with one or more people, as illustrated in Figure 8-5. The application is involved in the sharing in order to indicate who is sharing what with whom, and how often.

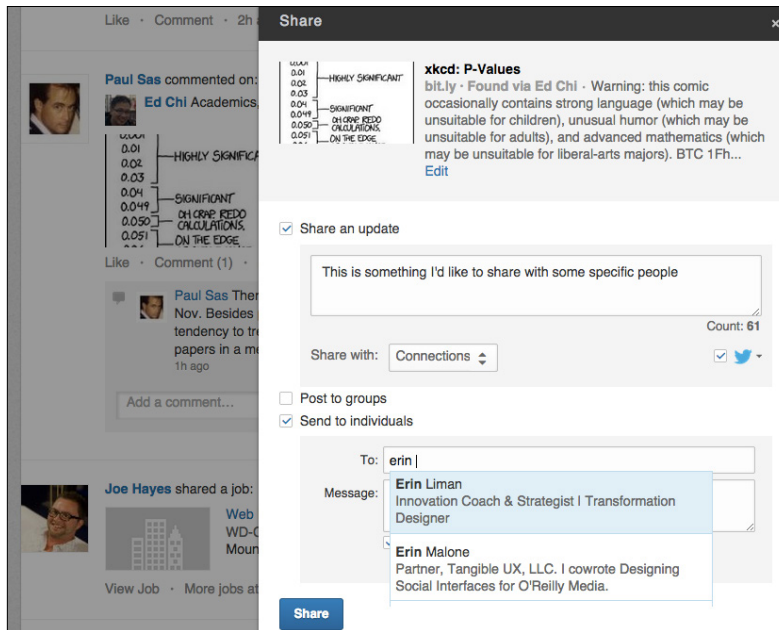


FIGURE 8-5

With LinkedIn, I can send this to a specific person (or to a group, or to my connections, or to the public as seen by LinkedIn, or to cross-post it the Twitter—pew!).

Use when

Use this pattern when you want to display content, resources, or applications in your product or on your site. When the user is logged in, you can provide an easier process by prepopulating her sender information and offering access to her contact list.

How

Provide a mechanism for people to spontaneously share content or objects they find by sending them to a friend or posting them to a shared, personal, or public space. Provide a consistent Share This widget on each screen or associate one with each granular object (pointers, media, applications).

Sending can be enabled for logged-out users with an encouragement to log in to gain access to contacts, or it can be enabled only for logged-in users, in which case it can be an incentive to sign up or a barrier to participation (see Figure 8-6).

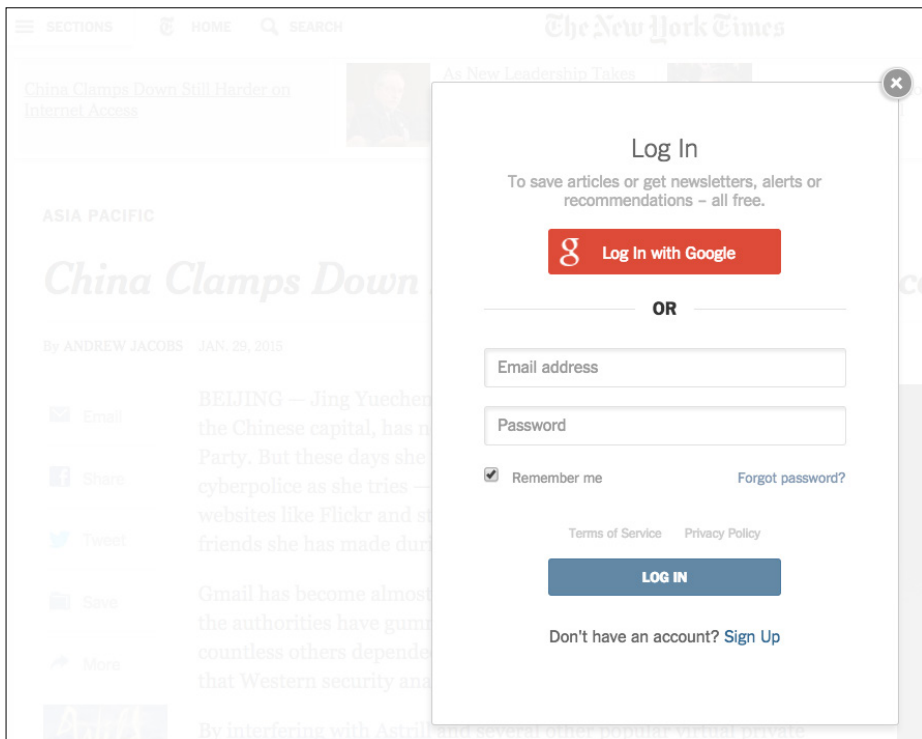


FIGURE 8-6

Login can be a barrier to email, or an upsell, or entirely optional. The *New York Times* doesn't care to send the article for you via email unless you're willing to log in first.

When the user clicks the sharing link, provide—in a pop up or overlay if possible—the minimal interface needed to facilitate rapid sending or posting. Offer autocomplete selection from an address book or a set of contacts if possible.

Consider including a text field for adding a personal note, although most people will skip this, and some might even be slowed down by it. One approach is to include a link that, if invoked, expands the optional text field, as Flickr’s widget does.

Special cases

Any interface that mimics (or hooks into) email can be misused for spam. If you’re using CAPTCHA, consider supporting audio CAPTCHA to provide better accessibility. Sophisticated users might likewise be reluctant to use a one-off sending method that won’t be tracked or archived in their personal mail system.

Why

A Send This option on a useful and ubiquitous Send/Share widget can provide your users with a convenient and familiar method for sharing more content, objects, and applications with one another. If they opt to execute their direct sharing through your widget, you can learn from the behavioral patterns and optimize your interfaces and offerings.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Don’t Break Email!” on page 46

“Faceted identity” on page 127

“One-way following (aka, asynchronous following)” on page 440

“Profile” on page 118

“Statuscasting” on page 177

AS SEEN ON

Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com>)

The *New York Times* (<http://nytimes.com>)

The Onion (<http://www.theonion.com>)

Yahoo! (<http://www.yahoo.com>)

Casual Privacy

What

When people post content or discover it online, they sometimes like to invite other people to view it (see Figure 8-7). You can do this with a Share or Send interface, but in some cases the resource isn't inherently viewable to anyone without an explicit invitation.

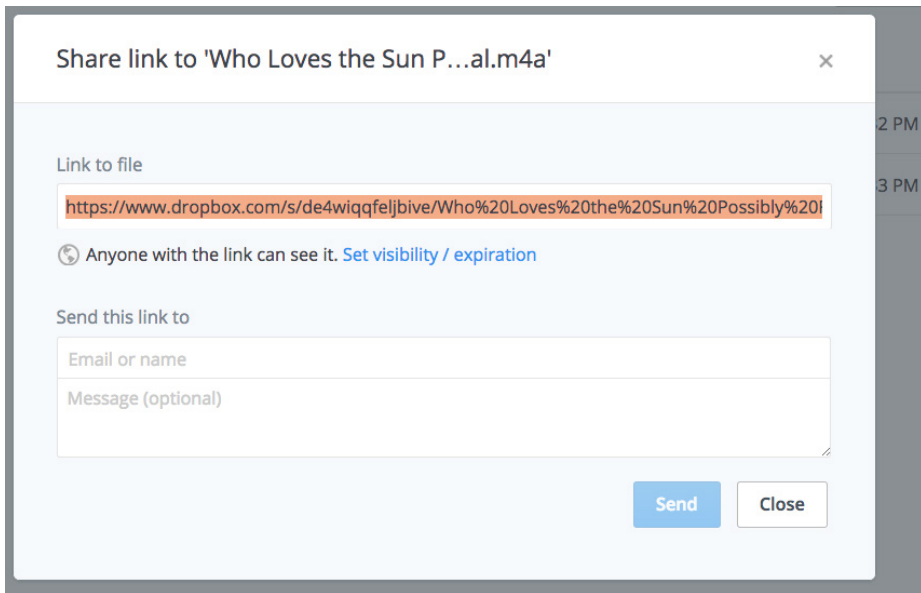


FIGURE 8-7

Files and folders in Dropbox can be shared directly with anyone using a custom URL that can be sent or shared via any medium.

Use when

You want to provide users with an invitation option after they have posted content, uploaded resources, or installed an application.

They aren't really needed for public resources that can be shared easily with a bookmarklet or Share This widget.

How

Generate a unique custom link for the content, and give users an option to copy and paste it into an ordinary email message or to send it automatically with a Send This interface.

Why

A custom link that gives limited access to a direct recipient using Casual Privacy facilitates fluid sharing within a system of overlapping publics. This relieves the sender from creating formal groups, configuring privacy settings, and granting explicit privileges.

You want to provide a form of temporary or limited access for the recipient of the custom link.

Optionally, You want to provide boilerplate invitation copy that the user can customize.

If the recipient follows the offered link back to your site, remind him when he gets there that he is a guest and might be seeing content not otherwise viewable, as depicted in Figure 8-8.

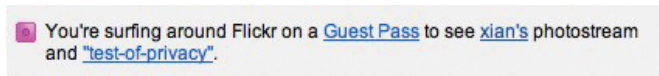


FIGURE 8-8

Flickr appends a reminder message to the screen accessed via the custom link as well as to any subsequent screens the recipient visits.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Many Publics” on page 275

SOURCES

Kellan Elliott-McCrea’s “Casual Privacy” talk at Web 2.0 Expo SF 2008, <http://www.web2expo.com/webexsf2008/public/schedule/detail/1826>

Kellan Elliott-McCrea’s “Casual Privacy” slides from Ignite Web 2.0 Expo, <http://www.slideshare.net/kellan/casual-privacy-ignite-web20-expo>

AS SEEN ON

Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>)

Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com>)

Ephemeral Sharing

It seems too early to declare that ephemeral sharing is a pattern at this point, or what the actual contours of the pattern will turn out to be as it finds its way, but the concept is already a salient trend. *Ephemeral*

means “of the moment” or “passing.” Ephemeral sharing is sharing designed against impermanence, designed to vanish and leave no coherent map of the past.

This should be distinguished from anonymity or pseudonymity, models of which we see across the digital space, but most of which generally in the past continued to offer a form of persistence of identity (assumed or real).

Some recent products have shot up the charts (Whisper), some have faded over time (Secret), and others to continue to thrive as of this writing (YikYak), but all of them have played with the notion of temporary or passing, assumed identity; a clear extension of the models from other recent popular sharing services, like SnapChat and WhatsApp, in which the content is expected to disappear.

We’ll keep an eye on this one as the shape of the pattern emerges.

Give Gift

Social networks in Asia pioneered economies around virtual goods payments, which can provide an interesting alternative to advertising-based monetization schemes.

What

Users seem to enjoy opportunities to make friendly gestures to one another, especially when those gifts can appear as a tangible, persistent decoration in personal or shared spaces, as demonstrated in Figure 8-9.



FIGURE 8-9

Public or visible gift giving is a testament to love or friendship.

Use when

Use this pattern in friendship- and romance-oriented social environments where visual displays of affection are welcome.

How

Provide an inherent gift-giving feature or make it possible for third-party application developers to do so through APIs for messaging between contacts and the ability to display objects on a profile.

If building an intrinsic gift-giving interface, add a Give Gift command to the list of actions a member can perform when viewing the profile or user card of another member, and/or provide a unique starting point for gift giving on the profile (see Figure 8-10).



FIGURE 8-10

Facebook profiles feature a gift box where a visitor can initiate the gift-giving process.

Display the gift choices, and optionally give the sender a range of choices about how public the display of the gift and optional accompanying message should be, as shown in Figure 8-11. Who should see them (friends, everybody?), and where (on the profile, in the activity stream, elsewhere?), and who can read the note?

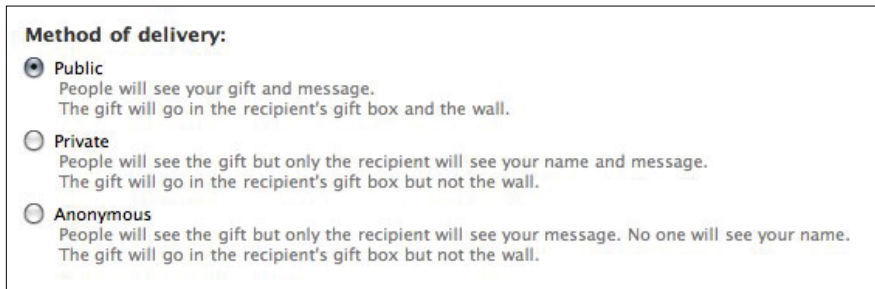


FIGURE 8-11

Facebook offers three degrees of publicness or the option of privacy for gifts.

Optionally, charge your users to send a gift. (Weigh the revenue benefit against the degree of frictionlessness you are counting on to establish this behavior.)

Scarcity can provide an incentive, as a way for the gift giver to show extra attention or effort in choosing or finding the right gift. Notify the sender when the gift has been successfully received

Give the recipient the option of accepting (and thus displaying on his profile) or rejecting the gift. If a gift is rejected, do not explicitly notify the sender. If the gift is accepted, display it on the user's profile and/or in his activity stream, according to the rules of your gift system and the choices the sender and receiver made.

SPECIAL CASES

Optionally, enable gift giving between strangers, but consider the risk of spam and stalking.

Think about whether you want to charge for virtual gifts and potentially find a revenue source there, promote free gift giving, or explore other forms of scarcity.

Why

Virtual gifts provide at minimum the equivalent of a Phatic Poke, a small positive gesture between two people. If displayed on a profile they may also represent a reminder of the friendship. Micropayments for virtual gifts could represent one of several revenue streams for a social application with a sufficiently engaged community. Services for delivering real gifts would extend the goodwill of a positive interaction beyond the confines of the virtual space and would have straightforward monetization opportunities.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Peer-to-Peer Awards” on page 204

“Profile” on page 118

“Nudging” on page 368

AS SEEN ON

Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>)

NeoPets (<http://www.neopets.com>)

Public Sharing

Although we sometimes prefer the phrase Direct Sharing over Private Sharing (partly in recognition of the fact that nothing contributed to an internetworked data system is ultimately “private” in any meaningful, dependable way), for the sake of clarity, we are trying to be consistent about contrasting private and public facets of many of these social interactions. Still, rather than viewing things through the lens of the age-old public/private dichotomy, it might be more fruitful to think in terms of many overlapping public spaces, some of which are more public than others.

In any given system, there can be a range of sharing possibilities, from objects that any passersby can freely view, to items restricted to viewing only by (logged-in, authenticated) members of the community, to those that only people either included in a formal group or explicitly invited can see.

We consider any kind of sharing that isn’t directed at an individual or a specific, defined list of individuals to be public sharing. This form of sharing can be active, as when a user affirmatively posts content or information for viewing and commenting by friends, followers, fans, family, the general public, or any other such audience. It can also be passive, as when activities are tracked and reported on an ongoing basis, generating update notices to friends or items in activity streams without requiring that the user consciously and deliberately share the activity or object.

Many Publics

As danah boyd wrote in her PhD thesis, “Taken Out of Context”:

Networked publics are publics that are restructured by networked technologies. As such, they are simultaneously (1) the space constructed through networked technologies and (2) the imagined community that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice. Social network sites like MySpace and Facebook are networked publics, just like parks and other outdoor spaces can be understood as publics. Collections of people connected through networked technologies like “the blogosphere” are publics, just like those connected by geography or identity are.... The concept of networked publics is slippery because the concept of “publics” is messy. The term “public” is contested, has multiple

meanings, and is used across disciplines to signal different concepts. During my interviews, I found that teens also struggle to de-fine this term and rely on multiple meanings to approach a definition from different angles. When used descriptively, “public” is often in opposition to the equally slippery concept “private” to signal potential access.

When designing a social application of any kind, you must immediately grapple with the perspectives of—at the very least—two publics. One is the “whole world” that will have some way of glimpsing your product, if only to see the high walls of your private garden. The other is the networked public you hope to cultivate, composed of the body of all of your members and participants. Most likely there will be more than two. The outside world can itself have subpublics that view your product in different ways. More important, as your members meet one another and organize themselves into groups around common interests, there will begin to be multiple networked publics within (or, really, facilitated by) your system.

Thus, when your users engage in Public Sharing through your application, this might mean that they are sharing objects with the whole world (as when someone posts content to an ordinary blog), or with the entire membership of your service, or with some other designated public they relate to through your product.

Any interface for One-Time Sharing (see “Share This” on page 279) or Ongoing Sharing should therefore provide choices to the user about who will be allowed to see the social objects she is sharing.

Alternatively, those choices can be baked into the rules of the system, so, for example, when choosing to share an object at Facebook, one choice is to add it to your profile.

Managing Context

There was a time when we could be fairly certain where we were at any given moment. Just looking at one’s surroundings would let us know if we were in a public park or a quiet library, a dance hall or a funeral parlor. And our actions and conversations could easily adapt to these contexts: in a library, we’d know not to yell “heads up” and toss a football, and we’d know to avoid doing the hustle during someone’s eulogy.

But as more and more of our lives are lived via the web, and the contexts we inhabit are increasingly made of digits rather than atoms, our long-held assumptions about reality are dissolving under our typing-and-texting fingertips.

A pre-web example of this problem is something most people have experienced: accidentally emailing with “reply all” rather than “reply.” Most email applications make it brutally easy to click Reply All by accident. In the physical world in which we evolved, the difference between a private conversation and a public one required more physical effort and provided more sensory clues. But in an email application, there’s almost no difference: the buttons are usually identical and only a few pixels apart.

Reply-All in email is a pretty straightforward problem — a binary choice for a single piece of data: one message goes either to one or multiple recipients, and the contexts are relatively transparent. But on many popular social network platforms, the problem becomes exponentially more complicated.

Because of its history, Facebook is an especially good example. Facebook started as a social web application with a built-in context: undergraduates at Harvard. Soon it expanded to other colleges and universities, but its contextual architecture continued to be based on school affiliation. The power of designing for a shared real-world context allowed Facebook’s structure to assume a lot about its users: they would have a lot in common, including their ages, their college culture, and circles of friends.

Facebook’s context provided a safe haven for college students to express themselves with their peers in all their immature, formative glory; for the first time a generation of late-teens unwittingly documented their transition to adulthood in a published format. But it was OK, because anybody on Facebook with them was “there” only because they were already “there” at their college, at that time.

But then, in 2006 when Facebook opened its virtual doors to anyone 13 or over with an email address, everything changed. Graduates who were now starting their careers found their middle-aged coworkers asking to be friends on Facebook. I recall some of my younger office friends reeling at the thought that their cube-mates and managers might see their photos or read their embarrassing teenage rants “out of context.”

The Facebook example serves a discussion of context well because it's probably the largest virtual place to have ever so suddenly unhinged itself from its physical place. Its inhabitants, who could previously afford an assumed mental model of "this web place corresponds to the physical place where I spent my college years," found themselves in a radically different place. A contextual shift that would have required massive physical effort in the physical world was accomplished with a few lines of code and the flip of a switch.

Not that there wasn't warning. The folks who run Facebook had announced the change was coming. So why weren't more people ready? In part because such a reality shift doesn't have much precedent; few people were used to thinking about the implications of such a change. But also because the platform didn't provide any tools for managing the context conversion.

This lack of tools for managing multiple contexts is behind some of the biggest complaints about social software platforms. For Facebook, it seems every few months there's a new story about someone's life being ruined because they misunderstood the its architecture of privacy; and just as often, there's a new feature or revamp of the rules and controls for managing private context. On LinkedIn, users have often complained the platform doesn't allow them to keep legitimate peer connections separate from others such as recruiters. In Google Plus, the search giant rolled an extensive contextual messages and tutorial information to try teaching users where the walls and doors existed in its complex sharing architecture, but since most people have more than one GMail account, it's a challenge to manage which address should receive a calendar invite versus which should be on social mailing lists, for example.

Not all platforms have made these mistakes. The Flickr photo site has long had a simply nested architecture of Public→Friends→Family→Private—a structure so clear, it's hard for users to make mistakes. LiveJournal, a pioneering social platform, has provided robust permissions controls to its users for years, allowing creation of many different user-and-group combinations. But Flickr has recently made their controls harder to locate; and in LiveJournal (for those who still use the venerable space) the options are so flexible, it's not hard for users to create more complexity than they can easily keep track of.

Some mobile-first social platforms, such as Path or SnapChat, the idea has been to constrain the structural possibilities to make these spaces more manageable by nature. But the limitations they've built in have become more complex as these platforms have evolved—the market pressure to keep adding features eventually breaks the fundamental simplicity.

This is a general challenge among all platforms that have to keep changing in order to stay interesting to the marketplace: while many have been working more at providing context management tools, the structures keep changing, which makes it hard to establish structural understanding. The more ambitious a platform is, the more complexity it demands that its inhabitants comprehend. Try figuring out all the ways that the Google ecosystem uses the word “group” (including “circles” and “communities” in Google Plus) — it’s instructive for grasping just how daunting the challenge is to stitch so many variant structural rulesets together into a rational, coherent understanding of “place.”

In the rush to allow everyone to do everything online, designers often forget that some of the limitations of physical life are actually helpful, comforting, and even necessary. We’re a social species, but we’re also a nesting species, given to having our little nook in the tribal cave. Maybe we should take a step back and think of these patterns not unlike their originator, Mr Alexander, did — how have people lived and interacted successfully over many generations? What can we learn from the best of those structures, even in the structureless clouds of cyberspace? Ideally, the result would be the best of both worlds: architectures that fit our ingrained assumptions about the world, while giving us the magical ability to link across divides that were impossible to cross before.

**ANDREW HINTON, INFORMATION ARCHITECT AT
THE UNDERSTANDING GROUP AND AUTHOR OF
UNDERSTANDING CONTEXT (O’REILLY)**

Share This

What

User wants to share an object (pointer, media, or application) with one or more people. The application wants to be involved in the sharing in order to learn who is sharing what with whom, and how often.

Use when

Use this pattern when displaying content, resources, or applications in your product or on your site.

How

Provide the means for people to spontaneously share content or objects they find by sending them to a friend or posting them to a shared, personal, or public space. Provide a consistent Share This widget on each screen or associate one with each granular object (pointers, media, applications).

When the user invokes the sharing link, provide—in a pop-up or overlay if possible—the minimal interface needed to facilitate rapid posting. Optionally include a Send This invitation to explicitly choose recipients to be notified of the posting.

Although the initial gesture of sharing is consistent, there are actually multiple architectures of sharing that you can make available to the user, most notably:

- Social bookmarking
- Uploading to the cloud
- Embedding
- Ongoing sharing

Why

Providing a one-time Public Sharing option in a ubiquitous Share This widget can provide your users with a convenient and familiar method for sharing more content and objects and applications with one another. If they opt to execute their public sharing through your widget, you can learn from the behavioral patterns and optimize your interfaces and offerings.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Activity Streams” on page 175

“Faceted identity” on page 127

“One-way following (aka, asynchronous following)” on page 440

“Profile” on page 118

“Statuscasting” on page 177

AS SEEN ON

Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com>)

The New York Times (<http://nytimes.com>)

The Onion (<http://www.theonion.com>)

Yahoo! (<http://www.yahoo.com>)

Live Real-Time Sharing

We continue see various facets of sharing mixed and matched, with a recent innovation being real-time video sharing. First Vine made it easy to insert a tiny clip into a tweet, and then more recently Meerkat and then Periscope showed up to make live videocasts easy to post and share (and somehow starting to favor portrait layout for video much to the dismay of purists everywhere!), as seen in this little excursion in Figure 8-12 from Twitter through a live Periscope broadcast to some recently archived clips.

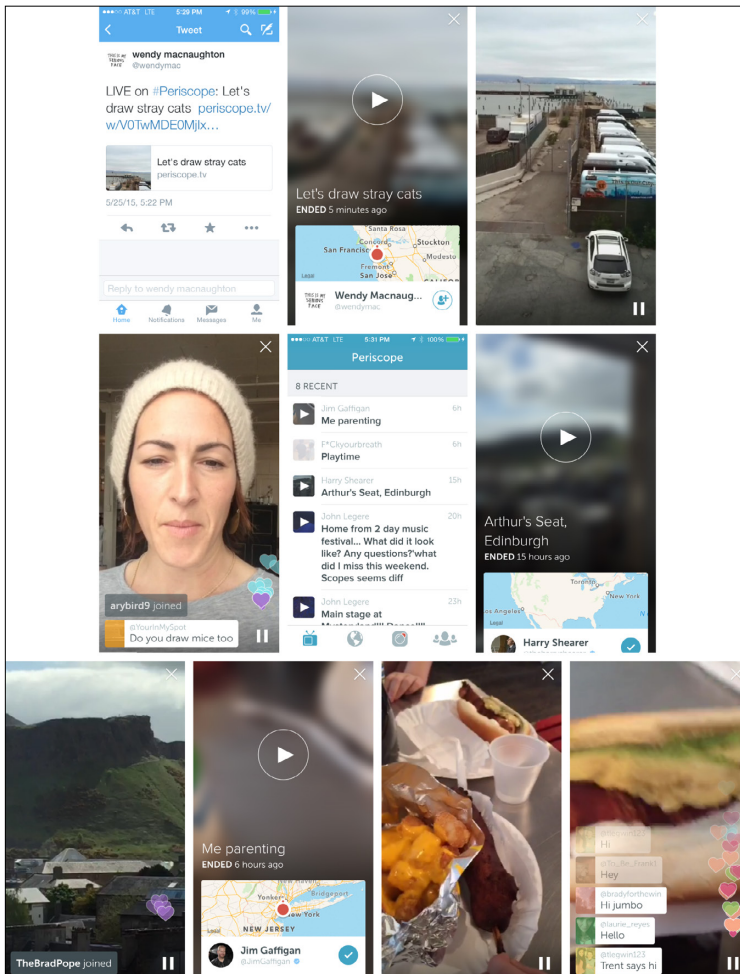


FIGURE 8-12

A tweet about a live Periscope session (“let’s draw cats,” except the cats started walking away...) led me to two recently archived clips, one from Harry Shearer and one from Jim Gaffigan

Reposting

What

In the infectiously snowballing of Tumblr reposts or the incorporation of retweeting into the basic vocabulary of Twitter (see Figure 8-13), we see that one of the most powerful forms of sharing is easy reposting of content that you like, in the same context where it first appeared (but in your own timeline or collection within that context).



FIGURE 8-13

One of the main things you can do with any tweet is retweet (repost) it.

Use when

Use this pattern as part of the framework for initial posts of content in your product so that viewers of the initial post can easily repost content they like to their own spaces.

How

Provide a Repost button, often in the style of a recycling button, close to the top and bottom of each granular story or piece of content (Figure 8-14).

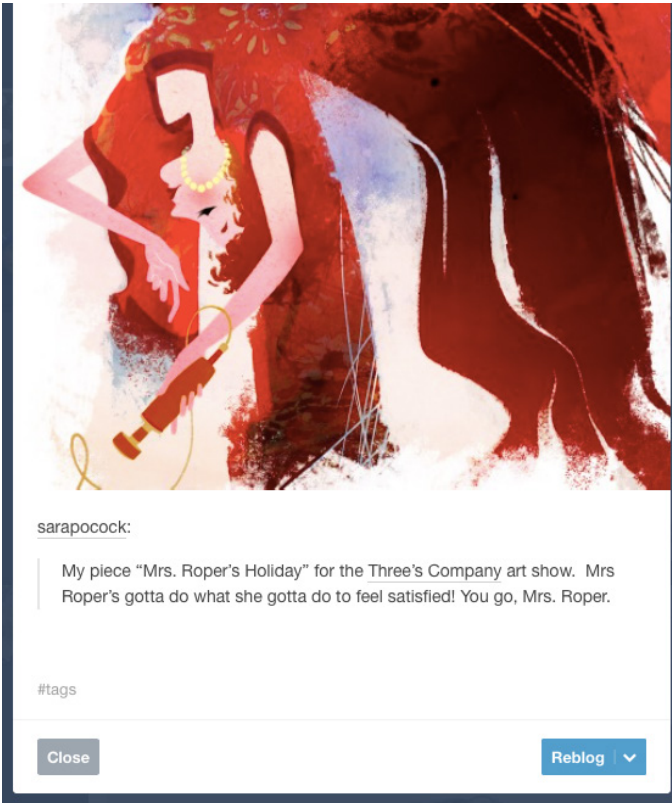


FIGURE 8-14

Tumblr's Reblog button brings up an overlay dialog for reposting the story or image or other content you like, with the option of adding your own note to it or posting it exactly as is.

Why

As with phatic communication (pokes) and lightweight responses (likes and emoji), reposting is a minimal-effort method of participating for people that lacks the burden of the creation of the original content. Frictionless resharing of content can potentially drive huge audiences to breakout-hit material.

AS SEEN ON

Tumblr

Twitter

Google Plus

Facebook

Social Bookmarking

Social bookmarking is a way for a community of users to collectively organize links to resources in a community-managed list. Social bookmarking uses keywords and metadata to organize these resources instead of utilizing a conventional hierarchical folder organization. Retrieval of this information from such systems is based on keyword search.

Social bookmarking is thus a form of One-Time Sharing for gathering pointers, generally in the form of title, link, description (the same canonical form used for early blogging and RSS).

Social bookmarking thrives thanks to the convenience of a bookmarklet, which moves the action of bookmarking socially into the same part of the interface (the “browser chrome”) where old-school bookmarking was always done, as illustrated in Figure 8-15).

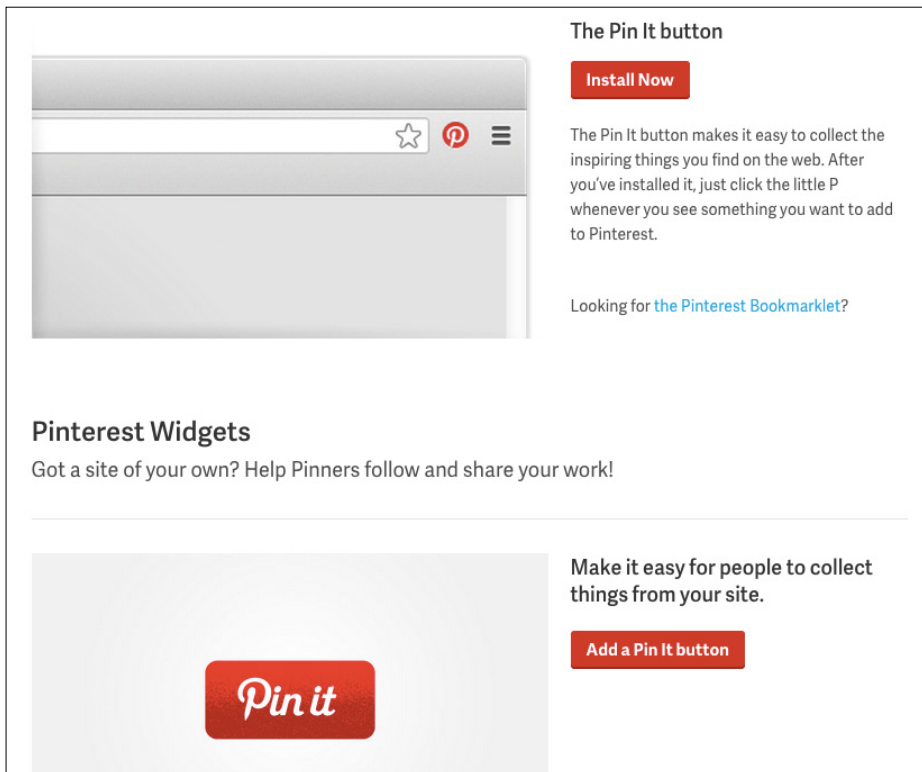


FIGURE 8-15

Pinterest offers multiple ways to facilitate sharing (“pinning”).

Whether invoked via a bookmarklet or Share This widget, the social bookmarking interface can guide the person posting the pointer toward capturing and reviewing the title and description metadata for the bookmark.

Uploading to the Cloud

Photos, files, videos, documents, and many other kinds of social objects are uploaded, posted to, and hosted by social applications “in the cloud.” Without getting into the technology of grid computing or service level, uptime, redundancy, security, and backups, we’ll just talk about the cloud in a more intuitive sense, as the place “out there” where we’re increasingly leaving our email inboxes, our photographs, our financial information, and more.

Whereas social bookmarking deals with sharing pointers to objects, uploading to the cloud means sharing the objects themselves, by contributing digital copies to the product’s repository. The terminology for this from the user point of view might be share, post, add, upload, or even bookmark or send. Flickr talks about uploading photos and, now, videos. Facebook has an Add Photos button and a Photos tab with a button labeled “+Create a New Photo Album.”

Uploaders typically hook into the user’s system interface for browsing and selecting files (as used by an ordinary Open dialog box) when presented in a browser or application interface. They can also be stand-alone client applications, which you can develop or which you might encourage third-party developers to create by publishing and facilitating the use of your APIs.

Embedding

What

Users like to be able to collect and display media objects (such as videos, images, and even slideshows) as well as badges and applications on their profiles, blogs, and activity streams, as demonstrated in Figure 8-16.

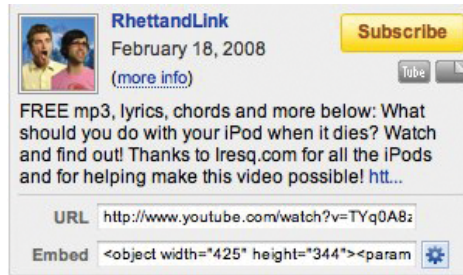


FIGURE 8-16

Supporting the use of embed codes for rich media and applications can enable organic growth and runaway memes.

Use when

Use this pattern when you want to give the user a way to display media or other objects that can be distributed freely.

How

Generate an embed code. An *embed code* is a snippet of markup that a user can copy and paste directly into a blog entry template, profile screen, or other social space for sharing that the user controls, as shown in Figure 8-17.

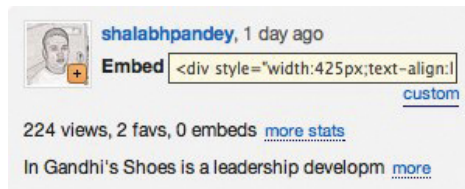


FIGURE 8-17

Copying and pasting text strings is definitely an interaction flow that could be improved upon, but it's the state of the art today for flexible embedding.

You may need to supply unique variations on the code to support variant hosting environments or to make the process simpler. SlideShare, for example, offers a generic embed code for most situations and a different code for embedding slideshows in WordPress.

Consider giving your users the option to customize the size, color palette, and presentation of the embedded object. Both SlideShare and YouTube, for example, enable the user to opt out of the display of related objects—slideshows and videos, respectively.

When possible, gather statistics about the number of times an object has been embedded, where, and how often it's been viewed or accessed through embeds (see Figure 8-18).

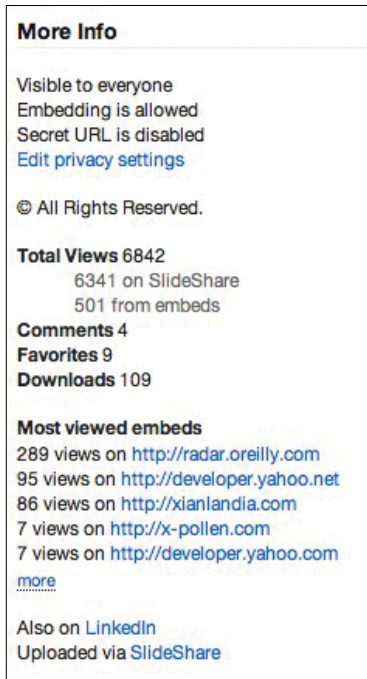


FIGURE 8-18

When possible, share embedding statistics by posting them alongside the object in its native habitat, as SlideShare does here.

Why

Users like to share and display content. The easier you make it for them to do so, the more likely they will. Embedding also has strong potential for organic spread, because it facilitates rapid duplication and redistribution. It is widely thought that YouTube obtained much of its early phenomenal growth from the fact that its videos could be embedded easily on MySpace pages (what the users back then called “my MySpace”).

RELATED PATTERNS

“Badging” on page 561

“Displaying” on page 242

AS SEEN ON

Google Docs (<http://docs.google.com>)

Scribd (<http://www.scribd.com>)

SlideShare (<http://www.slideshare.net>)

Vimeo (<http://vimeo.com>)

YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com>)

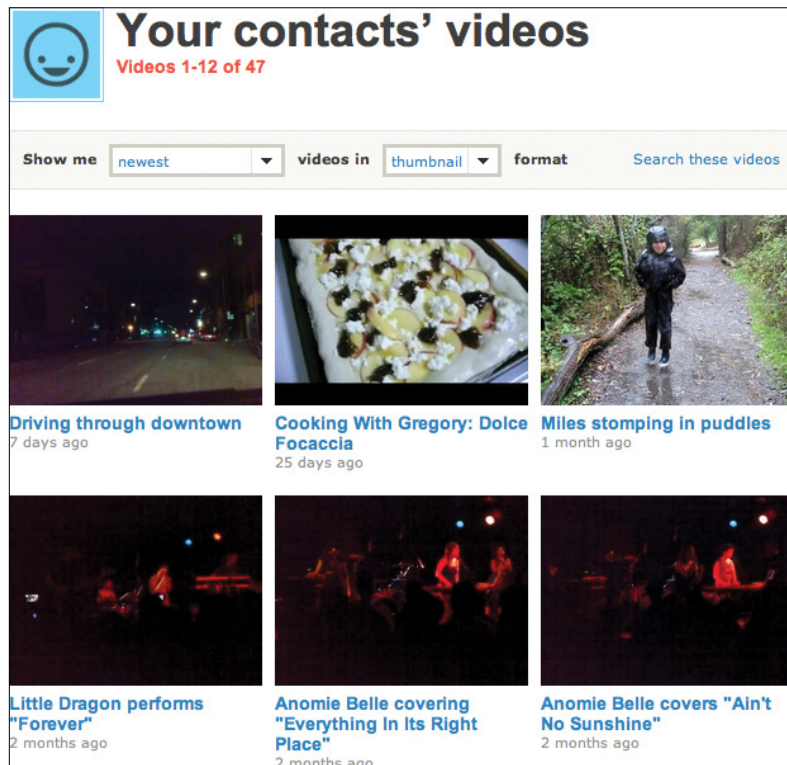
Passive Sharing

Passive sharing can also be described as ongoing sharing. It refers to any process through which participants may initially opt in to enable their activities to be tracked and posted as updates to Activity Streams.

Whenever I log in to Flickr or Vimeo or SlideShare, one of the things I see right away are recent uploads from my contacts, which you can see in Figure 8-19.

FIGURE 8-19

Recent videos from my contacts on Vimeo.



Different from directly sharing content with individuals or even actively sharing it with different-sized publics, ongoing sharing is a less conscious but more pervasive form of sharing, discussed at length in “Managing Incoming Updates” on page 180.

It’s a good idea to occasionally remind people that they’re sharing information passively in an ongoing manner, to protect them from the inadvertent indiscretions that can follow from forgetting who’s watching.

Further Reading

1. Kellan Elliott-McCrea’s “Casual Privacy” talk at Web 2.0 Expo SF 2008, <http://bit.ly/1LOjboO>.
2. Kellan Elliott-McCrea’s “Casual Privacy” slides from Ignite Web 2.0 Expo, <http://bit.ly/1LOjekm>.
3. Tip a Friend, <http://ui-patterns.com/pattern/TipAFriend> (see negative comments and suggestions that it’s an anti-pattern).

The Global Soapbox

It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it.

CHARLOTTE BRONTË

KEEPING UP WITH FRIENDS IS THE VIRAL PART OF WHAT KEEPS THE SOCIAL WEB GROWING, but it is the apps with intense activity around a topic that keep people coming back over and over again, and this activity often provides the core around which these communities are built. It's the *there*, there.

Destinations where people are contributing and conversing about something are often harder to define and design, because the structure and the content are defined and created by the users. This is the place where people stand on their soap boxes and inspire dialogues and arguments, and it is the place where private conversations, secrets, and intense debates can happen around subjects about which people are deeply passionate.

The key is to design flexible frameworks and spaces for people to define their own sense of place. Blogs have been successful over the years because the tools out there gave users the power to customize everything—the look, how often to publish, how long or short a post, how many authors or categories—while still displaying a standard suite of meta information. Pretty much everything is open, and because of that, the variety of blogs and uses of blogging software are as varied as the number of people out there.

There are some emergent display patterns for blogs, forums, email, chat, and instant messages, and following these enables users to understand the type of content and the implied expectations of behavior relating to it.

To fully round out these tools, team up one or more of these broadcasting patterns with patterns such as “Sign-up or Registration” (Chapter 3), “Identity” (Chapter 4), “Identity Cards or Contact Cards” (Chapter 4), “Reputation Influences Behavior” (Chapter 6), “Ratings (Stars or 1–5)” (Chapter 10), “Comments” (Chapter 10), and “Adding Friends” (Chapter 14).

Broadcasting

The patterns in this section give people the tools to broadcast in a one-to-many form through methods such as blogs and microblogs. Posting photos, videos, and podcasts also falls in this category and is often associated with Microblogging and Activity Streams (Chapter 5). In addition, publishing tools such as licenses, rights, and Terms of Service (which cover the contracts between your product and the user who is broadcasting, and then between the user and his audience of readers) are covered in detail.

Blogging

Every year or so, the death of blogging or the return of blogging is announced, and still somehow blogs continue to exist as a convenient format for self-publishing, and persist in spawning variations and evolutionary descendants.

What

An author wants to write commentary and post events, images, and videos on a regular basis. A reader wants to read commentary and view events, images, and videos on a regular basis by a particular author (see Figure 9-1).



FIGURE 9-1

A blog post from Mediajunkie—still blogging after all these years.

Use when

Use this pattern to create the framework with which users can publish text, links, images, and/or video on a regular basis.

- Use this pattern to bring a more casual level of commentary to readers as a complement to more formal editorial content.
- Combine this pattern with “Comments” on page 339 and “Tagging” on page 247 to encourage reader participation and conversations.

- Combine this pattern with “Hosted Modules” on page 567 to encourage the readership community members to interact.

How

Blogs have been around long enough to have settled into both a common format for individual posts and aggregation of the posts. Despite the advanced capabilities of common blogging software, readers have come to recognize blogs by their presentation pattern.

Posts

The individual blog post should contain these fundamentals:

- Title or headline.
- Content (this is the main content of the posting).
- Short description. This can be an abstract pulled from the main content post, or a separate field can be provided in which the author can write a separate abstract.
- Datestamp.
- Timestamp.
- Author attribution. This is especially important if your site has multiple blog authors (see “Attribution” on page 148).
- Tags or keywords. Provide a mechanism for the author to pretag the post.
- Comments. Most blogs have an option through which readers can leave comments on a post. When comments are enabled, the number of comments for the post should be displayed and should be linked to the comments. The Comment link is the call to action linking to the comment form.

When comments are enabled, there should also be tools available for managing spam. A common option is holding comments for review, which gives the moderator or blog owner an opportunity to delete spam before approving comments for publication. Recent years have seen the creation of antispam technology such as Akismet, which provides an API to developers that prefilters spam.

- Permalink. This is the permanent link for the posting that with which someone can bookmark the entry or blog about it.

Presentation of posts

- Present posts in reverse chronology.
- Provide an option for presenting posts on an index page with a title and short description for each that links off to the full post.
- Provide the ability to have a single page for each individual post.
- Provide the ability for a user to navigate backward and forward from one post to the next. Clearly indicate whether the user is going back in time.
- Archive past posts. Set up archiving by date, tag, keyword, or category, as illustrated in Figure 9-2.

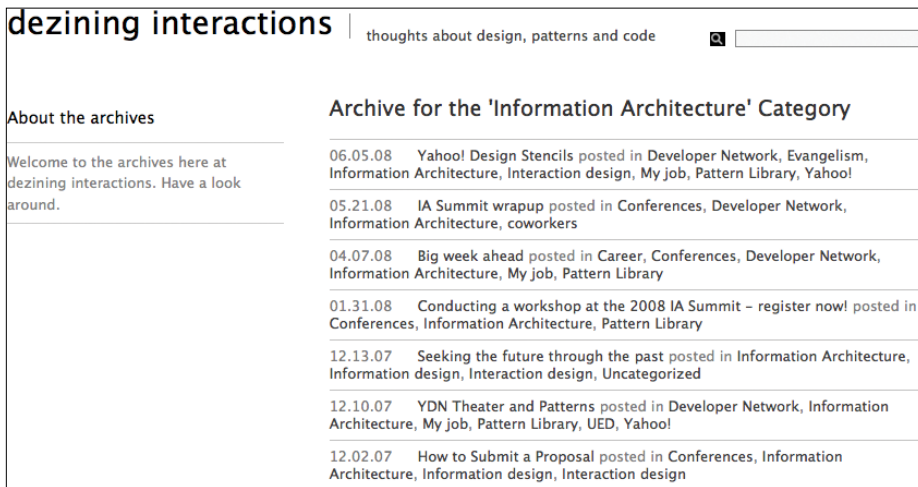


FIGURE 9-2

Archive by category. Posts are presented in reverse chronological order.

- Provide a search capability that searches titles, content, and tags.
- Offer users a way to subscribe to an RSS feed of the blog. Consider allowing users to subscribe to a specific category or tag.
- Provide an About area or page for author information. Information about the author lends credibility to the blog.
- Unless the blog is private, allow search engines to crawl posts.
- Provide the author with the capability to record his thoughts, commentary, interesting links, photos, and other material.

- Make it possible for the user to customize the template of the blog presentation.
- Provide a field for a title.
- Provide a large enough text entry for the body of the blog post. Consider rich-text editing tools to give the author formatting capability for his a post without having to know HTML.
- Provide the author with a preview before publishing.
- Give the author the ability to add tags or categories before publishing.
- Consider allowing the author to schedule the publication of the blog posting into the future. This makes it possible for an author to write a series of posts at one time and then have those posts autopublish on a predetermined schedule.
- Include a tool so that the author can bring in other modules of relevant content and material from other places. This might be badges from photo or link collection products or a network of relevant relationships.
- Provide the ability to upload and post photos and videos as well as text.

Give authors a dashboard to view all previous posts with a clear ability to edit, such as the one shown in Figure 9-3.

- Give authors a way to go back into older posts and edit or update them. Consider providing an automatic mechanism for indicating on the main screen and in the index and archives list that the post has been updated without moving the post in the time stream.
- Provide authors with a delete mechanism.
- Give authors the ability to turn comments on and off for each post.
- Provide authors with tools for moderating comments and comment spam.
- Offer the blog owner a method to add authors.

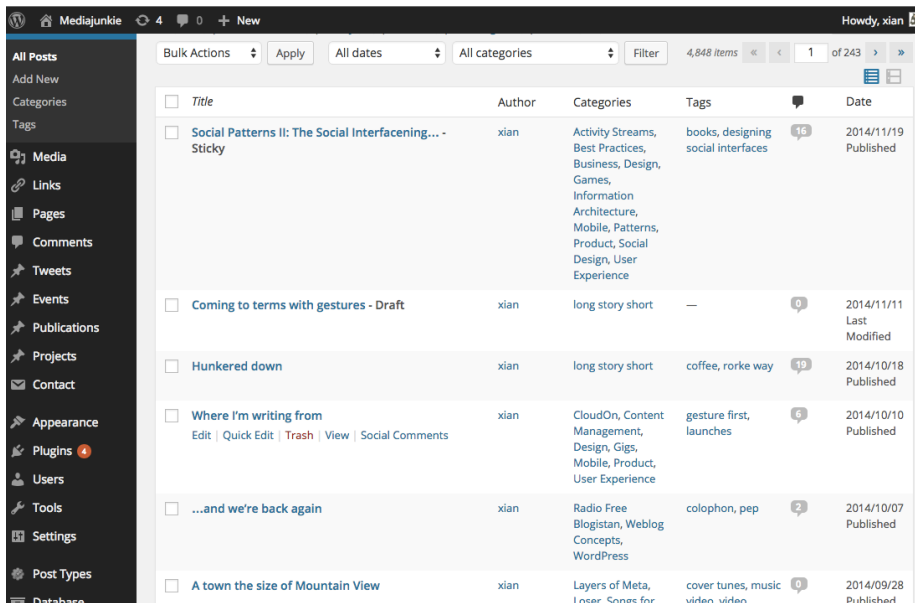


FIGURE 9-3

WordPress offers a comprehensive dashboard for managing posts as well as the framework for the blog.

Why

Blogs have been around for many years now and are a core part of both personal and corporate websites. They facilitate informal announcements and commentary on topics of interest to the authors. Blogs that have comments and tagging enabled imbue sites with a two-way relationship with their readers.

Light blogging tools can make blogging easier. More sophisticated and powerful tools put the ownership of managing the system (as well as the output) on the author. People will gravitate to the level of tool that is appropriate—whether it’s a hosted service, an embedded tool in a social network, or a fully owned piece of software sitting on the user’s server. Regardless, there is a base set of functionality that is now expected in blogging tools.

Giving people rich tools to share their thoughts and viewpoints is powerful. Even if only five people read it, everyone has something to say, and for every person saying something, there are a few who will listen and respond.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Statuscasting” on page 177

“Following” on page 409

AS SEEN ON

WordPress (<http://www.wordpress.com>)

Blogger (<http://www.blogger.com/>)

Medium (<http://www.medium.com/>)

Podcasting

Podcasting is a variation on blogging adapted for audio content. It has become a sort of on-demand radio format and is integrated into iTunes and other channels and infrastructure for delivering audio content. Podcasting is distributed typically via RSS feeds, and in principle any blog with audio content attached to its entries can be consumed as a podcast, but the unique demands of the medium have led to the development of custom tools for creating and sharing podcasts.

Likewise, social-network tools built around audio can provide the equivalent of a podcast in the form of a dedicated stream posted to that system, as shown in Figure 9-4.

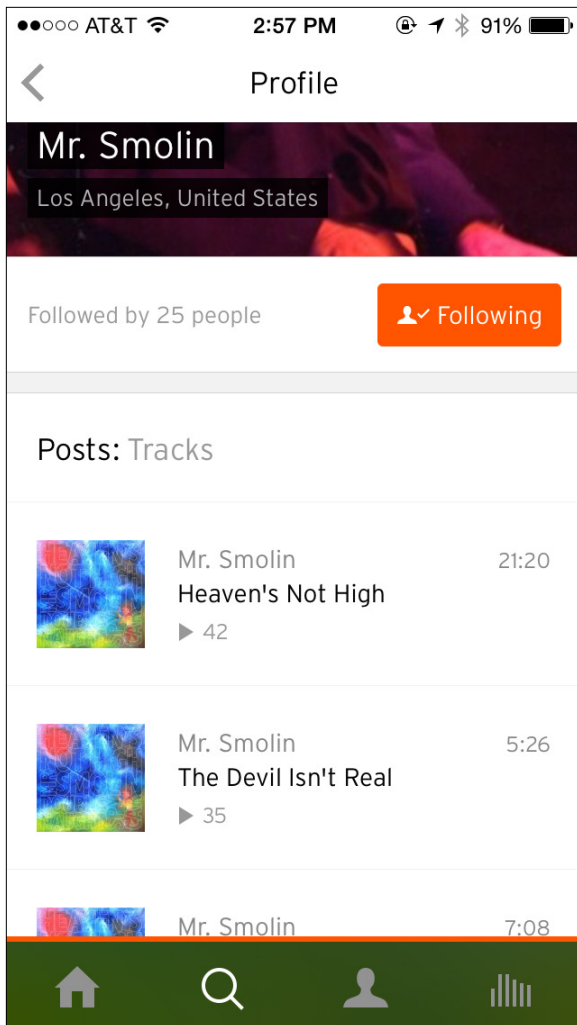


FIGURE 9-4
When I go to Mr. Smolin's profile on Soundcloud, all the tracks he's posted there are presented in a sequence, exactly the equivalent of a podcast or audio blog.

Video blogging

As with podcasting, distribution of serialized video content has also become easier to do. Video blogs can be traditional blogs with video content, podcasts with video instead of audio content, or simply a channel on a video network such as YouTube (see Figure 9-5). Underneath the specific nuances and techniques used to create and distribute video content, the blogging aspect of it remains more or less the same.



FIGURE 9-5

I subscribe to the Nicki Bluhm and the Gramblers' YouTube channel, so every time they post a new video, I find out about it right away.

Microblogging

With microblogging, users can create short posts, and this type of blogging has surfaced in services such as Twitter, Yammer, and even on Facebook's home screen. These are often aggregated into a stream and can consist of text, pictures, or video (see "Microblogging" on page 300 for full details).

Publishing

As people move into the role of content creator and publisher, it is important to ensure that they understand the range of rights and licenses that might restrict their publishing activities. This next suite of patterns covers areas such as the Terms of Service under which people contribute and participate on some sites, and discusses copyright and the Creative Commons licenses content creators can grant others who would like to use their content.

Cross-posting

Frequently these days, blog or other published content is posted to more than one destination in order to maximize distribution. This goes beyond tweeting a link to a published article and extends to cross-posting the entire article or a substantial portion of it to another blog or publication to garner more readers.

This can be done automatically, as when each post to a blog is automatically also posted to Facebook, or selectively, as when certain posts are reposted to a more visible site such as Medium, or when invited to repost an article in another venue.

Virtual Magazine

Publishing is already about a century out of date and ripe for disruption. The Internet has been wreaking havoc with older publishing models, for better or worse, since its infancy. One of the more recent publishing trends has been that of newfangled magazines with less well-defined issues and boundaries, such as custom channels on Medium (see Figure 9-6) or magazines such as Café.com that update continuously.

Matter

FEATURED



♥ Medium Staff

Let's Go Eat a Goddamn Snack: The NFL Cleanse

FIGURE 9-6

Matter is a magazine published entirely on the Medium blog network.

Timestamp

Also known as Datestamp or Freshness Dating

What

A person wants to know when something happened.

Use when

- You want to give users an indication of when an item, a thought, or a conversation was added to the site.
- You want to distinguish a flow between two people.
- You want to indicate the freshness of an item, especially if highlighted.

How

- Indicate in the metadata of the item—photo, blog post, forum post, or an item in a conversation environment such as IM or Twitter—a time- and/or datestamp, as shown in Figure 9-7.



FIGURE 9-7

Facebook notifications include a timestamp showing when or how recently the activity occurred.

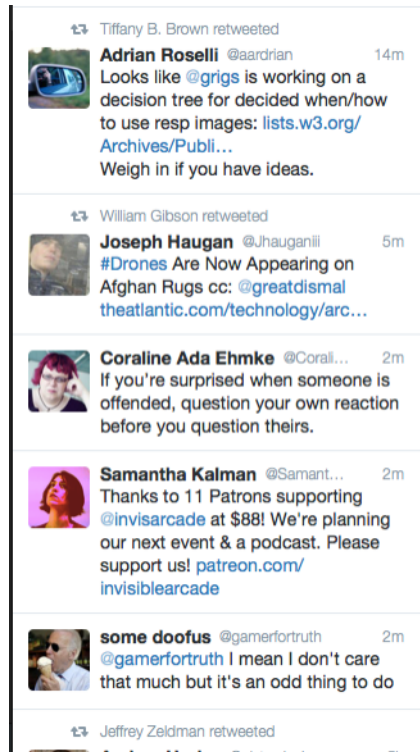
- Enable item filtering by date.
- Provide users with a function to search or browse by date. For blog posts, provide an archive by month and year in addition to categories or tags.

Freshness

Show items by newest item first as a default, as demonstrated in Figure 9-8.

FIGURE 9-8

Twitter lists items in order of newest first, based not on when originally posted but on when most recently posted, retweeted, or favored.



Some sites, such as Twitter, show followers by the date the user was first followed. This is not necessarily the best organization for this type of data. This might be interesting information, but it makes it difficult to easily find a specific person. There are no filters available to re-sort the follower list by alphabet, which would be more useful when looking for a specific person to message.

Think about whether it makes sense to sort the information or post type by date as a default.

Note that this is not a hard-and-fast rule. Sorting by relevance might make more sense at times, especially when having to filter heavy streams.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Activity Streams” on page 175

AS SEEN ON

Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>)

Instagram

Twitter (<http://www.twitter.com>)

Pinterest

Google Plus

Rights

Before asking people to work together, work for you, or assign work to one another, it’s best to choose a model for how rights are going to be handled. It’s a matter of some ethical urgency to delineate and preserve people’s individual rights as well as to create a framework of rights that fosters a climate of creativity and additive collaboration. In most jurisdictions, standard rights exist in the absence of anything stated specifically. For example, in the United States, a person has a copyright on their own work automatically, unless otherwise stated.

It’s equally important to educate participants (see Figure 9-9) so that they fully understand what rights they retain, what rights they give up, and what rights they must respect before rolling up their sleeves and getting to work.

Please note that all contributions to Social Patterns are considered to be released under the Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 Unported (see [Social_Patterns:Copyrights](#) for details). If you do not want your writing to be edited mercilessly and redistributed at will, then do not submit it here.
You are also promising us that you wrote this yourself, or copied it from a public domain or similar free resource.
DO NOT SUBMIT COPYRIGHTED WORK WITHOUT PERMISSION!

FIGURE 9-9

This notice informs contributors to the wiki companion of this book how their contributions will be handled, but whenever someone becomes an active participant, we also contact that person directly to ensure that the individual knows the drill.

When inviting people to contribute content to your product, ask them to verify that they have the right to do so before they become active contributors.

The pattern that follows (“Terms of Service”) renders advice on how to inform participants and to learn about the different license models you might consider for contributed content.

Terms of Service

What

A Terms of Service Agreement (See Figure 9-10) provides a legal framework for the use and dissemination of “information services” and intellectual property assets provided by a product.



FIGURE 9-10

Pressing the primary button constitutes agreement to the legal terms.

Every product can be construed as a provider of “information services” to the consumers of this information, whether it is visitors or registered members. Although it is not necessary to have a Terms of Service Agreement, it serves as a legal safeguard that establishes roles and responsibility for creation, use, and redistribution/dissemination of intellectual property in the event of a dispute or legal action.

When a form includes a checkbox for the user to indicate agreement to the Terms of Service (TOS), the user often doesn’t notice the checkbox and is confronted with an error message and a demand to read and agree to them before completing the form. There’s no reason to place the user in this position, where she might feel affronted merely because she did not notice a checkbox.

Use when

- Use this pattern in check-out flows and sign-up forms, as illustrated in Figure 9-11.

The image shows a 'Payment Information' form with the following fields: Payment Type (radio buttons for VISA, MasterCard, Discover, AMEX), Card Number, Security Code (with a 'What's this?' link), Expiration Date (dropdowns for 01 and 2008), Name on Card, a checked checkbox for 'Billing address = company address', Phone Number, and Purchase Order (with 'For your internal use' text). At the bottom, a red circle highlights the text 'By clicking the button below, I agree with the [Terms of Service](#)' and two buttons: 'Agree & Place Order' and 'Cancel Order'.

FIGURE 9-11

The prompt for agreement to the Terms of Service is best when integrated closely into the sign-up (or check-out) flow.

- Use this pattern when you intend to host users on your service who will be creating original content for public consumption.

How

- Consent to the agreement is expressed in the call-to-action button (“Agree and Continue”).
- The form offers an option to exit without agreeing (“Cancel” or “Don’t Agree/Cancel Order”).
- A statement makes it clear that submitting the form constitutes agreement to the terms (“By clicking you agree...”).
- The Terms of Service text is available via a clearly labeled hyper-text link (“Terms of Service”).
- The Terms of Service copy is supplied in a printable format.

INTERNATIONALIZATION

In different international regions, laws might require a separate checkbox or an interstitial that forces the user to see the Terms of Service before continuing.

Why

The goal of this pattern is to make the experience of completing the form better for the user and to avoid interrupting her or making her feel as though she has made an error.

Combining the agreement with the call-to-action button and clearly labeling the option offers a streamlined experience in the natural flow of filling out the form. The experience is somewhat analogous to signing a document.

It is important to offer an option to exit (cancel) the form without making the agreement, giving the user an escape hatch, which makes her consent to the terms more meaningful, given that she had an alternate choice available.

Linking to the Terms of Service provides direct access to the legal copy but avoids cluttering the screen with either a large amount of verbiage or an embedded text box or iframe.

The language preceding the buttons clearly explains that clicking means agreeing, so the legal force of the agreement is clear.

Offering a printable Terms of Service is a best practice that makes it possible for the user to keep a copy of what she agreed to (or an opportunity to show it to a legal expert before agreeing).

These five elements of the pattern work in tandem; removing any one of them defeats its purpose.

Finally, this pattern represents a best practice in the industry and is used by companies for whom check-out flows are core experiences (such as PayPal).

SOURCES

“Terms of Service” in the Yahoo! Pattern Library, <http://yhoo.it/1gni6Zy>

AS SEEN ON

eBay (<http://ebay.com>)

PayPal (<http://paypal.com>)

Yahoo! HotJobs advertiser interface (<http://hotjobs.yahoo.com/>)

Licenses

The licensing regime you offer your users (whether it's a single type of license or a range of options) can have a profound effect on the sorts of collaborations that can ensue. If people are unsure about their legal rights, worried about losing their rights, or (worse yet) afraid of being charged with infringing on the rights of others, ordinary risk-aversion will tend to decrease the amount of participation.

There are ethical implications for any system of licenses, but the considerations are many. We don't necessarily suggest that you follow any specific regime, but here are some of the most common ones in use online:

Public Domain

This is the most liberal license. Some content eventually will enter the public domain, even when originally given a tighter license.

Creative Commons

A nuanced range of choices designed to give options encouraging reuse.

Copyleft

An un-copyright regime invented by hackers.

Copyright

Traditional government-enforced copyright, which has become imbalanced in favor of original creators and against the public domain.

Public Domain

Public Domain licensing is the most liberal available (see Figure 9-12).



FIGURE 9-12

Public Domain licensing is the most liberal regime available.

From Wikipedia:

The public domain is a range of abstract materials—commonly referred to as intellectual property—which are not owned or controlled by anyone. The term indicates that these materials are therefore “public property”, and available for anyone to use for any purpose. The public domain can be defined in contrast to several forms of intellectual property; the public domain in contrast to copyrighted works is different from the public domain in contrast to trademarks or patented works. Furthermore, the laws of various countries define the scope of the public domain differently, making it necessary to specify which jurisdiction’s public domain is being discussed.

From Wikipedia’s article on public domain licensing at Wikipedia itself:

For all practical purposes on Wikipedia, the public domain comprises copyright-free works: anyone can use them in any way and for any purpose. Proper attribution to the author or source of a work, even if it is in the public domain, is still required to avoid plagiarism.

The public domain is generally defined (e.g., by the U.S. Copyright Office) as the sum of works that are not copyrighted, i.e., that were not eligible for copyright in the first place, or whose copyright has expired.

However, there is no such thing as the public domain on the Internet. International treaties, like the Berne Convention, are not self-executing and do not supersede local law. There is no globally valid “International Copyright Law” that would take precedence over local laws. Instead, signatory countries of the Berne Convention have adapted their laws to comply with the minimum standards set forth by the treaty, often with stronger provisions than required. Whether or not something is copyright-free in some country depends on the laws of individual countries.

Wikipedia, and the Wikimedia Foundation, its legal body, are based in Florida, United States. Although legislation is sometimes unclear about which laws are to apply on the Internet, the

primary law relevant for Wikipedia is that of the United States. For re-users of Wikipedia content, it is the laws of their respective countries.

In the U.S., any work published before January 1, 1923 anywhere in the world is in the public domain. Other countries are not bound to that 1923 date, though.

If you can get all your stakeholders (from the owner of the product to the participants) to agree to place as much content as possible in the public domain, or to make Public Domain licensing the default for collaborative content, you will then set into motion the greatest possible reuse and remixing of your community's content, with the consequence being you might give up control over how the content might be used or altered by others.

Creative Commons offers a public domain option (see "Creative Commons" on page 311).

SOURCES

Creative Commons public-domain dedication, <http://bit.ly/1gnifMF>

Ethical Public Domain

Public Domain Information Project (royalty-free music), <http://bit.ly/1gnirM1>

When U.S. Works Pass into the Public Domain, <http://bit.ly/1gnyiqO>

Wikipedia: Public domain, <http://bit.ly/1gniBmr>

Creative Commons

Creative Commons licenses were created to foster creative collaboration and encourage people to opt for the loosest possible restrictions while balancing that against any rights they feel they absolutely must retain (see Figure 9-13). Creative Commons licenses address four conditions that might be applied:

Attribution

Others may copy, distribute, display, and perform your copyrighted work and derivative works based on it as long as they give you credit the way you request. For example, patterns in the Yahoo! Design Pattern Library require attribution only.

Share Alike

Others may distribute derived works based on yours, but only if they use the identical license terms.

Noncommercial

Others may copy, distribute, display, and perform your work and derivative works based on it, but only for noncommercial purposes.

No Derivative Works

Others may copy, distribute, display, and perform only verbatim copies of your work.



FIGURE 9-13

Creative Commons licenses are composed from different combinations of four basic conditions.

CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSES

Based on those four conditions, there are six non-public domain Creative Commons licenses you can choose from or offer as choices for your users:

Attribution

This license lets others distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon your work, even commercially, as long as they credit you for the original creation. This is the most accommodating of licenses offered in terms of what others can do with your works licensed under Attribution.

Attribution Share Alike

This license lets others remix, tweak, and build upon your work even for commercial reasons, as long as they credit you and license their new creations under the identical terms. This license is often compared to open source software licenses. All new works based on yours will carry the same license, so any derivatives will also allow commercial use.

Attribution No Derivatives

This license allows for redistribution, commercial and noncommercial, as long as it is passed along unchanged and in whole, with credit to you.

Attribution Noncommercial

This license lets others remix, tweak, and build upon your work noncommercially, and although their new works must also acknowledge you and be noncommercial, they don't have to license their derivative works on the same terms.

Attribution Noncommercial Share Alike

This license lets others remix, tweak, and build upon your work noncommercially, as long as they credit you and license their new creations under the identical terms. Others can download and redistribute your work just like the Attribution Noncommercial No Derivatives license, but they can also translate, make remixes, and produce new stories based on your work. All new work based on yours will carry the same license, so any derivatives will also be noncommercial in nature.

Attribution Noncommercial No Derivatives

This license is the most restrictive of the six main licenses, allowing only redistribution. This license is often called the “free advertising” license because it allows others to download your works and share them with others as long as they mention you and link back to you, but they can't change them in any way or use them commercially.

SOURCES

Portions of this entry are adapted from content at the Creative Commons website (<http://creativecommons.org>), published under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

Copyleft

Copyleft is a play on the word “copyright” to describe the practice of using copyright law to remove restrictions on distributing copies and modified versions of a work for others and requiring that the same freedoms be preserved in modified versions (Figure 9-14).



FIGURE 9-14

Copyleft arose as a strong counter to the dominant copyright regimes.

Copyleft is a form of licensing and can be used to modify copyrights for works such as computer software, documents, music, and art. In general, copyright law provides an author with the power to prohibit others from reproducing, adapting, or distributing copies of the his work. In contrast, an author may, through a copyleft licensing scheme, give every person who receives a copy of a work permission to reproduce, adapt, or distribute the work as long as any resulting copies or adaptations are also bound by the same copyleft license. A widely used and originating copyleft license is the GNU General Public License. Similar licenses are available through Creative Commons Share Alike.

Copyleft licenses are sometimes referred to as *viral copyright licenses*, because any works derived from a copyleft work must themselves be copyleft when distributed.

Copyleft is considered “strong” when its provisions can be imposed on derived works; it’s weak when not all derived works inherit the copyleft license.

SOURCES

Gratis vs. Libre, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gratis_versus_libre

What is Copyleft?, Free Software Foundation, <http://bit.ly/1I2tNO9>

Copyright

Copyright is a form of intellectual property that gives the creator of an original work exclusive rights for a certain time period after which time the work is said to enter the public domain (see “Public Domain” on page 309). These rights include publication, distribution, and adaptation. Copyright covers published and unpublished literary, scientific, and artistic works, whatever the form of expression, provided that such works are fixed in a tangible or material form.

“Copyright” literally means the right to copy.

Internationally, copyright has been somewhat standardized, lasting between 50 to 100 years from the author’s death, or a finite period for anonymous or corporate authorship, but there are no “international copyrights” that enable you to protect your work throughout the world, as is illustrated in Figure 9-15.



FIGURE 9-15

Copyright laws vary from country to country, but they have their history in trying to balance the rights of creators against those of the wider community, in the interests of preserving cultural legacy.

Most countries are signatories of the Berne Convention and the Universal Copyright Convention (UCC), by which you can protect your works in countries of which you are not a citizen or national. The 1886 Berne Convention was the first to recognize copyright protection among sovereign nations rather than merely bilaterally. Under the Berne Convention, copyrights for creative works do not have to be asserted or declared, because they are automatically in force at creation.

“Fair use” is a doctrine in United States copyright law that allows limited use of copyrighted material without requiring permission from the rights holders, such as use for scholarship or review.

SOURCES

Copyright entry at Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copyright>

United States Copyright Office, <http://www.copyright.gov/>

What is Copyright Protection?, <http://www.whatiscopyright.org/>

Further Reading

1. Powers, David et al. *Blog Design Solutions*. friends of ED, 2006.
2. Copyright FAQ, <http://www.copyright.gov/help/faq/>
3. More about Creative Commons, <http://creativecommons.org>
4. “My 140conf Talk: Twitter as Publishing,” by Tim O’Reilly, O’Reilly Radar

Long-Time Listener, First-Time Caller

Flatter me, and I may not believe you. Criticize me, and I may not like you. Ignore me, and I may not forgive you. Encourage me, and I will not forget you. Love me, and I may be forced to love you.

WILLIAM ARTHUR WARD

Soliciting Feedback

SOLICITING FEEDBACK FROM PEOPLE, no matter the form, is one of the easiest ways to engage your community. After all, everyone has an opinion. Giving feedback is also considered one of the lowest barriers to entry for user engagement and is often the first step on the ladder of user participation.

User ratings are potentially the easiest item to add to a site to gather user opinions and can start a user down the participation road. Additionally, as you build up the engine around ratings, you can use the information to understand your users and create more value for them through recommendations (see “Recommendations” on page 412) and other socially driven features. Ecommerce benefits greatly from the inclusion of ratings and reviews. There is a level of trust and authenticity that consumers respond to even with the inclusion of negative reviews. Research has shown that people are more likely to buy if a product site includes ratings and reviews. Amazon has been quite successful at this, using purchasing behavior and ratings to infer which new products might be interesting to the purchaser.

Finally, leaving comments (which is the first step in having a user-to-user conversation about an item), giving feedback, and reviewing an item are all activities that will potentially grab your user for longer-term activity. Each of these encourages registration and repeat visitation. You can combine these patterns with one of the rating styles and tagging to create a suite of user opinion around original or user-generated content and form the foundation of a robust reputation system.

General Considerations

There are several types of user ratings, and each has its place depending on the context of use. However, they all share some common principles and benefits.

The ability to rate an item should entail nothing more than a minimal amount of investment by the user. The mechanism should be associated with the item and easy to find and positioned in a user flow at the optimal instance, such as after reading an article or making a purchase. The option to leave a rating or review should not be presented at a moment of bias, such as when they are about to delete an app from their phone, as is shown in Figure 10-1.

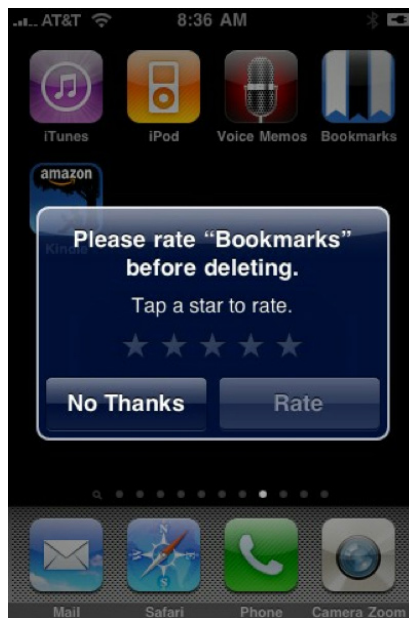


FIGURE 10-1

In the early lifecycle of apps on smartphones, a call to action to rate an application on the iPhone often presented itself at the moment of deletion, which is clearly not the best time to expect a positive rating.

Users who write reviews or leave comments should be held accountable. They should have an identity associated with their words and opinions—both to keep them honest and to help build the reputation of that identity. They should only be allowed to vote once lower the risk of some users gaming the system.

It should be very clear what users are rating or to what they're lending their opinion. They should be leaving this information about a service, experience, or thing, not about a person—although with services such as a real estate broker, rating an agent's knowledge and expertise is helpful to others. The criteria for rating should be clearly articulated. The simpler the rating mechanism, the less clear this becomes.

You should expose ratings everywhere. For example, you could reveal the rating for an item in search results, on browse screens, and details screens. You can use them to clarify searches and filter results regardless of the type of rating pattern used (see Figures 10-2 through 10-5).

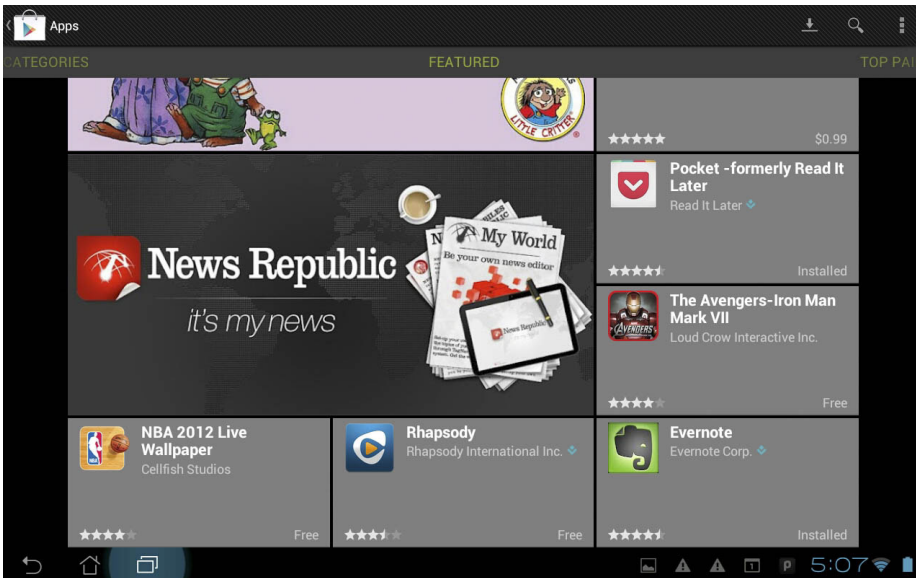


FIGURE 10-2

The Google Play store shows ratings at the top level to highlight and promote items (Google Play application on Android).

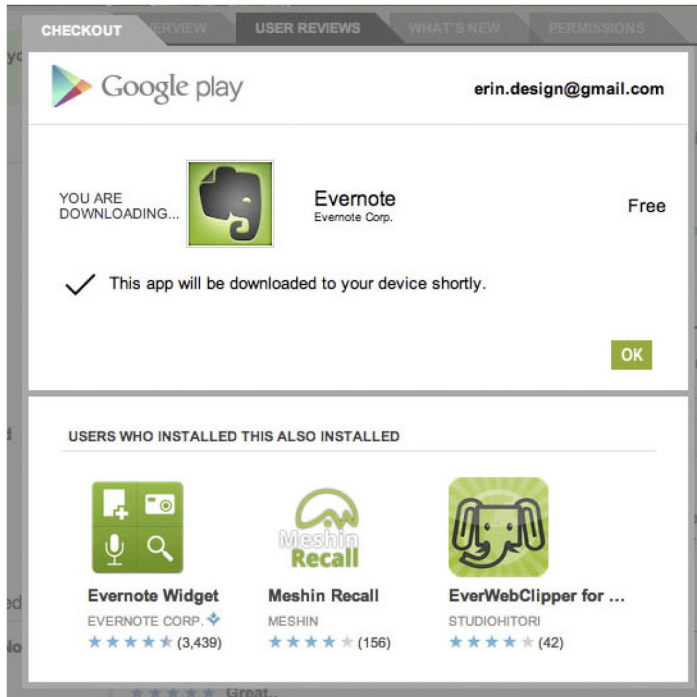
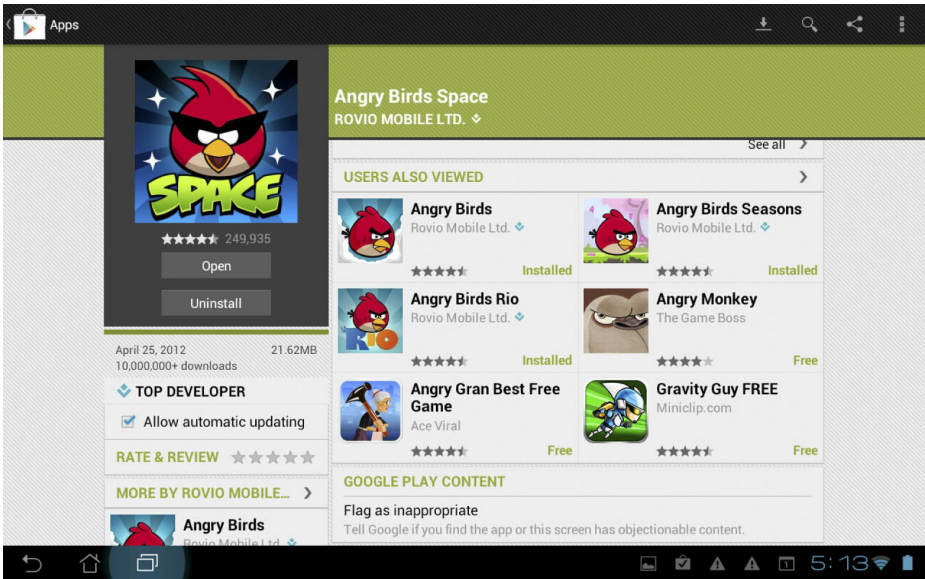


FIGURE 10-3

Google Play showcases the ratings for applications on a product page as well as ratings for applications people viewed that are similar to the item being viewed.

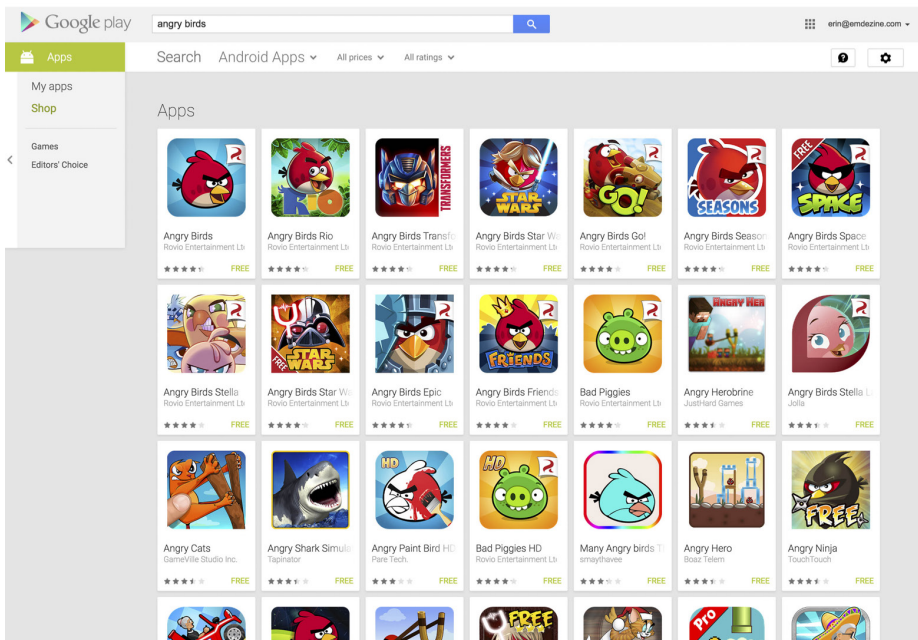
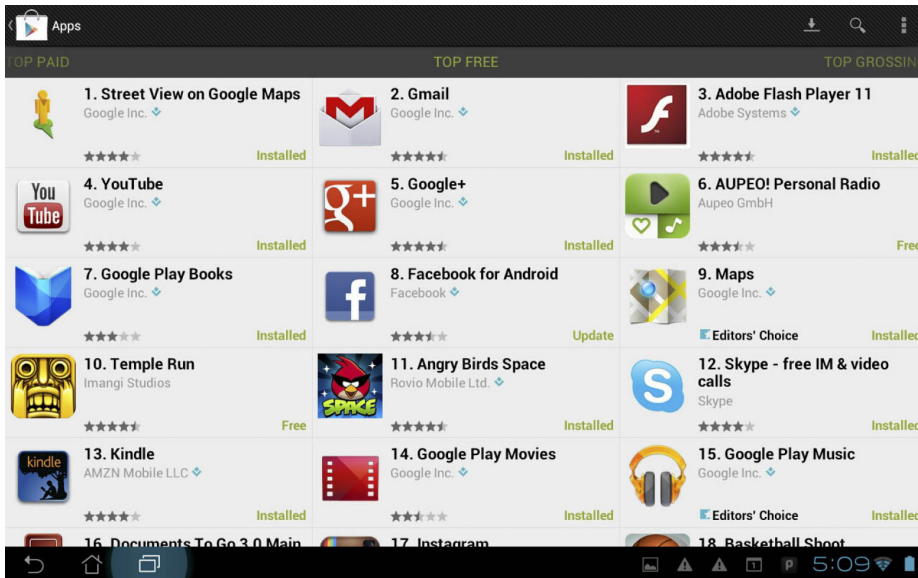


FIGURE 10-4

Google Play includes an item's rating in search and browse listings, both on their mobile devices and on the Web (Google Play application on Android and <http://play.google.com>).

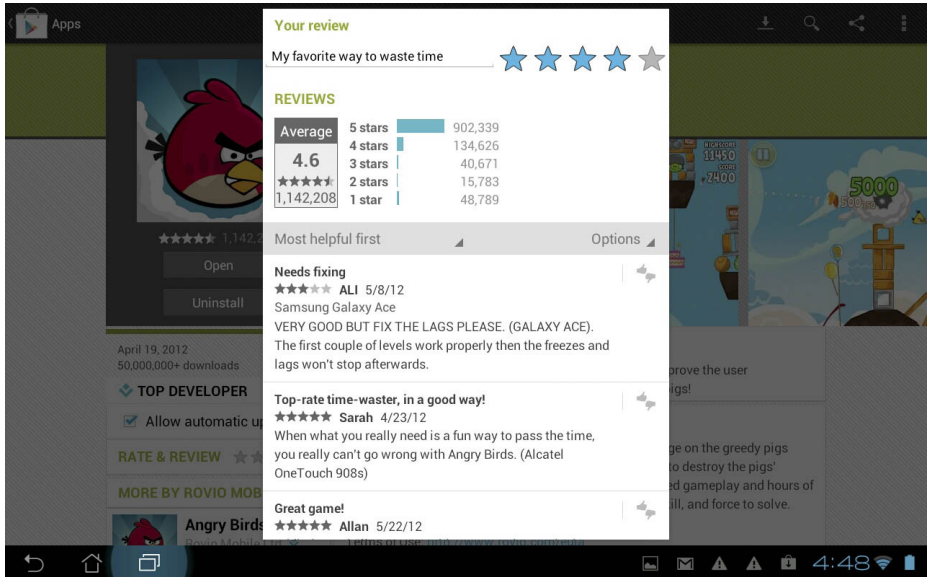


FIGURE 10-5

Google Play shows other ratings and reviews of the community as part of the review process (Google Play application on Android).

Because ratings and reviews help to build reputation, there should be recognition for a person's quality contributions—they should be reflected back to themselves and the community. People are more likely to trust another user's reviews over a critic, especially if that person is qualified, is like them, and is presented as being authentic and honest. You can present and clarify all of these attributes in the reviewer's profile and through your identity system.

Lastly, don't just implement it and walk away. You should analyze the data collected from ratings, reviews, and feedback and use that data to modify, tweak, and adjust the offerings to your users based on the things they tell you. The pact that you make when asking someone to sign up and give feedback is improvements to the content, the quality, or personalization of their experience.

Vote to Promote

What

The user wants to promote a particular piece of content within a community in which they participate. This promotion takes the form of an upvote for that item, and items with more votes rise in the rankings and are displayed with more prominence, as depicted in Figure 10-6.

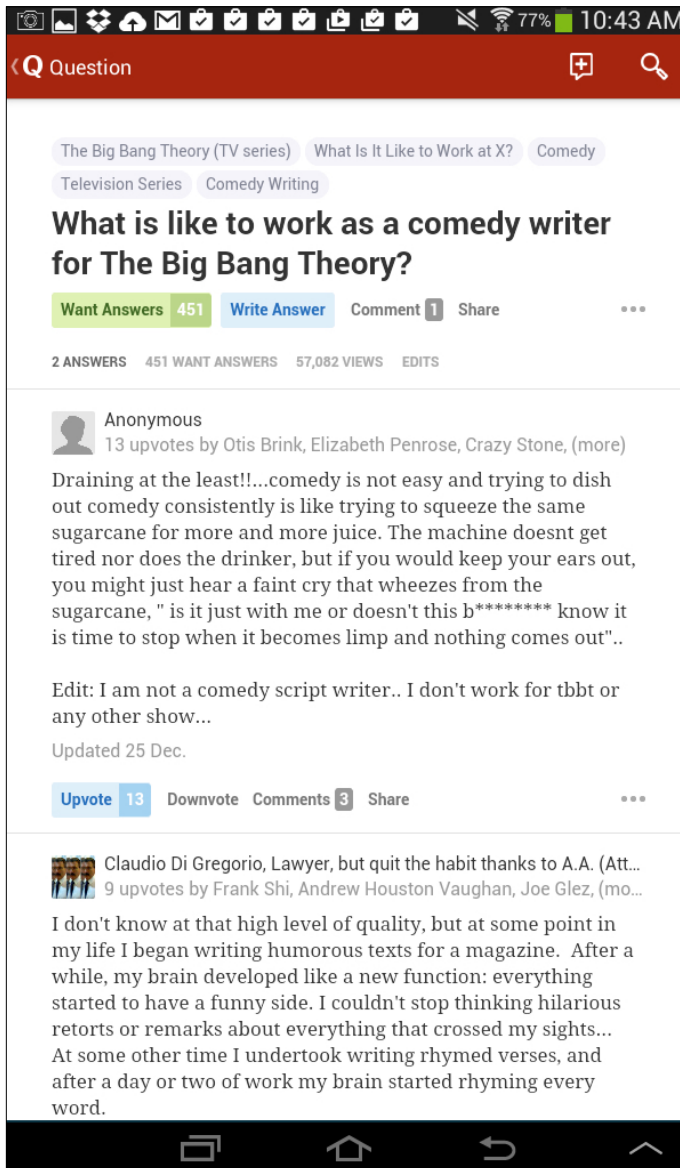


FIGURE 10-6

The question and answer site Quora uses a highlighted button labeled “Upvote” to encourage users to participate if they think the answer is good. The downvote mechanism is downplayed (Quora Android application).

Use when

- Users in the community have the ability to submit content to a “pool” of resources.
- Some democratic form of judgment is needed so that the community can compare the subjective quality of one submission to another.
- A fairly large community is required. Ideally, to make comparisons meaningful, popular submissions in the pool should receive significantly more votes (dozens, hundreds?) than those that are unpopular.

How

Provide a voting mechanism, attached to each item in the community pool. Clicking this mechanism counts as a vote in favor of that item’s promotion:

- Each user gets only one vote per item.
- Display a user’s vote back to him so that he can confirm the item for which he cast a vote.
- Users can change their votes after they are cast.

Highlight popular items:

- Display the most popular items prominently on a home page or section screen.
- Display them first in search results.
- Prominently display the number of votes that an item has received.

Try to ensure that users are voting on items that they have actually consumed (read, watched, listened to):

- On article pages, place vote controls after the article.
- Consider withholding the ability to vote on high-level listing pages. Make readers go into an article page before voting.
- Provide a standalone voting mechanism that third-party publishers can include on destination sites.

Items with fewer votes are not punished for their lack of popularity; they merely fall into obscurity, and disappear into the deep end of the popularity-ranked pool.

You might want to consider a moderation control that lets the community decide to remove an item altogether, but don't make this control prominent. The emphasis for this pattern is on promoting the good, not punishing the bad. You should downplay the downvote or exclude it altogether.

Be aware that a vote to promote type rating is often used as a substitute for Favorites or Bookmarks by some people. It is important to periodically analyze what the community is doing to see if both types of mechanisms need to be part of the available actions, as shown in Figure 10-7.

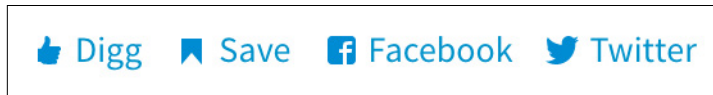


FIGURE 10-7

Digg uses both an upvote (Digg) mechanism to adjust placement and a Save control to collect articles into a private list (<http://www.digg.com>).

Why

This pattern is popular with a lot of user-contributed content aggregation sites (most notably on the link-popularity sites Digg, Reddit, and Newsvine, and the Q and A sites such as Quora). Such systems for collective choice are a good way to promote community participation; they provide a low-cost means for promoting popular content. Note, however, that popular content does not necessarily equate to quality content, so no promises of content quality should be made.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Community voting systems do present a number of challenges. In particular is the possibility that members of the community might try to game the system, out of any number of motivations, including the following:

Malice

Perhaps against another member of the community and that member's contributions

Gain

To realize some reward, monetary or otherwise, from influencing the placement of certain items in the pool

An overarching agenda

Always promoting certain viewpoints or political statements, with little regard for the actual quality of the content for which the user has voted

There are a number of ways to attempt to safeguard against this type of abuse, though nothing can stop gaming altogether. Here are some ways to minimize or hinder abusers in their efforts:

- Vote for things, not people. Don't offer users the ability to directly vote on another user: their looks, their likeability, intelligence, or anything else. It's alright for the community to vote on a person's contributions but not on the quality of her character.
- Consider rate-limiting of votes:
 - Allow the user only a certain number of votes within a given time period.
 - Limit the number of times (or the rate at which) a user votes down a particular user's content (to prevent ad hominem attacks).
- Weigh other factors besides just the number of votes. The algorithm might consider things such as story source (is it a blog repost, or the original story?), user history, traffic levels of the category the story falls under, and user comments. Consider keeping the exact algorithm a secret from the community, or discuss the factored inputs only in general terms.
- If relationship information is available, consider weighting user votes accordingly. Perhaps prohibit users with formal relationships from voting for each other's submissions.

This is a popular pattern on the Web, but it is important to consider the contexts in which we use it. Very active and popular communities (Reddit is an excellent example) that include community voting can also engender a certain negativity of spirit (mean comments, opinionated cliques, group attacks on "outlier" viewpoints).

RELATED PATTERNS

"Ratings (Stars or 1–5)" on page 334

"Reviews" on page 343

"Thumbs Up/Down Ratings" on page 327

AS SEEN ON

Quora (<http://www.quora.com>)

Reddit (<http://www.reddit.com>)

Digg (<http://www.digg.com>)

Thumbs Up/Down Ratings

What

A user wants to express a like/dislike (love/hate) type of opinion about an object (person, place, or thing) he is consuming, reading, or experiencing, as illustrated in Figure 10-8.

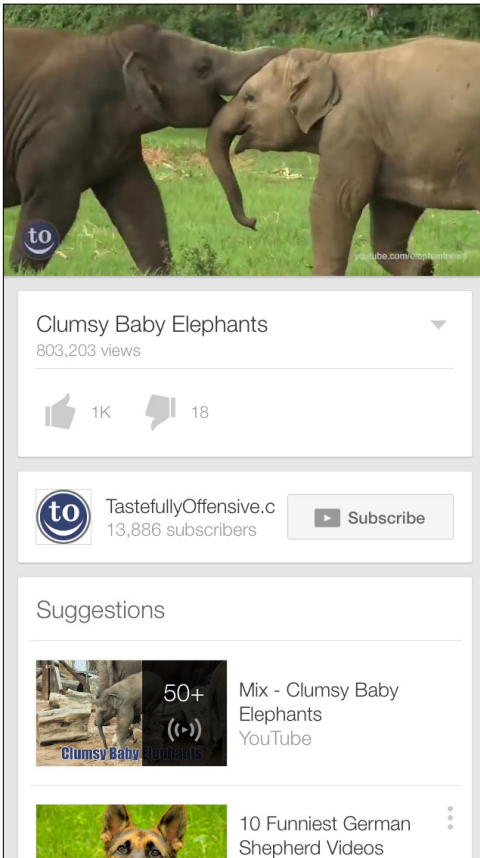


FIGURE 10-8

On YouTube, users can rate videos with a thumbs-up/thumbs-down style of rating. The mechanism for rating is close to the video in both mobile and web instances (YouTube iOS application).

Use when

- You want to provide the ability to quickly grab a user’s opinion on an object.
- You want to offer an easy, fun way to begin engaging users in the community.
- Polarized opinions are more appropriate for the experience than degrees of opinion.
- You want to adjust what types of content is shown to the user based on her likes and dislikes (see Figure 10-9).

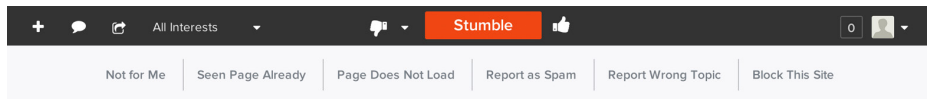


FIGURE 10-9

StumbleUpon (<http://www.stumbleupon.com>) includes a drop-down secondary menu under its Thumbs Down selection with which users can give the system more information, some of which is preferential and some which is technical, such as a page not loading.

How

Do consider thumb ratings when opinions about a rated asset will tend to be strongly polarized. For example, if you can state the question simply as, “Did you like this, or did you not?” thumbs might be appropriate. If it seems more natural to state the question as, “How much did you like this?” star ratings are probably more appropriate.

Do consider using thumb ratings for developing personalized recommendations.

For example, Pandora uses declared music interests to create a personalized playlist of songs that are similar in style. It then uses the thumbs-up rating (Figure 10-10) on a song to add more songs like this to the music stream and a thumbs down to remove that song from the music stream.

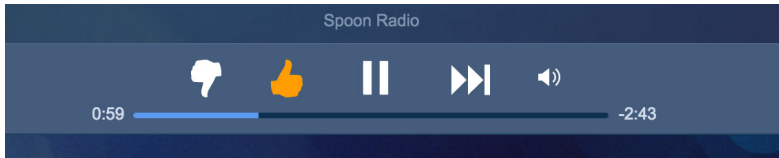


FIGURE 10-10
Thumbs-up and down on Pandora is embedded directly into the music controls (<http://www.pandora.com>).

The benefit of rating is expressed to the user by instantly stopping the play of the song.

You can see a simple yes/no, like or dislike, thumbs-up or thumbs-down action for personalizing content or for giving the system instant feedback in mobile apps ranging from dating apps such as Tinder and Grindr, to the pet matchmaking app BarkBuddy, to voting apps such as Thumb (see Figure 10-11 and Figure 10-12).

In mobile experiences for which a quick like/dislike is associated with imagery, also consider using the equivalent swipe gestures—left for no and right for yes are the current interaction pattern.



FIGURE 10-11
BarkBuddy uses the heart (thumbs-up) and the X (thumbs-down) to let users quickly note likes and dislikes. The positive items (the heart) are collected into a list of favorites, and a Stats section tabulates you which breeds you tend to favor (BarkBuddy iOS application).

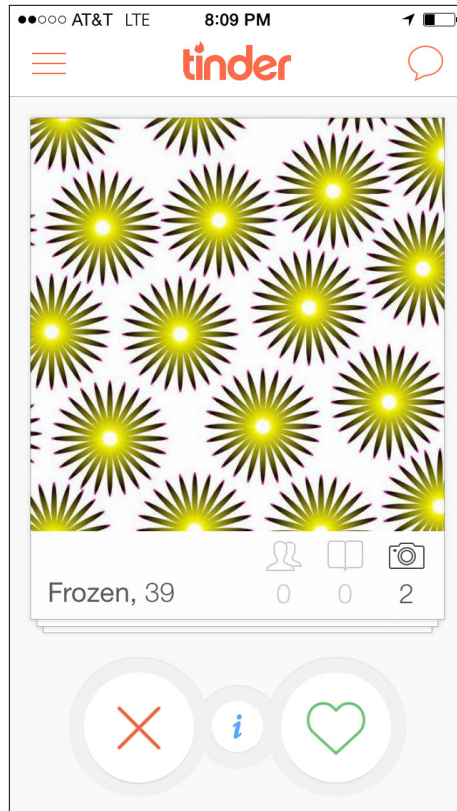


FIGURE 10-12

On both BarkBuddy and Tinder, gestures are the primary interaction, with a right swipe indicating a positive intent and a left swipe indicating a negative intent. The swipes are redundant to tapping the X or Heart. In the Tinder case, there is only system response if the other person reciprocates positively (Tinder iOS application).

Do not consider thumbs for rating multiple facets of an asset. For example, don't provide multiple thumbs widgets for a product review intended to register a user's satisfaction with that product's price, quality, design, and features. Generally, thumbs should be associated with an asset in a one-to-one relationship: one asset gets one thumb up or down. (After all, Emperor Nero would never let a gladiator's arm survive but put his leg to death! Think of thumbs as "all or nothing.")

Do use thumb ratings when an easy, lightweight ratings mechanism is desired. The context for these ratings should be appropriately fun and light-hearted, as well.

Do not use thumb ratings when you want to provide qualitative data comparisons between assets. For example, in a long listing of DVDs available for rental, you might want to permit sorting of the list by rating. If you provide thumb ratings, this sort would have very little practical utility for the user. Instead, you should consider a scalar, 5-star rating style.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Place the thumb rating widget in close proximity to the asset being rated.
- Ensure that the rating widget is secondary in prominence to the primary call to action, unless rating is the primary task (Figure 10-11). For example, in a shopping context, it is probably appropriate to keep “Add to Cart” for an item as the predominant call to action, with “Rate This” being less noticeable.
- Be consistent in the treatment of the imagery used for thumbs across the site (or group of sites if applicable).
- Indicate to the user whether he has previously rated the item.
- If possible, refresh the widget inline as a user votes and clearly indicate what was selected.
- Provide a way for the user to change his vote at any time.
- If using gestures to capture intent, provide an alternate touch method for voting (e.g., a plus or minus, X, or heart).
- Present community consensus tallies as whole numbers rather than percentages for simplicity and ease of understanding.
- Consider highlighting items that have reached a certain level of positive votes over a long amount of time from a large amount of people.
- Be cautious about promoting the lowest-rated or least-favored items, because the negativity can appear insensitive or rude.

Considerations

VOTE COUNTS: WHY NOT PERCENTAGES?

Percentage comparisons between two or more rated items are problematic, due to response liquidity: when there are few ratings (as there will be, initially, for any rated item), small differences of opinion can yield big perceived differences in rating.

For example, if two out of three users give Movie A a thumbs down, it appears that community consensus is 66 percent negative, which is technically accurate, but might not represent an accurate picture of the tastes of the larger community. Really, two out of three votes just doesn't count for much.

However, if 666 out of 1,000 users slam Movie B (expressed as a percentage, also 66 percent), this is probably a significant indicator of the larger community’s opinion about that item.

When viewing Movie A alongside Movie B in a feature on “Hot Movies Opening This Weekend,” it’s misleading to represent their approval ratios as percentages. It’s better to just give your users the numbers (how many positive, how many negative, and how many overall) and let them figure it out.

Note that this is not the ideal situation, which is why we recommend that any context that relies on heavy data comparisons (e.g., the ability to sort, filter, or promote content based on ratings) might not be an appropriate use of thumb-style ratings.

Also note that this “liquidity problem” is not unique to thumb ratings. It is, in fact, a well-known factor in economics (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liquidity>).

Thumbs-up only

Use a thumbs-up-only type rating only when you don’t want negative ratings to appear insensitive or inappropriate, such as rating a person.

A thumbs-up, positive-only variation might be contextually appropriate for the assets that you want people to rate. If you strongly suspect that opinions about a type of asset will concentrate toward the positive pole of opinion (consistently), offer them only that option.

A thumbs-up-only option gives users a way to easily participate, with a “Me, too” or “I agree” opinion.

A thumbs-up, positive-only variation can be more culturally appropriate to present. In some cultures it is deemed less-than-appropriate to express a strong negative opinion about something. (Remember, thumb ratings are recommended for contexts in which opinions are strongly polarized.) For these locales, it might be preferable to provide positive-only opinions, and just let the absence of a rating connote a negative opinion.

International considerations

The concept of thumb ratings can be problematic for some locales.

First, the symbolism of an extended and raised thumb is problematic: in some locales, it is considered an insult, thus a plus/minus widget would probably be more appropriate; in other locales, representations of any body part (especially disembodied ones) are considered offensive; and, finally, some locales will just not “get it.”

Second, the very notion of a binary, black-or-white, love-it-or-hate-it ratings system might not be a natural fit for some cultures. Many locales have stated a preference for “shades of gray” in a polarized scale. (Note this is subtly different from star ratings, which imply “I like it exactly this much.”)

Third, in some areas it is considered rude to criticize things openly. In this instance, consider the thumbs-up-only variation.

Why

The benefit to other users with thumbs-up/-down style ratings is that these ratings, when assessed in aggregate, can quickly give a sense of the community’s opinion of a rated object. They can also be helpful for drawing quick qualitative comparisons between like items (this is better than that), but this is of secondary importance with this rating type.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Ratings (Stars or 1–5)” on page 334

“Vote to Promote” on page 323

AS SEEN ON

YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com>)

Pandora (<http://www.pandora.com>)

StumbleUpon (<http://www.stumbleupon.com>)

BarkBuddy (mobile application)

Tinder (mobile application)

Ratings (Stars or 1-5)



What


A user wants to quickly leave her opinion on an object, with minimal interruption to any other task flow she is involved in, as depicted in Figure 10-13.


FIGURE 10-13
Ratings and reviews on
Petco.com.

PRODUCT REVIEWS




[WRITE A REVIEW ▶](#)



 55 out of 60 (92%) reviewers recommend this product. Sort By 


 5 / 5
My French bulldog-Pug loves these! December 21, 2014


 **FrugLover** from Honolulu

I buy these every couple of months. While they don't last forever, they are great for hours of football fun with my little monster.

 helpful 0  0 




 



 4 / 5
One of their favorites December 18, 2014


 **Doggymom7** from Charlotte, NC


These little balls are great. They are one of my dogs favorite toys. No toy lasts very long in our house, but these seem to last longer than some of the others. The material is a little more durable, ...

[\(read more\)](#)

 helpful 0  0 




 



 2 / 5
Alright...for about 30 mins. December 12, 2014

 **wendydarling** from santa barbara, ca

I have 8 month old french bulldog that LOVED this toy. We had a great time playing fetch with it, but the moment he found the seam, he was able to rip it open and destroy it in minutes. I guess for ...

[\(read more\)](#)

 helpful 0  0 

1 2 3 4 5 ... 20 ▶

Use when

- Use this pattern when the user wants to leave an opinion quickly.
- Use in combination with reviews for a richer experience.
- Use to quickly tap into the existing “community” of a product.
- Use when ratings are collected together to present an average rating of an object from the collective user set.

How

- Show clickable items (stars are used most often) that light up on rollover to infer clickability. Users are generally so familiar with a typical 5-item scale that you don’t need to use stars to understand intent, as exemplified in Petco’s ratings widget (see Figure 10-13).
- Initial state should be “empty” and show invitational text above to invite the user to rate the object (e.g., “Rate It!”).
- As the mouse pointer moves over the icons, indicate the level of rating (by means of a color change) and display a text description of the rating at each point (e.g., “Excellent”).
- When the user has clicked the rating (fifth star, third star, etc.), the rating should be saved and added to the average rating, which should be displayed separately.
- The saved rating should be indicated with a change in final color of the items and a text indication that the rating is saved.
- You also should display an aggregate or average rating.
- Users should be able to adjust their ratings later if they change their mind.

CONSIDERATIONS

Consideration should be made for presenting the call to action for a rating if a user is not logged in.

Labels are important because they help the user decide which rating to select and how that compares to the average.

Don’t conflate a critic’s rating with user ratings. Be clear whose is whose and disambiguate appropriately.

Why

Rating an object provides a lightweight model for user engagement. Ratings are often tied with reviews to encourage richer user contributions and activity.

ACCESSIBILITY

Use JavaScript and CSS for displaying the rollover states and for instant collection of the rating. For cases in which this is not possible, you can add a Save Rating button to confirm the final selection of the rating.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Reviews” on page 343

“Vote to Promote” on page 323

AS SEEN ON

Amazon.com (<http://www.amazon.com>)

Petco (<http://www.petco.com>)

Zappos (<http://www.zappos.com>)

Yelp (<http://www.yelp.com>)

Netflix (<http://www.netflix.com>)

Multifaceted Ratings

What

Multifaceted ratings provide a mechanism for users to give nuanced feedback about a product or service, even if they don't write a lengthy review (see Figure 10-14).

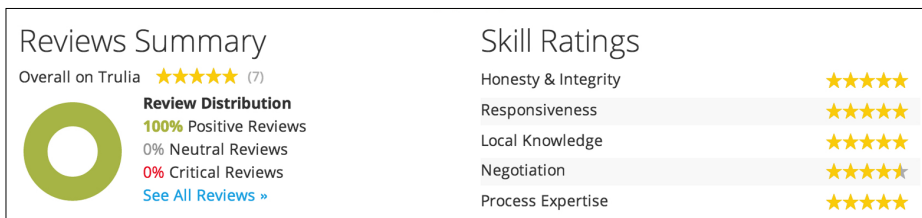


FIGURE 10-14

A faceted rating widget for a real-estate agent on Trulia (<http://www.trulia.com>).

Use when

- Users want to compare and contrast conflicting attributes; for example, performance of a car versus comfort.
- You want to give people the ability to hone in on the attributes that matter most.
- An experience, service or product has a lot of dimensions and a single rating doesn't appropriately capture the depth.

How

- Ensure that people understand the attributes for which they are rating.
- Roll up the facets into an overall aggregate rating for the item. Be transparent in how facets roll up and affect the overall rating, such as in Figure 10-15.

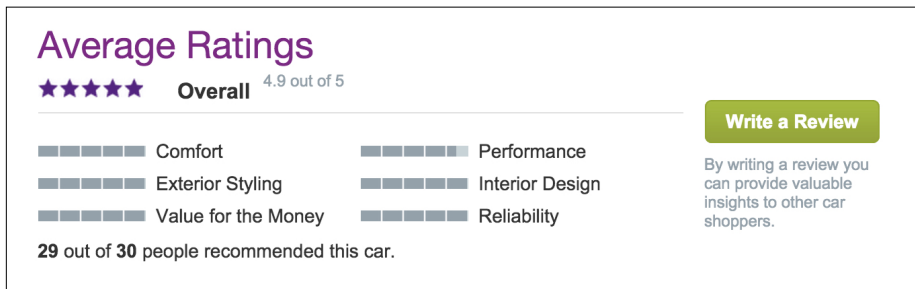


FIGURE 10-15

The aggregate rating widget for Cars.com clearly indicates the average rating and how many recommended this specific car.

- Ensure that your math makes sense.
- Pair with reviews to add context.
- Don't mistake tags and the ability for users to add tags for a rated facet.

Why

Faceted ratings can be a powerful research tool for consumers looking to make a purchase. They are useful for skimming in search results and offer a lot of valuable information in a smaller footprint than lengthy reviews.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Reviews” on page 343

“Ratings (Stars or 1–5)” on page 334

AS SEEN ON

Cars.com (<http://www.cars.com>)

Trulia (<http://www.trulia.com>)

The Lifespan of Content and What Should Be Rateable

What type of items are rateable?

Items that should be rateable by the community share some common traits.

Rateable items should have some intrinsic value.

We should never ask users to provide metadata (basically “add value”) to an item whose own apparent value is low. Or, more specifically, we should be careful to only ask for user participation in a way that acknowledges an item’s intrinsic value: it might be OK to ask someone to give a thumbs-up rating to someone else’s blog comment (because the “cost” to do so is low, basically a click), but it would be inappropriate to ask for a full-blown review of the comment. There would be more effort and thought involved in writing the review than there was in the initial comment!

Rateable items should persist for some length of time.

Rateable items must remain in the “community pool” long enough for all members of the community to cast their votes. There’s also little use in asking for a bunch of metadata for an item if others cannot come along afterward and enjoy the benefit of that metadata (Figure 10-16).

“How long will this item be relevant?”



FIGURE 10-16

The content-lifespan spectrum.

A RATEABLE ITEM'S LIFESPAN

Highly ephemeral items such as News articles that disappear after 48 or 72 hours probably aren't good candidates for rating.

Juxtapose this with TiVo (which is kind of the canonical example) where thumbs (up and down) are used to rate TV shows for recommendation purposes. The programs being rated have high value (i.e., they cost money to produce, and we get entertainment value out of them), and they're highly persistent (they'll recur at the same time next week, and in reruns, and in syndication, etc.; for all intents and purposes, TV episodes are immortal). And TiVo's entire user experience (including user-education movies that ship with the unit, its printed manual, and, heck, the dang remote has 'em hardcoded on there) is oriented around the thumbs-up and thumbs-down voting. I'd venture that thumb voting and the recommender system are a huge part of why many people buy TiVo in the first place. (OK, that plus "pause live TV.")

Items with a great deal of persistence (on the extreme end are real-world establishments, such as restaurants or businesses) make excellent candidates for rateability. Furthermore, the types of ratings we can ask for can be more involved. Because these establishments will persist, we can be reasonably sure that others will always come along afterward and benefit from the work that the community has put into the item.

When it comes to explicitly input recommender systems, we should acknowledge the limitations of folks' interest in "feeding the machine." If they understand the benefit, and they think that the work they'll put in will at some point be worth something to them, then people will play along.

BRYCE GLASS, COAUTHOR, *BUILDING WEB REPUTATION SYSTEMS* (<http://buildingreputation.com>)

Comments

What

A user has a comment or opinion about an item she is viewing on the site and wants to share it, as demonstrated in Figure 10-17.

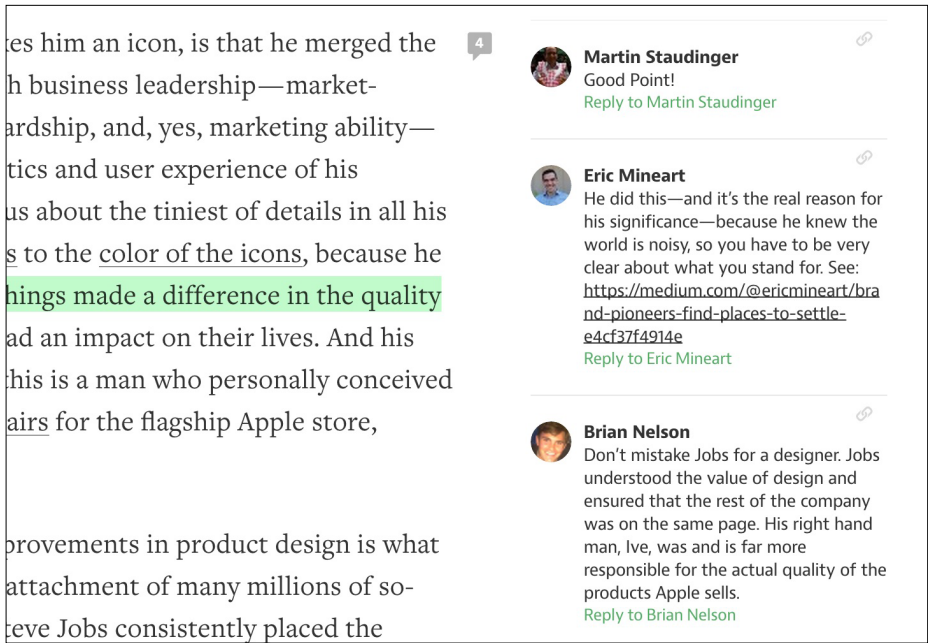


FIGURE 10-17

Medium (<http://medium.com>) displays comments integrated within the article. Comments are indicated with a number bubble (more as an annotation than end comment) and as the next reader scrolls over the comment, the specific phrase, sentence or paragraph is highlighted in order to give context to the comment.

Use when

- You want comments associated with an object (person, place, or thing) on your site.
- You want to give users a means to express an opinion in relation to an article or blog post or begin a public conversation.

How

- Provide a text entry field for the comment that is large enough for several lines of text.
- Associate the comment call to action in close proximity to the item (image, article, blog post) on which the user is commenting, as shown in Figure 10-18.

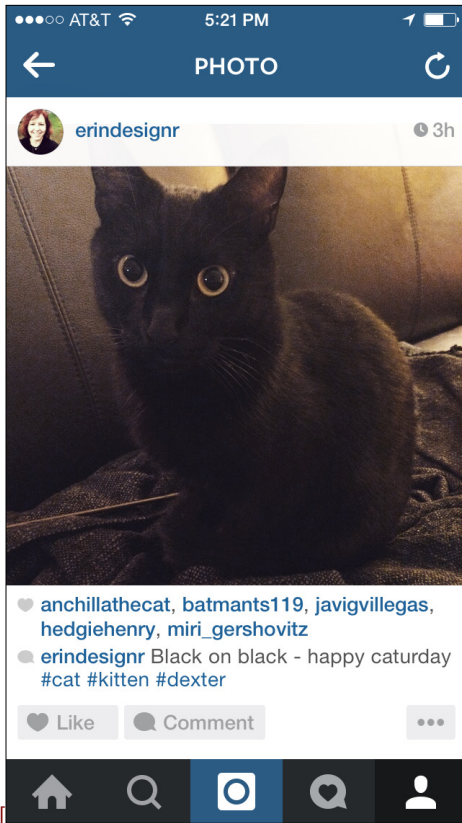


FIGURE 10-18

The call to action for commenting is directly beneath the image on Instagram and is of equal weight to the Like action (Instagram iOS application).

- Ask for an identifier in order to attribute the comment (username or nickname).
- Provide a method for anonymous commenting, through either a drop-down selection or by allowing the user to leave the identifier blank and then automatically noting that as anonymous.
- If the user is already registered in the system, autofill the attribution field.
- Link the user attribution to the user's site profile. If there is no profile system, give the user a way to link the name to a website of her choice (see "Attribution" on page 148).
- To reduce spambots, present some type of validation option (CAPTCHA, Image Captcha, etc.) that only a real person can answer.

- To further preclude spambots, require user registration before a user can leave a comment on the site. Use this as an opportunity for progressive registration (see “Sign-up or Registration” on page 59).
- Consider some community moderation to filter out trolls, spam, and other bad participants who post spam or illegal or hateful comments (see “Group Moderation” on page 491).
 - Ensure that the community Terms of Service and rules of conduct are clearly articulated for users in advance.
 - When comments are removed, be clear about the reason and make sure it falls within the guidelines for the site.
 - Don’t remove comments just because you disagree with them. Dissent and opposing opinions make for a lively discussion.
 - Don’t be afraid to ban someone and shut down his account if he is continually abusive and inappropriate. However, this action should only come after an appropriate warning has been issued.
 - Consider utilizing the technique of disemvoweling (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disemvoweling>) to censor unwanted comments or spam without having to actually delete the posts or comments. By using the practice in public, the site sends a message that this behavior is unacceptable, and the bad apple looks stupid.

CONSIDERATIONS

When making the decision to add comments to your site, consider whether you will be creating a commenting system from scratch, requiring a robust identity system, spam controls, and possibly moderation or whether you might implement a third-party system.

Third-party systems such as Disqus, CommentLuv, LiveFyre or Wordpress commenting plug-ins make it possible for users to leave comments on your content but authenticate through other systems with an identity they already own. This lowers the barrier to entry for community conversation and, ideally, the amount of technical work the content owner has to do.

The trade-off, though, is that these other companies are building their social graph, gathering demographic data and using that for their own business agendas which might not be in harmony with your own.

Why

Comments are an easy way to promote user participation on your site and can be a conduit for multiuser conversation. Comments associated with an item give context to the conversations and the participation.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Reviews” (next section)

AS SEEN ON

Medium (<http://www.medium.com>)

Instagram ([instagram app](#))

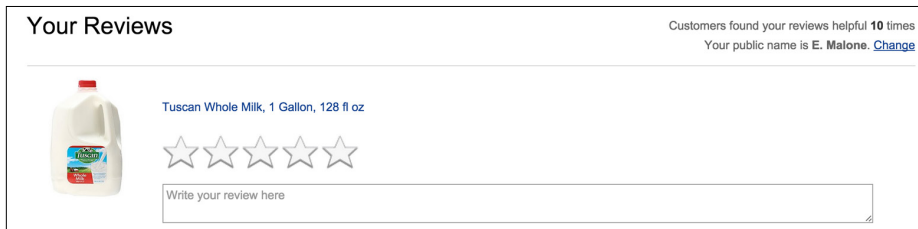
The *New York Times* (<http://nyti.ms/1gnj2gG>)

Most blogs, including those using WordPress (<http://wordpress.com/>) and other blogging tools

Reviews

What

A user wants to share her opinion with others about an object (person, place, or thing) in greater detail than a simple rating or comment, as illustrated in Figure 10-19.



The screenshot shows a review form titled "Your Reviews" on Amazon. In the top right corner, it says "Customers found your reviews helpful 10 times" and "Your public name is E. Malone. [Change](#)". The main content area features a product image of a "Tuscan Whole Milk" jug on the left. To the right of the image is the product name "Tuscan Whole Milk, 1 Gallon, 128 fl oz" and a five-star rating system with all five stars currently empty. Below the stars is a text input field with the placeholder text "Write your review here".

FIGURE 10-19

A review form on Amazon (<http://www.amazon.com>).

Use when

- A user wants to write a review of an object.
- You want to supplement the content of a product/website with user-generated reviews.

- You are also using the “Rating an Object” pattern (see “Ratings (Stars or 1–5)” on page 334). Combined, they will help to obtain better review feedback.
- You are also using reputation rankings (for encouraging quality user-generated content).

How

- Provide contextually relevant links with which the user can initiate the process of writing a review.
- Provide a clear call to action in your text, such as “Write a Review” (see Figure 10-20 and Figure 21).

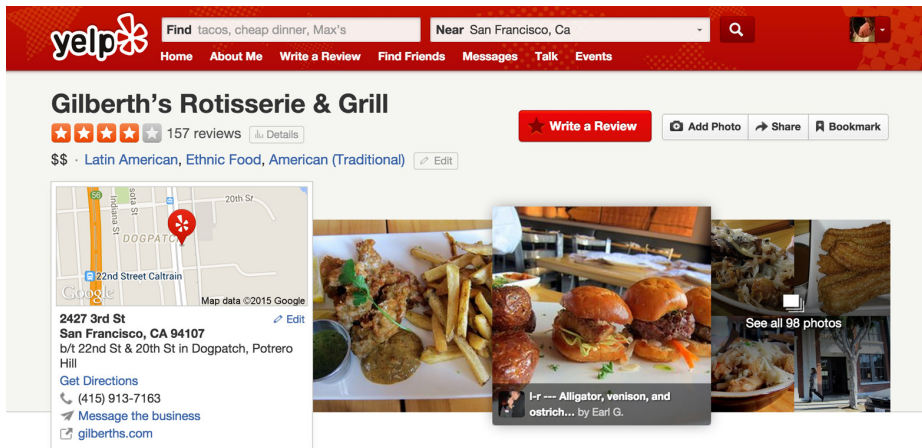


FIGURE 10-20

Yelp (<http://www.yelp.com>) uses a slightly larger button in a brighter color (red) for the “Write a Review” call to action.

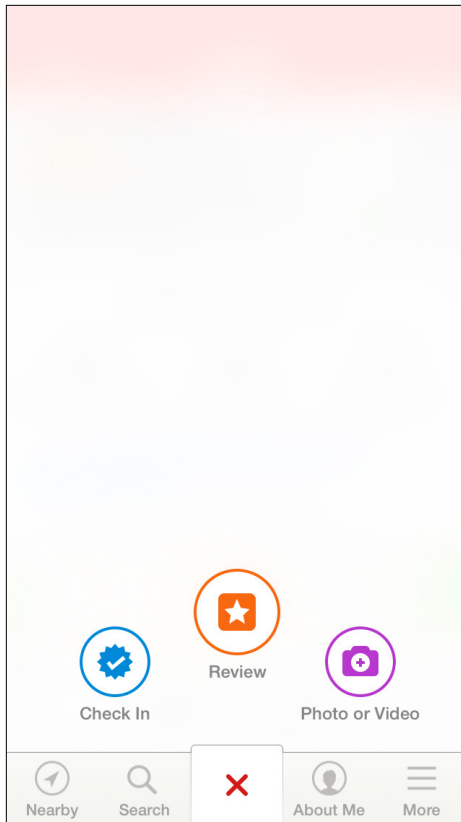


FIGURE 10-21

Yelp has put its “Review” call to action into the main tool bar in its mobile application so that the button is easily accessible from everywhere (Yelp iOS application).

- Include the following five fundamentals in the review form:
 - The ability to input a user’s quantitative (rating) assessment
 - A field to enter the user’s qualitative (review) assessment of the object
 - Guidelines for helping the user write a review
 - Any legal disclaimers
 - User identity, most often a required field or prepopulated if the user is logged in
- Clearly indicate which fields are required.
- Organize the fields to be most conducive to completing the review rather than exactly how they will appear when published.

- Utilize maximum and minimum character restrictions on fields to encourage the desired field length (short and concise versus narrative).
- After the user has completed her review, present the options to submit (primary call to action), preview, or cancel the review.
- If the user submits the review and has filled out the required fields, consider showing a confirmation page or message.
- Set expectations regarding when the review will be published.
- Provide a clear path back to the review’s initiation point.
- Provide additional, relevant objects for review if possible.
- Provide appropriate in-line error messaging on the review form if required fields are not completed.
- If a user previews the review, display how it will appear when published, and then give him the option to either edit or submit his review.
- If a user cancels a review, return him to the review’s initiation point.

CONSIDERATIONS

Consider providing a mechanism by which users can rate the reviews on an item. Amazon’s use of “Was this Review Helpful” has helped elevate quality and useful reviews. This is especially helpful when there are hundreds of reviews.

Consider utilizing a “Top Reviewer” label for users who consistently contribute quality reviews (based on the Helpful Review rating).

Pair reviews with ratings to allow quick input as well as the context of a review.

ACCESSIBILITY

- Make it possible for the user to move through the fields by pressing the Tab key.
- Set up the Enter key so that the user can submit the review by pressing it.

Why

Qualitative fields such as Pros and Cons seem to be easier for users to create than a full narrative. They do not need to think in complete sentences, and they have more specific direction regarding what to write (positives and negatives). Additionally, readers find them easier to scan than a narrative.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Ratings (Stars or 1–5)” on page 334

AS SEEN ON

Amazon (<http://www.amazon.com>)

Yelp (<http://www.yelp.com> and *Yelp mobile*)

Soliciting Feedback

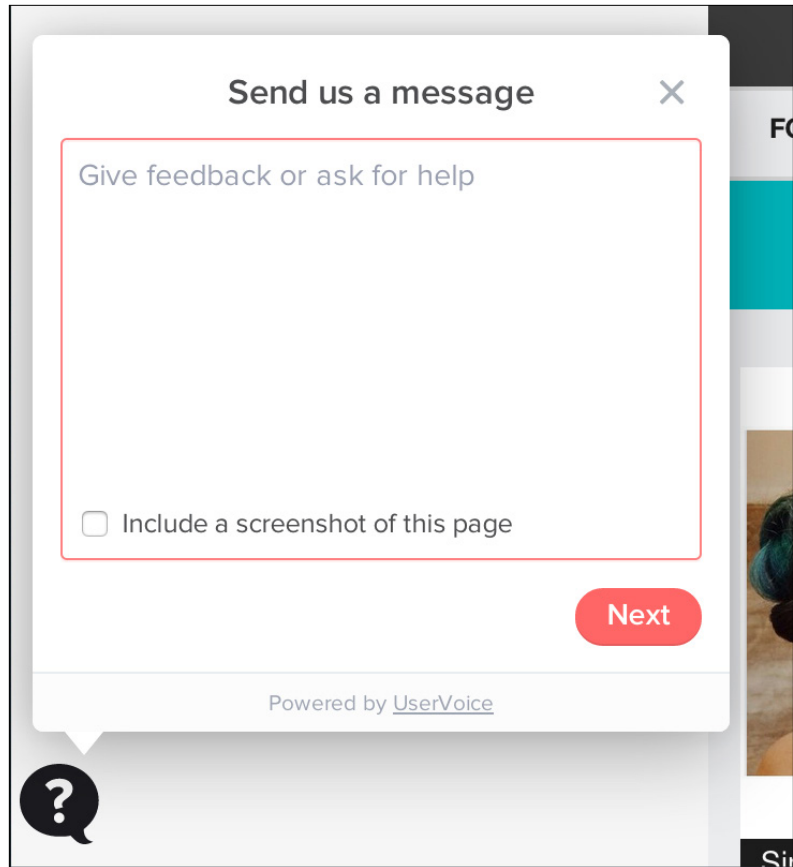
What

The site owners want to be able to collect feedback about the site from its users, as depicted in Figure 10-22.

FIGURE 10-22

The Hunt's (<http://www.thehunt.com>) web version of their service offers a question mark call to action to trigger a feedback entry form.

Selecting the radio button automatically adds a screenshot to the entry allowing the folks on the other end to know where the user was when they needed help or wanted to offer feedback.



Use when

- You need a mechanism to collect user feedback about your site or service.
- You want to capture feature improvements or new feature ideas.
- You want to better understand your users and how they interact with your site.

How

- Provide a clear “Give Feedback” or “Leave Feedback” call to action (see Figure 10-23).

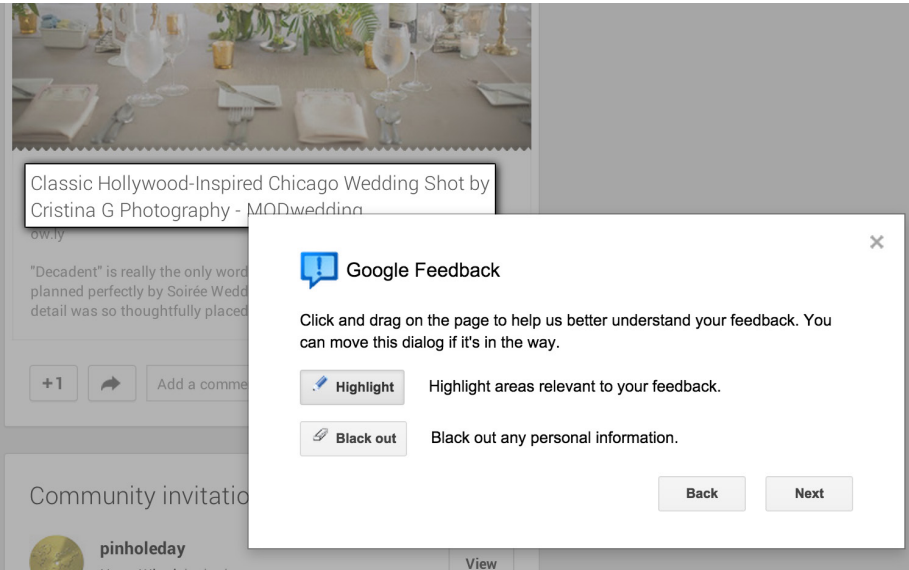


FIGURE 10-23

Give the user a way to scope what the feedback is about. Google's feedback process on Google+ makes it possible for users to actively highlight the area of concern and to black out personal information (<http://plus.google.com>).

- For many sites and applications, the feedback link is relegated to the footer of the site or in the settings screen. This means that only the most tenacious people end up finding it. If you are actively soliciting feedback, consider a different placement, such as a side tab call-to-action or a modal prompt.
- Prompt for feedback after some number of visits or uses or after a purchase flow has been completed.
- Don't forget to ask for feedback directly and overtly, as shown in Figure 10-24.

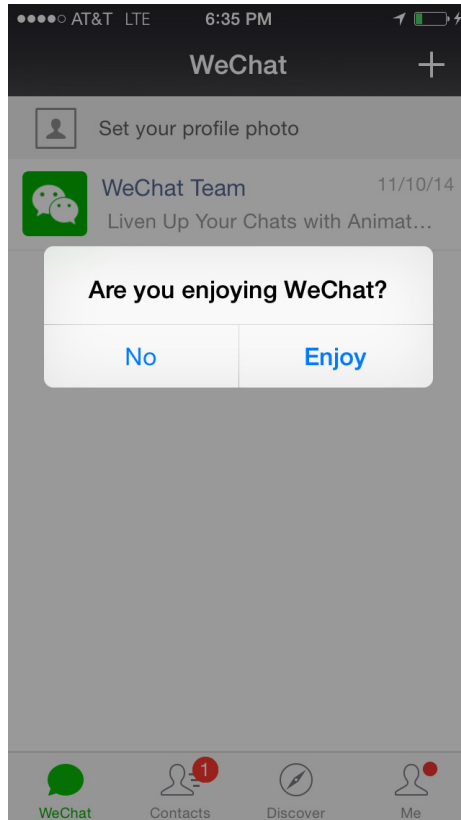


FIGURE 10-24
After several times opening the application, WeChat comes right out and asks if the user likes the application (WeChat iOS application).

- Provide a free-form field for the user to write out and explain her feedback.
- Be clear about the intent of the feedback form. If no one associated with Customer Support or Help will ever see this information, say so, and give the user an opportunity to access help.
- Provide a way for the user to identify himself. This is especially important if the feedback is presented in a public forum.
- Give the user a means to select a method for a company representative to get in touch. Keep that contact information private.
- Consider aggregating all user suggestions together and letting users browse through the comments, feedback, and suggestions of the community.

- Consider including a tool for users to rate other people’s suggestions. You can use the highest-rated feedback to help inform new features and prioritize product improvements, as illustrated in Figure 10-25.

The screenshot shows the 'Hot Ideas' section of the Hootsuite interface. At the top, there are navigation tabs: 'Hot ideas', 'Top', 'New', 'Category', 'Status', and 'My feedback'. Below this, three suggestions are listed, each with a vote count, a 'Vote' button, a title, a description, and a 'Flag idea as inappropriate...' link.

564 votes
Hootsuite for Windows & Windows Phone
 We want Hootsuite to be issued for Windows & Windows Phone as Universal App, Since Windows Phone alone has over 50 Million Active users, and we want a very good Twitter Client Such as HootSuite.
 Please take our Request in Consideration.
 Thanks In Advance,
 42 comments · Campaigns · Flag idea as inappropriate...

257 votes
Add a preferences option to disable images displayed within Twitter streams in the Hootsuite web dashboard
 I would like the option to turn off the auto-display of images that are included in tweets. I prefer a text view of my streams and not an image gallery. Images take up too much space in my HootSuite dashboard and I now only see max 5 tweets in a column due to the images taking up all the space. I used to be able to see almost a dozen tweets in a column. I'm sure some users like the images so I would just like the option to turn them off.
 62 comments · User Experience · Flag idea as inappropriate...

PLANNED · John Hallett (Admin, Hootsuite) responded
 Hello everyone,
 We have begun planning the ability to make auto-display of images in-stream an elective option.
 Thank you for your feedback.

69 votes
Add the ability to revert back to the old theme
 You - Hootsuite - are enticing users to use the new style Hootsuite without making it clear that once they switch there's no turning back. I thought, ok, I'll give it try. Within seconds it was obvious to me that it made the page far too busy and harsh on the eye. I wanted to revert back immediately but I discovered that I could not. Think you've been deceitful and underhand in that way that you've promoted the 'new style'. And turns what was perfectly simple, into a horrendously busy page, with images everywhere, repeated in many cases because of... [more](#)
 5 comments · User Experience · Flag idea as inappropriate...

FIGURE 10-25

User suggestions on Hootsuite are ordered based on community popularity (<http://www.hootsuite.com>).

- If the feedback or suggestion is really a bug or a help question, provide a way for the user to filter the scope in the interface, and then behind the scenes send the request, help, or bug to the appropriate people in the organization. If a user knows that someone is listening to a channel, she will use that channel for all her issues, regardless of your intent or labeling.

CONSIDERATIONS

Providing a feedback mechanism for your site, whether you build it yourself or use a third-party service, requires a commitment on your part.

If you build the feedback mechanism yourself, you need to create a system to filter the feedback into a few buckets for action. Feature requests should be separated from bugs. Bugs need to be triaged and compared against an existing list of bugs. You should provide acknowledgment of the feedback in some form so that users know they aren't speaking into a black hole.

When you create your own system, you own everything and can adjust and manage the flow as time and people permit, but the support of this part of the software can often take an amount of effort that you might not have been anticipated.

Leaving your feedback system to a third party such as GetSatisfaction or UserVoice still requires effort to filter and engage with the community, but the management of the operations of the system is covered. On the other hand, any changes to the system are out of your control, and the feedback site is not integrated with your service.

Either way you choose involves issues and benefits and should be weighed against staffing, operational costs, and long-term goals.

Why

Giving your users the tools to offer feedback and suggestions imbues them a sense of ownership over the site. If the site is extremely social and houses a person's online identity (see Chapter 4), users already have a sense of ownership for the site. They are using the site frequently and most likely in ways that you had never predicted. Tap into that passion.

Tapping into the community is a way to gather new ideas for improvements and future features, and can give insight into how your users perceive the site experience and your brand.

AS SEEN ON

Get Satisfaction (<http://www.getsatisfaction.com>)

UserVoice (<http://www.uservoice.com>)

Hootsuite (<http://bit.ly/1Ns78MW>)

We Chat (mobile application)

Further Reading

1. Farmer, F. Randall and Bryce Glass. *Building Web Reputation Systems*. O'Reilly Media, 2010.
2. "The Digg Effect." ReadWriteWeb, December 6, 2007. <http://bit.ly/1LOoGDM>.
3. Frauenfelder, Mark. "Revenge of the Know-It-Alls: Inside the Web's free-advice revolution." *Wired Magazine*, July 2000. <http://wrd.cm/1LOoNPV>.
4. "Reviews are Good." *Revenue Magazine*, July/August 2007:104.
5. Blackshaw, Pete. *Satisfied Customers Tell Three Friends, Angry Customers Tell 3,000: Running a Business in Today's Consumer-Driven World*. Broadway Business, 2008.

Watson, Come Quick!

The great secret of succeeding in conversation is to admire little, to hear much; always to distrust our own reason, and sometimes that of our friends; never to pretend to wit, but to make that of others appear as much as possibly we can; to hearken.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

THERE ARE SEVERAL DIFFERENT TYPES OF COMMUNICATION THAT CAN BE UTILIZED AMONG USERS, and these should be considered when putting together the tools for provisioning a social site. Each has its strengths and its specific kind of behaviors.

One-to-many, or broadcast, communications— for example, blogs, video blogs, and microblogs—offer users the opportunity to author and publish. The author is presenting her opinion about something, perhaps an article she read, new music to hear, thoughts about a specific topic, or recent activity status. There is no expectation of conversation, but adding comments and tools such as Twitter replies creates an opportunity for indirect conversations to take place.

Many-to-many communications—for example, message boards and forums, listservs, and chat—facilitate multiple people discussing multiple topics, usually bound by a parent topic. Anyone can start a conversation, and everyone can read it and participate. These are often public, but listservs generally require membership to participate.

One-to-one communication—for example, instant messages, Twitter direct messages, and Skype—provides communication between two people (or a small group), usually in real time and often in private.

Meaning-Making Machines

Grandma Powazek once told me why she stopped making cucumber salad. She'd been chopping cucumbers when her hands began to hurt. She thought the cucumbers caused the pain.

It's logical, of course. Her hands hurt when she was chopping, and felt better when they weren't. It's also completely wrong. Her hands hurt because she was developing arthritis. But no amount of lecturing from my dad could change her mind.

In Yiddish this is called *bubbe maisse*, literally “mother stories,” but we all do it.

Our brains take a ton of input and turn it into narrative stories to help us understand the world. Imagine your brain sitting in a movie theater, watching the flashing screen. It takes those separate images and creates a story around them, just like you're taking these individual words and turning them into something more than a string of definitions.

What's interesting is that if you take away some of that input, our brains work twice as hard to fill in the gaps. In one of my favorite episodes of Radiolab (a podcast aired on NPR), the hosts talk to fighter pilots who have had out-of-body experiences (<http://bit.ly/1Ns8sPX>) and find that, when the brain is deprived of input, it can create elaborate virtual realities on its own.

This is relevant online because we have much less input than in real-life social situations. Virtual communications such as email, blog comments, and instant messages come without the associated social data to which our brains are accustomed. In the absence of context, our brains fill in the rest. What we fill it in *with* is a byproduct of our own insecurities.

In the October 2008 edition of *Science*, a researcher named Jennifer Whitson published a study called “Lacking Control Increases Illusory Pattern Perception” (<http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/abstract/sci;322/5898/115>). She did an experiment with two groups that were given a test. The “powerless” group members were told that their answers were half right, half wrong, no matter what they said. The “in-control” group members were told that their answers were right.

Both groups were then shown a series of images of random static. Here's the interesting part: the people in the “powerless” group were more likely to see images in the static—to find meaning in chaos—than the people in the “in-control” group. So, although all our brains are meaning making machines, the results of this study show that stressed-out brains work harder to find meaning. They literally see things that are not there.

I think this is fascinating because it begins to explain the old question: why do normal people become jerks online? Sure, people are more likely to act out when they think they're not being watched, and the screen contributes to that. But why is that so? Maybe it's because their brains are working harder to create meaning in the online chaos, and the meaning their stressed-out brains see is one in which they're justified in lashing out. After all, every child's first excuse for a fight is to insist that the other kid started it.

All of this is just biology. You can't tell a person that what he's seeing or feeling is not real and expect him to believe you. So what to do? The NPR story on Whitson's study contained this juicy bit at the end:

In a different experiment, she asked volunteers who were feeling a lack of control to talk about a personal value that they consider important. When these people were shown fuzzy, meaningless images, they did not see imaginary objects. Maybe this could help in real life, Whitson says. When you're feeling powerless, maybe you should stop and think about what you really care about—something you do have control over.

In addition to being a great tip for individuals, this is something community designers should think about. How can the interfaces we create to collect community participation give the user an "in-control" feeling? If they did, I believe the user's participation would be more positive.

Everything we experience in life is a story we tell ourselves. As a creator of, or participant in, online community, remember that you're much more in control of your story than it sometimes seems.

(This essay was originally published at <http://powazek.com/posts/1263> on October 4, 2008.)

DEREK POWAZEK, COMMUNITY MEDIA MAVEN

Synchronous versus Asynchronous Communication

Thinking about time as part of designing conversation systems is a critical consideration when deciding what type of communication tool to add to your social framework. Public conversations in forums and streams (Twitter, for example) are often asynchronous and take place over extended periods of time. Individuals can be online at different times, participating in the conversation when it is convenient. Comments on a blog post that all refer to a single starting object are

generally very easy to follow and can drift in and out of activity over a long period of time. These types of conversations might benefit from threading or other tools to help users follow the conversation. This adds complexity for the system as well as for end users, but it can aid in following the conversation across multiple users. Many of these types of conversations are public. The real-time conversations in instant messaging tools are synchronous and rely on all participants being present and engaged at the same time. Users can follow these types of conversations easily because the conversation is happening in real time and is usually between a small number of participants. These conversations are often private.

Sign In to Participate

Most communication and activity tools in social contexts require users to sign up before participating (see “Sign-up or Registration” on page 59 and “Sign-In Continuity” on page 77) and then to log in for ensuing sessions.

This serves multiple purposes. Users trade something of value for the privilege of participating. Registration information is used for monetization and advertising by site creators.

Additionally, requiring sign-up lets site owners save the contributions of each user. Without the registration information associated with the user, the user’s participation is lost as soon as the session ends.

Finally, having an account associated with a particular username helps build a reputation based on that participation and makes it possible for others to form an opinion about that user and his contributions.

Meta-conversation

What

A user wants to discuss something that is off the main focus of the site.

Use When

Use this pattern when you want to keep a separation between the sites main topic of focus and the inevitable discussions that are tangential to that topic.

How

- Create a separate forum or location for discussions not related to the site's main focus.
- Clearly indicate to users that off-topic discussions should occur on the separate site rather than the main one.
- Moderate discussions to the separate site if users are not migrating appropriate conversations themselves.

Why

Any site that accommodates user interaction and communication will see a number of conversations arise that are unrelated to the main topic of focus. If these conversations are left unmediated, over time they will tend to overwhelm the site's main focus. Use this pattern to maintain a separation between conversations about the main topic and conversations about the site itself, or other unrelated topics.

AS SEEN ON

metafilter and the discussion site *metatalk*

stackoverflow and the discussion site *meta stackoverflow*

CONTRIBUTED BY

Contributed to the wiki by *Sam Dwyer* (steerpike).

Forum

What

A user wants to participate in a discussion with other people on a focused topic (see Figure 11-1). This can be in a standalone discussion board, in a series of ad hoc but related forums, or in the form of a comment thread on a specific piece of content, such as a news article or blog post.

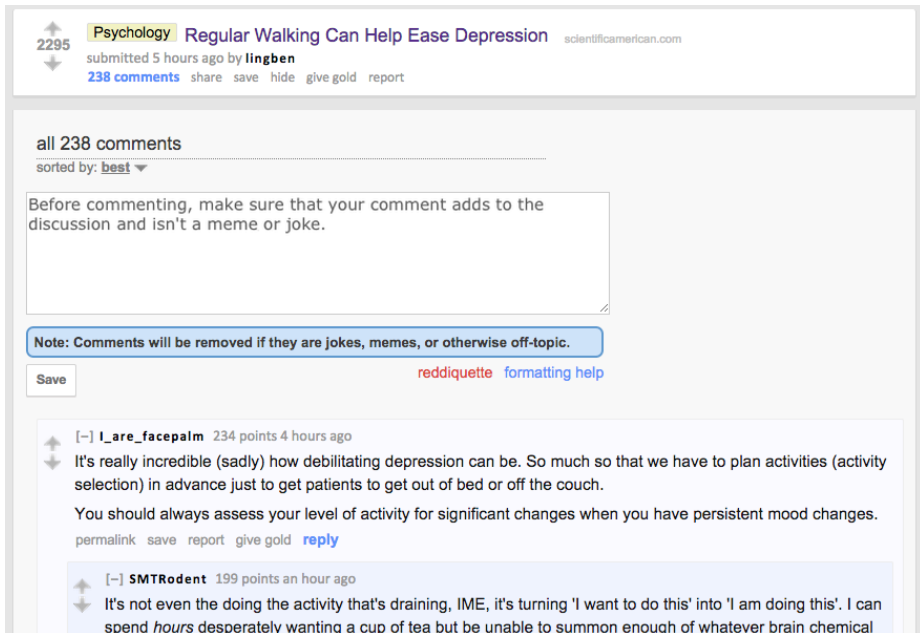


FIGURE 11-1

Reddit has become a sort of pocket-Usenet for discussing everything on the Internet.

Use when

- You want users to be able to create topics for discussion.
- You want to give users the opportunity to respond to those topics.
- You want users to be able to respond to other users' responses.

How

- Consider “preseeding” topics for discussion on sites that have a specific context.
- Give users the ability to create new topics for discussion.
- Provide a clear call to action for posting a message within a topic.
- Provide a clear call to action for posting a reply to a message, as illustrated in Figure 11-2.

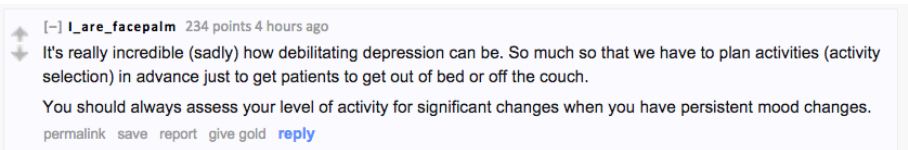


FIGURE 11-2

To enable replying directly to another comment or message, provide a clear prominent reply button (or link) closely associated with the message content.

- Clearly indicate if there is a character limit in the reply or topic fields.
- Provide a preview mechanism for the user to see before posting.
- Timestamp and datestamp posts and topic creations.
- Present attribution with each message and link the username to that person's public profile (see "Attribution" on page 148 and "Profile" on page 118).
- Indicate if the poster is an "official" representative of the site (see "Norms" on page 484 and "Role Model" on page 485).
- Provide users with the ability to edit their own posts in case of errors and typos. Indicate that the post has been edited with a timestamp or datestamp indicating the edit.
- Consider indicating presence as part of the attribution (see "Attribution" on page 148) for posts. If sharing presence, give users a way to communicate in real time via a chat or IM mechanism.
- Indicate when a topic is new.
- Indicate when a topic is hot.
- Allow the major search engines to crawl and search topics and posts in public forums.
- Include a function for users to follow discussions via RSS or other subscription methods.
- Present messages in a threaded format so that users can follow a conversation throughout its lifecycle.

Moderation

- Moderate the discussion lists with a light but firm hand. Too much, and people will take their discussion elsewhere; too little, and the community can become fractured, be overrun by trolls, or veer into flame wars and violate legal and ethical norms (see “Community Management” on page 484).
- Provide a mechanism for users to report (or “flag”) abuse or inappropriate posts to the moderator or site owner, as shown in Figure 11-3 (see “Report Abuse” on page 496).

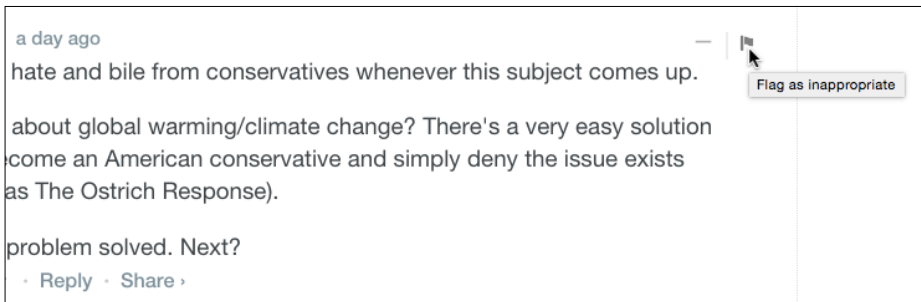


FIGURE 11-3

Disqus offers a flag icon on each post to make it easy for other readers to call out abusive or otherwise inappropriate or offensive.

- Include the ability for a discussion topic to be closed, and clearly indicate that no more posts will be allowed.

Why

Forums and message boards are a more controlled method for conversations around a topic of interest than comments. Message boards make it possible for multiple topics to be created within the context of a larger topic of interest and can provide the infrastructure for a rich community.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Attribution” on page 148

“Comments” on page 339

“Community Management” on page 484

“Groups” on page 463

AS SEEN ON

Reddit (<http://www.reddit.com>)

Disqus (<http://disqus.com>)

Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com>)

vBulletin (<http://www.vbulletin.com>)

Yahoo! Developer Network (<http://developer.yahoo.com>)

Yahoo! Finance (<http://finance.yahoo.com>)

Public Conversation

What

People want to have a conversation in a public environment and don't mind others watching or overhearing (see Figure 11-4). Note that there can be negative consequences to an environment that is too oriented toward being open and public and insufficiently protective of participants from harassment and abuse. Twitter is currently under fire for facilitating a climate that feels unsafe and excluding to many marginalized folks.

FIGURE 11-4

The conversation on Twitter is primarily public with side conversations between people, much like a cocktail party.



Use when

- You want to create a framework for public conversations.
- You need to differentiate public from private conversations.

How

- Provide users with a way to create a dialog among themselves. Provide a framework that is flexible enough to support two or more people in conversation. Clearly indicate through the interface that the conversation is public and can be seen by others.
- Give people the opportunity to add a comment to a statement, item, or other comments. This creates a conversation in an asynchronous method, as demonstrated in Figure 11-5.



Please, Grateful Dead, Don't Keep Truckin' On

The Grateful Dead may be finally wrapping things up. Joe Queenan is ready.

WSJ.COM | BY JOE QUEENAN

Like · Comment · Share

👍 19 people like this.

💬 View previous comments

50 of 95



Jen Joseph What'd we used to say back in the day about people like this casting dispersions about the Dead? "Fuck em if they can't take a joke."

Yesterday at 11:22am · Like · 👍 1



Tom Brunemeyer The first album isn't as good as the second, third, fourth, fifth or sixth. But it doesn't suck at all. Viola Lee Blues alone is enough to save it. And Garcia's singing on Morning Dew is actually really sweet.

Yesterday at 11:26am · Edited · Like · 👍 2



Mike Nimzo yeah he's not wrong about their first album. And it's entirely possible he saw some clunky shows.

FIGURE 11-5

Comments on posts or activity allow microconversations to happen asynchronously, as in Facebook discussion threads around timeline posts.

- Provide a form field for text entry. Clearly indicate the character count for conversing. Comments on a blog or a post in a message board generally have a large character limit. Microblogging has set the trend for short character counts. For example, Twitter limits its character entry to 140 (see “Microblogging” on page 300).
- Consider offering the option for content-free communication. The phatic “poke,” as popularized by Facebook, brought a sense of play and whimsy into the online communication arena, although I can’t think of the last time I poked or was poked by anyone on Facebook.
- If the public conversation is around an item (e.g., a photo or news article) or in a hosted forum, periodically moderate to warn against bad behavior or to remove spam.

- If the public conversation is in a personal environment or in a framework specific to the conversation, let users self-moderate by giving them the means to delete or edit their own words. Additionally, include functionality for users to block or ignore specific users that they don't want to hear from, without disrupting the flow of conversation to other participants (see “Report Abuse” on page 496).

Why

- Sometimes people want to have conversations in the context of the social situation they are in and don't want to move to email or an offline situation.
- Providing options for public conversations makes it possible for the conversation to become the content and a shared activity.
- There will always be lurkers, but open, public conversations are more likely to entice folks who otherwise might not chime in and participate.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Comments” on page 339

“Forum” on page 359

“Private Conversation” (next section)

AS SEEN ON

Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>)

Twitter (<http://www.twitter.com>)

Private Conversation

What

People want to have a private conversation in the context of a social or interest-based online situation, as shown in Figure 11-6.

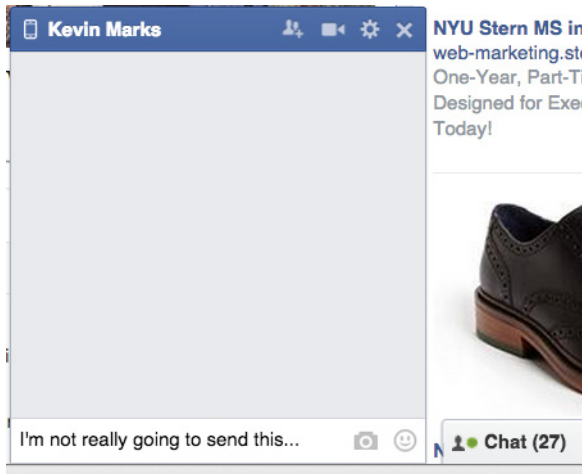


FIGURE 11-6

With Facebook, you can see who's online when you are visiting the product, and you can privately message someone in an instant message chat.

Use when

You would like to create a private environment in which people can talk.

How

Present a way for people to send private messages to each other for both synchronous and asynchronous conversations.

Creating an in-context inbox for private messaging can compound a fractured online identity. Consider allowing users to utilize their previously set-up email for messaging as an option. But don't break email—let people reply directly from an email message to keep the conversation going.

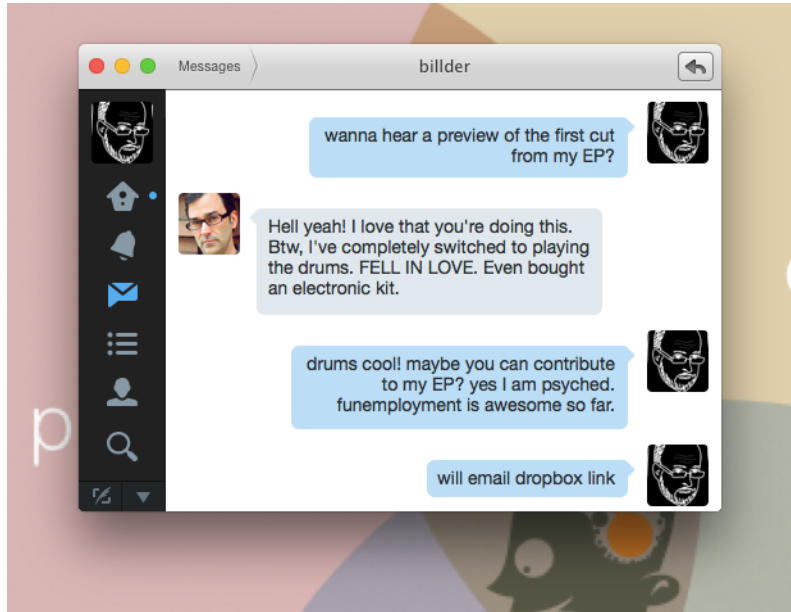
Younger users are less likely to use email for conversations, so an in-context messaging system might be more appropriate for the younger demographic.

Provide a “nudge” capability. Make it possible for one user to send another a canned message of encouragement or a nudge for more participation or conversation.

Sometimes, just the ability to have a backchannel from the public arena can be all that's needed, rather than a heavy messaging system. Twitter provides the ability for its users to send a direct message to each other within the system, as depicted in Figure 11-7.

FIGURE 11-7

Private conversation in Twitter works basically like IM or SMS chatting.



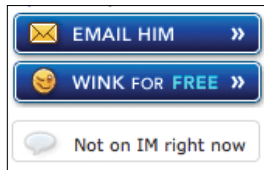
Consider an inline chat capability when also displaying online presence (see “Availability” on page 167).

NUDGING

Providing simple tools (see Figure 11-8) for one user to nudge another can get a conversation going, especially if one person is shy or not as confident online as the other.

FIGURE 11-8

Match.com (<http://match.com>) offers users the ability to wink at someone. Low-effort, low-risk in the stressful arena of online dating.



BACKCHANNEL

A backchannel for a private conversation within a public conversation tool will keep people engaged in the service for longer periods of time.

Twitter’s direct message feature makes it possible for people to message each other within the same interface as the main one by simply adding the letter D at the beginning of a user’s handle.

Why

Sometimes, people want to have an “offline” conversation away from the public venue. Giving people tools for private conversations—whether asynchronous (such as email, direct messages, or notes) or synchronous (such as instant messaging)—can help to strengthen ties in relationships and increase participation in the social environment.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Presence Actions and Facets” on page 163

“Public Conversation” on page 363

AS SEEN ON

Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>)

Match.com (<http://www.match.com>)

Twitter (<http://www.twitter.com>)

Group Conversation

What

Multiple people want to have a discussion together about a topic of interest.

Use when

- To enable multiple users to converse in real time.
- Within communication tools to expand the opportunities for conversation.

How

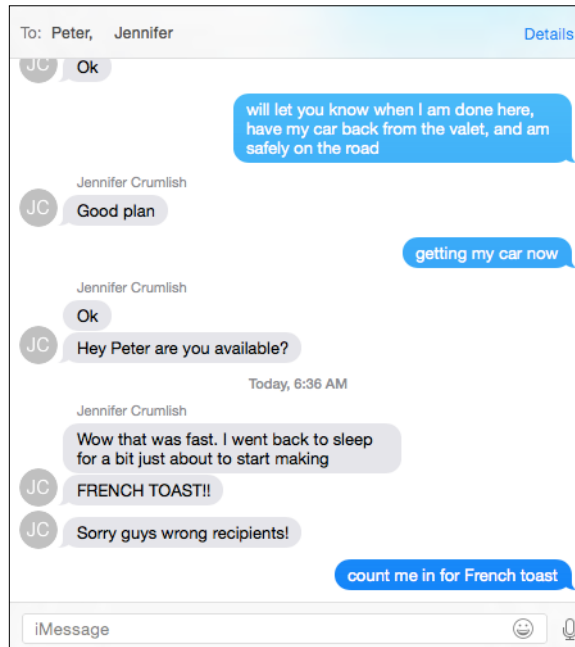
- Show the user a large enough window to keep up with the ongoing conversation.
- Provide a field for the user to enter his thoughts.
- Fields should be flexible, and users should be able to resize them.
- Provide tools for text shortcuts, such as emoticons, to visually impart emotions: laughing, sarcasm, sadness. If possible, show the graphic interpretation of the text symbols.
- Clearly indicate who is saying what. Show the speaker’s name and consider showing a timestamp for each part of the conversation.

PRIVATE GROUP CONVERSATIONS

- Make it possible for one person to initiate a conversation and invite other participants on the fly, as demonstrated in Figure 11-9.

FIGURE 11-9

Any user can initiate a group chat in iMessage (Messages) by inviting others from their contact list.



- Provide a URL to the group creator so that she can easily invite others into the conversation.
- Provide a list of people for creating group conversations.
- Include functionality for the user to save a transcript of the chat as a text file.

PUBLIC GROUP CONVERSATIONS

- Provide the means for users to create public conversation spaces on the fly.
- Provide a search mechanism so the user can easily discover public conversations.
- If the conversation space is initiated by a user, give her the ability to name the room so that others can find it by searching or browsing.
- Give the user the option to store the space for later or repeat use.

- Consider promoting or featuring interesting group discussions.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Groups” on page 463

“Private Conversation” on page 366

“Public Conversation” on page 363

AS SEEN ON

Acrobat Connect (<http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobatconnect/>)

AIM (<http://www.aim.com>)

Skype (<http://www.skype.com>)

WebEx (<http://www.webex.com>)

Yahoo! Instant Messenger (<http://messenger.yahoo.com>)

Yuuguu (<http://www.yuuguu.com>)

Designing for Disparate Online Information Worlds

Social interfaces are designed and deployed to support ongoing interactions between often geographically dispersed people drawn together by common interests to engage in serious conversation and chatter, and to exchange information and entertainment resources from across the Internet. Throughout this activity, a number of complex phenomena are apparent: questions are asked and answered, information is sought and provided, people chat about matters both trivial and profound. As they come to know one another over time, participants can come to perceive the virtual setting within which they interact as a distinct place with its own unique characteristics and capabilities, its own set of defining concerns, values, and practices—what could be called an “Information World” (see Jaeger & Burnett’s 2010 Routledge book, *Information Worlds: Social Context, Technology, and Information Behavior in the Age of the Internet*).

Online, as in the physical world, each setting has its own distinct characteristics; interface and design features have a tremendous influence on the patterns of behavior and engagement within a world, both overtly and implicitly. Twitter’s 140-character limitation, for instance, both places a powerful constraint on what can be exchanged between participants and supports a shared set of user-based practices, resulting in phenomena such as hashtags (both informative and playful) and linguistic innovation (an unavoidable valorization of the concise and, often, a fracturing of standard grammatical and spelling norms). Facebook’s integration of both profile and “cover” photos into users’ timelines also has a significant influence on how users are able to represent themselves to their circle of friends, affording a much more intricate play of visual self-referentiality and identity construction than is the case on Twitter, which remains a predominantly textual world (though with links to other media).

Interface and design characteristics also have implications for the place of information within online information worlds—how it is presented, how it is perceived by participants, and how it is deployed to construct its meaning and value—as well as for the shape and organization of the social worlds they support. Part of this is a function of formally stated norms for behavior decreed by the organization hosting the world in the form of FAQs, user agreements, and terms of service statements; such rules and guidelines set limits for what kinds of information can be shared within a world, as in Facebook’s notorious censorship of photographs of nursing mothers.

But, part of it is also a function of design decisions and population characteristics. For instance, the information world of Twitter in its entirety is far too vast to be experienced by any given user, and the design decision to make connections one-way (that is, one user’s decision to follow the tweets of another does not ensure a reciprocal relationship) makes it possible for individuals to craft their own smaller information worlds out of a set of seemingly endless possibilities without necessarily engaging in interactions rooted in friendship or other personal connections.

In the same sense, the predominant social design characteristic of worlds such as Facebook as well as less popular settings such as Google+ is the decision to place the individual user at the center of his or her own circle(s) of “friends,” with the ability to choose both his or her own friends and information resources while ignoring others. In one sense, all users of such systems share a single interface as a common entry point into or road-map of their online world. All users of Facebook, that is, share the overall contours of experience, for good or ill—each users’ “timeline,” in terms of fundamental appearance and function, looks like all others, and each user is constrained by the same set of functions, such as Facebook’s binary option between choosing to have the order of the “feed” determined either through Facebook’s own default algorithm for choosing “Top Stories” or making the (not always easily found) choice to display “Most Recent” posts first. In another sense, however, each user’s experience of Facebook is unique, as one’s “Timeline” is populated with posts made, for the most part, by one’s unique set of friends, acquaintances, organizations, and so on. This means that the information world of each user in these settings is distinct from the world of each other user; each individual sees, with some exceptions, only what he or she could expect to see as a result of friending choices, “Likes,” and so forth.

In terms of the design of an online social space as an information world, this is quite distinct from a number of older settings such as Usenet or the WELL. For instance, the WELL—which remains, largely, a purely textual rather than multimedia setting—is divided into a set of “Conferences” that are subdivided into “Topics”; all posts within these topics are displayed in simple chronological order, and are available in the same form and order to all users, with a relatively limited number of options for individual customization. In other words, this kind of design implicitly conceptualizes interactions and information flow as shared social resources rather than merely as matters of individual choice.

Such a set of ranges and options for social interaction and the sharing of information has important implications for the kinds of values and behaviors that emerge within Information Worlds. Still, within—and influenced by—the constraints imposed by design decisions, users within all online spaces develop their own defining sets of norms and values, which come to define collective perceptions of appropriate behaviors, activities, and attitudes within their shared worlds. Over time, these norms and values become embedded within the very fabric of the world’s interactions and expectations; they become a guide, an often unstated but still crucial rubric for participation, for understanding where the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable may be found.

As a result, each world has its own distinct set of norms and values that emerge in many different ways as a group persists over time, giving each world its own unique “flavor” that mirrors the design of the world as manifested in actual user activity. These norms and values also affect the ways in which participants establish their individual and group identities within their shared space, how they refer to one another, what comes to be considered to be “on-topic” posting, and even the ways in which certain types of information—often ideological or political—are either encountered or utterly ignored.

**GARY BURNETT, PROFESSOR, SCHOOL OF INFORMATION,
FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY**

Arguments

Flame Wars

Flame wars break out when a person responds in a volatile manner to a negative, hostile, or otherwise personal attack against him by another person (usually a *troll*, a person trolling for a reaction). These usually happen in forums or message lists, but they also can take place in online chats, in IM, and in comments on an object.

A flamer often starts out espousing an opinion as the only valid opinion on the topic being discussed. The conversation then devolves as others challenge that opinion and the flamer begins making personal attacks.

In most social contexts, flame wars are not welcome and are against the terms of service. The flame war hijacks the conversation away from the majority. In many cases the flame war will die down as the community moderates itself and makes it clear that this kind of behavior is not tolerated. In more extreme cases, a community moderator, product owner, or those who uphold a company’s Terms of Service have to be brought in to address the situation. Community moderation can cut a flame war off at the knees by censoring the participants or throwing the participants off the service (see “Community Management” on page 484).

Vendettas

Vendettas can happen within an online community when one person or a group of people takes retaliatory, vengeful, or hostile actions against another person or group of people. Vendettas should be dealt with through community moderation and possibly termination of the offenders' accounts. Vendettas, as with flame wars, can hijack and destroy a community if not dealt with swiftly and firmly.

Sock Puppets

Sock puppets are fake users whose identity is fabricated by another user for the sole purpose of deception in an online space. These fabricated identities are often created for the purpose of talking up or praising a product or another person or to support a cause, usually in support of the sock-puppet creator. A *New York Times* article claims that “sock-puppeting” is defined as “the act of creating a fake online identity to praise, defend or create the illusion of support for one’s self, allies or company.”

Sock puppets, if found out, can be dealt with through community blacklisting or community moderation by the product owner.

Response Notifications

We are beginning to see the notifications layer outside of apps as a competitive battlefield among products for your attention, a trigger to follow up on or continue conversations, and in some cases even a miniature user experience for responding or taking action in the direct context of the notification itself (without even visiting the underlying app).

Many products will offer to buzz your phone for you every time someone mentions you or likes or comments on a post or comment of your own, and alerts and badges in the discussion interface serve as another avenue for catching your attention and reminding you that you have something to go look at, as shown in Figure 11-10.

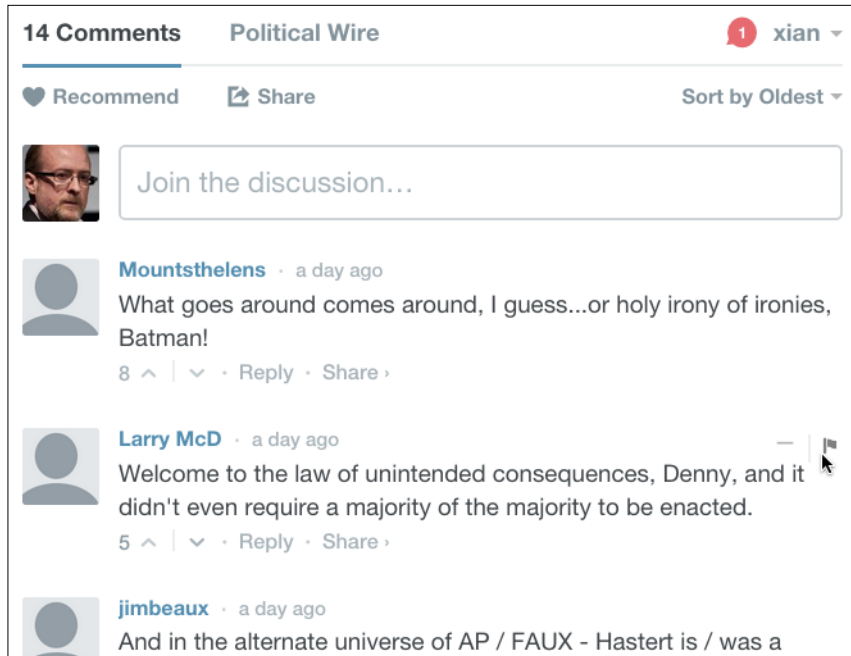


FIGURE 11-10

Checking in for my morning political fix I see one person has replied to (or liked) one of my comments from yesterday.

Further Reading

1. Reed, Mike. "Flame Warriors." <http://bit.ly/1N4jVER>
2. Stone, Brad and Matt Richtel. "The Hand That Controls the Sock Puppet Could Get Slapped." *The New York Times*, July 16, 2007. <http://nyti.ms/1Nsble6>

[*Part IV*]

A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood

SO FAR, WE'VE LOOKED into how to represent people in your application (and, perhaps more important, how to enable people to represent themselves), and we've examined the sort of activities people can do by touching social objects within your system. This brings us smack into the realm of relationships.

Without relationships between and among people, there is no social. Shared activities, like many of those discussed in Part III, naturally lead to the development of relationships in the real-world sense of the term: people meet through shared affinities, engage in activities together, date one another, make commitments to one another, and eventually find that they are in some sort of ongoing relationship.

In this part, we look at the mechanisms for labeling and declaring relationships, the community dynamics that can arise from multiple overlapping relationships (and, particularly, how to encourage healthy behavior and discourage parasites and vandals), and how to provide people with the means to bring their virtual connections into the real world through local engagement and shared event creation.

Barnraising

I still remember the moment I saw a big piece of the future. It was mid-1999, and Dave Winer called to say there was something I had to see. He showed me a web page. I don't remember what the page contained except for one button. It said, "Edit This Page"—and, for me, nothing was ever the same again.

I clicked the button. Up popped a text box containing plain text and a small amount of HTML, the code that tells a browser how to display a given page. Inside the box I saw the words that had been on the page. I made a small change, clicked another button that said, "Save this page" and voilà, the page was saved with the changes.... Dave was a leader in a move that brought back to life the promise, too long unmet, that Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the Web, had wanted from the start. Berners-Lee envisioned a read/write Web. But what had emerged in the 1990s was an essentially read-only Web on which you needed an account with an ISP to host your web site, special tools, and/or HTML expertise to create a decent site. What Dave and the other early blog pioneers did was a breakthrough. They said the Web needed to be writeable, not just readable, and they were determined to make doing so dead simple. Thus, the read/write Web was truly born again.

DAN GILLMOR, DAVE WINER: A TOAST, <http://bit.ly/1gnjETA>

Collaboration

THE FIRST THING I EVER POSTED ON THE WEB WAS PERSONAL: a story (<http://ezone.org/no/bird.html>). The next thing I produced and posted was collaborative: a magazine (<http://ezone.org>). This was 1994. We

knew we wanted to engage newcomers more fully than the traditional letters to the editor, and many of the letters (and email messages) we received at the time were submissions. People wanted to work with us and we wanted to work with them, and they came from all over the world. We managed for four years with no system in place besides a series of personal understandings, but any form of collaboration requires some form of orchestration, and our ad hoc approach didn't scale.

In the earliest days of online social-networking applications (think SixDegrees and Friendster), there eventually came the “so what” problem: you could make an account, register your name, find people, connect to them, and then... what? There was no *there* there. You might be able to form groups and discuss things, but of course you could already do that through a lot of other interfaces (such as email lists and Usenet, for Pete's sake), even if they weren't explicitly noted as social.

No, it's only when you begin enabling people to “do things” together that the real power of online social networks kicks in.

Today, it's possible to orchestrate collaborative groups through a series of time-tested, well-proven design patterns. These patterns provide people with a shared space, give them a way to invite others, provide the means for managing tasks, employ version control, and look after people's rights.

Wiki projects, such as the omnipresent Wikipedia; open source software development using tools such as Sourceforge, Collabnet, and Github; Yahoo! Groups; and charismatically driven groups of people such as Ze Frank's (<http://zefrank.com>) fanbase, which you can see in Figure 12-1, have all demonstrated the power that can be unleashed when you give people interfaces for working together on their shared concerns.



FIGURE 12-1

Ze Frank’s “If the earth were a sandwich” challenge recruited numerous participants into attempting to place slices of bread at antipodes, to turn the planet into a sandwich.

Manage Project

What

When people get together and form groups, they often discover a shared desire to accomplish something tangible or complex, frequently something with a real-world (offline) impact (see Figure 12-2).

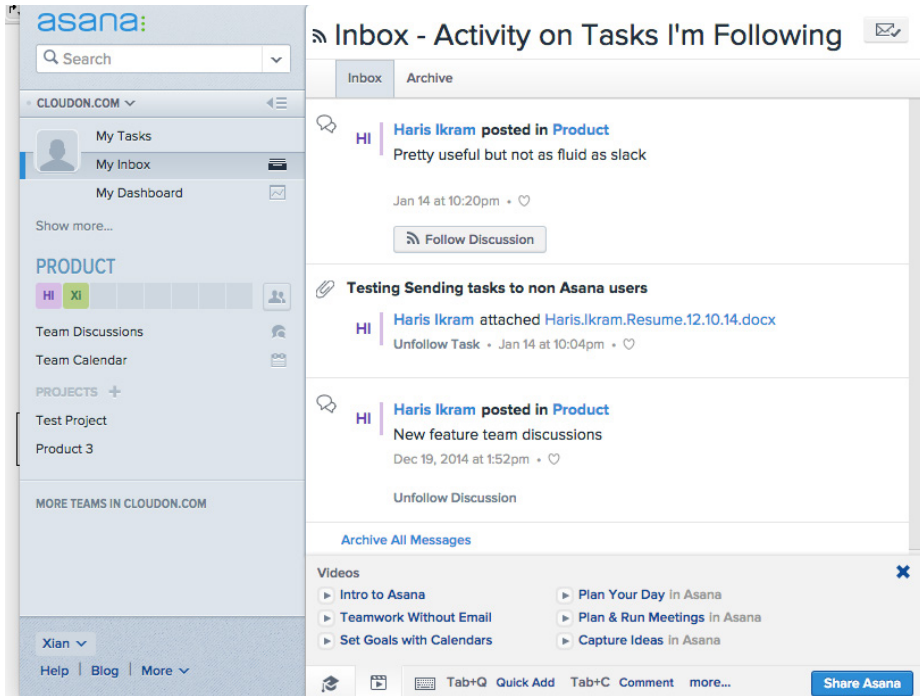


FIGURE 12-2

You can use most social interfaces to organize projects by sheer force of effort, but it's easier if you've got at least the fundamentals of project management available, such as tasks, calendars, file upload, and collaborative editing.

This pattern is also known as a “Workspace” pattern.

Use when

Use this pattern when you have enabled group formation and wish to host and support group project activities. If you don't have the bandwidth (literally or figuratively) to support this, consider supporting third-party services.

How

- Support your members' ability to orchestrate projects by coordinating goals, tasks, and deadlines among multiple participants with varying degrees of commitment and availability.

- Provide a workspace for connecting all the facets of the project (people, tasks, dates, collateral) and, if possible, offer a summarized dashboard view linking to more detailed inventories by facet. This makes asynchronous communication possible (see “Synchronous Versus Asynchronous Communication” on page 357) across disconnected geographies.
- Provide a mechanism for the creator of the project or a participant to bring in collaborators with “Send Invitation,” and possibly to assign varying rights by individual or group, as shown in Figure 12-3.

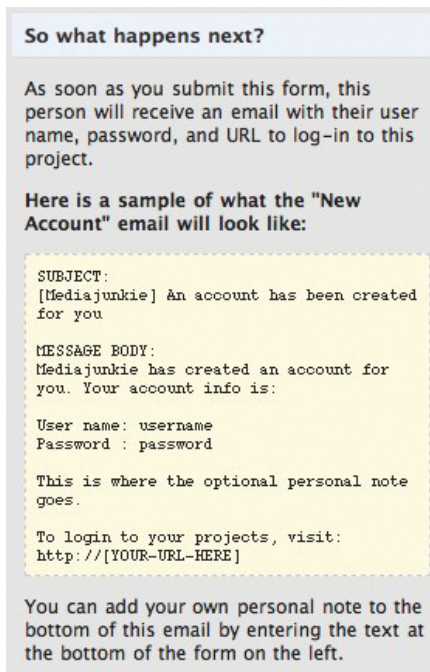


FIGURE 12-3

With Basecamp, you can add an entire company (team) to your project or invite individuals by adding them to an existing company.

- Support task management with the ability to assign tasks, accept tasks, and distribute processes among multiple participants by breaking them down into individual tasks. Optionally support the ability to declare that one task is dependent on another and possibly calculate the critical path to the end goal.
- Provide a calendar on which deadline and milestone dates can be scheduled and then verified.
- Offer the ability to send messages to project participants, as well as reminders and notifications.

- Provide a means for *collaborative editing* of documents or source code, including version control (Figure 12-4).

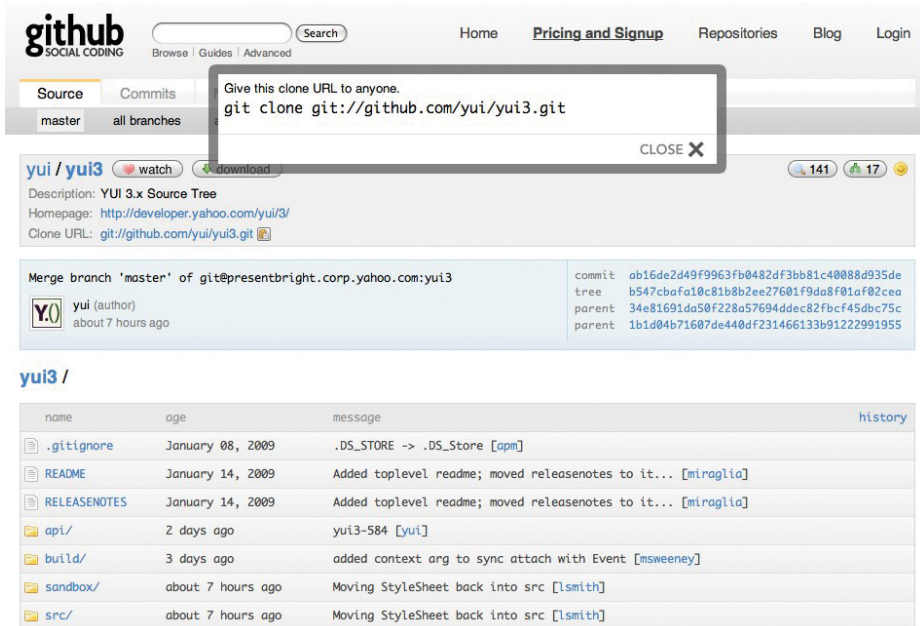


FIGURE 12-4

At GitHub, I can make my own clone of the YUI 3.0 codebase, fork it, and then have it merged back into the main trunk.

- Include a way for project participants to make and keep track of decisions.
- Optionally provide an interface for project blogging (see “Blogging” on page 292) or statuscasting (see “Statuscasting” on page 177) so that project participants can report on their progress and anyone can see at a glance what has been happening lately on the project. Or, provide a timeline view (see “Activity Streams” on page 175) on the dashboard to roll up all recent events in chronological order.

Why

Giving your community members the tools to work together or manage their own efforts increases the utility of your service and the culture of the social environment. However, your users can often do this effectively via email and phone and perhaps a filesharing system. Do you have anything more to offer? Do you need to?

RELATED PATTERNS

“Calendar” on page 519

“Face-to-Face Meeting” on page 503

“Group Conversation” on page 369

“Open APIs” on page 569

“Send Invitation” on page 85

“Activity Streams” on page 175

AS SEEN ON

Asana

Confluence

Basecamp (<http://basecamphq.com>)

Bugzilla (<http://bugzilla.org>)

GitHub (<http://github.com>)

Groove (<http://office.microsoft.com/groove/>)

SharePoint (<http://www.microsoft.com/sharepoint/>)

Traction (<http://tractionsoftware.com>)

Voting

What

To make decisions, the members or stakeholders of a group need a way to give their opinions, and project leaders need to know which options have the most support from the participating community, as illustrated in Figure 12-5.

Question

Which of the various traditional pattern headings and groupings do you prefer?

- Problem, When to Use, Solution, Rationale
- Context, Forces, Resolution, Consequences
- What, When, How, Why

You can change your vote until the moderator closes this poll.

Vote Cancel

FIGURE 12-5

Polls are one way to gather directed input from collaborators.

This pattern is also known as “Polls” or “Surveys.”

Use when

Use this pattern to collect the opinion of a group of people around a topic (with facets).

This pattern works best when groups are large enough that only a core subgroup is doing most of the collaboration, to provide a voice to the less fully engaged members of the group.

Voting can be in an enterprise or workgroup context. It also can integrate equally well in a consumer context, in which a group of people freely associating with one another need ways to discern their preferences and make collective decisions.

How

Provide a form by which a group moderator or participant can suggest a question or topic to be voted on, and then facilitate a series of possible votes (anything from “yes” or “no” to a multiple-choice option).

Optionally, provide configuration choices governing such issues as how long the voting will remain open, whether users can change their vote, whether votes are anonymous or open, whether a person is restricted to vote for a single choice or can vote for more than one, or whether a ranking of choices is preferred, as demonstrated in Figure 12-6.

*** Enter question**

2000 characters left, 2000 characters max

Enter choices

* Choice 1:

* Choice 2:

Choice 3:

Choice 4:

Choice 5:

Select additional options

Number of choices: Vote for one choice
 Vote for one or more choices

Poll results: Display results during polling
 Display results when poll is closed

Voter identity: Do not display voter identity
 Display voter identity with each vote

Close poll: Manually
 On

Poll Results: Send results to the entire group via email

FIGURE 12-6
 Yahoo! Groups makes it easy to create an instant poll and invite the members of the group to vote in it, including the ability to change their vote up to a deadline.

Why

Voting and surveys provide a means of soliciting feedback (see Chapter 10) about specific questions from a wider participating community.

Note that it's possible for some users to game voting systems, especially if no fixed identity is required or authenticated before voting (see "Identity" on page 112); voting can provide perverse incentives in much the way that a leaderboard can (see "Leaderboard" on page 211); and there are many competing voting algorithms out there, each with its own pros and cons.

RELATED PATTERNS

"Ratings (Stars or 1–5)" on page 334

"Reputation Influences Behavior" on page 188

"Thumbs Up/Down Ratings" on page 327

"Vote to Promote" on page 323

AS SEEN ON

Evite (<http://evite.com>)

SurveyMonkey (<http://surveymonkey.com>)

Yahoo! Groups (<http://groups.yahoo.com>)

Collaborative Editing

What

People like to be able to work together on documents, encyclopedias, and software codebases, as depicted in Figure 12-7.

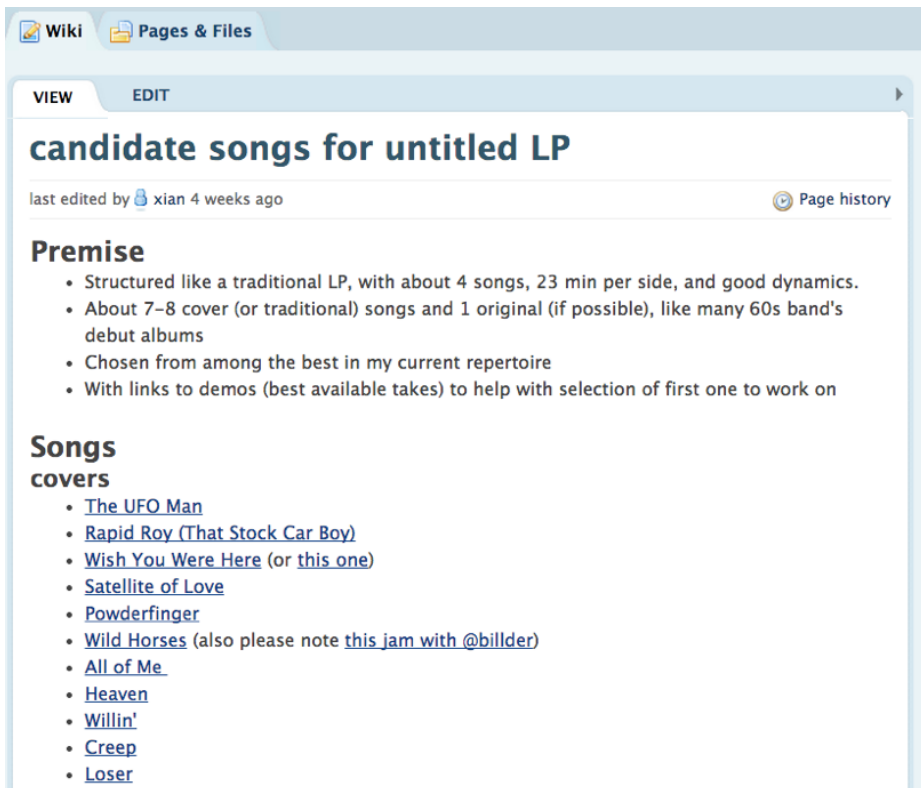


FIGURE 12-7

With asynchronous editing, multiple people can work on the same document.

Use when

Use this pattern when you want your members to be able to work together to curate their collective wisdom or document their shared knowledge.

How

- Provide a repository for hosting documents with version control. Give users a way to bring in additional collaborators with an invitation to participate, as in Figure 12-8 (see “Send Invitation” on page 85).

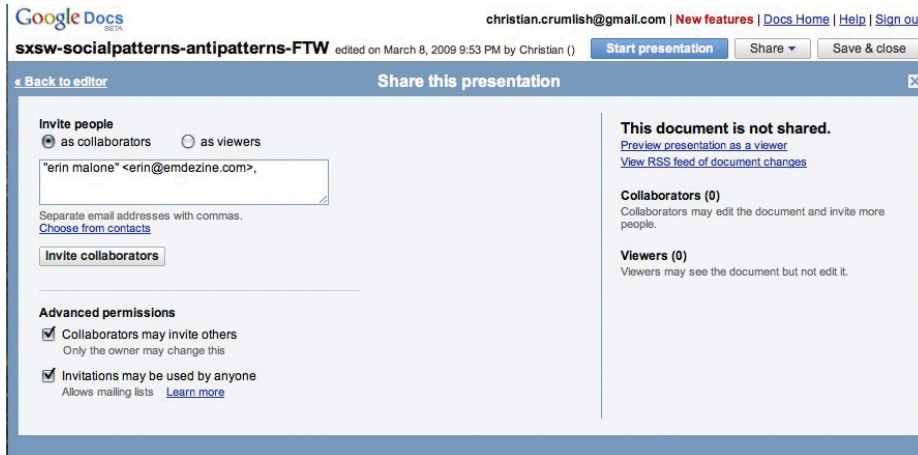


FIGURE 12-8

You can use the “Invite to Participate” pattern to invite collaborators to work together on a document.

- Provide an Edit This Page link (see “Edit This Page” on page 393) directly on the document to be edited, or give users the means to upload incrementally updated versions of a stored document.
- For direct editing, provide an edit box, similar to a blog or comment interface, such as that shown in Figure 12-9.

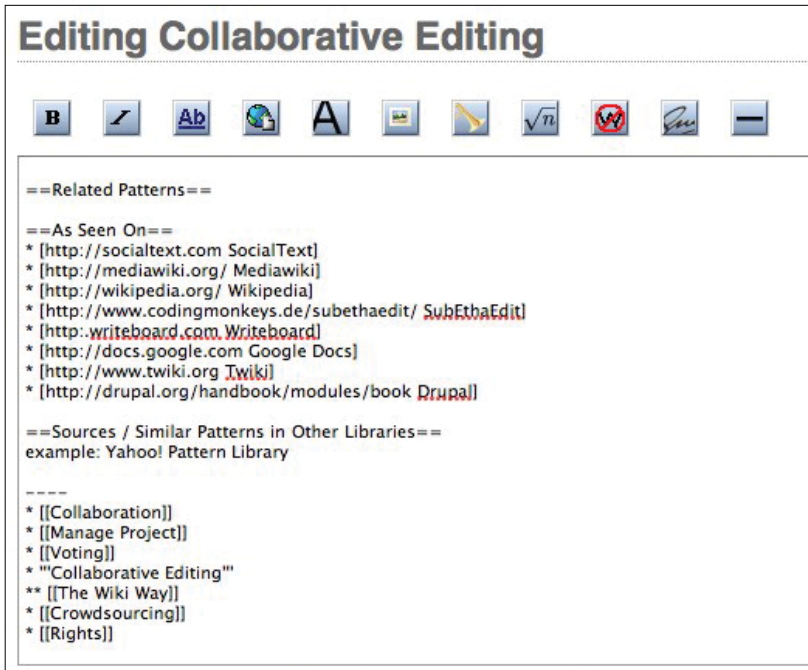


FIGURE 12-9

It doesn't get more meta than this: here I am editing this very pattern in the collaborative wiki where it lives outside of the book.

- Optionally, give contributors mechanisms for tracking changes, whether via notifications or with RSS feeds.

Why

Collaborative editing is better suited to the online (web or cloud) contexts than the alternative: sending documents via email to multiple participants and then orchestrating the proliferating multiple, asynchronous updated copies of a document, with aspirational filenames ending in “finalFinalfinal,” as painfully demonstrated in Figure 12-10.

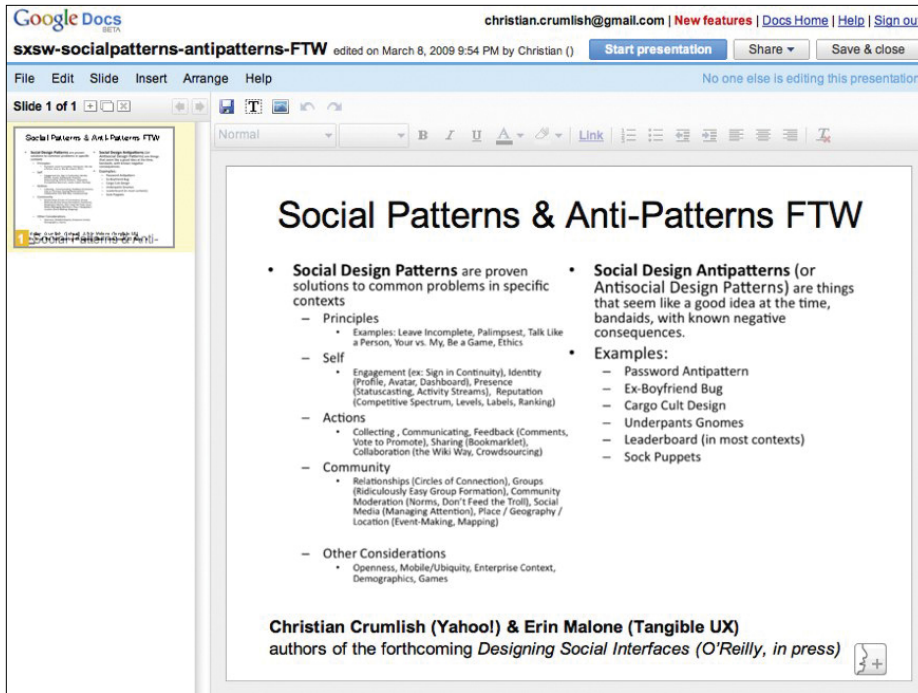


FIGURE 12-10

Collaborative editing does away with multiple copies of files, unreconciled changes, and email overload.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Comments” on page 339

AS SEEN ON

Drupal (<http://drupal.org/handbook/modules/book>)

Google Docs (<http://docs.google.com>)

Mediawiki (<http://mediawiki.org>)

SocialText (<http://socialtext.com>)

SubEthaEdit (<http://www.codingmonkeys.de/subethaedit/>)

Twiki (<http://www.twiki.org>)

Wikipedia (<http://wikipedia.org>)

Writeboard (<http://writeboard.com>)

Numerous FAQ documents that accompany active Usenet newsgroups

Suggestions

Also known as suggested edits, proposed changes, tracked changes, or “track changes,” or pull request.

What

People like to be able to ask for help with a document without always wanting to give direct editing control over the content itself. Other people feel more comfortable proposing changes and allowing the owner of document to accept or reject the changes, as shown in Figure 12-11.

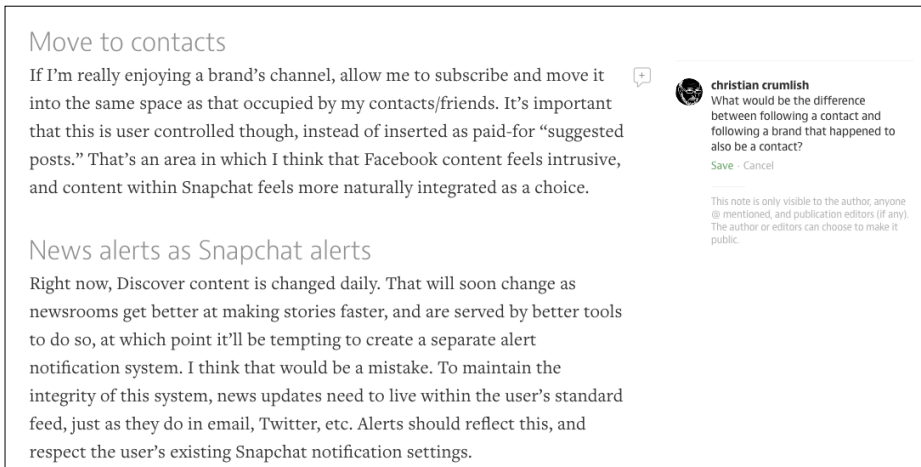


FIGURE 12-11

Medium enables readers (and invited reviewers prepublication) to add comments in the margin of any paragraph, which remain unpublished until the author has a chance to review and either make the comment public or delete it.

This same model applies outside of documents as well—for example, when a Git user makes a pull request, proposing that a change be added to the core.

Use when

Use this pattern when more fine-grained control over editing permissions or review flow will help people be more productive.

How

Define a role or a mode in which edits or comments are not accepted or made public automatically but are instead left in a pending state for review by the document owner, who can choose to accept or implement the suggestion, or reject or ignore it.

There are two forms of this pattern, which can be used individually or mixed together:

- Pending edits (as with the Track Changes feature in Microsoft Word or the suggestion feature offered by Google Docs), in which a proposed edit is entered directly into the document and then either implemented or rejected.
- Pending comments (as with Medium), in which a suggestion is made in the context around the document and not directly in the form of its content. The suggestion is then either made public or left hidden or removed.

Why

A layer of pending or proposed changes around a document makes room for discussion and deliberation and gives the owner of the document clarity about the final result.

AS SEEN ON

- Medium
- Google Docs
- Git

Edit This Page

What

The more difficult it is to edit a shared document, the fewer will be the number of people who will bother to do so. Even forcing people to switch contexts (to an “editing mode”) will create a barrier to participation for a significant fraction of potential contributors (see Figure 12-12).

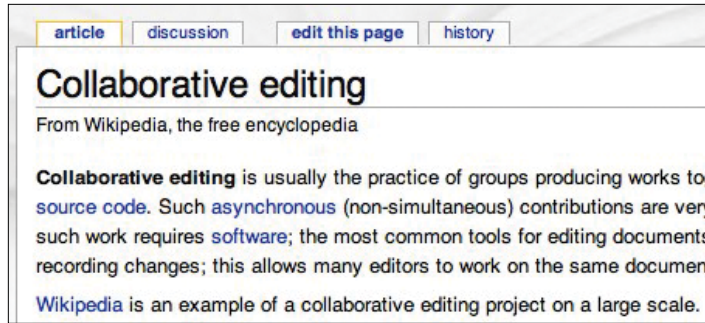


FIGURE 12-12

A button or link inviting the reader to edit this page encourages collaboration (and lowers the threshold for making improvements by reducing the friction involved in offering edits).

This pattern is also known as “Edit This, “Universal Edit Button,” “Inline Editing,” “Read-Write Web,” or “Two-Way Web.”

Use when

Use this pattern in interfaces for editing shared or personal documents. You can use this for contexts in which universal editing, anonymous editing, or registered, authenticated, and privileged editing is permitted.

How

- Provide a button or link on any editable content that links directly to an edit box for the content, preferably without even loading a new page, as illustrated in Figure 12-13.

FIGURE 12-13

If you can display an edit box directly in the reader’s original context, the experience of making and saving an edit and then resuming reading is smoother than if the editing must be done in a separate context.



- Optionally, when restricting editing only to privileged groups, hide the button from anyone who has not been authenticated as a contributor.
- Consider providing a WYSIWYG editing environment. This will reduce one of the barriers to participation for the majority of people who are not comfortable using abbreviated markup languages to format and style text.

SPECIAL CASES

When trying to cultivate a culture of collaborative editing, community moderators might need to make an extra effort to recruit, campaign, and encourage contributions. By default, many people are passive, even when invited to edit content, because they are afraid to break something or give offense to a preceding editor. The interface should be as inviting as possible, but be prepared to challenge incumbent behavioral patterns.

Offer a “sandbox” area for beginners (see Figure 12-14), in which they can practice editing safely without worrying about damaging anything or exposing themselves to criticism.



FIGURE 12-14

Giving your collaborators a sandbox in which to practice their editing skills can ease the slope of the learning curve and take some of the fear out of inline editing.

Why

The great promise of the Web draws in part from its facilitation of two-way communication and collaboration across geographical and other boundaries. An interface element that invites the reader to become an author goes beyond the “second-class” forms of participation, such as giving feedback and ratings. The easier you make it to edit content, the more likely people will take the time to do so, and potentially spur one another on to build knowledge stores and other projects that otherwise might never have come into being.

AS SEEN ON

Wikipedia (<http://www.wikipedia.org>)

Just about every wiki, everywhere

The Wiki Way

What

Collaborative editing can become bogged down in conversational mode. Moreover, when contributors become too attached to their own individual contributions, this can impede the development of the collaborative document (see Figure 12-15).

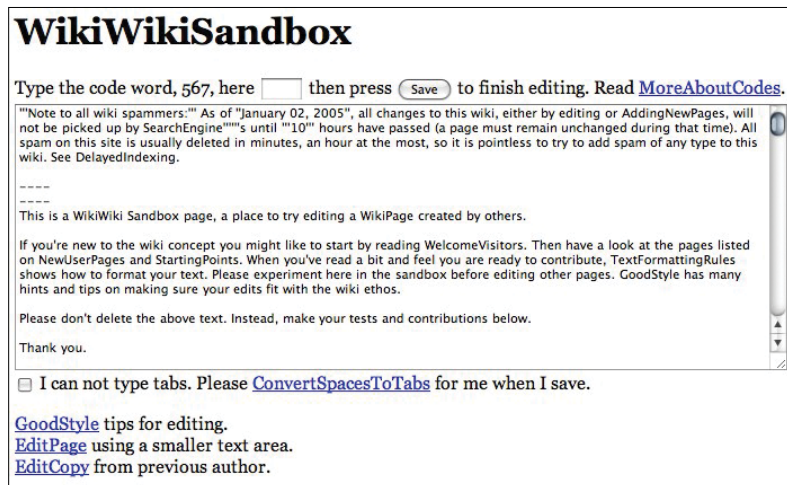


FIGURE 12-15

Many of the principles underpinning Ward Cunningham’s original wiki (created to house the Portland Pattern Repository) should be kept in mind when you’re trying to facilitate effective collaborative editing in a community setting.

Use when

Use this pattern when providing an interface for collaborative editing.

How

Encourage anonymous editing, use version control, and enable refactoring of document content by contributors.

Here are the original principles Ward Cunningham cited when recalling the design principles that underpinned the first wiki:

Open

Should a page be found to be incomplete or poorly organized, any reader can edit it as he sees fit.

Incremental

Pages can cite other pages, including pages that have not been written yet.

Organic

The structure and text content of the product are open to editing and evolution.

Mundane

A small number of (irregular) text conventions will provide access to the most useful page markup.

Universal

The mechanisms of editing and organizing are the same as those of writing; thus, any writer is automatically an editor and organizer.

Overt

The formatted (and printed) output will suggest the input required to reproduce it.

Unified

Page names will be drawn from a flat space so that no additional context is required to interpret them.

Precise

Pages will be titled with sufficient precision to avoid most name clashes, typically by forming noun phrases.

Tolerant

Interpretable (even if undesirable) behavior is preferred to error messages.

Observable

Activity within the product can be watched and reviewed by any other visitor.

Convergent

Duplication can be discouraged or removed by finding and citing similar or related content.

There are many wiki authors and implementers. Here are some additional principles that guide them, but were not of primary concern to me:

Trust

This is the most important thing in a wiki. Trust the people, trust the process, foster trust-building. Everyone controls and checks the content. Wiki relies on the assumption that most readers have good intentions (but assume that there are limitations to good faith).

Fun

Everybody can contribute, but nobody has to.

Sharing

The dissemination of information, knowledge, experience, ideas, views, and so on is paramount.

Why

The wiki approach has unleashed a torrent of creativity on the Web and seems to have captured in its principles the fundamental grain of digital, electronic, web-enabled collaboration.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Learn from Games” on page 47

“Passive Sharing” on page 288

Chapter 17

AS SEEN ON

WikiWikiWeb (<http://c2.com/cgi/wiki>)

Crowdsourcing

What

Some jobs are too big for the immediate group of engaged collaborators to manage on by itself. The community will benefit if the interface provides a way to break a large project into smaller pieces and engage and give incentives to a wider group of people (or “crowd”) to tackle those smaller pieces, as shown in Figure 12-16.

Get Results
from Mechanical Turk Workers

Ask workers to complete HITs - *Human Intelligence Tasks* - and get results using Mechanical Turk. [Get started.](#)

As a Mechanical Turk Requester you:

- Have access to a global, on-demand, 24 x 7 workforce
- Get thousands of HITs completed in minutes
- Pay only when you're satisfied with the results

Fund your account **Load your tasks** **Get results**

Get Started

or [learn more about being a Requester](#)

FIGURE 12-16

Amazon’s Mechanical Turk plays matchmaker to people looking for distributed help in solving problems or answering questions, and other people willing to do work such as this for a fee.

Use when

Use this pattern when you want your active core community members to engage with the wider set of people participating in your social environment and get their help accomplishing ambitious projects that would not be possible with fewer people.

How

- Provide a method for splitting up a project into individual tasks so that each task can be advertised individually. Also, provide a venue for announcing crowdsourced projects.
- Give community members a way to “shop for,” review, and claim individual tasks for the project.

- Provide an upload interface or submission form with which participants can contribute their completed work (assuming the work isn't accomplished directly in your interface).
- Keep track of tasks that have been claimed but not completed by their deadline so that they can be returned to the general pool and reassigned.
- Ideally, offer a dashboard view for management of the project.
- Where appropriate, incorporate a mechanism for compensation for the participants.

Why

Crowdsourcing breaks large jobs into pieces that can be tackled with a much lower commitment threshold, taking advantage of the loose ties in social networks.

AS SEEN ON

Amazon Mechanical Turk (<http://www.mturk.com/mturk/welcome>)

Assignment Zero (<http://zero.newassignment.net/>)

The ESP Game (<http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~biglou/ESP.pdf>)

iStockphoto (<http://istockphoto.com>)

ReCAPTCHA (<http://recaptcha.net/>)

SETI@home (<http://setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu/>)

Threadless (<http://threadless.com>)

Further Reading

1. “Berners-Lee on the read/write web.” BBC News, August 9, 2005. <http://bbc.in/1gnkIGQ>
2. Cross Cultural Collaboration. <http://bit.ly/1gnkQWS>
3. Marjanovic, Olivera, Hala Skaf-Molli, Pascal Molli, and Claude Godart. “Deriving Process-driven Collaborative Editing Pattern from Collaborative Learning Flow Patterns.” http://www.ifets.info/journals/10_1/12.pdf
4. Winer, Dave. “Edit This Page.” <http://bit.ly/1gnlJ1F>
5. Edit This Page PHP. <http://bit.ly/1gnlO5F>

6. Paylancers blog. <http://paylancers.blogspot.com/>
7. The Power of Many. <http://thepowerofmany.com>
8. Regulating Prominence: A Design Pattern for Co-Located Collaboration. <http://bit.ly/1gnlQub>
9. Howe, Jeff. "The Rise of Crowdsourcing." *Wired*, 14.06. <http://wrd.cm/1I2vKdB>
10. Venners, Bill. "The Simplest Thing That Could Possibly Work." <http://www.artima.com/intv/simplest.html>
11. Universal Edit Button. <http://bit.ly/1I2vM5c>
12. Wiki Design Principles. <http://bit.ly/1I2vMlN>
13. Udell, Jon "The Wiki Way." <http://bit.ly/1N4lsuI>
14. Wired Crowdsourcing blog. <http://crowdsourcing.typepad.com>

Heard It Through the Grapevine

Some commons-based peer production efforts are less self-conscious on the part of the users, and emerge more as a function of distributed coordinate behavior, like del.icio.us or Flickr. The critical defining feature of these “enterprises” is that they rely primarily on social information flows, motivations, and relations to organize the group. Individuals self-identify, mostly, for tasks, and through a variety of peer-review mechanisms contributions get recognized by the group and incorporated into what emerges as the collaborative output.

YOCHAI BENKLER INTERVIEW IN *OPENBUSINESS* (ABOUT HIS BOOK *THE WEALTH OF NETWORKS*)

Keeping Up

As with “Web 2.0” and “synergy,” the buzzphrase “social media” has taken on a life of its own and has already spawned its own mutant bastard: “social media marketing.” Similar to those other terms—and much Internet jargon—“social media” means different things to different people. As noted at the beginning of this book, we prefer to use the term to refer to social production and consumption of media objects, not merely as a lazy synonym for social networking in general. This chapter is devoted to the collection, sharing, and creation of social objects. As Hugh MacLeod put it in a post on his weblog, called “Social Objects for Beginners” (http://www.gapingvoid.com/Moveable_Type/archives/004390.html):

The Social Object, in a nutshell, is the reason two people are talking to each other, as opposed to talking to somebody else. Human beings are social animals. We like to socialize. But if you think about it, there needs to be a reason for it to happen in the first place. That reason, that “node” in the social network, is what we call the Social Object.

So, how do these social-media objects swirling around us add up to an ecosystem or even a marketplace (see Figure 13-1.)? How do people discover them, subscribe to them, and share them across networks?

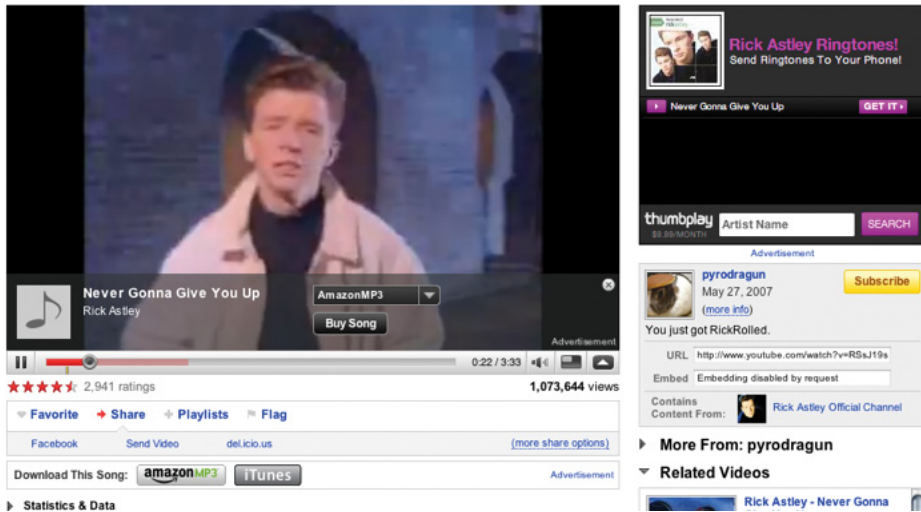


FIGURE 13-1

Take any classic or interactive medium, add social interaction to it, and you've got social media, whether it takes off or fizzles in a vacuum.

Social Metadata and Future Uses

Social Metadata Today

Many of our digital interactions with others today transpire on one form of social platform or another. We can use these platforms for quick live chats, longer discussions with others that take place over time asynchronously, or to add comments and annotations. Our lives are increasingly filled with different platforms, services, channels, and digital feeds. These services cover a range of devices and depth of complications. But, in the mix of all of this, much of what we have often has structure and metadata in the service as well as a means to use it beyond the initial service.

The services, if they have a web-based version, most often have well-structured HTML (often using HTML5 structure) underpinnings and often have light semantics with microformats, Microdata, or RDFa with schema.org included. These various forms of metadata help to extend understanding and remove ambiguity. Services that are not on the Web often offer an Application Programming Interface (API) as a means to interact with the service. Many web services also offer APIs as an additional means to share their information with relevant metadata wrappers.

This metadata provides structure to much of the information that is shared in the services. At a minimum, this provides a light structure. But, most often it provides a quite capable means of understanding the information and the relevant structure around it. With social it is really important to know who shared what information so that an identity is provided for that service and the name related to it. Other basic metadata such as time and date likewise provides sufficient basic scaffolding to derive related structure, particularly if the information is a response (if so, metadata must include a pointer to the prior information to which the current “blog” is a response, as well as information about the group object containing the thread.

What this metadata provides us today is a means within a service to make sense of history around an object, discussions, versions, or modifications with related annotations. It also provides the means to repurpose the information or share it across many different services. We never really have lived in a one-social-platform world, but today we are far from that, and metadata is a means to make sense of things across services.

Today's Metadata and Future Uses

Toward the end of the 2000s, our social platforms shifted a bit from being something one ran on their own as their main hub (a blog as the main hub for sharing, gathering, and disseminating) to a much more fractured and distributed patchwork model. But, it is because of the structured metadata and openness of APIs and the ability to discern identity through metadata as well as authentication through various social platforms that we can weave some of this together.

The use of the current state of metadata allows for tools such as IFTTT (If This Then That) and Zapier to use open metadata to identify new activity in a service and use that as a trigger to repurpose it. IFTTT and Zapier can take information from one service and drop it into another service so that it can be seen in another service to give another context, aggregated into a broader view of things in a dashboard, sent to a device as an alert, or many other possibilities.

Syndication and cross posting is another prime use made possible by metadata. Because the social spheres are rather fractured, the ability to post information in to one place and have it pushed and posted into other services that have different communities or different use contexts is really valuable for many people. A person's photo and comment about a place in Foursquare (a location check-in and finding service) can be easily pushed into Twitter and Facebook, whereas services such as Instagram (a photo-sharing service) can push photos, annotations, and location out to Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Tumblr, Foursquare, and Mixi. These services use the metadata as a means to bring a sharable object from one service into another service and have it work well in the context of the service into which the object and context are pushed.

One of the greatest uses of metadata in this distributed social patchwork is the ability to align related metadata between services so that there can be interoperability. The advantages of this are the ability to use one service and share information/objects with another service, but have the comments and discussions around the information/object that are contributed to various services show up in other services or be pulled into a central conversational space that pulls comments and conversations from across the services. This provides a means to have threaded discussions take place, which then can be seen in all the various services, as if native while showing the service they were created in and shared from.

Deriving Context

To have this interoperability the most important piece is holding onto context when working across services. There are many pieces of metadata that are important to hold onto to keep context clear as well as to help work through to an optimal understanding of context now and in the future.

Ensuring that the metadata captures the service from which the content/object originated is important. Not only the *service*, but a link to the object and its framing in the original service is deeply valuable. Often this linking to the original service is part of the requirement of the service agreements for sharing information outside the service. Each service has its own tone and interaction model as well as extended metadata, which might or might not travel along with the content or object, which, in turn, help provide an understanding of the original framing.

Metadata around meaning is incredibly important around the “*who*” and “*what*” elements in and around the content / object being shared. This is where services like schema.org are really helpful so to annotate the who and what and point to a central place to help disambiguate what is being discussed. As far as the who, linking to an authenticated identity for the person creating and sharing the information is really helpful, as well. If that authenticated identity can point to other verified services with that related identities for the same person it is really helpful.

When identity can be captured in metadata, the *conversations* that happen around the content/object also need to have the identities captured as well as *time*. Because the interweaving of conversations from different platforms around the common content/object happen in aggregated services or are distributed between services, the threading of conversations requires identity metadata and time metadata (the service the comments in the conversation are from is also really important to capture, not only for context of that service but for clarity around identity) for threading and building of conversations.

History and Refindability

Being able to find information and have it in context through metadata is incredibly helpful. Search also is greatly aided by good structure and metadata. The ability to not only find something of value in and across content and objects in social platforms is something that is increasingly difficult, and so is refinding things. The sheer volume of information shared makes this an increasingly difficult task, but one that needs metadata to give context so as to enable filtering.

Findability (finding something for the first time) can be daunting these days, but refinding information is greatly enhanced with good metadata. Individuals can tag and bookmark items, which adds metadata that is in their context to items of interest. This layering of one's own context in metadata greatly improves refinding items of interest or of potential interest. Refinding items is often one of the more stressful activities, largely due to the volume of material, but also deriving the service in which it was seen.

Another factor with refindability is the ephemeral nature of services and things in services today. Finding a great quote or annotation that frames things in a valuable way can be as valuable as the main content/object. But, holding on to things can be difficult. With good metadata wrapping things as well as the ability to tuck objects into multiple places, the probability for not only the item of interest to be refindable, but the surrounding metadata to make sense of the context it was originally derived can be held onto, as well.

Aggregation and Agency

A benefit of social metadata is the ability to use algorithms to find related information, provide smart filtering, and offer services that can find and aggregate information that is related. This aggregation can use the metadata to build intelligence and then run AI-related processes on them to aggregate information. Often this sort of information is really helpful for finding related information, finding people of interest (and value) around a subject, but then to also work with agency to provide aggregation of information that is needed without having to do much work other than say, "Yes, show me that information." The services pull information that is relevant to people, upcoming discussions and meetings, and other events. Using the metadata the information is search, parsed, and filtered to items that are highly relevant.

Summary

By providing metadata wrappers as essential parts of what they offer, our tools and services today are enabling a much more fluid and potentially interconnected digital environment in which to participate. As humans, we are really good at creating technologies across our existence that create information overload, but we are also really good at creating ways to optimize the right amount of information that meets our needs. In this digital world where information is growing exponentially, the solution to not being overwhelmed is all predicated on good metadata to satisfy the needs of today and tomorrow.

**THOMAS VANDER WAL, PRINCIPAL AND SENIOR
CONSULTANT, INFOCLOUD SOLUTIONS ([http://
infocloudsolutions.com](http://infocloudsolutions.com))**

See Chapter 18 for a further discussion of microformats and semantic markup in general.

Tuning In

Social media is a two-way street: read/write. In addition to providing tools for sharing and publishing media, you can provide your users with interfaces for zeroing in on the streams they're interested in and then sifting through them for the most interesting and relevant objects (see Figure 13-2).

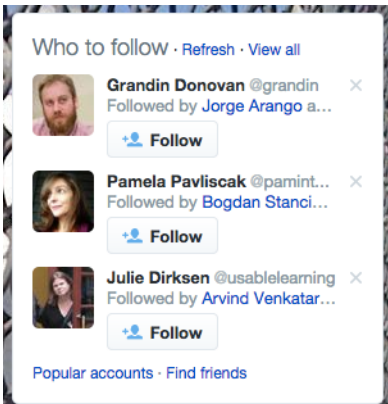


FIGURE 13-2

Twitter suggests some accounts I might want to follow, but leaves it up to me to opt in (or ask for more suggestions, or ignore or fail to notice this entirely).

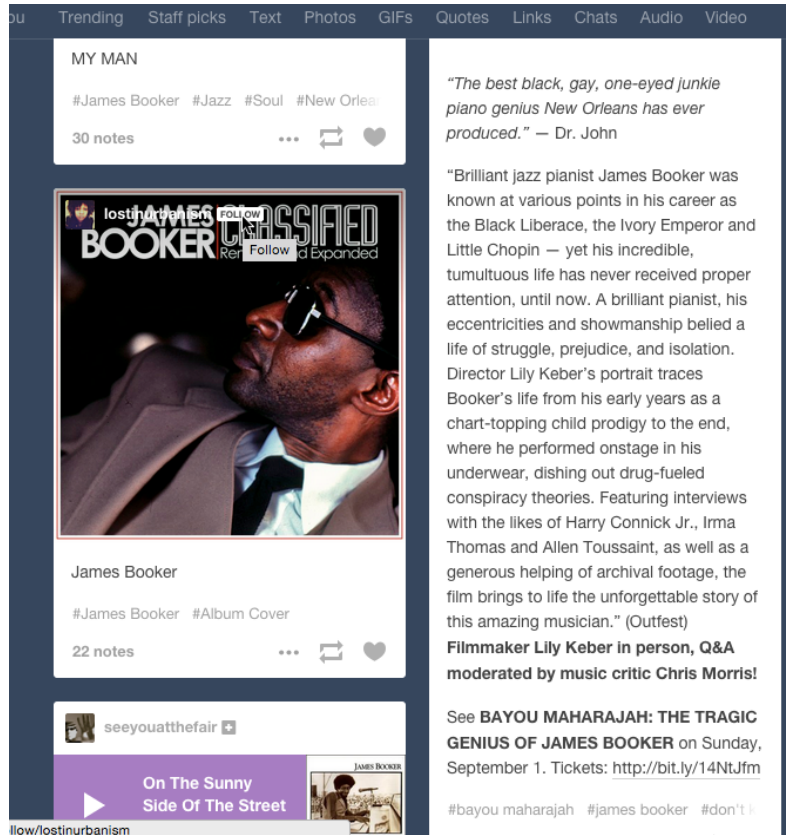
Following

What

Also known as *asymmetric following* (and explored more thoroughly in Chapter 14), following is a way of expressing interest in someone else's activities and objects and subscribing to them (see Figure 13-3). It does not require reciprocation, and although it might correspond with acquaintanceship or friendship, it does not necessarily imply a reciprocal relationship between the follower and the followed.

FIGURE 13-3

I can choose to follow Lost in Urbanism on Tumblr without any obligation for that blogger to approve, confirm, or reciprocate. Thus, following is a way of subscribing to or indicating interest in somebody's activities.



RELATED PATTERNS

“Add/Subscribe” on page 244

“One-way following (aka, asynchronous following)” on page 440

“Activity Streams” on page 175

Filtering

What

As human beings, we rely on context to derive meaning from our sensory inputs. One of the unfortunate side effects of augmented universal oversharing is that we get these streams (torrents, really) of updates and objects from all of our connections across multiple social facets, usually with most or all of the originating conceptual context stripped away.

This dissolution of context is alienating and disorienting for most normal people. Even those of us who are at times capable of surfing these unrestrained information feeds usually grow weary of the onslaught eventually.

The first resort for most people is *social filtering*, which means relying on the pointers of friends and those we follow for deciding what to pay attention to, as demonstrated in Figure 13-4. The ordinary follow and subscribe interfaces suffice for enabling users to “tune in” to the recommendations of others, but you can use this pattern to give people additional handles on which to filter for context.



FIGURE 13-4

An arbitrary link to a blog post or comment thread is unlikely to get my attention, but if Abi Jones takes the time to mention something, I’m much more likely to click through and check it out.

Use when

Use this pattern when the potential for information overload and jumbling together of unrelated contexts grows intolerable.

How

Provide affordances for restoring (or, if necessary, imposing) contextual filters on datastreams so that they can be parsed in more manageable groupings, as depicted in Figure 13-5.

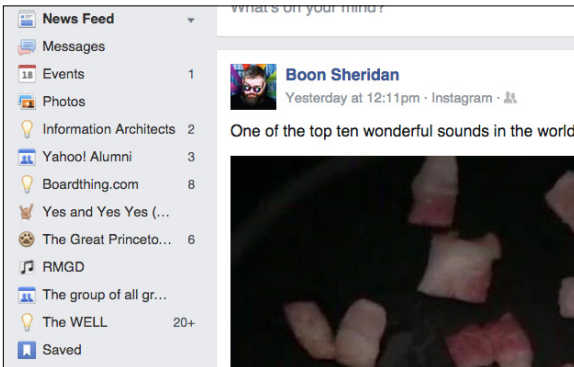


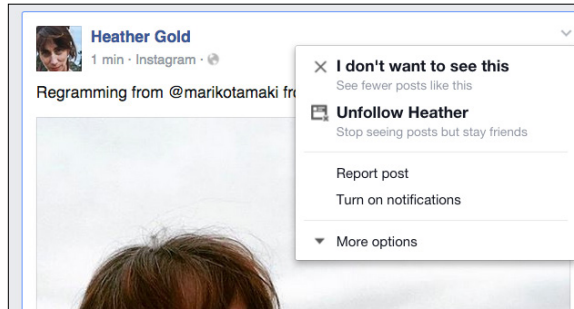
FIGURE 13-5

With Facebook, you can focus on a single source of posts (such as a group) when you don’t want to wade through everything.

You can also provide a means to achieve filtering by giving users a way to hide people or specific types of objects. Instead of singling out a context and showing just items in that context, which tends to be a temporary choice, hiding involves singling out a context and filtering items in that context *out* of view, as illustrated in Figure 13-6.

FIGURE 13-6

Facebook also gives you the ability to see fewer of certain types of posts or posts from individuals or to unfollow people entirely (without unfriending them), to remove their posts from your stream. (Don't worry, Heather: I'm still following!)



People will also use leaderboards (see “Leaderboard” on page 211), favorites (see “Favorites” on page 238), trending topics or posts, and other “best of” tools as an attempt to filter on quality.

Why

Giving people the ability to filter incoming information based on various contexts (type of content, closeness of relationship to the sender, timeframes, and so on) gives them the means to establish a stable point of view from which to explore the rich, never ending stream of new objects and information.

AS SEEN ON

Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>)

Twitter (<http://friendfeed.com>)

Recommendations

What

In the search for relevancy and quality, people have a difficult time zeroing in on satisfactory content. Recommendations are suggestions of content that might be desirable. Recommendations can be generated algorithmically based on correlation, affinity, social graph, and

so on (see Figure 13-7), or you can give users the ability to generate them affirmatively, recommending content for their connections or followers.



FIGURE 13-7

Amazon recommends media for me based on my past buying habits as well as on similarities between my behaviors and those of other customers.

Use when

Offer algorithmic recommendations when you have a sufficient body of data about your user's self-declared and implied interests as well as a rich enough social graph to be able to identify similarities and make helpful guesses about likely interesting content.

A recommendation differs from a like in that it requires a much higher threshold of commitment to the quality of the recommended object. It is one thing to like something for oneself and permit others possibly to know this and interpret it how they will. It is another thing entirely to endorse something, to put your name on it and say, "If you don't like this, you might not be impressed by my taste."

Manual recommendations work when users are connected as friends or in following relationships. They can be aggregated to create personalized summaries, as shown in Figure 13-8.

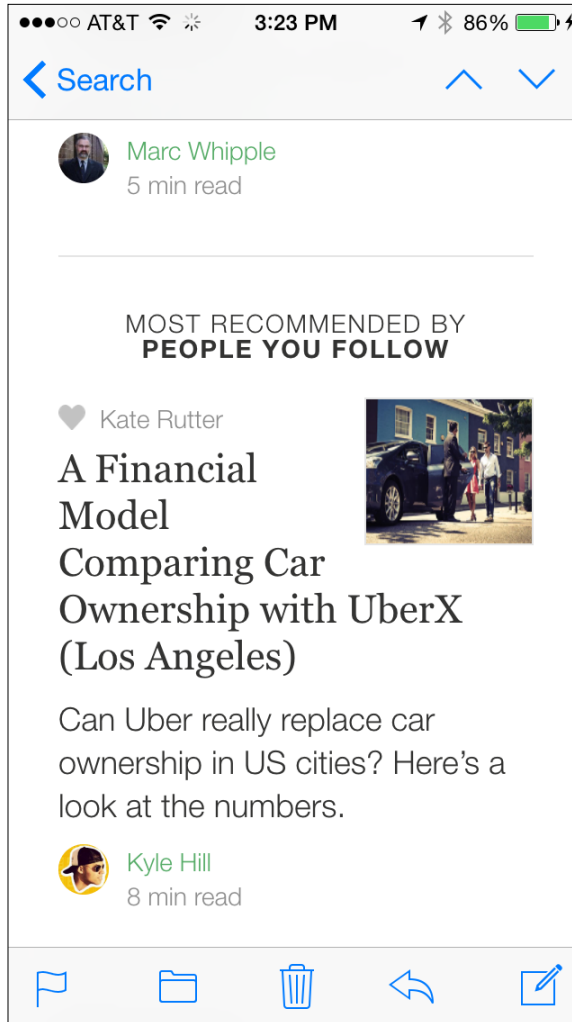


FIGURE 13-8

Medium sends me email every day recommending new articles to read. Some are chosen by their staff and others were recommended by people I follow.

How

- For manual recommendations, provide a trigger attached to content (see Figure 13-9).
- Offer a call to action inviting the user to explore recommendations. Educate the user about how to obtain better recommendations (for example, by rating content).

- Display recommendations as a list or, if there is a large number, in a carousel or scrollable window.

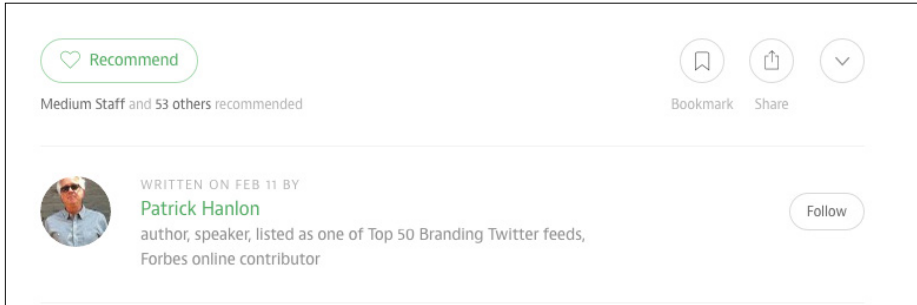


FIGURE 13-9

Medium provides a Recommend button (among other things) at the bottom of every article.

Why

Recommendations push objects toward people rather than relying on them to be passively discovered. If you can provide value to your users by making educated guesses about the type of objects they are interested in, you might be able to capture their loyalty. The benefit to users is more readily finding the information and media they need without having to expend quite so much effort hunting around for it.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Testimonials (or Personal Recommendations)” on page 135

AS SEEN ON

Amazon (<http://www.amazon.com>)

Netflix (<http://www.netflix.com>)

Medium (<http://www.medium.com>)

Twitter (<http://twitter.com>)

Social Search

Social search is an emerging phenomenon, and there are a number of different aspects of search that can be enhanced with a social dimension (Are you searching for people? Are your searches facilitated by social behaviors? Are you searching for social objects?). The

phenomenon of finding content by searching on user-contributed tags is perhaps one of the most familiar social-search experiences available online today.

The two most interesting forms of social search I've seen are real-time search and conversational search.

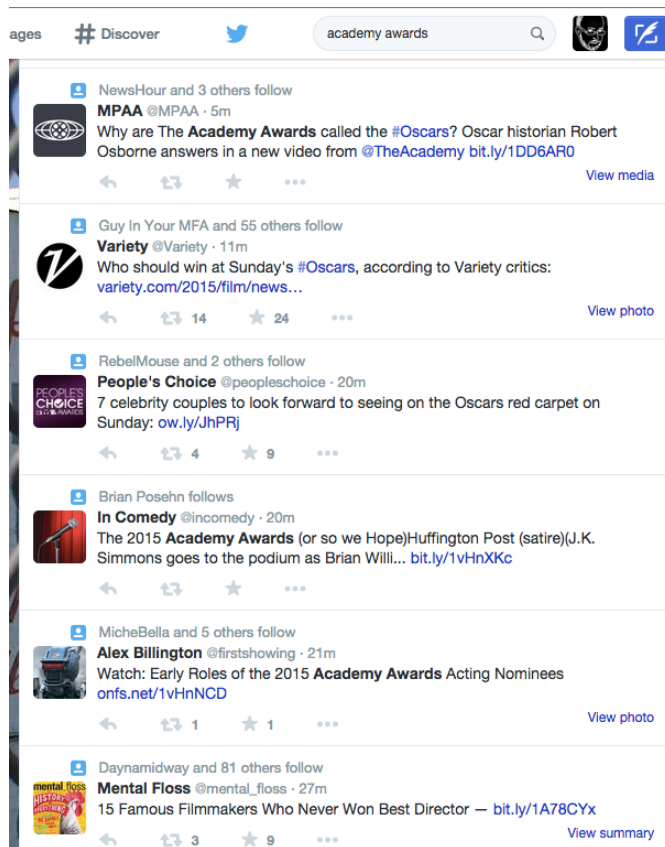
Real-Time Search

What

People can't always find breaking news and current topics of public conversation with ordinary keyword searches of indexed resources, and they already get frequent pointers to current information by the electronic equivalent of word of mouth, as shown in Figure 13-10.

FIGURE 13-10

My search for tweets about the upcoming academy awards are presented in context, showing me who among the people I follow also follows the person who posted each tweet.



This pattern is also known as “The Notificator” (<http://bit.ly/1IKyHNm>).

Use when

Use this pattern with an activity stream service so that people can find concepts in up-to-the-minute status updates and activities.

How

- Provide the familiar elements of a search interface (a text box and a search button), and make it clear to the person searching that the results will be ordered chronologically (in most-recent to oldest order, often referred to by the tech jargon “reverse chronological”), not by relevancy.
- Optionally, give the user hints about the sort of things that she can profitably search for in a real-time search interface, such as trending topics.
- Optionally, offer the ability to subscribe to search results, most commonly in the form of an RSS feed, to give people the ability to track a term or phrase and be notified almost immediately whenever it appears, as demonstrated in Figure 13-11.

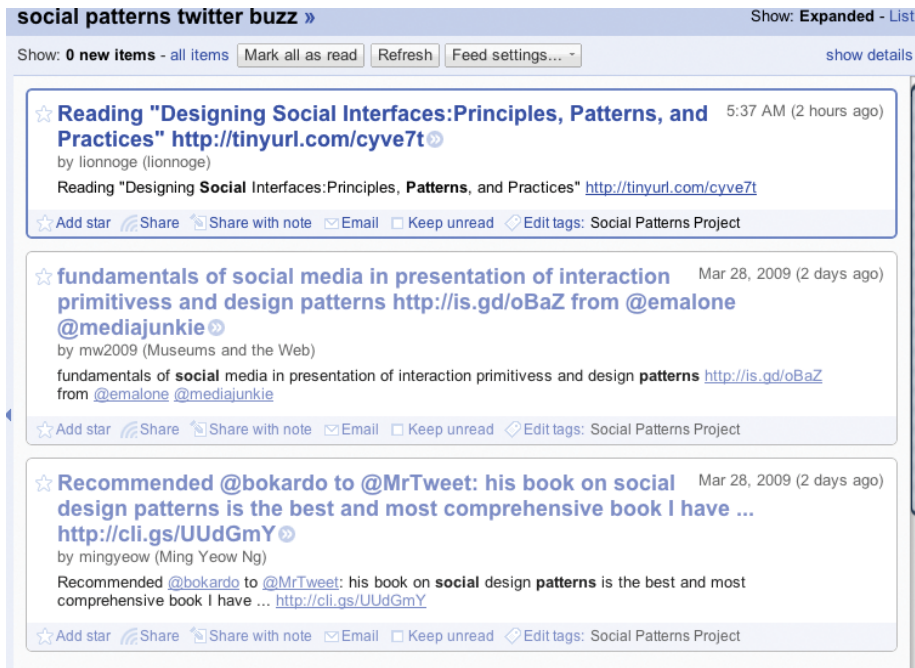


FIGURE 13-11

While writing this book, I subscribed to the RSS feed for a Twitter search on the phrase “social patterns” as way of tracking the spread of this meme.

Why

The world is moving too fast for “old-school” search engines to keep up with the leading edge. Real-time search tools that capture signals from the social web provide a method for finding extremely current information and news.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Tools for Monitoring Reputation” on page 220

AS SEEN ON

Google Alerts (<http://www.google.com/alerts>)

Twitter Search (<http://search.twitter.com/>)

Conversational Search

What

People sometimes want information or advice that can't be found in a neutral, objective reference guide (see Figure 13-12), and they would ask another human being directly if they could find someone interested in or knowledgeable about the topic of their question.

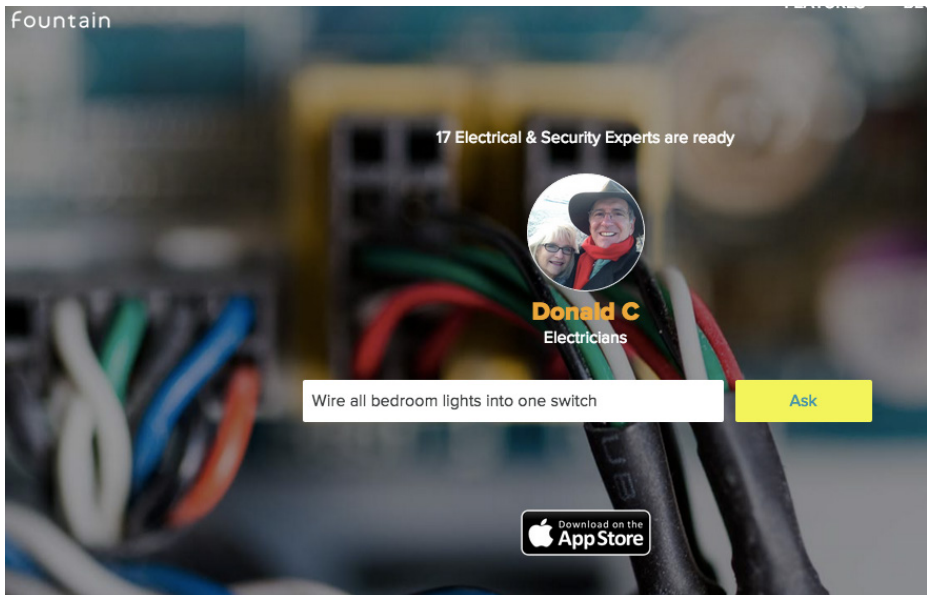


FIGURE 13-12

Consulting a reference is often the best way to find information, but sometimes asking a person is better.

This pattern is also known as “Subjective Search.”

Use when

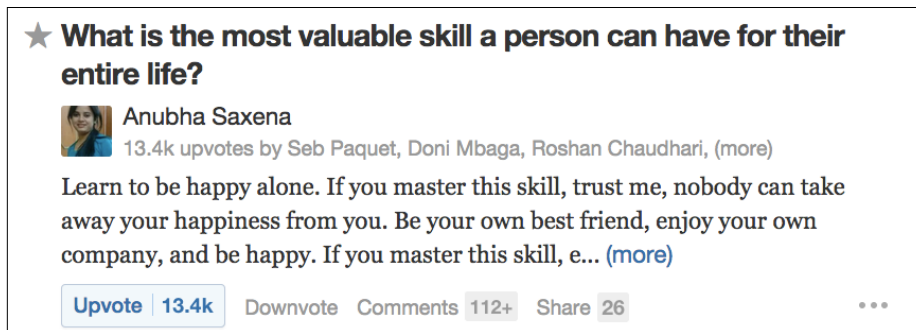
Use this pattern when you want to foster communication and cooperation among the people using your social application.

How


- Provide a large, inviting text-entry box to encourage questioners to write full sentences (like a human being) instead of query strings or Boolean operators, and label the form button with a word such as “Ask.”

At the same time, expose open questions to people as a way of inviting them to answer (or route questions to likely, willing responders based on affinities you derive from the metadata in your social graph).

- Optionally, embrace a reputation system to help ferret out the best contributors and the most helpful answers, as depicted in Figure 13-13.



★ **What is the most valuable skill a person can have for their entire life?**

 **Anubha Saxena**
13.4k upvotes by Seb Paquet, Doni Mbaga, Roshan Chaudhari, (more)

Learn to be happy alone. If you master this skill, trust me, nobody can take away your happiness from you. Be your own best friend, enjoy your own company, and be happy. If you master this skill, e... (more)

Upvote 13.4k Downvote Comments 112+ Share 26 ...

FIGURE 13-13

Quora shows you how many people have upvoted answers by this poster, as a gauge of reputation.

Why

Directly querying an index of data is a great way of searching for information, with historical roots going back to the earliest libraries, archives, and repositories, but people have always gathered information in other ways, as well. In fact, most people in the real world ask other human beings for information as a starting point.

AS SEEN ON

LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com>)

Yahoo! Answers (<http://answers.yahoo.com>)

Quora (<http://www.quora.com>)

Fountain (<http://fountain.com>)

Most mailing lists everywhere

Pivoting

Some people like to browse, others prefer to search, but most use a combination of both. And no one ever says to themselves, “Today I’m going to only browse and do no searching,” or vice versa. A person might begin by searching for information and then when he finds something juicy, begin browsing from there to related content. Similarly, browsing can lead to search and then back to browsing again.

Providing your users with ways to “pivot” between one form of discovery and another offers them the richest possibilities.

To do so, include a persistent search box that is always in the same location (most commonly the upper right or upper left of the screen), and when displaying search results, offer related links; for example, “more like this,” and other opportunities for lateral exploration.

This is more of a loose principle than a full-fledged pattern, because it has to do as much with how various interface elements are combined as it does with any one particular content discovery tactic.

Anticipatory Content

Another protopattern that’s beginning to show up around the Web (sometimes in tandem with ubiquitous swipe-dismissable mobile-scale “cards”) is that of search or other personal or social content pushed to the end user without waiting for him to browse, search for,

or request it. This might be an alert that a traffic jam means that the user should leave now to avoid being late for his dentist appointment, or it could be a notification that Beyoncé tickets have just gone on sale near you.

Further Reading

1. Borthwick, John. “Creative destruction... Google slayed by the Notificator?” <http://bit.ly/1IKyHNm>.
2. Evans, Brynn M. “Do your friends make you smarter? Exploring social interactions in search.” <http://bit.ly/1U2KdeV>
3. MacLeod, Hugh. “Social Objects for Beginners.” <http://bit.ly/1N-4myXe>; TweetNews, <http://tweetnews.appspot.com>
4. Evans, Brynn M. “Why social search won’t topple Google (anytime soon).” <http://bit.ly/1N4mDue>

One of Us, One of Us

I used to think of all the billions of people in the world, and of all those people, how was I going to meet the right ones? The right ones to be friends, the right one to be my husband. Now I just believe you meet the people you're supposed to meet.

DIANE FROLOV, NORTHERN EXPOSURE, "THE QUEST," 1995

only one.

C.S. LEWIS

Relationships

HAVING A GROUP OF PEOPLE TO HANG OUT WITH, communicate with, and participate with is key to the successful social experience. One of the worst problems is to show up somewhere and find that you're alone. The ability to find friends and make them a part of your circle for participation is one of the key interactions to design when building a social site. It used to be that the first impulse was to simply import all contacts from the variety of address books a user might have. This process, like casting a large net into the ocean and hoping for the best, doesn't help filter out meaningful relationships. Not all contacts are equal. I might have my aunt and my accountant in my address book, but I don't necessarily want them as friends on Facebook.

The strength of ties in relationships and the type of site and network being encouraged all need to be considered when offering ways for users to build relationships—whether casual, professional, or for dating. Additionally, the context surrounding these relationships needs

to be considered when developing the circles of friendship or one-on-one connections. Do mutual friends enhance the experience or hinder it, and should the connection be private like in the dating application OkCupid versus Tinder which shows who you know in common from Facebook?

Is the friend-of-a-friend potentially more helpful than the people I might know directly, such as on LinkedIn, where that second- or third-degree connection might be the key to the next job?

Is the site a broadcast-type site, such as Twitter, where following what a person has to say is more important than actually knowing him in real life?

Is knowing a person in real life important, like having a small circle of trusted friends to share family photos with on Shutterfly or using an application like Hangouts or Blobix to plan an evening out with the group?

The patterns in this chapter look at the ways to find and add friends to a user's network and the considerations you must make when creating the framework for relationships. The framework must equally take advantage of weak ties and strong ties; it must provide ways for users to change their minds, back and forth, about following or friending others; and it must be graceful in how the system alerts both the user and the recipient of the follow or unfollow. After all, although the system might be mediating the connection, it shouldn't cause undue embarrassment or create a social faux pas.

We look at relationships in the context of groups. In these cases, the topic of interest is often the driving factor for belonging and the relationships people grow over time.

Finally, we'll look at the one-on-one relationship and how these tools influence behavior on dating sites. The social components that are selected to flesh out the dating site should be matched to the level of intensity or seriousness of the intent. The more motivated someone is to find a match, the more she will put up with pay-walls and account gates, lengthy profiles to fill out, and other features. The more casual dater will only tolerate so much before moving on to another service.

Relationships Terminology

Cohort:* A number of people banded together or treated as a group.

Associate: A person who shares a common activity like cycling or photography

Colleague:* A person with whom one works.

Confidant: A person with whom one shares personal or private information.

Connection: A link or relationship; the action of connecting; (connections) influential people with whom one has contact or to whom one is related.* In social networking (e.g., Flickr), a person to whom a user has connected. The connection might not necessarily be reciprocal.

Contact:* A person who may be asked for information or assistance.

Family:* A group consisting of two parents and their children living together as a unit; a group of people related by blood or marriage; the children of a person or couple; all the descendants of a common ancestor; a group united by a significant shared characteristic.

Fan:* A person who has a strong interest in or admiration for a particular sport, art form, or famous person.

Follow: In social networking (e.g., Twitter), the act of marking a person or a person's content to have streamed into your experience. On Facebook, this is streamed into the NewsFeed, and on Twitter, into the activity stream.

Follower:* A person who follows; a supporter, fan, or disciple.

Friend: A person with whom one has a bond of mutual affection, typically one exclusive of sexual or family relations*. In social networking (e.g., Facebook), a friend is someone who a user has connected to and the connection is reciprocal and agreed upon by both parties. Partner/Significant Other/Boyfriend/Girlfriend: A person with whom one has a romantic or sexual relationship.

*As defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*

Find People

What

The user wants to find people she knows so that she can connect and interact with them on a site or application, as shown in Figure 14-1.

You can find your friends in a variety of ways. Start with Flickr suggestions, or sync contacts from other places on the web.

flickr

YAHOO!

Gmail

f

<p>Travis Price (etravus) - SoHo New York City, USA photos: 14,203 following: 5,024 profile Follow you follow 29 people in common</p>	<p>Jon madison (Jon madison) - South King County, WA, US photos: 3,377 following: 2,139 profile Follow you follow 32 people in common</p>
<p>Ivonne Carlo ("ivo") - San Juan, Puerto Rico photos: 4,362 following: 2,456 profile Follow you follow 26 people in common</p>	<p>Jeroen van Vliet (Jeroen van Vliet [bsidez]) - Utrecht, The photos: 357 following: 9,390 profile Follow you follow 36 people in common</p>
<p>Therese (alkithereska) - El Cerrito, CA photos: 8,994 following: 417 profile Follow you follow 44 people in common</p>	<p>Elsabeth Feldman (hurleygurley) - Los Angeles, California, photos: 2,193 following: 1,086 profile Follow you follow 30 people in common</p>
<p>Tantek Çelik (tantek) - San Francisco photos: 26,371 following: 1,061 profile Follow you follow 33 people in common</p>	<p>Irina Souiki (Irina Souiki) - Toronto, Canada photos: 5,108 following: 990 profile Follow you follow 29 people in common</p>

Not seeing who you're looking for? [Refresh your recommendations](#)

Or, try searching for people already on Flickr:

Search Facebook

 Erin Home

Review Your Friend Suggestion

Carol Page Moffitt
 Lillington, North Carolina
 Kathy Dewey Dunn and 7 other mutual friends
 Suggested by Harriet Jordan Geiger

[Add Friend](#) [Ignore](#)

Respond to Your 46 Friend Requests

View Sent Requests

Doug Frank
 Photographer at Milagro Webphoto
 Susan Burnstine and 13 other mutual friends

[Confirm](#) [Delete Request](#)

Alberto Escamilla
 Middletown, California
 Yelena Zhavoronkova is a mutual friend.

[Confirm](#) [Delete Request](#)

Jay Cornelius
 Atlanta, Georgia
 Joan Vermette and 25 other mutual friends

[Confirm](#) [Delete Request](#)

Stephane le Toumelin
 Lausanne, Switzerland
 Jeanne Wells and 21 other mutual friends

[Confirm](#) [Delete Request](#)

Samuel Vincent
 guaranty high school

[Confirm](#) [Delete Request](#)

Harvey Mendelson
 Cleveland Heights High School
 Linda Donohue and Rebeca Trevino are mutual friends.

[Confirm](#) [Delete Request](#)

Add Personal Contacts

Choose how you communicate with friends. See how it works or manage imported contacts. Facebook won't store your password.

Skype Name

Skype Password

[Find Friends](#)

Search for Friends

Find friends from different parts of your life

Name

Search for someone

Hometown

Enter a city

Current City

San Francisco, California

Enter another city

High School

Broad Ripple High School

George C. Marshall High School

Enter another high school

Mutual Friend

Ben Sykes

Rave Dave

John R. Benham

Enter another name

College or University

East Carolina University

FIGURE 14-1

Various methods are presented to add connections on Facebook (top) and on Flickr.

Use when

- You want to help users find people they care about who might already be using this site.
- You want to expand a user's circles of connections beyond friends and family.
- You want to encourage connections after the initial network-building exercise.
- You want to help user's find and connect to individuals privately for dating.

How

Provide a variety of ways for users to build out their connections.

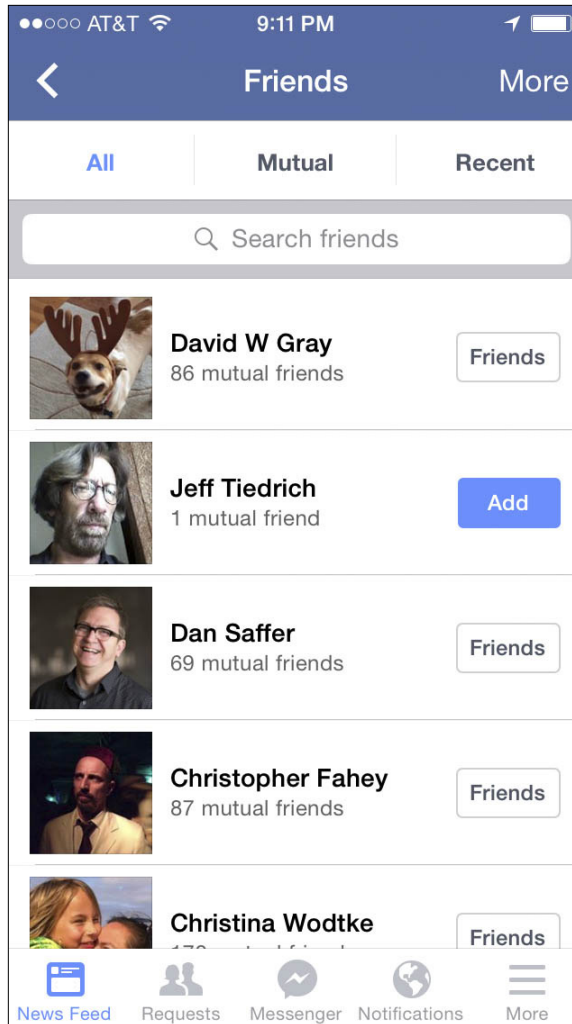
BROWSING FOR PEOPLE

Provide a mechanism for users to browse friends of friends.

Offer users a way to browse people based on common interests.

Consider presenting a user's friends and connections in a graphical grid that shows avatars; give others a means to browse through to their profiles. Provide visual clues to a person's identity (via the avatar) to help confirm that person's identity (see Figures 14-2 through Figure 14-5).

FIGURE 14-2
A Friends list on
Facebook mobile.



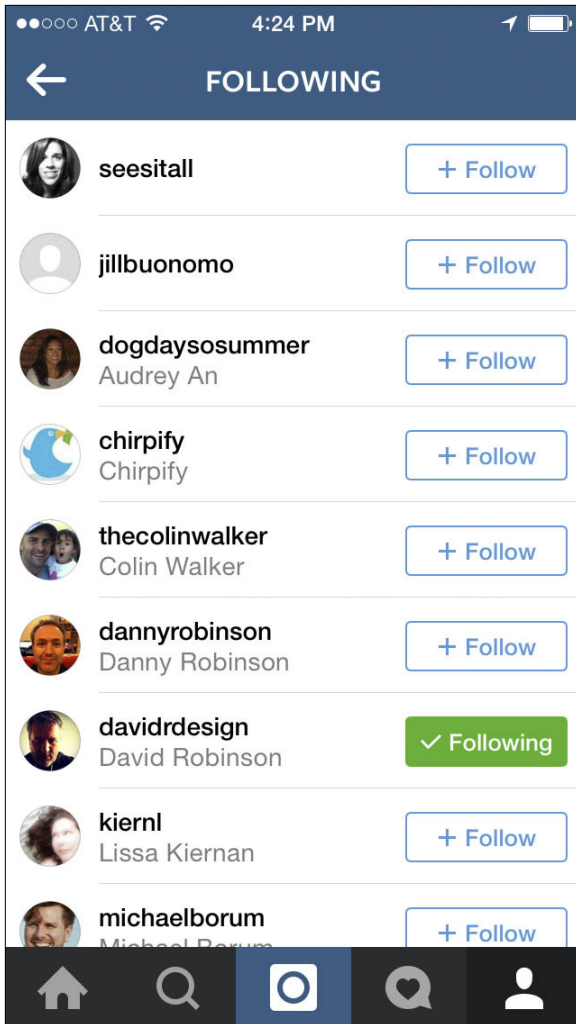


FIGURE 14-3
A Following list on Instagram.

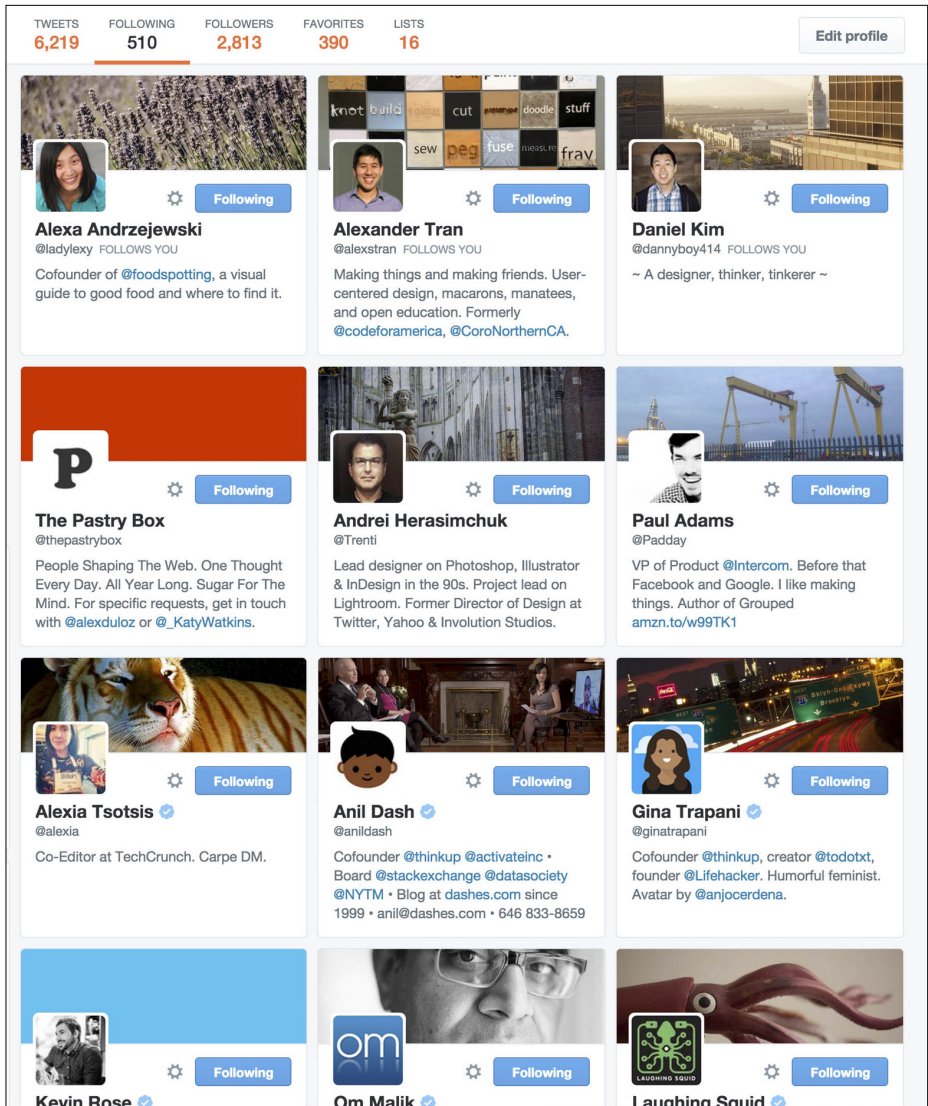


FIGURE 14-4
The Following grid on Twitter.

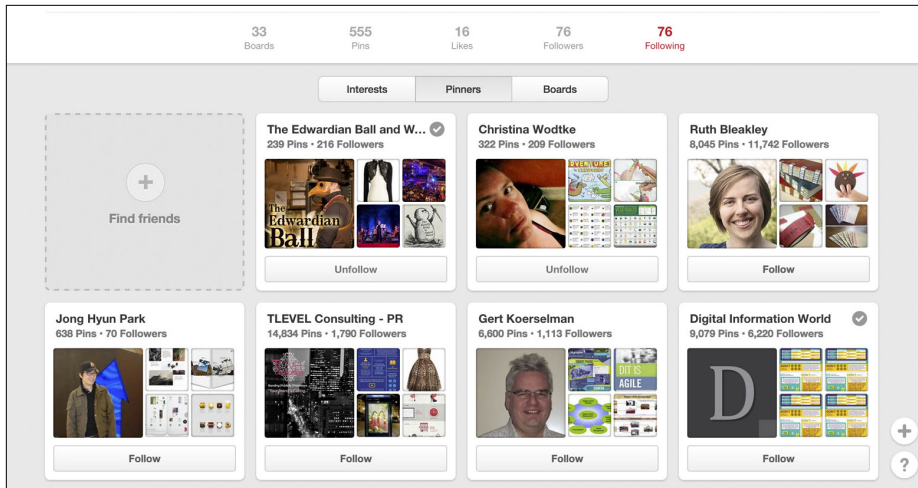


FIGURE 14-5
Following pinners on Pinterest.

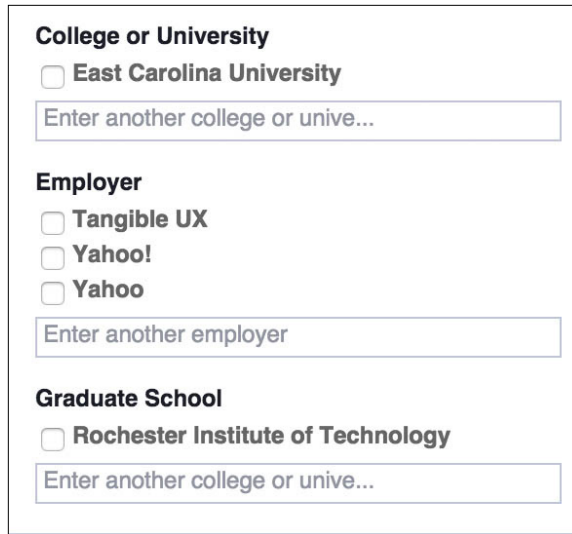
SEARCHING FOR CONNECTIONS

- Make it possible for users to search for friends within the network on your site.
- Provide a keyword field. Clearly indicate what terms are accepted in the search query—name, interests, email, or other identifying factors.

With Facebook, users can constrain a search by known information about the user. For example, users can search for people from their high school or college graduation years, or from companies they have worked for recently, as depicted in Figure 14-6. Constraining the search in this way increases the likelihood of finding people a user really knows.

FIGURE 14-6

Facebook offers constrained searches by a user's schools and workplace.



The image shows a screenshot of a search filter interface. It is organized into three sections, each with a title and a list of options:

- College or University**: Includes a radio button for "East Carolina University" and a text input field with the placeholder "Enter another college or unive...".
- Employer**: Includes radio buttons for "Tangible UX", "Yahoo!", and "Yahoo", and a text input field with the placeholder "Enter another employer".
- Graduate School**: Includes a radio button for "Rochester Institute of Technology" and a text input field with the placeholder "Enter another college or unive...".

FINDING FRIENDS FROM EMAIL, IM BUDDY LIST/ CONTACTS, AND OTHER NETWORKS

- Provide the user with functionality to import contacts from his address book or instant messenger lists to use as a comparison list to find people already using the service.
- Include a mechanism with which users can import their connections from another service using the Authorize pattern (see “Authorize” on page 90).
- Compare known data points—name, email address, or other reliable information—and then present to the user a list (with images for ease of identification) of relevant people who also use the service.
- The user should be able to select one or more names to make them connections.
- If reciprocity is required, present the message that will be sent to the user and the option to send the request for connection or an option to cancel the request (see “Adding Friends” on page 437).
- When bringing in people lists from an address book or address book service for a user to connect to, do not automatically spam the user’s contacts asking to connect.
- Do not automatically spam the rest of the user’s contacts with invitations to join the service.

DISCOVERY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Consider presenting people the user might know as potential connections, as illustrated in Figure 14-7.

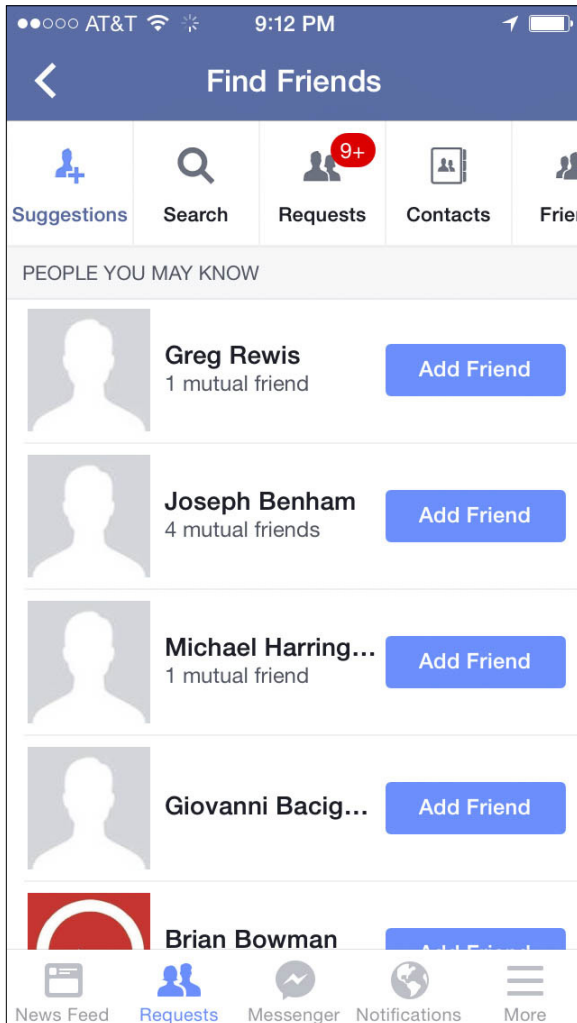


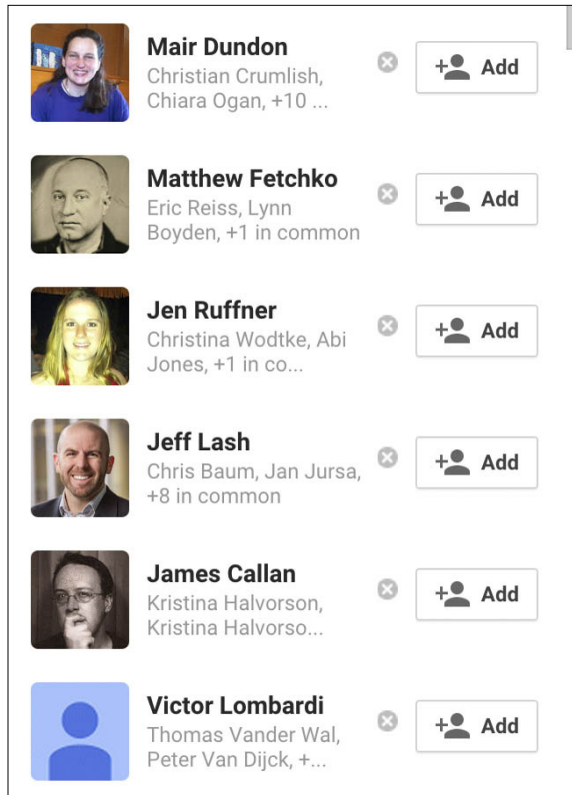
FIGURE 14-7

Facebook mobile makes people recommendations to encourage users to expand their networks.

- Use known connections and friends of friends to extrapolate potential connections for users, as shown in Figure 14-8.

FIGURE 14-8

Google+ makes suggestions based on people in common and displays those people in a list for context.



- Present to the user who they might know in common with another user (see Figures 14-9 and 14-10).

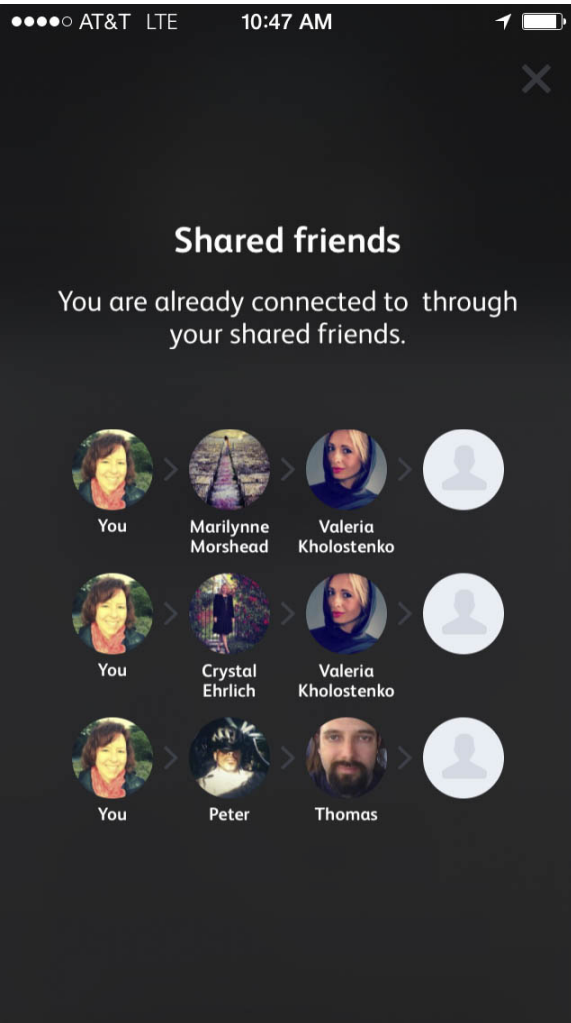


FIGURE 14-9

The mobile dating application Blendr shows the degrees of separation through people you know in common.

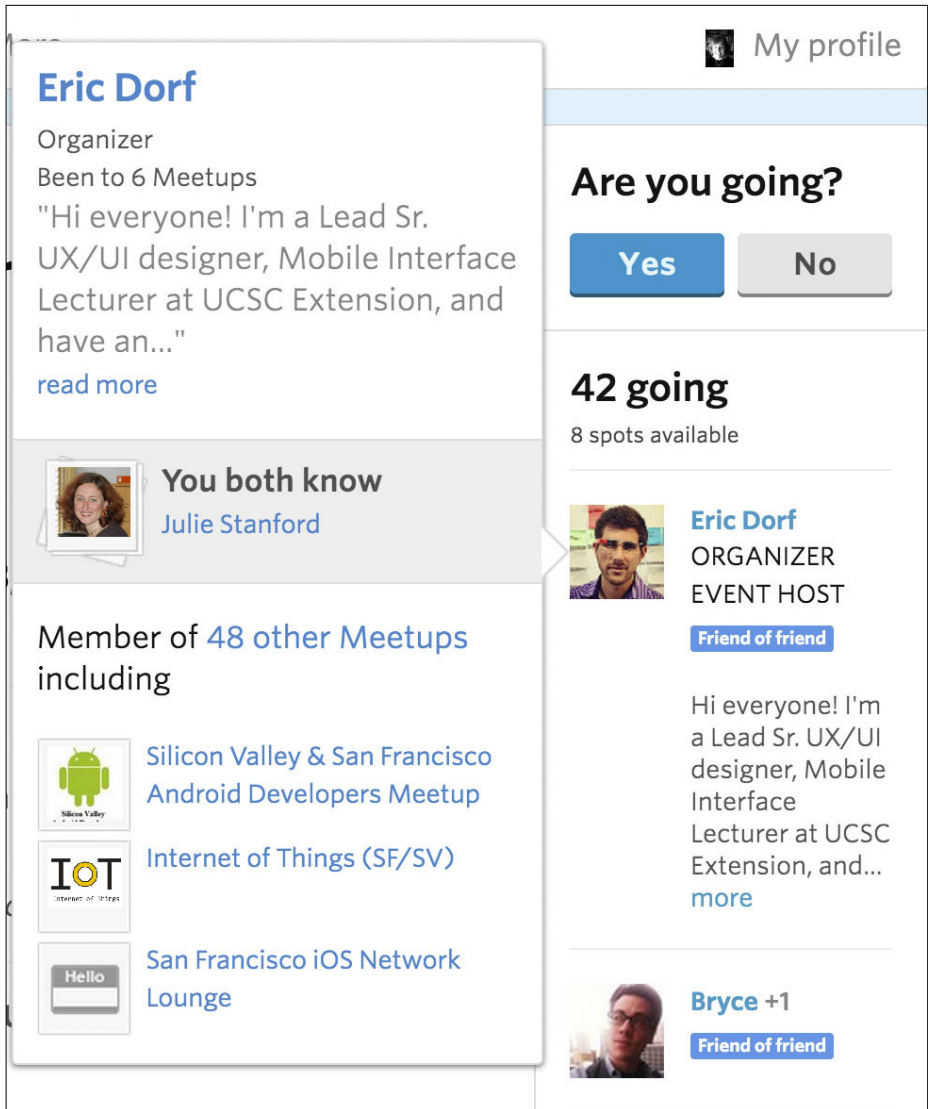


FIGURE 14-10

Meetup shows people who are friends of friends and then indicates who you know in common.

Why

Having a circle of connections and friends is what makes the Web social. Building a network of connections is difficult, and as more time goes by, the network becomes overly redundant as a user moves from

site to site. Providing easy mechanisms for users to find people and build their networks will encourage repeat use and prevent social-networking burnout.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Adding Friends” on page 437

“Sign-up or Registration” on page 59

AS SEEN ON

Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com> and Facebook mobile application)

Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com>)

LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com>)

Twitter (<http://www.twitter.com>)

Pinterest (<http://www.pinterest.com>)

Instagram mobile application

Blendr mobile application

Adding Friends

What

A user has found people she knows or wants to know (see Figure 14-11) and wants to add them to her circle of connections.

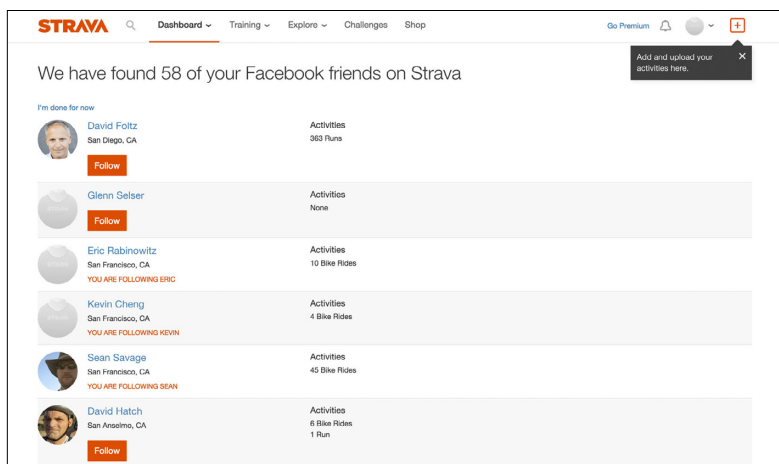


FIGURE 14-11

Recommended connections from Strava, based on people using the service who are also in the author's Facebook network.

Use when

- User connections are a core part of the site’s experience.
- Relationships will be confirmed, providing a two-way reciprocal relationship.
- You want one user to be able to follow another participant without reciprocity.
- You want to give users a way to ignore a connection request.

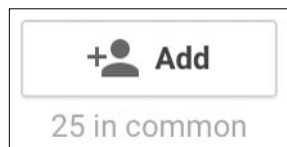
How

When a user has found people he cares about on your site (see “Find People” on page 425), provide an easy way to add these people as connections.

- Provide a clear link (a button or text/icon combination) as the call to action to add this person as a friend, as demonstrated in Figure 14-12.

FIGURE 14-12

An “Add” call to action on Google+.



- After the person has been added as a Friend, clearly indicate to the user that this person is now a friend, as shown in Figure 14-13.

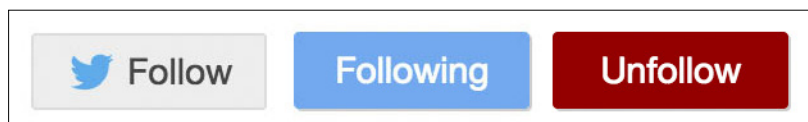


FIGURE 14-13

Twitter’s Follow button turns to a Following button when you are following that person. The action of that button is to now Unfollow.

CONFIRMING FRIENDSHIP/TWO-WAY CONNECTIONS

Requiring two-way relationships encourages a network that more closely resembles real-world relationships.

- Clearly indicate when selecting “add as a friend” that the relationship must be confirmed by the other party before it will be recognized on the site (see Figures 14-14 and 14-15).



FIGURE 14-14

Facebook swaps the action button “Add as Friend” to “Friend Request Sent,” alerting the user that the recipient of the request will have to confirm the relationship.

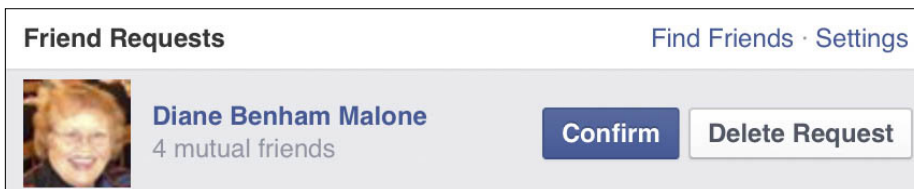


FIGURE 14-15

Facebook shows an Add request that has been sent and must be approved before adding the person to the Friends list.

- Likewise, alert users when a connection request is being made, such as shown in Figure 14-16.

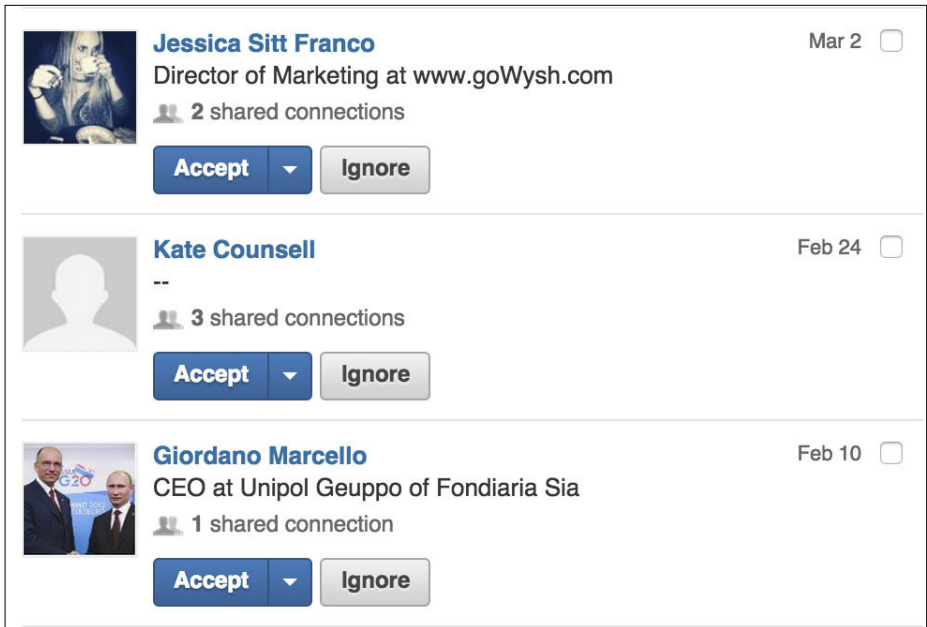


FIGURE 14-16

LinkedIn alerts users to invitations to connect in the Inbox.

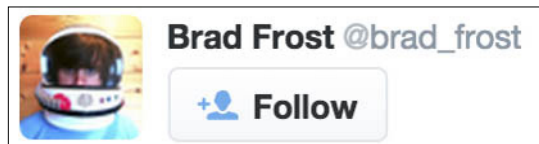
- Include functionality for the user to cancel the request at any time.

ONE-WAY FOLLOWING (AKA ASYNCHRONOUS FOLLOWING)

An alternative to reciprocal relationships is the one-way connection. This type of connection is best used when the content is more important than a personal relationship. This is essentially a subscription to the person’s activities and contributions within the system, as illustrated in Figure 14-17.

FIGURE 14-17

Twitter has a simple large “Follow” button associated with the identity of the person to follow.



- Label the action in a way that doesn’t imply an intimate or real-life relationship, such as “friends” or “family.” Instead, use terminology like “Contacts,” “Fan,” or “Follow.”
- When a connection is made, alert the connected person about it, as depicted in Figure 14-18.



FIGURE 14-18

Twitter indicates in the interface when people have followed a user.

- If two parties connect to each other—in a mutual one-way connection—acknowledge the connection, as is demonstrated in Figure 14-19.

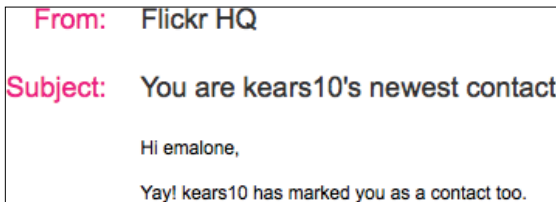


FIGURE 14-19

Flickr sends a message when a relationship is reciprocated.

IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT RELATIONSHIPS

Most social networks require users to make explicit connections and declare their relationships publicly. But there are situations in which the implied relationship will do. By subscribing to someone's blog or joining an interest group, there is an implied relationship between the user and the author of the blog or the person and the group of people involved in the group. The very nature of being involved in the group implies relationships that might or might not be very strong.

Expressing these implied relationships within the interface can help users to make explicit connections as well as get a sense of the group with which they are involved.

Give users the opportunity to become involved without having to explicitly declare relationships, and let the relationships evolve over time.

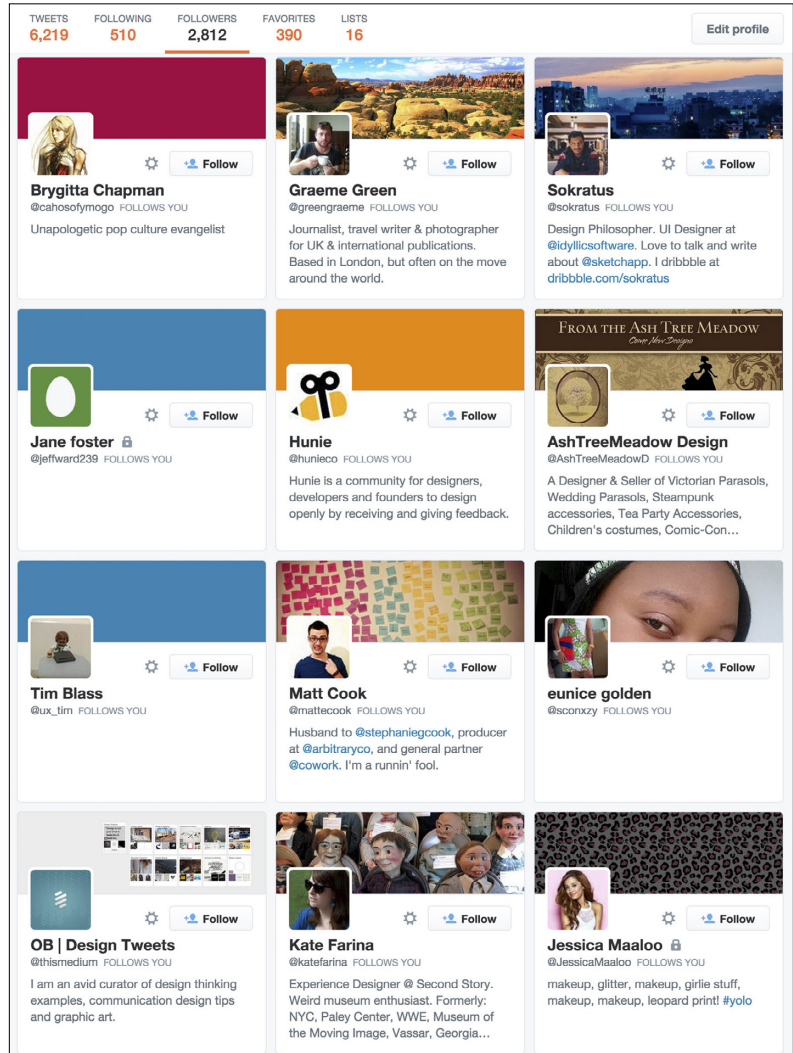
FANS AND FAME (AKA ASYNCHRONOUS FOLLOWING)

Public websites such as blogs and microblogs (e.g., Twitter) and sites such as Instagram—for which the default for photo posts is public—make it possible for their authors to broadcast to the world. Include interactions in the interface so that users can follow or subscribe to the

author or the author's content. These one-way relationships are often initiated by people who are just fans of the author or their content. "Fan" has an implied difference from "friend," in that the relationship is usually one-way and there is often little or no direct interaction between the fan and the object of fandom other than consumed broadcasts (see Figure 14-20).

FIGURE 14-20

Twitter's Followers grid and list is, in essence, a list of fans for a person or her tweets. To some, collecting followers has become a game or popularity contest.



TEMPORAL CONNECTIONS

- Provide a means for users to easily bookmark or create a list of other users privately.
- Provide an easy mechanism for users to remove someone from this list.
- Indicate when someone from their list “Flirts” with them or has updated his profile.
- Consider alerting a user when someone from her list is also on the service, as shown in Figure 14-21.

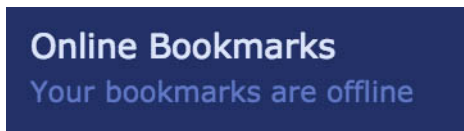


FIGURE 14-21

With Okcupid, users can “Bookmark” people and will show when they are online in the main navigation on the web version.

- Consider alerting a user when someone from her list is nearby and give users a way to specify the radius within which “nearby” falls.

IGNORE ME

Include functionality for users to ignore connection requests, as illustrated in Figure 14-22.



FIGURE 14-22

With Facebook, users can choose between adding a person and ignoring the request. However, it isn’t clear what happens until the Ignore button is clicked.

Clearly indicate what the consequences of “Ignore” will be; otherwise, the outcome will be a collection of neglected connection requests living in some sort of perpetual purgatory. Many people won’t actively

ignore someone, because it isn't clear what will happen if they select Ignore. They fear insulting the person who is making the request even though this isn't a person with whom they would consider connecting.

- Does the requestor get a message that he is being ignored? If the requestor isn't notified, the action is the same as no action.
- Does Ignore block this person from requesting a connection again? Or, is that what happens with the Block link?

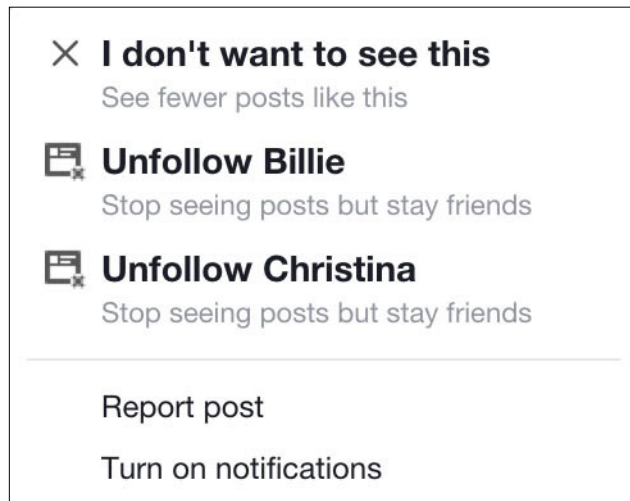
Give users a mechanism to ignore content from people they are currently following or with whom they are friends.

Facebook's interface clearly indicates that you will only stop seeing posts from this person but will stay friends. There is a separate action for Unfriending (see Figure 14-23).

Tumblr offer's users the ability to Ignore another user's content, which just removes that person's posts from the follower's feed while still showing as Following them, although this isn't 100 percent clear until you investigate what actually happens and the controls in settings (see Figure 14-24 and Figure 14-25).

FIGURE 14-23

The actions associated with each post in the Feed on Facebook gives users a way to just filter by content or totally stop seeing things from certain people without the social anxiety of unfriending them.



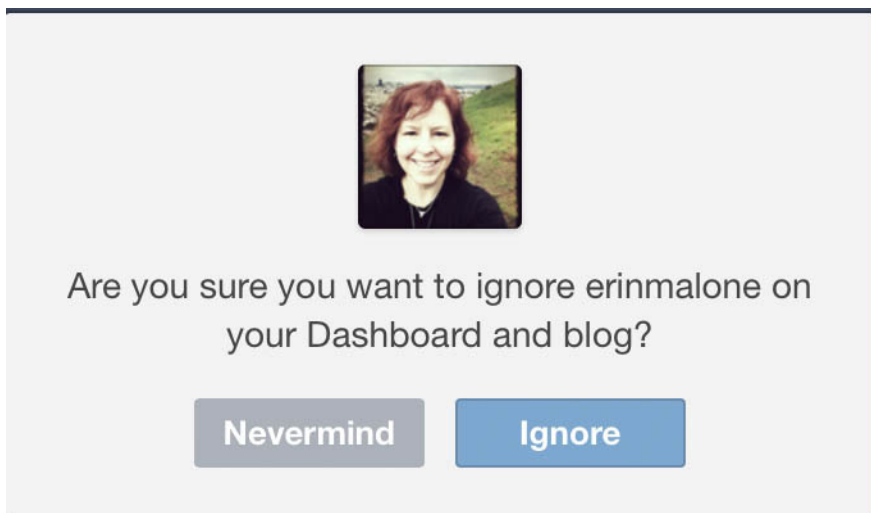


FIGURE 14-24

Tumblr offers the ability to ignore a user on the dashboard. The action can be reversed. The act of ignoring doesn't unfollow the person, just removes the activity from the dashboard stream.

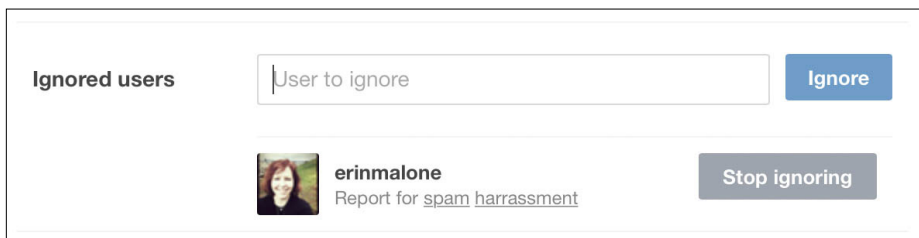


FIGURE 14-25

With Tumblr, users can easily reverse the Ignore action with a Stop Ignoring button. This action flows that person's activity back into the dashboard stream.

The social implications of ambiguity of both ignoring a connection request or ignoring content from someone to whom a user is already connected are high and can lead to a lot of relationship noise because people fear doing the wrong thing or inadvertently offending someone.

Clearly set expectations for the user about the implications for each action. Add rollover messages to inform the user of the consequences of these actions.

Without setting clear expectations, you are wasting your design and development effort, building a feature that users will be too scared to use for fear of negative social implications.

Why

Giving users the tools to connect to one another encourages conversations and sharing among networks of people, resulting in viral growth of the site. People want to do things with their friends or with others who have similar interests, and providing a pathway for them to connect strengthens these ties.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Find People” on page 425

“Unfriending” on page 458

AS SEEN ON

Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>)

LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com>)

Tumblr (<http://www.tumblr.com>)

Circles of Connections

What

A user wants to indicate nuances in her relationships with other people, such as is demonstrated in Figure 14-26.

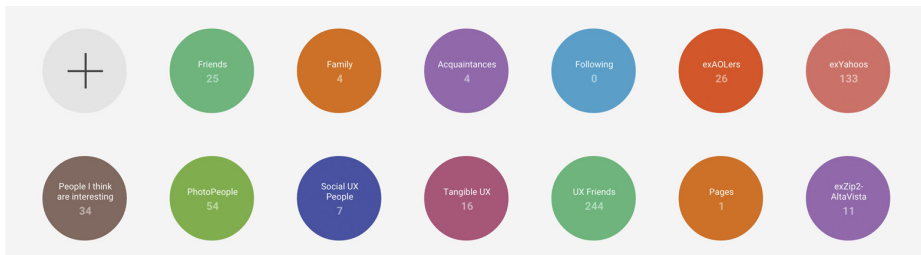


FIGURE 14-26

With Google+, users can create groupings of connections and give them unique names.

Use when

- To distinguish levels of participation in a person's network.
- To set permissions for shared activity and content.
- To disambiguate real-life versus online and strong versus weak ties.
- To help users filter which content to consume.

How

- Depending on the context of your user experience, levels of granularity in describing connections might or might not be important.
- Consider giving users the option to classify their connections along a continuum of influence or intimacy.
- Clearly articulate what the implications are for each level of classification (see Figure 14-27).

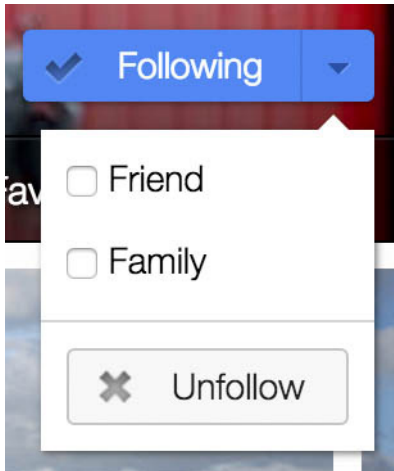


FIGURE 14-27

With Flickr, users can categorize connections as friend or family or unselected. When images are uploaded, visibility can be constrained based on the relationship indicated.

- Don't add too many levels, or you risk confusing users about what each level permits. Users need to be able to easily separate what each level allows and how their actions and content will be consumed based on those levels.

Why

Real-life relationships are complex, and context often changes how two people might interact. Online representations of relationships need to be presented in as simple a format as possible to aid in understanding and usability.

Providing mechanisms for users to create relationship groups avoids awkward social situations and puts the user in control of how his actions and data are consumed.

However, providing too many options or unlimited options can become cumbersome and overwhelming over time to manage, so carefully balance the customization with ease of use.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Adding Friends” on page 437

“Blocking” on page 459

AS SEEN ON

Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com>)

Google+ (<http://plus.google.com>)

Product Lessons We Can Learn from Google+

Note that although I worked on the original Google+ team and invented the ideas behind Circles, I have long since left, and have no insider knowledge about what is happening, nor does this essay contain any confidential information. I’m simply sharing what I think are clear product lessons that can help many of us build better things, all of which can be deduced from public information.

1. Build Around People Problems, Not Company Problems

A dominant theme in the discussion of what is happening with Google+ has been a focus on the problems Google faced with the rise of Facebook and whether those problems still exist now. As of this writing, everything I have read in the past few weeks discusses this from a company-problem point of view. There has been little discussion on which problems Google+ should or could solve for people, or what new inventions it could build to make people’s lives better. Contrast this with other parts of Google that are solving clear problems that people have. If Google+ wants to see engagement numbers similar to Facebook, it needs to focus on how Google+ makes people’s lives markedly better. The vast majority of people don’t care about Google’s problems. Likewise, they don’t use Facebook to collect data about themselves so they can be targeted with better advertising. They simply want better tools to help them live a more fulfilling and happier life, and often they can’t foresee tools they will later come to value.

The point here is that social software is not done. Do people want better ways to build, maintain and grow relationships? Of course. Better ways to share their experiences with the people they care about no matter where they are? Of course. None of these problems are solved. People don't even yet know how they will share experiences in the future; this is why the *Facebook acquisition of Oculus Rift* is so interesting. Large parts of Google+ don't offer anything beyond what exists elsewhere.

The Internet is still in its infancy, and there is yet so much room for invention and so much opportunity to make people's lives better. There is no need to worry so deeply about competitive threats, as if it is a zero sum game and there is a foregone product conclusion.

2. Perceived Benefits Need to Be Greater Than Perceived Effort

My mobile phone's address book is full of people I don't recognize. It is a pretty comprehensive list of all the people in my life, yet woefully managed. One of the most personal parts of my most personal device is full of strangers. This is the same for almost everyone, and the reason is simple: it's not worth the effort to keep it up to date. This is the problem with Google Circles.

The perceived benefit was clear to everyone. Circles more clearly mapped to how life works offline, where people typically share different parts of their life with different groups of people. It was a clear Achilles heel for Facebook at the time, given that Facebook's primary design pattern was to share everything with all your friends, which limited what people were comfortable sharing.

But this is a very difficult design problem, and identifying a clear user benefit alone isn't enough. Execution is as important as initial insight or unique value proposition. Looking at most mobile phone address books indicated people would not manually put their friends into Circles, and, more important, that they wouldn't keep them up to date. Circles requires ongoing manual work, and despite the perceived value, it's simply not worth the effort. It doesn't matter how beautiful the UI is (see Figure 14-28), how polished the transitions and animations are, how much fun has been added to the experience, people will simply not do it because the perceived effort outweighs the perceived value.

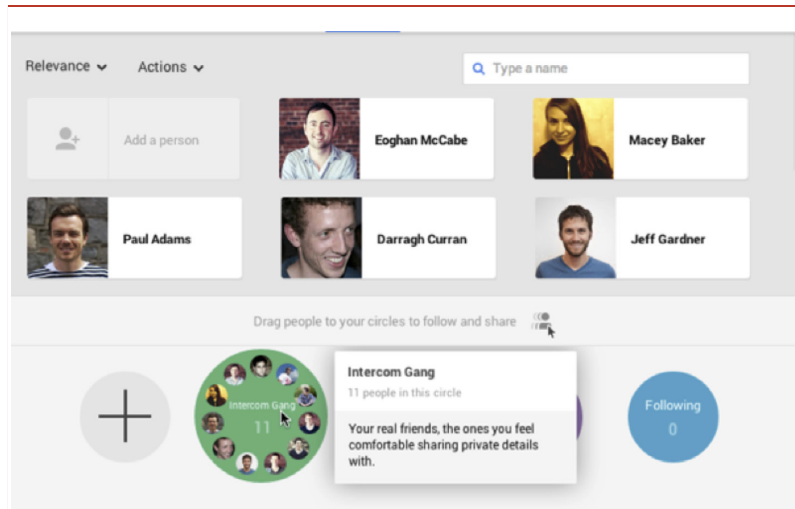


FIGURE 14-28
Circles organization on Google+

Personally, I don't think this can be fixed. Circles as a literal interpretation, and manual execution, of how real-life social networks work will not succeed. It's time for a rethink, but more on that later.

3. Ruthlessly Focus and Descope, Be Patient, The Internet Is Young

Other than incredibly rare outliers such as Instagram, social networks take a long time to build out and deepen, just as real-life relationships do. This requires patience and deliberate focus. It's too easy to chase too many things.

Google+ tried to be everything, all at once. As well as the rise of Facebook, there was the growth of Twitter, and Google+ attempted to compete with both. Facebook and Twitter are very different products and often serve independent needs for people. The product complexity within Google+ and the lack of aggressively killing off features people don't use suggests that this remains an issue.

This lack of focus adds huge complexity to the product and requires huge cognitive exertion on the parts of users, therefore increasing the effort required. All of the massively successful social products of the last few years have started out by doing one thing really well and then growing organically and expanding.

4. Embrace the Idea that Life Is Messy

Of all the things we need to deal with in life, relationships with other people are the most complicated and messy, all the way from initial introductions to marriages. They involve the deepest of human emotions, from who we perceive ourselves to be, how we project ourselves to others, what we desire, who we want to become, the groups we feel a part of, who and how we love, how we think about mortality.

It's no wonder that social design is hard!

There is a deep dichotomy between this messy reality and software builders' desire for structured data. Maybe someday we'll figure out that our brain is all nodes and links, deep and shallow pathways between objects, and we can directly map to it with software. But likely this won't be in our lifetime.

I believe that one reason behind the rise of WhatsApp is that it solves the "Circles" problem in a way that embraces the idea that life is messy. Although Circles, and indeed *Facebook Lists* and *Facebook Groups*, all assume that the group is the defining object, with clear boundaries, WhatsApp does not. Much of WhatsApp usage is group conversations, but the subtle, critical difference is that these groups are typically not permanent or sustaining. It is not a stable set of people discussing multiple things in sequence over time. It is one-off combinations of people grouped together for something temporal, such as an event, a concert, a party, a weekend away. The groups then decay gracefully. When necessary, they are rebuilt from scratch. Often there is a defining event that brings a group of people together, people are added, they communicate, share content, it gets messy, but then it dies.

In this sense, email works the same way as WhatsApp. We email the same groups of people over and over again, rebuilding the same list manually every single time. To many engineers, this is crazy, leading to horrible inefficiencies in data processing and storage. There's duplication everywhere. But this is the messy reality. The cognitive effort to add in people's email addresses is low. Thus, doing it over and over again makes sense. Suggesting others to add based on common patterns (as Gmail does) makes this faster for people, reduces the effort, and makes it a better experience.

One wonders whether this is how Circles should have worked, or, more important, how it should work in the future. Circles as temporary rather than permanent.

5. A Fast-Follow Product Strategy Doesn't Work When You Have Network Effects

There is a nightclub close to our office. It's pretty run down, it plays questionable music, it serves questionable beer. And every night, it's packed. People love it. Many new nightclubs have opened up next door, only to close their doors months later. They had better decor, better music, better beer. But they didn't have the one thing necessary for success: people's friends. People want to be where their friends are, and this trumps everything.

Google+ applied a *fast-follow* product strategy. The theory of fast follow is to copy a competitor's features, emulate the core offering, and then outperform on one other area, bypassing the incumbent product. The objectively better product wins. There are many successful examples of this strategy, including Android, Windows, and Google search. For Google+, it is clear that many parts of Facebook were emulated: the Stream, Photos, User Profiles, Company Profiles, and Notifications. But, the one thing that couldn't be emulated was people's friends.

Network effects take time to build. This requires an entirely different product strategy than fast follow. And it requires patience and focus.

6. People Need Clear Conceptual Models That Exist in Real Life

Many of our friends aren't punctual. I remember a time before mobile phones when we had to wait at a prearranged meeting spot and then wonder and wonder how late our friends were going to be. One of the best things about mobile phones was that those experiences went away. Yet Hangouts brings that experience back. Should I just wait? Should I open a new tab and do other things? (See Figure 14-29.)

It feels broken to have to use another channel, like email or a messaging app, to talk to someone who is supposed to have joined the Hangout. The move from Google Chat to Hangouts is an interesting one. I'd love to see normalized engagement numbers on Google Gchat versus Hangouts, and Gchat IM conversations versus the current Hangout-oriented implementation of chatting in Gmail. I wonder how successful Hangouts really is? It's *Play store rating* is 3.8. I personally find the conceptual model behind Hangouts confusing and much preferred the simplicity of Gchat. I know many others feel the same.

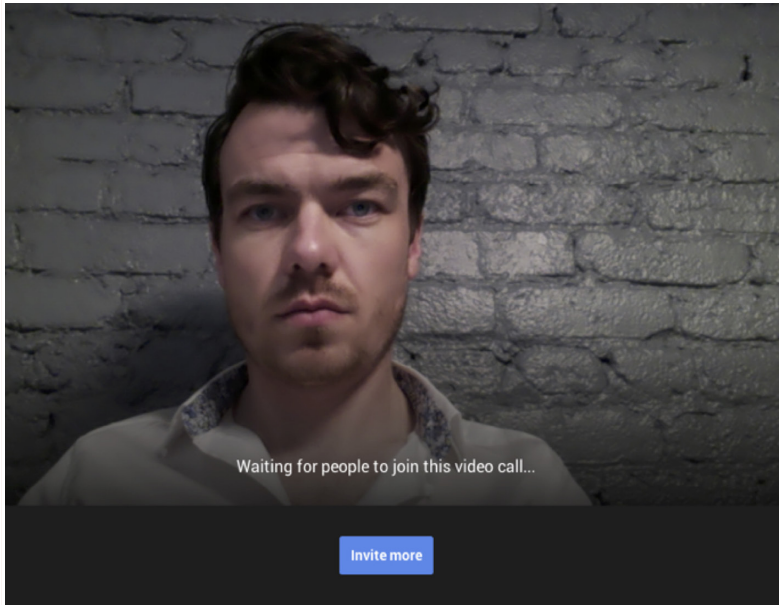


FIGURE 14-29

Waiting in a Hangout for others to show up.

Looking back at the history of communication, most successful social software has an analogous offline experience. Even something such as a Newsfeed can be easily compared to a local town square as the primary source of news and gossip. With a new tool, people need an established way of thinking about it to reduce the perceived effort of use. I can only think of one real-life experience with the same conceptual model as Hangouts—where one person puts themselves out into a place without prearrangement and waits for someone to join them—and it’s illegal in almost every country. It seems that to set up a Hangout, you first have to do other work, such as ask someone if she is available, or create a calendar event, or at best deal with an awkward social metaphor and new abstraction: “the hangout.”

The concept of calling someone just seems so much simpler. Hangouts are possibly great for work and meetings, not so much for calling your family and friends.

So, What to Do Next?

What would one do if we applied these lessons to figure out what to do next? I think Google+ is actually in a reasonable spot. It just needs to go back to absolute fundamentals and have ruthless focus. Remember that *product strategy means saying no*. To understand what people problems Google+ might solve, focus on a tiny number of these, possibly even just one, and make this simple to understand, just as Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, and Secret have done.

Google+ is incredibly complex and difficult to understand. Simplify the product offering by killing features and lowering the effort required to get value out of it by killing many of the choices in the UI.

Finally, and, most important, it needs to build upon established real-world social norms and conceptual models. We're still only getting started with social software. While social-science patterns are very well established, there are no established ways to build social products. Copying competitors is unnecessary. There are so many things we can make better for people if we carefully and deliberately observe and understand their world.

**PAUL ADAMS (@PADDAY), VICE PRESIDENT OF PRODUCT
@INTERCOM**

Publicize Relationships

What

To promote virality, the system announces, or publicizes, relationships between people, as demonstrated in Figure 14-30).

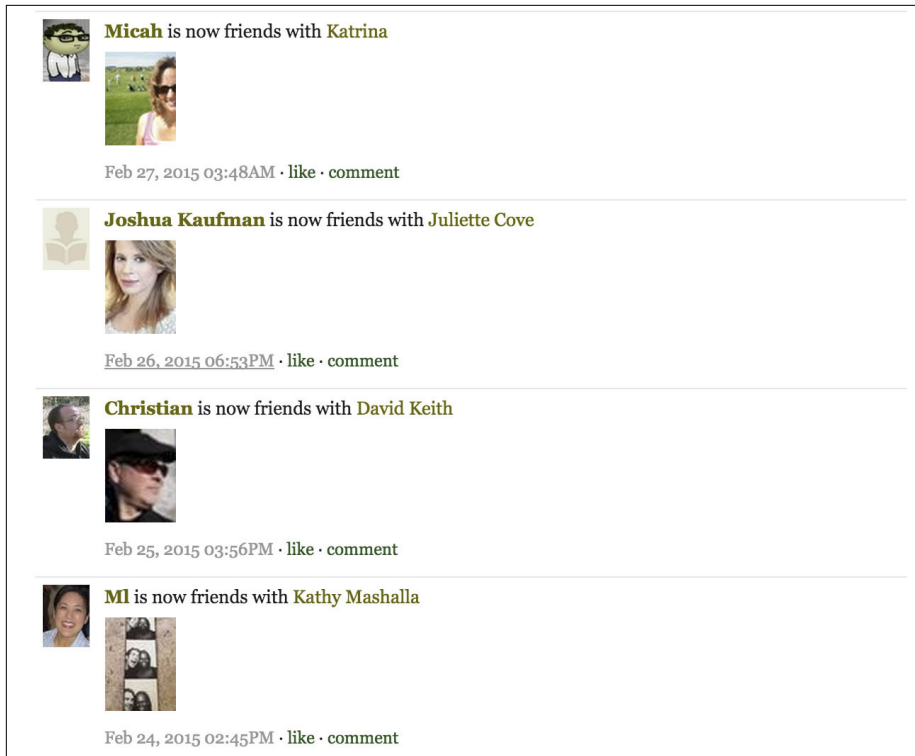


FIGURE 14-30

GoodReads (<http://www.goodreads.com>) announces new connections to users on their activity feed for their network of connections.

Use when

- To announce new connections to people in shared networks.
- To show profile visitors to whom the person is connected.
- To promote connecting by sharing new connections and enticing users to make them, as well.

How

- As discussed in “Adding Friends” on page 437, consider publicly showing the group of people with whom a user is connected, as depicted in Figure 14-31.

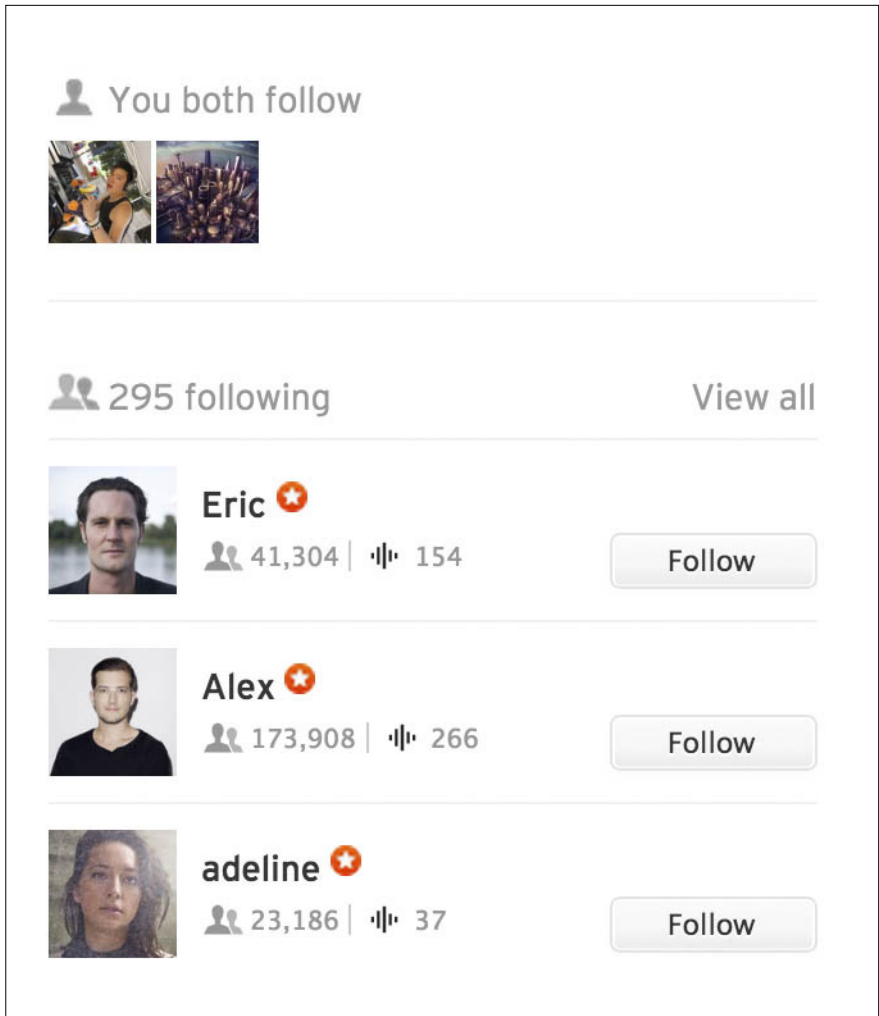


FIGURE 14-31

SoundCloud (<http://www.soundcloud.com>) indicates what connections have in common with another person and showcases a handful of people in the other person's network on her profile. The call to action to follow is adjacent to the follower's name.

- When a new connection is made, consider announcing the new connection to each person's network via the activity stream, as illustrated in Figure 14-32.

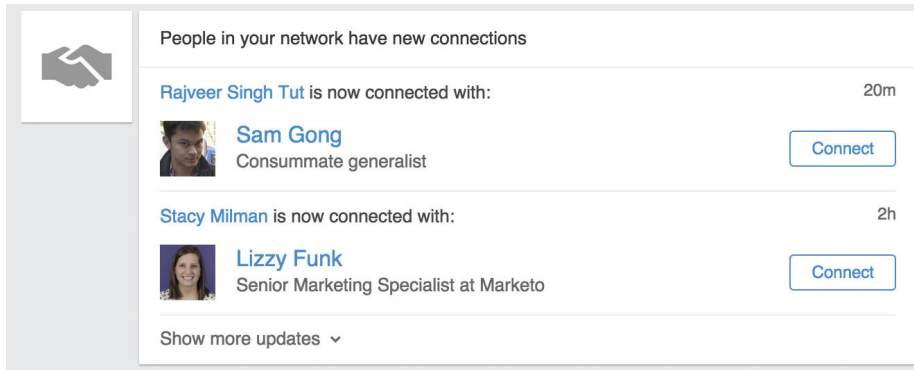


FIGURE 14-32

LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com>) shows recent connections in the Activity stream.

- When visiting a person’s profile, display to the user whether or not she is connected (see “Profile” on page 118).

Why

Publicizing relationships helps a network grow through friends of friends browsing and connecting.

Announcing new connections to the group gives everyone an opportunity to know who’s there and who among them they know. Chances are, someone else in the group knows the new person and might want to connect, as well. This is especially useful when the person is new to the service and can help alleviate the cold-start issue of having no connections.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Adding Friends” on page 437

“Identity Cards or Contact Cards” on page 144

AS SEEN ON

Goodreads (<http://www.goodreads.com>)

SoundCloud (<http://www.soundcloud.com>)

LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com>)

Unfriending

Relationships online are more ephemeral than in real life, and the desire to add and delete, friend and unfriend, follow and unfollow people is as fluid as people are complex.

What

A user has a collection of friends (see Figure 14-33) and then decides he wants to remove a person from his friends or connections list.

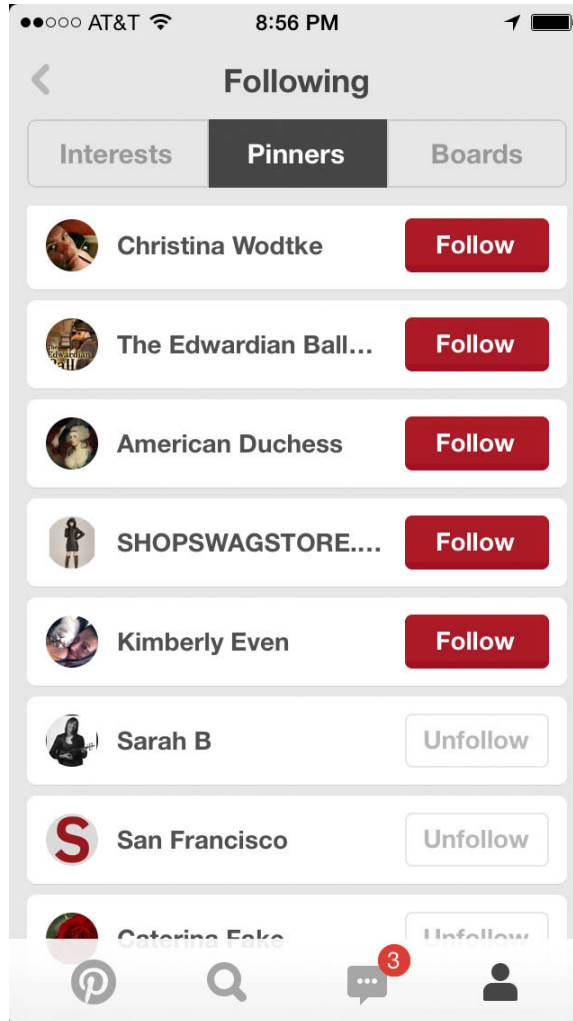


FIGURE 14-33

Pinterest offers an Unfollow function for every person and board you follow (Pinterest iOS application).

Use when

- You want to users to have a way to remove connections.
- You want to give users a method to manage unwanted relationships.

How

- Provide an easy way to remove connections without embarrassing the user.
- Provide a “Remove” or “Unfollow” call-to-action button or link near the connection’s name or relationship status.
- Clearly indicate the consequences of each action.

Blocking

- Provide the option for users to block other users.
- Consider including the ability to block from any place in the interface. (Block in search results, in texting, in matches on OkCupid, as shown in Figure 14-34).

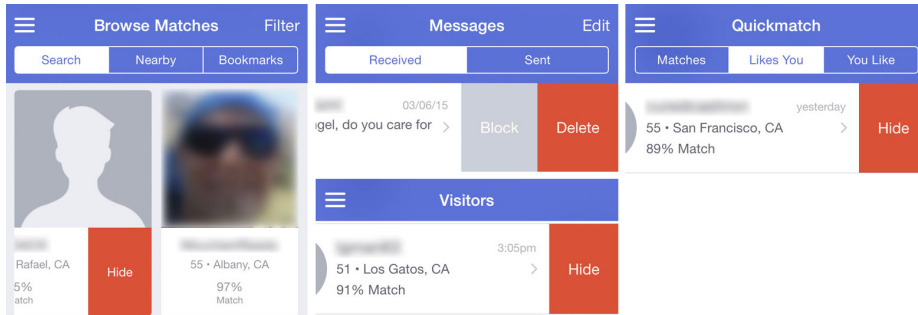


FIGURE 14-34

With OkCupid, users can Hide and Block other users from every part of the interface. You use Hide in results and browse to keep people from showing up in the lists, and Block stops unwanted messages from coming through (OkCupid iOS application).

- Clearly indicate the consequences of blocking a user, as demonstrated in Figure 14-35).

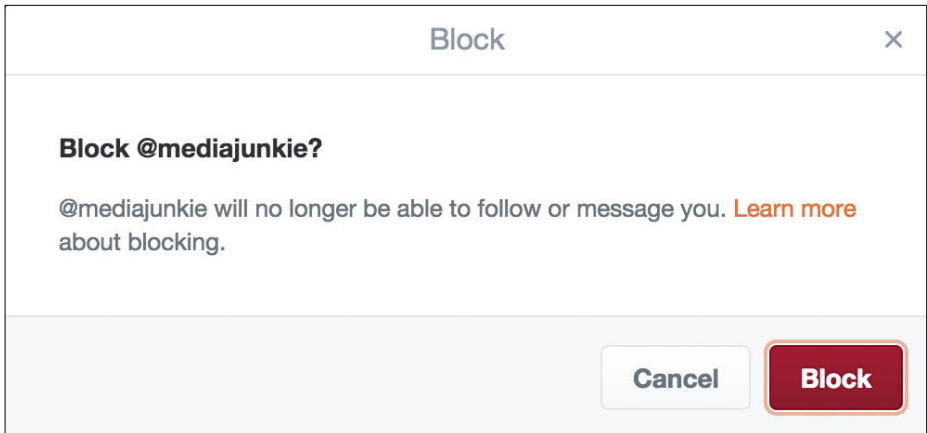


FIGURE 14-35

When the block option on Twitter (<http://www.twitter.com>) is selected, the site presents a screen that clearly defines the ramifications of this action and then provides a graceful way to back out or continue with the block action.

OSTRACIZING

Wiktionary defines *ostracize* as follows: “to exclude someone from society or from a community, by not communicating with or even noticing them, similar to shunning.”

danah boyd writes about the Top 8 culture in MySpace and the social ramifications in real-life high schools when someone isn’t added into this special class of friends, which functions as a shunning and ostracizing behavior. (See “Friends, Friendsters, and Top 8: Writing community into being on social network sites” at <http://bit.ly/1HsFApZ>.)

Age plays a role in the ensuing drama, so consider your target demographic when thinking about these types of tools or lack thereof on your site.

Some users inevitably will ostracize others. The ability to ignore and block are overt forms of ostracizing, whereas simply ignoring requests for connecting is a more passive behavior. Human behavior indicates that this is a part of group dynamics, and the systems we build need to be flexible enough to accommodate this.

BOZOFILTER

A *bozofilter* is a filter with which a user can block email or messages from specific individuals.

Use this if you want to provide the ability for users to filter out specific posts or messages based on the poster or sender. This is especially helpful for blocking trolls and spammers in forums and groups, or annoying people making unwanted advances in dating services.

Allow the “bozo” to still see his message in context even when others won’t see it. This can help keep the person from creating another account.

Why

Relationships come and go, and as we develop tools supporting the creation and nourishment of relationships between people, we must also have the methods for undoing these. These tools need to provide graceful ways to back out of a friendship, sever a connection, and hide unwelcome content without embarrassing either side.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Adding Friends” on page 437

AS SEEN ON

Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>)

Pinterest mobile application

OkCupid (<http://www.okcupid.com> and OkC mobile application)

Twitter (<http://www.twitter.com>)

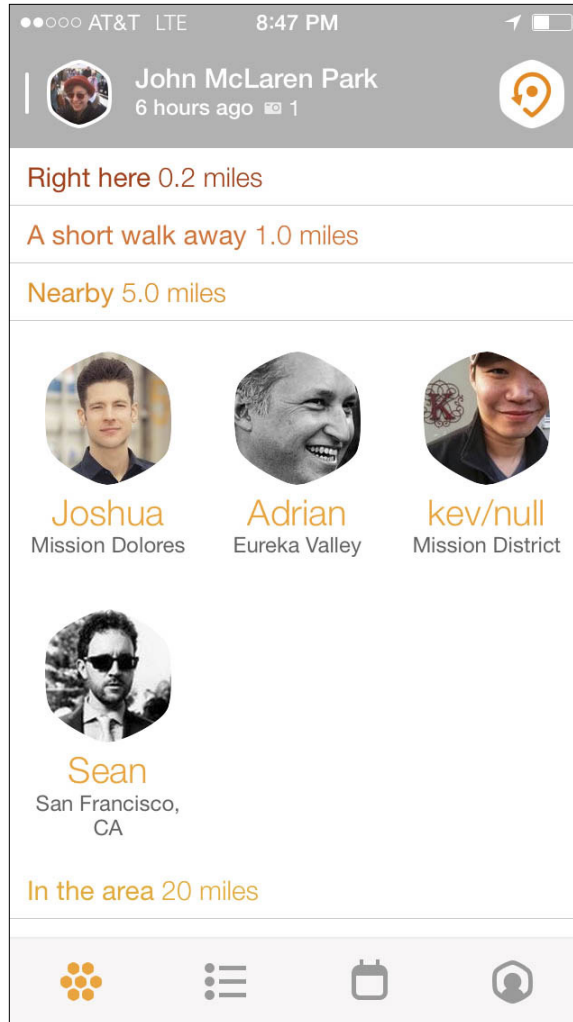
The Ex-Boyfriend Anti-Pattern

The boyfriend anti-pattern (also known as the ex-girlfriend bug) exists when the social system makes suggestions for connecting, based on friends-of-friends inference, to people who are not desired, such as an ex-boyfriend or ex-girlfriend.

The anti-pattern also presents itself when systems without connections grouping or filtering rely on location awareness (see Figure 14-36) and alert a user’s network about where the user is or announces an event to her entire network, regardless of whether the user wanted that to happen.

FIGURE 14-36

Without filters, Swarm announces location to everyone in the user's network and how far away everyone is from a user when they check in someplace. It also offers the option to specifically select who sees location announcements (Swarm iOS application).



Consider this: in 2005, the mobile-social-networking software Dodgeball facilitated people broadcasting their location to their network via SMS text messaging to encourage impromptu social gatherings. At first there was only one bucket for friends, but as people began hooking up, dating, and breaking up, there was a very strong need to filter out an “ex” without totally alienating that person through unfriending or blocking. The founders of Dodgeball called it “the ex-girlfriend bug,” and created a feature called “manage friends” to address the issue. This functionality provides a level of filtering and permissions that you can use to constrain sending updates and

announcements to only certain groups. The exes who are on a filtered friends list never know you are in the same neighborhood, and social awkwardness is avoided by not having to “unfriend” them.

To avoid this issue, give your users more control over privacy and broadcast settings, and provide the ability to filter based on groups of people. Give users control over their communications and information streams through the creation of buckets or circles of connections. This in turn avoids all those potentially awkward social situations (online and in real life) when information about whereabouts or actions appears to the wrong people.

Groups

What

A user wants to participate with a group of people, usually around a topic of interest, such as those presented in Figure 14-37.

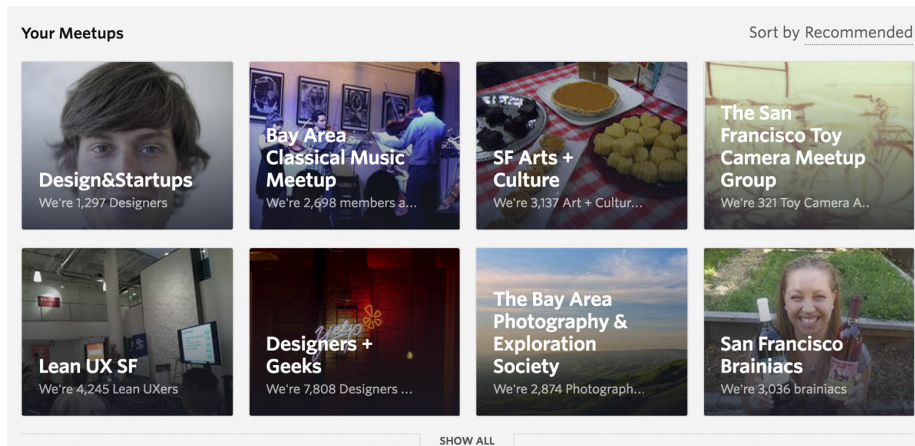


FIGURE 14-37

MeetUp (<http://www.meetup.com>) offers the ability for people to create groups around topics of interest. The focus is for offline real-world gatherings supported by the service.

Use when

- You want to give people a mechanism to create groups around topics of interest.
- You want to create groups on the fly from a list of people.

How

Groups and clubs are generally closed, private networks of people. In many cases they have come together based on a shared interest or topic such as photography or a school.

RIDICULOUSLY EASY GROUP FORMATION

- Set it up so that users can create a group on the fly with a list of users, as demonstrated in Figure 14-38.

FIGURE 14-38

Users can create Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>) groups easily and on the fly just by giving them a name and adding a group of people.

The figure consists of two screenshots of the Facebook 'Create New Group' interface. The top screenshot shows a group named 'TestGroupforBook' with a dropdown menu of suggested members. The bottom screenshot shows the privacy settings for the group, with 'Closed' selected.

Create New Group

Group Name: TestGroupforBook

Members: C

Privacy: [Dropdown]

Members list:

- Christina Wodtke
- Madonnalisa Gonzales...
- Christian Crumlish
- Christopher Fahey
- Michelle Millis Chappel
- Lee Cline
- Julia Crutchfield DeCr...
- Chloe Malone

Buttons: Cancel, Create

Create New Group

Group Name: [Input]

Members: Who do you want to add to the group?

Privacy:

- Public
Anyone can see the group, its members and their posts.
- Closed
Anyone can find the group and see who's in it. Only members can see posts.
- Secret
Only members can find the group and see posts.

[Learn more about groups privacy](#)

Buttons: Cancel, Create

- Configure it so that one person can pull the group together and alert users that they either are invited or are automatically in the group.
- Automatically connect each person—in a mesh—and notify all members that the group has been created and they are now connected to everyone else in the group.
- Indicate what the benefits are and what activities can take place in the group (e.g., group chat, private communications among the members, and shared content).

CREATE

- Give users the ability to create both public and private groups. Public groups should show up in search results and have a minimum amount of content that is viewable by the public to encourage joining.
- Consider threaded discussion boards as part of the group suite of tools.
- Consider an email list or RSS feeds for the discussion boards.
- Provide storage space as part of the group for centrally stored images and files.
- The group should be able to carry out a minimum level of customization. Consider preset templates to choose from or skinning to create an environment specific to the topic or personality of the group.
- Give group creators the ability to mix and match the tools needed/wanted for the group.
- Consider a variety of group tools depending on the needs of the group. These might include photo albums, calendars, events, address books, maps, bookmarks, RSS feeds, discussion lists, polls, and so on.

FINDING GROUPS

- Provide users with a mechanism to browse or search through public groups.
- Provide a “Join this group” call to action from within search results as well as from the main group details page.

- Each group should have a home (details) page that describes what the group is about. Users should see enough information to make an informed decision about joining the group.
- Consider displaying an indication of activity level of the group, as illustrated in Figure 14-39.

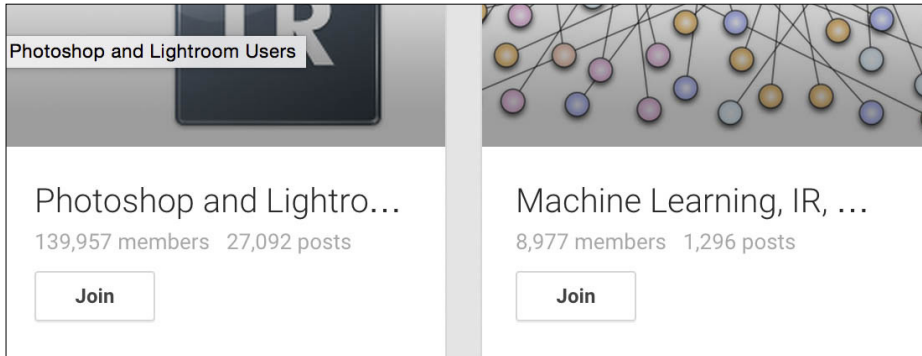


FIGURE 14-39

Google+ Groups (<http://plus.google.com/communities>) shows the number of members and activity level.

- Display the number of members in the group.
- Provide a member list or roster of members.
- Users should be able to browse the list of groups that is displayed on a friend's profile.

PARTICIPATION

- Give users the means to post and share images and files among group members.
- Consider allowing members to invite other potential members to join the group.
- Provide users with a way to build a contextual profile (see “Profile” on page 118) that is built with participation and group activity and for that to be customized for the group, even within a platform, as depicted in Figure 14-40.

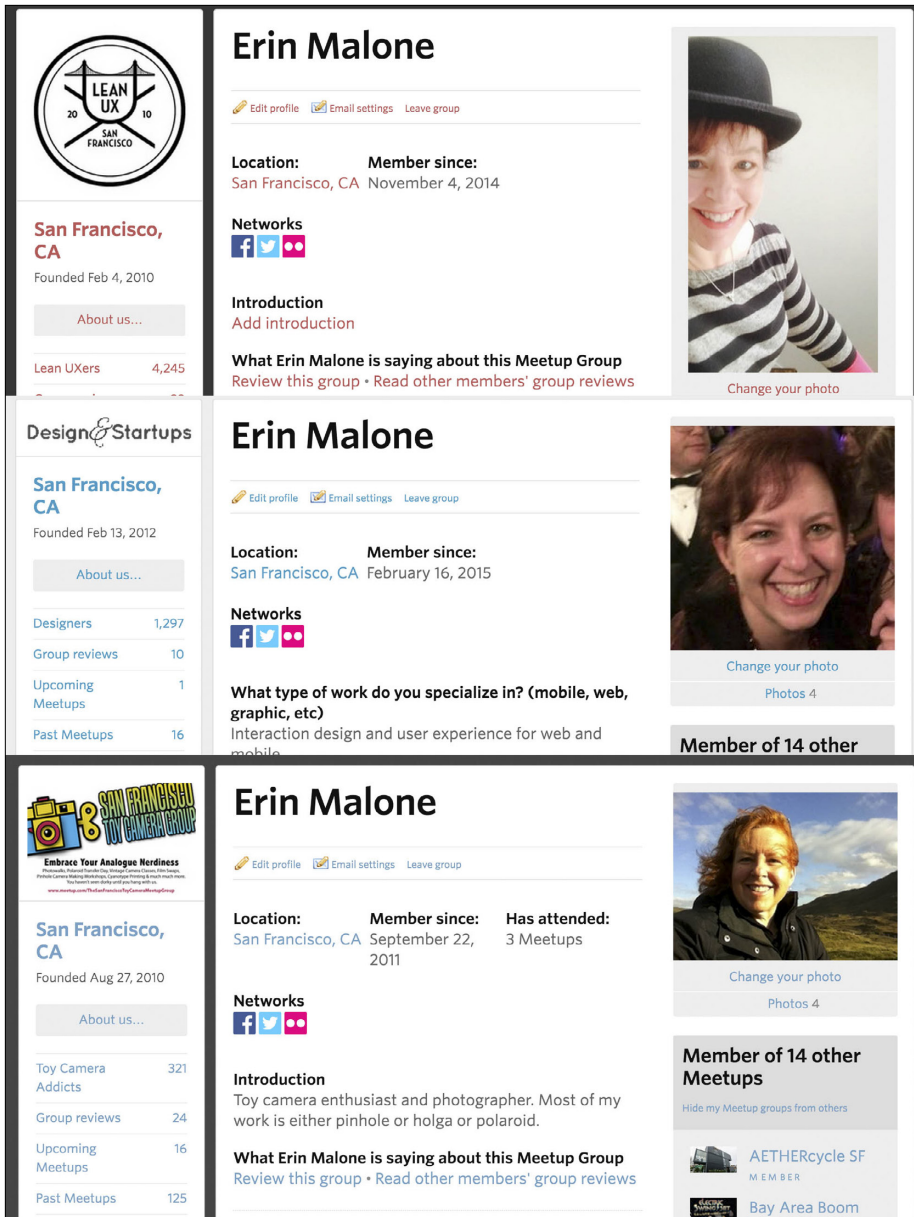


FIGURE 14-40

With MeetUp, users can have slightly different profiles per group, even across the same platform.

- On a user's home page or dashboard, provide a list of groups to which the user belongs.

- Provide an indication of recent activity in a group on the user's dashboard, as shown in Figure 14-41.

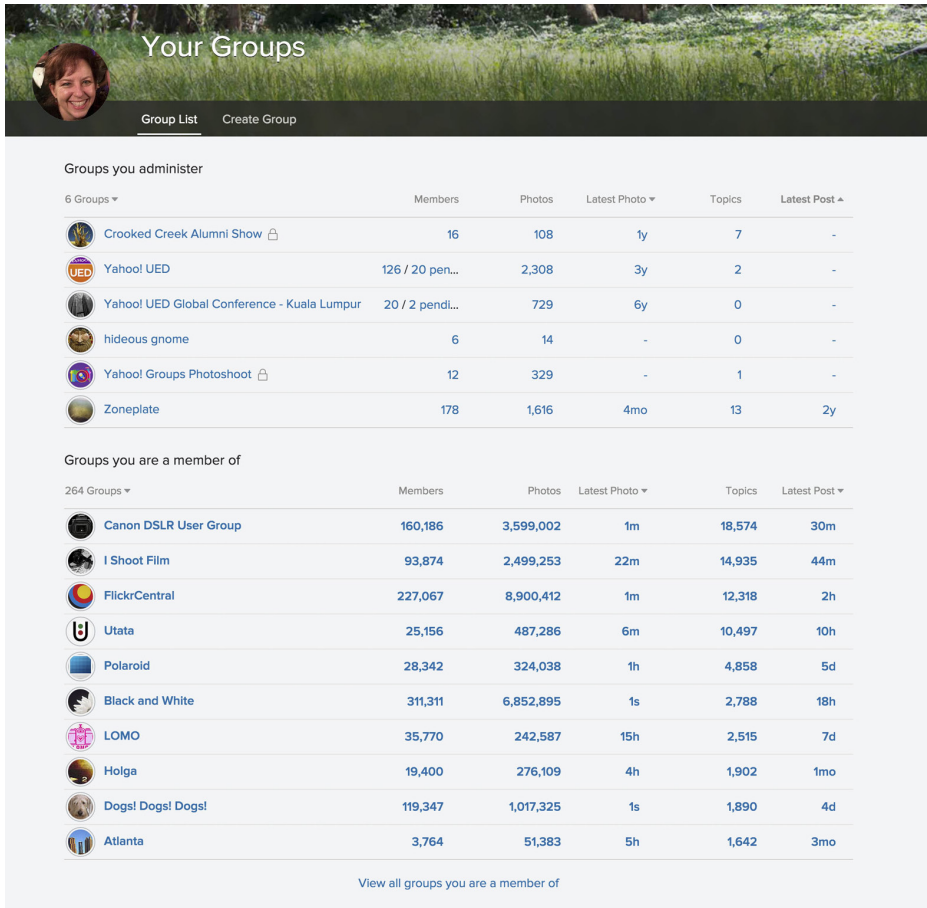


FIGURE 14-41

Flickr groups (<http://www.flickr.com>) are divided into sections based on administration/ownership versus membership. The list is ordered by recent activity.

ADMINISTRATION

- The group creator should be able to assign administrative duties to other members.
- The group creator should be able to assign moderator duties to other members.

- Give the group creator authority to assign group ownership to other members. This is especially helpful if the original owner wants to leave the service but wants the group to continue without her future involvement.
- Provide tools for managing and deleting spam.
- Give administrators, moderators, and group owners the authority to remove members who violate the group rules.
- Give administrators, moderators, and group owners the authority to block users from posting if the group is public.
- Provide an option for membership approval.
- Make it possible for administrators, moderators, and group owners to invite members.

Why

Creating a group to provide a place for like-minded people is one of the most basic tools for creating social experiences online. Giving people the tools to create spaces and manage them promotes organic product growth and takes advantage of the passion and energy of your user base. Give people the tools, and they will create spaces for play, conversation, and ongoing exchange.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Forums” on page XXX

“Profile” on page 118

AS SEEN ON

Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>)

Google+ (<plus.google.com>)

Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com>)

MeetUp (<http://www.meetup.com>)

What’s Age Got to Do with It?

As we look to the future of connected software, designers need to consider and understand what is happening with both ends of the age spectrum. The youth market has grown up using the Internet, cell phones, and other digital devices. This market is savvy in ways that

most of us who are not directly a part of it cannot even comprehend. For every way that we might consider designing a service, the youth market will find ways to mix it up and combine it with something else that we might never have dreamed about.

There is a lot to learn from how the youth demographic uses technology and how it shapes their lives, both online and off. The Digital Youth Project (November 2008), funded by the MacArthur Foundation, studied hundreds of youth in different social, economic, and interest groups over several years. It found that teens often must work around the interfaces that we are designing in order to make them work for their social norms. From page 37 of the Digital Youth Project Whitepaper:

For example, the issue of how to display social connections and hierarchies on social network sites is a source of social drama and tension, and the ongoing evolution of technical design in this space makes it a challenge for youth to develop shared social norms. Designers of these systems are central participants in defining these social norms, and their interventions are not always geared toward supporting a shared set of practices and values.

Youth are much more aware of the nuances involved in the processes of “friending,” and how the display of these friends and the messages they send to others relates to their place in the social hierarchies offline. They spend their time online using communication tools such as texting and video chat, using tools like SnapChat and the built-in SMS/texting in their smartphones with their friends from the real world. They use these tools to enhance their already existing relationships and to show newly “friended” others the peer group with which they are associated. This isn’t as important to adults, although the ramifications of “Ignoring” and “Unfriending” are of concern to all ages.

Designers need to be aware of what kinds of messages will be sent to a user’s community when certain actions are taken (i.e., how and whether this kind of information will be publicly displayed). They should also understand how rule sets developed for relationships and connection circles have an impact on how an individual is perceived among his peer groups.

Additionally, designers should be concerned with levels of privacy, balancing the desire for openness and ease of use with the need to filter and group relationships to mirror the real world.

Teen Strategies for Friending

Teens have different strategies for choosing whom to mark as Friends. By and large, the teens I interviewed “Friend” those they know—friends, family, peers, and so on. Yet, even within the confines of this general rubric, there is immense variation. Teens may choose to accept requests from peers they know but do not feel close to, if only to avoid offending them. They also may choose to exclude people they know well but do not wish to connect with on Facebook or MySpace. This category rarely includes peers, but it often involves parents, siblings, and teachers. Both MySpace and Facebook offer many incentives for adding people other than close friends. Many of the privacy features that were introduced during the course of my study limit non-Friends from profile viewing, leaving comments, and, in some cases, sending messages. Teens who wish to talk with peers or friends of friends are encouraged to accept requests from peers so as to open the channel of communication.

Teens must determine their own boundaries concerning whom to accept and whom to reject. For some, this is not easy. Generally, there are common categories of potential Friends that most teens address in deciding how to structure their boundaries. The first concerns strangers. While many early adopters of MySpace gregariously welcomed anyone and everyone as Friends, the social norms quickly changed. For most teens, rejecting such requests is now the most common practice. Although teens who accept Friend requests from strangers rarely interact with these people online, let alone offline, the same concerns that keep teens from interacting with strangers online also keep them from including strangers in their lists of Friends. Like many teens, Guatemalan-Pakistani 15-year-old Ana-Garcia from Los Angeles adds only people she knows as Friends. She does not want strangers on her Friends list, and she is adamant that her sister does not have strangers on her list either. Her approach reifies MySpace’s claim that it is “a place for friends.”

Although most teens focus on Friending people they know, some teens actively connect with strangers. Teens commonly send Friend requests to bands and celebrities. They do not believe that such connections indicate an actual or potential friendship, but they still find value in these Friends. Other teens seek strangers who share their interests, primarily around music. For example, Eduardo, a Hispanic 17-year-old from Los Angeles, leverages MySpace Music to make his rap music available to a wider audience.

He loves that he can share his music with his friends, but he especially likes that there is the potential to meet other musicians or people who might help him produce his music. Another musician, Dom, a 16-year-old from Washington, has actively used MySpace to connect to other musicians. Through MySpace, he found another musician who shared his musical interests, and they recorded music together. Teens who have passionate interests can and do use social network sites to meet others who share their interests.

Connecting with strangers is controversial, but there is little social cost to rejecting Friend re-quests from strangers—because these people are unknown, teens do not worry about offending them. Rejecting known individuals, on the other hand, is much more complicated. So, even though teens differ on whether to connect with strangers, they generally accept Friend requests from all known peers, including all friends, acquaintances, and classmates, regardless of the quality of the relationship. Jennifer, a white 17-year-old from a small town in Kansas, upholds this social convention because “I’d feel mean if I didn’t.” She sees Friend requests as a sign of niceness and the opening of potential friendships. She also thinks it is important to be nice because she would be “mad” if someone rejected her attempt to be nice.

Social-network sites take this to the next level because Friending can be both a symbolic display of popularity and a functional way of gaining access to what is being said.

While Friending classmates can lay the groundwork for building a friendship out of an acquaintanceship, not all such Friend requests are attempts to deepen the relationship. Often teens send requests to everyone they know or recognize, and no additional contact is initiated after the Friend request is approved. This only adds to the awkwardness of the Friend request. As Lilly, a 16-year-old from Kansas, explains, getting Friend requests from classmates does not mean that they even know who she is at school, making it difficult to bridge the online-offline gap: “It’s just on Facebook, you’re friends. At school, you don’t have to talk if you don’t want to.... It’s kind of nice, but then at the same time it’s not because you know they’re your Friends.... You don’t say hi in the hall ‘cause maybe they just added me because somebody else had me added and they’d be like, ‘I don’t know who you are. Hi.’”

Lilly accepts requests from all classmates, even those who she is not sure know who she is, but her friend, 15-year-old Melanie, prefers to mock the dynamic that this sets up. Melanie will approach classmates who send her Friend requests with comments such as “Hey Friend from Facebook” simply because she thinks it is funny. Melanie’s approach to Facebook is quite unusual. Not only is she willing to call out the absurdity of being Friends online but not talking at school, but she is also willing to buck the norms by rejecting people she does not like and deleting people who annoy her. Melanie notes that Facebook “is better than real life” because while there is no simple mechanism to formally indicate disinterest in school, it is possible to say “No” on Facebook by rejecting Friend requests. Likewise, when people annoy her on Facebook, she is comfortable deleting them. While Melanie and Lilly both find the online Friending practices to be “fake,” Melanie is more outraged. Both girls are in the top classes at school and involved in many activities, but neither is particularly popular. I get the sense that Melanie’s resentment stems from her frustration with the status games and peer pressure that take place at school. Melanie is adamant to point out that she does not drink or party; she thinks teens should be more focused on what is “important.”

Most teens find deleting people discomforting and inappropriate. Penelope, a 15-year-old from Nebraska, says that deleting a Friend is “rude... unless they’re weird.” Yet, while she will do it occasionally, the process of deleting someone is “scary” to Penelope; she fears that she will offend someone. Generally, it is socially unacceptable to delete a Friend whom one knows. When this is done, it is primarily after a fight or breakup. In these situations, the act of deletion is spiteful and intentionally designed to hurt the other person. Teen awareness of malicious deletions adds to the general sense that deleting someone is socially inappropriate. Thus, it can be problematic when teens accidentally delete people they know. Ana-Garcia, the 15-year-old from Los Angeles, faced this problem when her brother decided to log in to her account and delete two pages’ worth of Friends. Luckily, those she did know understood as soon as she explained what happened. Although deleting known people can be seen as malicious, it is socially acceptable to delete strangers. In fact, there is often social pressure to do so. Lolo, a 15-year-old from Los Angeles, says: “At the beginning, I was just adding people just to get Friends and just random boys living in New York or Texas. Then, my boyfriend [was] kinda like, ‘You don’t know them...’ so I deleted them and then I had 300 and I really knew them.”

By forcing them to articulate relationships, the Friends feature forces teens to navigate their social lives in new ways. While teens are developing a set of shared social practices for Friending, the norms for these practices are still in a state of flux and interpretive flexibility. The process of adding and deleting Friends is a core element of participation on social network sites. It allows teens to negotiate who can gain access to their content, but it also means that teens have to manage the social implications of their decisions. Because the peer groups that teens connect with on social-network sites are the same as those they socialize with in everyday life, decisions about whom to accept and reject online directly affect their offline connections. By facing decisions about how to circumscribe their Friends lists, teens are forced to consider their relationships, the topology of their peer group, and the ways in which their decisions may affect others.

DANAH BOYD, PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER AT MICROSOFT RESEARCH, RESEARCH ASSISTANT PROFESSOR IN MEDIA, CULTURE, AND COMMUNICATION AT NEW YORK UNIVERSITY, AND FELLOW AT HARVARD'S BERKMAN CENTER FOR INTERNET AND SOCIETY

Even though teens may adapt interfaces and social tools to fit and augment the social behaviors happening offline, they still fall into similar patterns of use as their adult counterparts when it comes to consuming, creating, and then contributing to the community.

Various age groups can be found participating in communities of interest across the Internet and in every type of experience. When people are motivated to contribute and share, and meaningful tools are available to promote discussion, offer feedback, and share ideas, age differences between users are less meaningful.

For the aging population, adoption of technology and social spaces has meant more connectedness and the ability to stay independent, even if their physical selves have slowed down.

Seniors and boomers moving into senior citizen status are still one of the fastest-growing netizen populations. Because their kids and grandchildren are using social tools to share their lives, these users have had to learn these tools, as well, to stay engaged and active in the family circle. This adoption spreads out to their other social circles, and suddenly we have the baby boomer generation taking over Facebook. My mother, who is on Facebook and is at the leading edge of the boomers, has more connections than I do ranging across multiple generations.

There are some general best practices to consider for interfaces that might cater to the aging population. Keeping this group of users in mind during the design will create easier-to-use interfaces for all age groups:

- Create larger target areas.
- Provide better contrast between object and ground (text or iconography).
- Create legible interfaces (consider type size and readability issues).
- Make choices clear.
- Include confirmation messages to increase the user's confidence in her success. Many older people are newly engaged with these types of interfaces and consider themselves at fault when things don't work properly.

Consideration of alternative interfaces for seniors, such as voice or gestural, becomes more realistic as devices for the home become intertwined with social interfaces. These bring with them a whole host of other issues and design challenges that we don't have room to address here, but designers should educate themselves on the specific difficulties in these areas for all users.

Dating and the One-on-One Connection

The rise of online dating has only increased since we wrote the first version of this book in 2009. In the subsequent time, the number of mobile applications dedicated to dating, hooking up, and finding a significant other has grown significantly with different apps coming online every week. There are applications that cater to very focused segments, such as Grindr for men, Her for women, Tinder for hook-ups, eHarmony for the more marriage minded, OkCupid, and others for general dating, just to name a few. These tools approach the idea of more transient networks, and relationships are focused on the one-on-one connection. These services utilize many of the same components and ideas as discussed earlier in this chapter and in Chapter 4 to create social experiences revolving around “the date.”

Dating services run the gamut from sexting and hook-up applications (Tinder, Snapchat) to services that promote or are focused on creating marriages (eHarmony, ChristianMingle). The hookup end of the spectrum tends to offer the least amount of information in the profile

and the tools for connecting are temporal, such as shared images that expire after 24 hours. There is less information about prospective dates on these services versus the more marriage-focused services, which present deep questionnaires for its users to fill out to help in the matching process and for creating better connections.

These sites and services are attempting to short circuit the “getting to know you” phase from the offline world, but they don’t replace real-world interactions.

In these types of social experiences the need for privacy, control of the profile and what is shown or not, safety online, and seamless transitions back and forth between online and offline, connecting and disconnecting are some of the important social aspects for these services.

Over the past few years I have heard many people refer to their OkCupid profile and experience as their “other” social network. It’s where they meet new friends and they keep their profiles active even after they begin dating someone exclusively.

Flirting

What

A user wants to let another user know they find them interesting or attractive, as demonstrated in Figure 14-42

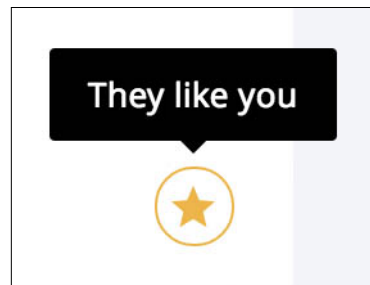


FIGURE 14-42

On the dating site OkCupid (<http://www.okcupid.com>), users can indicate that they “Like” someone to send a signal another person that they are interested.

Use when

Use this pattern when you want to provide a way for two or more people to engage in light interactions in a dating context.

How

Provide a mechanism for indicating interest such as a Like/Heart/Star/Check or other positive icon that is different than sending a message, as illustrated in Figure 14-43.

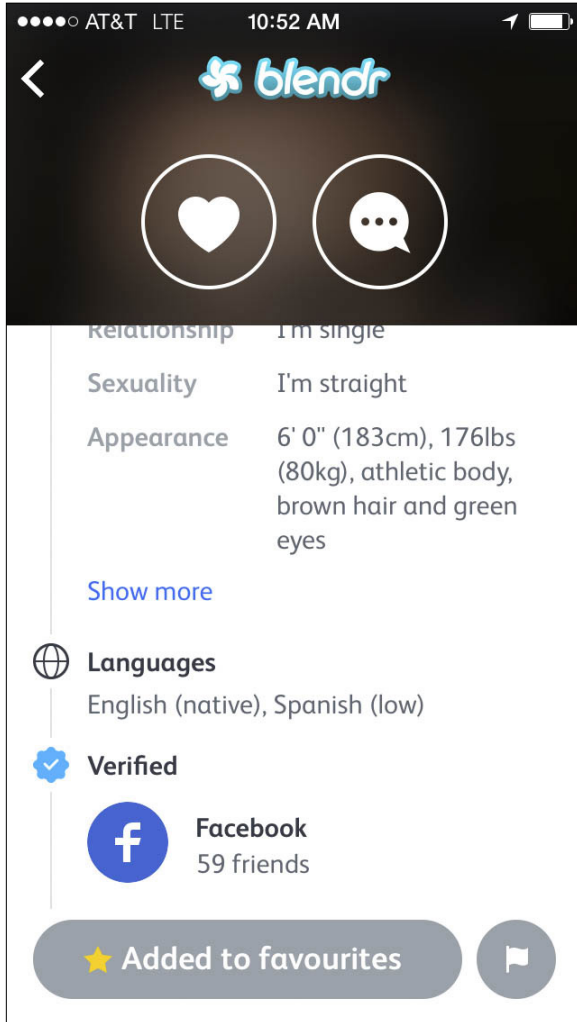


FIGURE 14-43

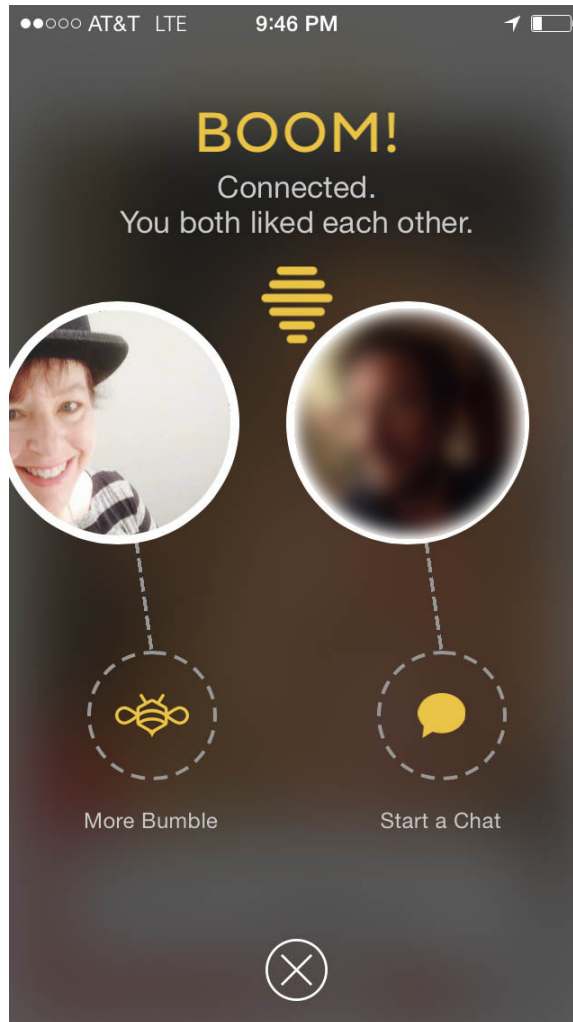
On the mobile dating application Blendr, users can indicate that they like someone by selecting the heart icon. They can also add interesting people to a Favorites list (Blendr iOS application).

Provide some ability for users to see when someone is flirting with them.

Many dating sites allow users to flirt or send a Like but then gate the ability to see who sent the action behind a paywall. Gating too many features can dampen growth and stifle connections so be aware of the balance between revenue needs and actively encouraging people to meet and date.

Consider presenting people based on location nearness and offer tools for immediate or real-time flirting, as shown in Figure 14-44.

FIGURE 14-44 Like most mobile dating applications, when two people connect on Bumble, they are offered a call to action to immediately begin texting or chatting (Bumble iOS application).



Why

Light actions to simulate real-world flirting such as winking and smiling with Likes/Checks/Hearts/Stars or announcing visits to a profile can stimulate conversations and connections between people who otherwise don't know each other.

AS SEEN ON

OkCupid (<http://www.okcupid.com> and OkCupid mobile application)

Tinder mobile application

Match (<http://www.match.com>)

Bumble mobile application

Cybersex/Sexting

What

Users want to be able to participate in cybersex or heavier flirting with other users, as demonstrated in Figure 14-45.

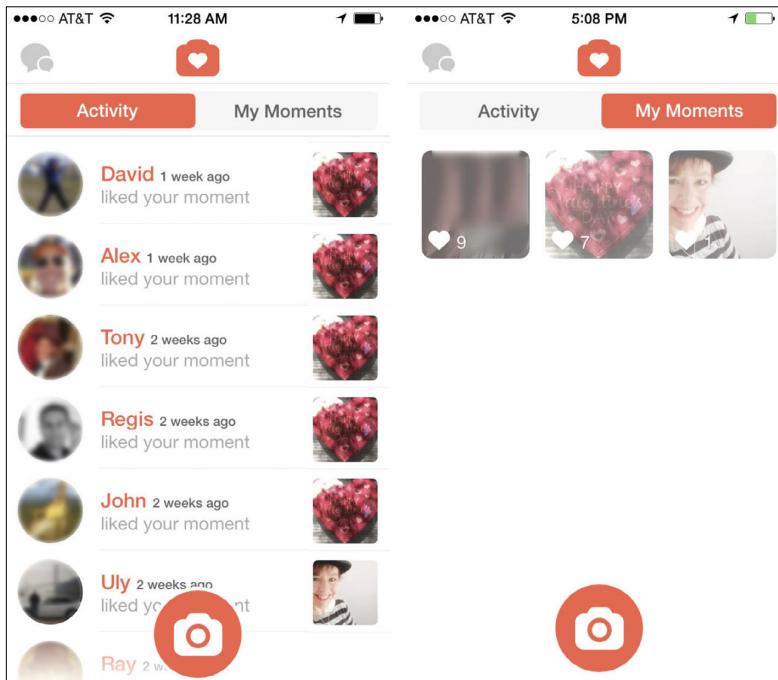


FIGURE 14-45

With Tinder, users can post images to followers which expire in 24 hours from posting (Tinder iOS application).

Use when

You want to encourage users to move into the next phases of online connection beyond light flirting.

People want to have more private and intimate connections with prospective dates.

You want to help people continue conversations or a connection even after meeting in real life.

How

Provide a direct text mechanism between two or more people.

Provide the ability for users to exchange pictures privately, in a way not associated with their profile.

Consider providing the ability for users to participate in video chat.

Consider giving users the ability to share images and videos that expire within a set time frame and are not archived with the person's profile.

If there is an expiry for images or video, clearly indicate when the items will expire.

Provide an indication to the user that the other person has seen their shared image, text, or video.

Provide a history to the user about what they have shared and to whom. Give him a way to delete this history or opt-out of it from being saved in the first place.

Why

With so much dating activity happening online and with mobile applications, it is only natural that more hard core flirting as well as full-blown sexual activity, innuendo, and teasing will have moved online, as well.

AS SEEN ON

Tinder mobile application

Hinge mobile application

Zoosk mobile application

Further Reading

1. Slater, Dan. "A Million First Dates." *The Atlantic*, January 2013. <http://theatltn.tc/1HsH1oi>
2. Khan, Khalid S. and Sameer Chaudry. "An evidence-based approach to an ancient pursuit: systematic review on converting online contact into a first date." *Evidence Based Medicine*, November 2014.
3. boyd, danah. "Friends, Friendsters, and Top 8: Writing community into being on social network sites." 2006. <http://bit.ly/1HsFApZ>.
4. Stone, Brad. "Friends May Be the Best Guide Through the Noise." *the New York Times*, May 4, 2008. <http://nyti.ms/1LYfsqa>.
5. Adams, Paul. *Grouped*. New Riders, 2012.
6. Dunbar, Robin. *How Many Friends Does One Person Need*. Harvard University Press, 2010.
7. Ito, Mizuko et al. "Living and Learning with New Media: Summary of Findings from the Digital Youth Project," The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Reports on Digital Media and Learning, November 2008. <http://bit.ly/1LYhBCf>.
8. Slater, Dan. *Love in the Time of Algorithms: What Technology Does to Meeting and Mating*. Current, 2013
9. Watts, Duncan J. *Six Degrees: The Science of a Connected Age*. W.W. Norton and Co., 2004.
10. Scott, John P. *Social Network Analysis: A Handbook*. Sage Publications Ltd., 2000.
11. Botsman, Rachel and Roo Rogers. *What's Mine is Yours, The Rise of Collaborative Consumption*. Harper Business, 2010.
12. Boyd, danah. "Taken Out of Context: American Teen Sociality in Networked Publics." PhD thesis, 2008. <http://bit.ly/1LYhGGc>.
13. Lenhart, Amanda, Mary Madden, Aaron Smith, Alexandra Macgill. "Teens and Social Media." Pew Research Report, 2007. <http://bit.ly/1LYhGGc>.
14. Granovetter, Mark. *The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited*. State University of New York, Stony Brook, 1983. <http://bit.ly/1h7tfOk>.

15. Christakis, Nicholas and James Fowler. *The Surprising Power of Our Social Networks and How They Shape Our Lives*. Little, Brown, 2009.
16. Leonard, Andrew. “You are who you know.” *Salon*, June 15, 2004. <http://bit.ly/1MUNEQG>.
17. ———. “You are who you know: Part 2.” *Salon*, June 16, 2004. <http://bit.ly/1MUNM2z>.
18. Watts, Andrew. “A Teenager’s View on Social Media: Written by an actual teen.” *Backchannel*, January 3, 2015. <http://bit.ly/1N4mU0a>
19. _____. “What Teens Really Think about YouTube, Google+, Reddit and Other Social Media: Written by an actual teen.” *Backchannel*, January 12, 2015. <http://bit.ly/1N4mYx1>

Good Cop, Bad Cop

In the past I engaged in the whack-a-mole game against abusers. I spent many man months on algorithmic approaches for fighting abuse. My efforts focused on analysis of the content, sophisticated filters, and user “rehab” automation. In the end, the abusers (as a collective) have won. While I had given up and have left to engage in more fulfilling endeavors, the abusers have gradually figured out ways to bypass filters, create multiple accounts, and keep flooding message boards and public forums with spam.

Anyone who has ever tried seriously to block email spam knows that these kind of arms’ races are very hard to win. We are very few, the abusers are many, and there always seems to be more of them. They have learned to share sophisticated tools (like breaking captcha) so effectively the pros and the least sophisticated script-kiddies are no longer two separate groups.

The good news is that there is a better way, but it requires a totally new and fresh approach.

In particular, I’ve become a true believer in community-moderation and collaborative filtering, after seeing the success of schemes like those of Y! Answers and Slashdot. What these successful sites are doing in essence is empowering their (good) users to take ownership of the abuse and quality-level goals. They create strong incentives for good users to put an effort into moderating the sites. Users who consistently exhibit good judgments and willingness to contribute, get “strength points” making them more and more powerful in the never ending game of stamping-out abuse.

In contrast, abusers have almost no power. The more they abuse, the more they lose points. New accounts start with zero reputation/ power making them useless to engage in the game. Once we get a critical-mass of good and willing users, the incentive system feeds itself. The abusers may bypass a filter, but they cannot fool an army of dedicated human beings.

A YAHOO! “PARANOID” (SECURITY PROFESSIONAL) WHO WISHES TO REMAIN ANONYMOUS, YAHOO! ABUSE TEAM, ON AN INTERNAL WIKI (QUOTED WITH PERMISSION)

Community Management

ADMINISTRATORS ARE PEOPLE, TOO! And they deserve good interfaces. Far too often, since the earliest days of the Web, beautiful sites have been launched to the public with minimally functional content management and administrative functionality, or sometimes none at all. Similarly, a social product has an engine room, too: it needs an administrative side where community managers can help cultivate the best contributions and downplay or discourage the worst.

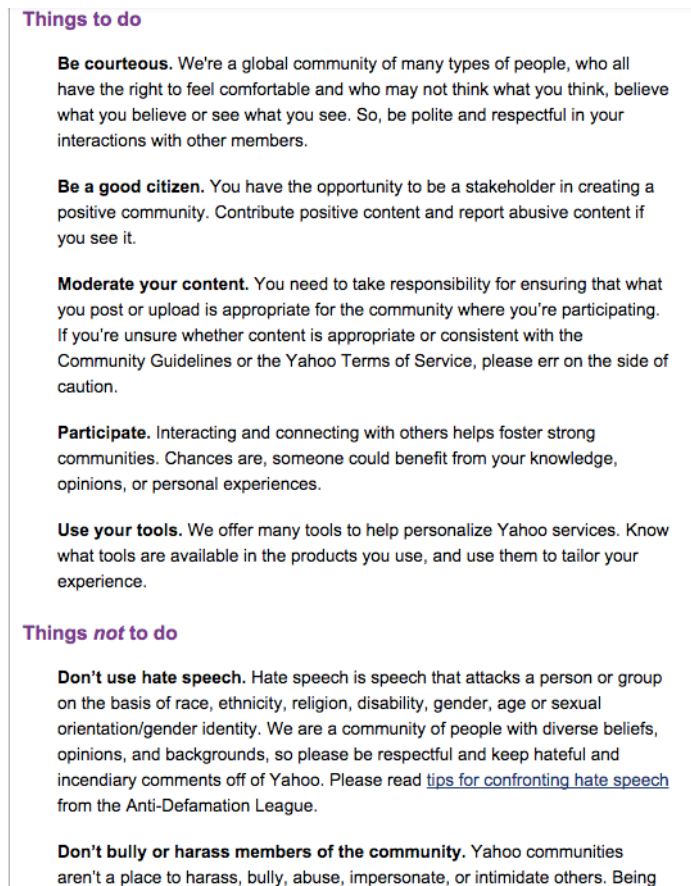
But, how can people be expected to behave well if they don't know what constitutes good behavior? Thus, it's important to establish and clearly communicate the behavioral norms of the community and to actively participate in the community, particularly in its impressionable early days, modeling good behavior and demonstrating how to get things done.

Norms

In the context of managing social networks and information in the public domain, *Norms* refer to a pattern and expected behaviors (in contrast to those established by law) when operating or working with a system.

Norms are socially enforced, and less restrictive than rules, although this does not quite reflect on the actual effectiveness of a Norm as compared to a legally established Rule. In many cases, Norms appear to be more effective in molding or directing user behavior as compared to rules because of greater visibility of actions in a broader community. This appears to align with the fundamental observation that a broad community involvement in management is far better than the management entrusted to a select few.

A key building block of any community interface is a published set of guidelines that is easy to find and crystal-clear, such as those presented in Figure 15-1.



Things to do

Be courteous. We're a global community of many types of people, who all have the right to feel comfortable and who may not think what you think, believe what you believe or see what you see. So, be polite and respectful in your interactions with other members.

Be a good citizen. You have the opportunity to be a stakeholder in creating a positive community. Contribute positive content and report abusive content if you see it.

Moderate your content. You need to take responsibility for ensuring that what you post or upload is appropriate for the community where you're participating. If you're unsure whether content is appropriate or consistent with the Community Guidelines or the Yahoo Terms of Service, please err on the side of caution.

Participate. Interacting and connecting with others helps foster strong communities. Chances are, someone could benefit from your knowledge, opinions, or personal experiences.

Use your tools. We offer many tools to help personalize Yahoo services. Know what tools are available in the products you use, and use them to tailor your experience.

Things not to do

Don't use hate speech. Hate speech is speech that attacks a person or group on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, disability, gender, age or sexual orientation/gender identity. We are a community of people with diverse beliefs, opinions, and backgrounds, so please be respectful and keep hateful and incendiary comments off of Yahoo. Please read [tips for confronting hate speech](#) from the Anti-Defamation League.

Don't bully or harass members of the community. Yahoo communities aren't a place to harass, bully, abuse, impersonate, or intimidate others. Being

FIGURE 15-1

Yahoo! publishes and links to a clear, straightforward set of community guidelines that apply across the entire Yahoo! Network, an excerpt of which is shown here. It includes an overview, what you should do, and what you should not. Specific Yahoo! products can also have their own additional community guidelines.

Role Model

If you conceive of the founders or creators of a social product as a kind of external deity ruling with an iron fist, you conjure up one sort of image of a community. But, if instead, you picture the founders manifesting (or “incarnating”?) as ordinary users in the system, they can walk among the common folk and demonstrate how life in this microcosm is really intended to be lived (see Figure 15-2). This doesn't preclude attending to and learning from the innovations and revealing mistakes of your users, but it is a proven method for getting patterns and norms of behavior established from the get-go.

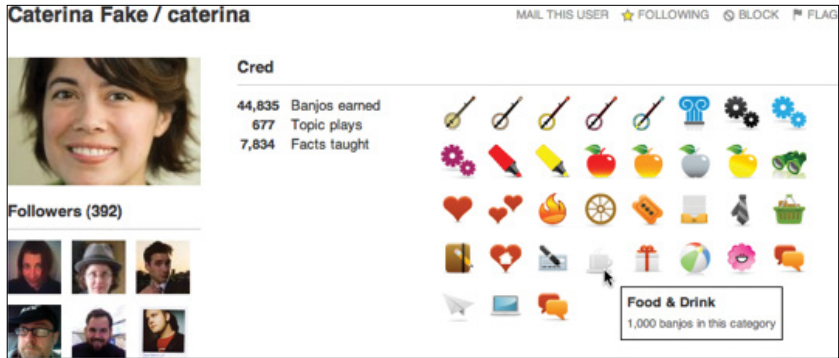


FIGURE 15-2

By manifesting as a full participant, a founder can seed the community with great content while actively modeling the intended behavior and reinforcing the norms and expectations of a new community.

Potemkin Village (Anti-Pattern)

Users might want discrete areas for discussing separate topics, and app creators might have an elaborate vision of a complex arrangement of topic and groups; but, instead of creating a complicated empty scaffolding in hopes of enticing community to take root (the “if you build it, they will come” fallacy), start small and compact, and then prepare to grow organically (see Figure 15-3).

Create one main topic, a pinned (permanently on top) welcome topic, and perhaps a separate help topic, but nothing else. Resist the urge to anticipate the contours of the conversations and groups. Wait until people are begging for a subtopic, and then fork the original group. Repeat.

This way, any pioneer community members will all interact in a single shared space, with no dilution of numbers. By the time they want to begin sequestering topics from one another, you’ll have already reached critical mass.

Continue to resist calving-off new groups until they are clearly and undeniably needed.

Building out a thorough structure of anticipated groups or discussions before a product has any real life in it creates a “Potemkin Village”: an empty, fake site that dissipates across too many cubbyholes any early momentum that it might otherwise gather.








	Me and My Day Job	2	262	My Gainful ... by noonie Mar 28 2009 - 2:31pm
	Most Life-Changing Show	4	335	Most Cosmic ... by J T Dutton Mar 25 2009 - 5:43am
	News and Talk Deadhead History lives here! along with everyday talk topics.	35	7691	spinnin' ... by johnman 3 hours 3 min ago
	Tapers	5	646	The Vindex by Sunshine- daydre... 19 hours 23 min ago
	The Vineyard This is where all the vines grow, along with related technical and other discussion. New to vining? See the New Vines 2009 topic for details on how to get started.	219	13543	Dylan-Dead ... by Phatmoye 49 min 8 sec ago
	The Scene WharfRats live here, along with free- topic discussions and our own Shakedown Street. Talk too, of the best and worst scenes, and the Unbroken Chain symposium.	6	119	The Summer of ... by lamagonzo Mar 27 2009 - 3:23pm
	Dancin' In The Street Topic-free discussion.	19	1044	Meet Me at ... by braygun 1 hour 55 min ago
	Shakedown Street The virtual parking lot to hawk your (legal, please) wares.	2	164	Your own ... by ccs tryin real ... Mar 28 2009 - 5:06pm
	Strangers Stopping Strangers Did you meet a fellow traveller in an offbeat kinda way?	5	111	As I was ... by Richard Vigeant Mar 27 2009 - 6:40pm
	Wharf Rats The folks, not just the song.	1	312	WharfRats Meet ... by Sparkling Clean Mar 27 2009 - 4:08am

FIGURE 15-3

Instead of building a Potemkin Village, the architects of the relaunched dead.net (<http://dead.net>) website began with a judicious few groups and then let the community spawn the rest.

Collective Governance

Determine how much self-governing you want your community members to do, and then give them the tools with which to do it. They will want to make their own decisions. Sometimes, they might want to use voting to do so.

Also, confer with your users when deciding on the direction of the product. Don't necessarily bow to the majority's will, but some decisions are best made when given over to the community.

As Craigslist has wrestled with sustainable ideas for making money without damaging the “magic” of its community, the founder has frequently asked the community to help decide the direction of the service. For example, the decision to charge for rental listings in a few hot real estate markets and keep everything else free was made by consensus within the existing user community.

Building an Online Community

You want to grow a healthy and vibrant community. You need three main things: 1) an intuitive, easy-to-use community platform; 2) great community content; 3) users (this can be the most difficult part). And then, of course, you need robust community management, responsiveness to user needs, and smart feedback loops that use community data to evolve and grow the community. A great community will offer a simple, clean, elegant, integrated set of features, editorial, and functionality that will maximize the collective wisdom of your community. A great community forms at the intersection of the community host's purpose and the user purpose, so know what these are before you begin building it.

Good stories are the glue of the strongest online and offline communities. Every group, from hunter-gatherer tribes to modern physicists, has a story that binds them together with history, mission, and purpose. Weave your story into your interface and interactions, and let your users become main characters in that story.

To draw traffic to an open community, optimize it for search engines. Create friendly, human-readable URLs, use clean HTML, include relevant keywords in page headers, tag content, and pay attention to internal linking. Discuss topics that are popular or commonly searched for, or that use niche keywords related to a specific topic. Also, create outposts on social networking sites to build awareness and draw traffic, and form content and blogging partnerships on relevant sites to draw targeted new users.

After users are in the community, have an easy onboarding process. Login/sign-up pages are the first reflection of your brand and community; they should be beautiful and intuitive. They are the first step in building trust with your users. Don't be afraid to have witty or warm welcoming web copy to create intimacy and inspire emotional connection. Make login pages as minimal as possible and consider using social sign-in to reduce friction. Provide an introduction area for new users and give them context so that they know what to do right away. For example, if a main feature of your community is an activity feed but a user must first follow a number of interesting people to populate the feed, guide the user through a step-by-step process to follow people in categories they find compelling. Ensure that before they finish the sign-up process they will have a vibrant sense of the site's activity and completed the first important steps to participate, including creating their initial profile.

Design your community responsively for multiple devices. For mobile, you'll need to distill your community's functionality down to its essence; mobile apps with a clean, simple UI that focus on one or two main tasks do best. Mobile helps to facilitate integration between online community and offline events, because users can check-in at particular locations and events. Also, consider a minimal number of push notifications that will draw in but not annoy your users.

Integrate with other applications. Depending on your community's use cases, consider taking advantage of social sign-in, Open Graph metadata to control sharing of your pages on Facebook, Dropbox integration to upload photos, Google Hangouts for video chat, an open API for developers to build on, and connections to enterprise applications such as Salesforce. Be aware of your community as a hub within a network of services that users are embedded in, and pull in and share information and activity accordingly.

As you're designing the interface, think about the different kinds of participants. Determine who the influencers are in your online community (the people who will help it grow) and provide them with visibility and tools to spread their influence. For influencers, consider special badges that show off their status; prominent display of fan/friend stats; asynchronous follow; robust share tools; special member messaging capabilities; special access to community staff; roles in community governance, moderation, and policing; private influencer-only groups; and special highlighting of their content.

Don't just cultivate the big fish. Look for up-and-comers who create great content or are especially passionate. Help them attain visibility as if they were already superstars. Respond to them quickly and listen to their feedback. Give them attention and advice and opportunities. If you have an automated way to expose great user-created content, ensure that your algorithm does not just pull up existing influencers. Your community blog is a good place to give up-and-comers some love. Their stories will inspire others and create engagement as members follow their successes. At least some of them will actually become superstars, and they'll be grateful, and naturally draw more passionate members into your community's orbit.

If you want more good content from your community, highlight the highest quality content and bury the low-quality content. You will get more of what you highlight. When building your community interface, don't assume that all of the user content you get will be great, so design with a content burial system in addition to a content highlighting system. A common mistake in launching a new discussion forum is to set up too many initial categories. This splits conversation, especially when traffic is still low. It's better to start a discussion with a few categories and then expand later as your usage dictates.

Don't forget about the lurkers, who may be 99 percent of your audience. You can reflect their presence in numerous ways, such as displaying reader views on a blog post or highlighting recently browsed or most-popular items. Some might not ever post, but might be wonderful aggregators—does your community have a way for users to bookmark, favorite, tag, or make lists? Create a game plan for gently easing lurkers into participation. Use tactics such as a simple “recommend” link at the end of an article or a “Like” button or “You may also be interested in...”. Consider integrating with existing social applications; if lurkers see that their friends are active on your site, they are much more likely to participate.

Communities that focus on photos and videos can be very appealing, so if appropriate for your community, make sure to facilitate easy upload of visual content as well as beautiful presentation and easy sharing on both desktop and mobile.

If the goal of your community is to gather knowledge, a robust search and browse navigation is crucial. Create a question search widget that displays similar questions so as to avoid duplicates. Also, make it easy to follow a question and get notifications as answers come in. Surface relevant questions that need answering to users upon login or a profile visit. Consider taking the most popular questions on your community's topic and the best answers and using them to seed a knowledge base that is integrated into your community.

Constantly collect and track your community's data and use that for several purposes: 1) reflect back user stats, such as content views, to community members to encourage them to participate more and guide their behavior; 2) refine the community platform based on usage (e.g., you can personalize calls-to-action and notifications based on user actions); 3) make business-wide decisions based on popular topics, most popular product feedback ideas, most active users, frequently-asked questions, and so on (e.g., integrate top product ideas into products); 4) Measure ROI and monetize your community. Measure ROI in terms of your business' community purpose—for example, reduction of support calls or marketing value. If you are monetizing your community, user data can be valuable for advertising, product sales, and so on.

Develop a system of notifications to remind users of new content, mentions, member actions, or tasks that need completing. Consider an opt-in email newsletter to deliver top community news and content. These notifications and updates require a tone unique to your community that cultivates intimacy and conveys trust—they should not be written in engineer-speak, unless you are running a community for engineers. Carrying your community's story through all communications—its budding history, emerging culture, unique members and useful content as well as its promising future—will encourage users to be a part of the story and make your community great.

SHARA KARASIC, SOCIAL PRODUCT STRATEGIST,
www.sharakarasic.com

Group Moderation

The goal of community moderation is to foster rich conversations, connections, relationships, and activities. Reward the kinds of participation that you want to see more of, and gently discourage the behaviors you believe are counterproductive.

When dealing with flame wars and sock puppets (see “Flame Wars” on page 374 and “Sock Puppets” on page 375), “don't feed the trolls.” Whenever possible, de-escalate. Give problem users “time outs” (suspensions from posting privileges), and when necessary, freeze entire threads or topics to let emotions cool.

For incorrigible characters, consider banning them (but there's always the risk that they will simply reregister with a new account), or put them in a "Hall of Mirrors" in which only they (and perhaps other spammers and trolls) can see their posts. They will wonder why no one is falling for their tricks anymore.

Official moderators (paid, employed staff) can do only so much. They will need to find allies in the community itself. Promote from within. Create labels (see "Labels" on page 198) and identify the most helpful community members. Grant moderation privileges to trusted users, and harness the feedback of all users to promote the best contributions and bury the worst.

The Community-Building Trifecta

One of the most common questions I'm asked is, "How do you build a community?" This question is usually followed by an explanation that the community must be built because either a boss wants one, or because of the mistaken belief that an owned community is the fastest way to get the word out about a new product. Building a community takes a great deal of effort and is often impossible. I have no interest in extinguishing someone's genuine desire to be a part of a community, but building one takes a lot of work and is extremely difficult. To build a community, you need passion, commitment, and proper tools. If even one of these three components is missing, your efforts will not be successful.

The *passion* must come from both your side and from the community. Building a community around a product or idea that is not going to elicit passion is impossible. In other words, if your idea/product sucks, don't waste your time. You will not be able to manufacture passion. If you don't have passion, you don't have a community; it's that simple.

Committing yourself to months of continued nurturing is also required. This must come from you or your team, not from your burgeoning community. Almost all community sites that succeed begin with either a pre-existing userbase or a community-savvy team who are willing to put in the time creating messages, content, images, and more to make it look like there is an existing community there already. The time drain is significant, so don't be surprised to find that you must spend hours each day creating and responding to discussion topics, often from your coworkers. In the early days, almost all of the creation of content will be on your side. Do you have the resources and desire to do this? Without this significant *commitment* of time, your "soon-to-be-community" will die a quick death.

Tools are the final part of the community trifecta. Don't ask new community members to stumble through a complicated registration process or spend more than the minimum amount of time interacting with your interface. Reputation should be considered. You should carefully think through how a user receives information. Notification workflows should be deep and should encourage repeat visits to the site, visits that add value to the user. Analytics can't be an afterthought, but measuring success must be a primary part of your planning. The tools you employ should make talking to you, and to other members of the community, easy and fast. Don't create barriers because you failed to properly plan, create, and test a vital area of the user's experience.

In short, if you don't have the time, the money, the desire, and the dedication to create a community, don't bother. It's much faster/cheaper/easier to locate a great community and take part there. Moreover, if your product or idea is poor, and you still need to get the word out, do what people in your situation have been doing for years: spend a great deal of money marketing it. Or, better yet, go back to the drawing board and create a great product. Community is precious, and it's great when it works, but it's not going to work without great effort.

ROBYN TIPPINS, MARIPOSA INTERACTIVE,

<http://www.mariposaagency.com>

Collaborative Filtering

What

People need help finding the best contributions to online community (see Figure 15-4).

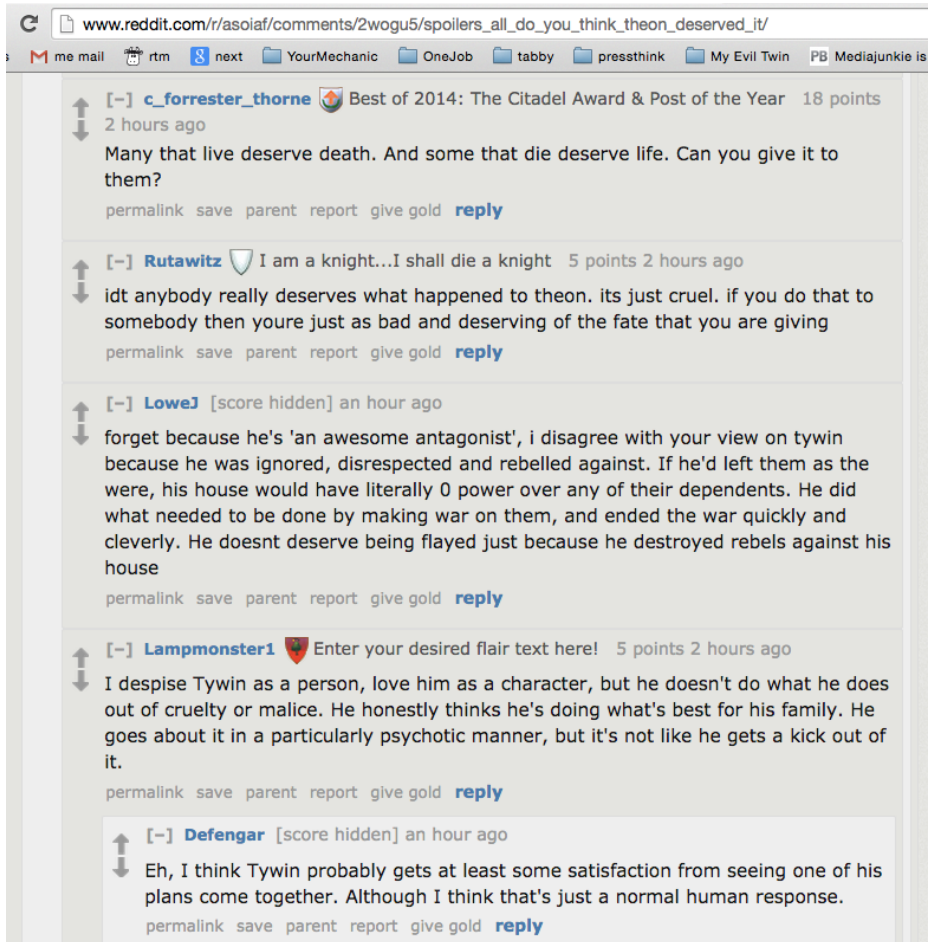


FIGURE 15-4

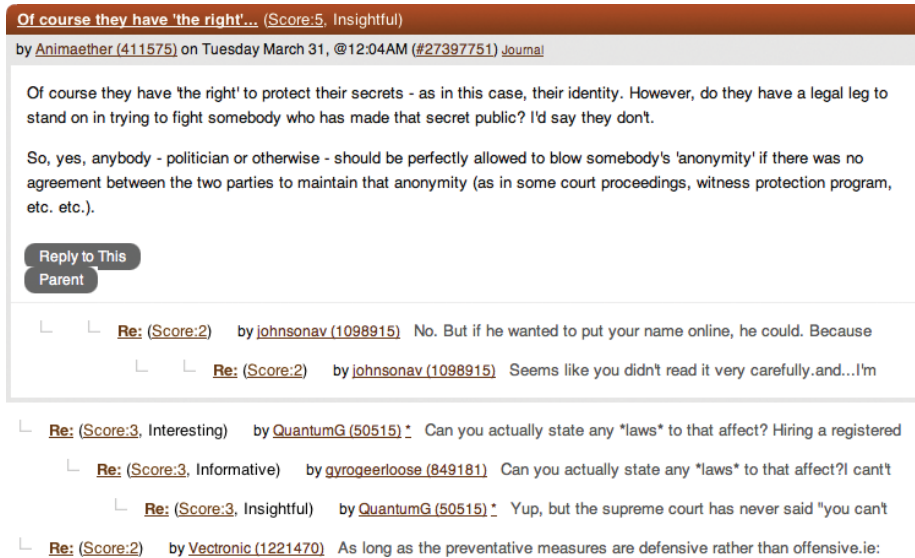
Readers of Reddit (known as “redditors”) vote posts and comments up and down, affecting which comments you see at the top and whether some are displayed at all by default.

Use when

Use this pattern when you have a large base of contributors and a wide range of quality.

How

Enable authenticated users to vote up or down, or otherwise rate content. Optionally give users with higher reputation status more privileges to highlight or hide content. Aggregate the votes, and use this to determine sorting and display order, as illustrated in Figure 15-5.



The screenshot shows a comment thread on Slashdot. The main post is titled "Of course they have 'the right'..." with a score of 5 and is marked as "Insightful". It was posted by user Animaether (411575) on Tuesday, March 31, at 12:04 AM. The post content discusses the legal implications of revealing secrets. Below the post are two buttons: "Reply to This" and "Parent". The thread includes several replies, each with a score and user name:

- Reply 1: Score 2, by johnsonav (1098915). Text: "No. But if he wanted to put your name online, he could. Because"
- Reply 2: Score 2, by johnsonav (1098915). Text: "Seems like you didn't read it very carefully.and...I'm"
- Reply 3: Score 3, Interesting, by QuantumG (50515). Text: "Can you actually state any *laws* to that affect? Hiring a registered"
- Reply 4: Score 3, Informative, by gyrogeerlose (849181). Text: "Can you actually state any *laws* to that affect?! can't"
- Reply 5: Score 3, Insightful, by QuantumG (50515). Text: "Yup, but the supreme court has never said 'you can't"
- Reply 6: Score 2, by Vectronic (1221470). Text: "As long as the preventative measures are defensive rather than offensive.ie:"

FIGURE 15-5

At Slashdot, only comments above a rating threshold are displayed automatically in the thread. A reader can still expand a hidden comment to read it, or change her preferences to move the threshold.

Why

The collective wisdom of the community can help filter out the best contributions and conversations.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Reputation Influences Behavior” on page 188

“Thumbs Up/Down Ratings” on page 327

“Vote to Promote” on page 323

AS SEEN ON

Reddit (<http://reddit.com/>)

Slashdot (<http://slashdot.org/>)

Yahoo! Answers (<http://answers.yahoo.com/>)

Report Abuse

What

Any active, successful social system online is subject to abuse. We know it will occur, so we need to have processes in place for identifying and mitigating it. People need a way to report it that isn't too inconvenient and doesn't require them to type in or restate information that we could glean from context.

In a growing community, abuse reporting scales up faster than human beings can handle it, so you need an escalation strategy to deal with the consequences of popularity.

Use when

Use this pattern when you want to give your users the ability to self-moderate content that is contributed by the community, as shown in Figure 15-6.

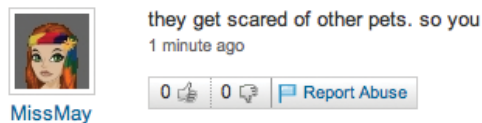


FIGURE 15-6

To safeguard a thriving community, you must pay attention to any signals of abuse; enabling your participants to flag abusive content helps the community moderate itself.

How

The experience of reporting abuse should be as simple and transparent as possible. Do not ask the user to enter data that could have been captured automatically. Make it clear to the user how the report will

be handled, without overpromising, and then deliver the user cleanly back to the context from which he reported the abuse. Where possible, immediately hide the reported content from the user who reported it:

- Offer a Report Abuse link on any community-generated content (optionally include the standard flag icon).
- Reporting abuse should take the user to a simple form.
- Abuse reports should be tracked as signals along with other evidence of abuse.

For highly granular user-generated content (such as a stream of vitality updates on a screen), the Report Abuse affordance must be made available individually for each item, without overwhelming the screen with a stream of Report Abuse links or little flags.

REPORT ABUSE LINK

Use consistent terminology for labeling the report link. Some products prefer “Report Abuse,” and others use “Flag.”

OPTIONAL ICON

Optionally, include a consistent icon to mark the link for reporting abuse. (Reporting abuse is sometimes colloquially referred to as “flagging” abusive content; hence, the iconic symbol for the abuse report button is a flag.) It should be easy for the user to spot a Report Abuse flag icon and click it to initiate the abuse reporting process:

- Avoid the flag icon for contexts in which it will conflict with existing terminology or symbols (as in Mail, for which “flagging” a message indicates that it is important, not that it is abusive).
- Likewise, if the icon doesn’t suit the design, use only the “Report Abuse” link text.
- Do not use the icon without text. (It’s OK to use text without an icon.)

ABUSE REPORT FORM

The form should be as simple as possible (but no simpler):

- Clicking the Report Abuse link should take the user to a form where he can select the type or nature of the abuse and optionally fill in more context.

- The user should not be required to manually enter the relevant URL or screen name or any other metadata that you can glean from the source.
- If possible, use an inline short form for people who are already signed in (they just choose from two categories—offensive or illegal—optionally make a comment, and they’re done).
- Signed-out users will need a full-screen form where they can indicate how they can be contacted.

CONFIRMATION

Submission of the form should generate a success message that does not promise any specific action. It should then return reporting users to the original context where they initially started the abuse-reporting process. Optionally, hide the offending content from them while the response to the report is pending.

ABUSE TRACKING

After a user submits an abuse report, it must be reviewed by a customer-care agent (unless a reputation system is in place to track signals of abuse). As a product scales up, you need to factor additional considerations into the abuse-reporting process:

- Just provide a way for a user to report abusive content and send the request to a support team for review.
- Add priority to different requests by allowing users to choose whether this abuse violates community guidelines or is illegal.
- Take into consideration whether you should inform the original poster about the abuse report.
- Take into consideration whether an appeal mechanism should be provided.

Why

Providing users a standard way to report abusive content and behavior complements any algorithmic and behavioral signals of abuse gathered.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Reputation Influences Behavior” on page 188

AS SEEN ON

Craigslist (<http://craigslist.org/>)

Yahoo! (<http://www.yahoo.com/>)

Most social products

SOURCES

This pattern is based on the Report Abuse component pattern written primarily by Micah Alpern at Yahoo!.

Further Reading

1. “Community Lessons from Flickr’s Heather Champ,” from Brian Oberkirch’s Only Connect blog. <http://bit.ly/1IKNw2q>
2. Derek Powazek’s posts on community, <http://powazek.com/posts/category/community>
3. Rheingold, Howard. “The Virtual Community.” <http://www.well.com/~hlr/vcbook/>
4. “Beyond the FAQ: Implicit and explicit norms in Usenet newsgroups.” *Library and Information Science Research*;25:333-51.

Where in the World?

It's a beautiful day in this neighborhood. A beautiful day for a neighbor. Would you be mine? Could you be mine?

MR. ROGERS' NEIGHBORHOOD

TUBBS: I haven't seen you before. Are you local?

MARTIN: No, I'm meeting up with a friend actually—going hiking.

TUBBS: Don't touch the things! This is a local shop for local people, there's nothing for you here!

TUBBS: Edward! Edward!

EDWARD: Hello, hello? What's going on? What's all this shouting, we'll have no trouble here!

TUBBS: I caught him stealing from the shop.

EDWARD: Who is he? Is his identity known?

TUBBS: He's not local.

"THIS IS A LOCAL SHOP," SKETCH BY LEAGUE OF GENTLEMEN, BBC

The Local Connection

ONE OF THE THINGS WE LIKE TO DO AS SOCIAL CREATURES IS TO PLAN EVENTS AND GATHER IN GROUPS. Lunches, dates, meetings, playdates, parties, weddings—even funerals—and events to punctuate the week and celebrate milestones and major life events are all occasions to gather people together. Events have become easier to plan with a variety of online tools, and with the explosion of social tools, they can be more collaborative than ever. Invitation tools and calendaring are two

of the oldest applications available online. The addition of the social graph and other rich social tools continues to keep these tools relevant, and now we see these features creeping into mainstream social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn.

The rise of the smartphone and geo-capable mobile devices means that we can be connected and location-aware regardless of where we are. Location capabilities such as *geo-tagging*, *geo-mashing*, and even *neighborhoods* provide a context of place around what we are doing online. Although people might be generally drawn together based on interests or on activities, the natural progression of a community will eventually lead people to get together in real life. The crossover of interests and desire for face-to-face meetings is powerful and really useful. Without explicit interactions to facilitate meeting in person integrated into interest sites, people will still figure out how to bring groups together—only it will be cumbersome and might require the use of multiple sites, along with email, texting, and old-school phone calls. Incorporating event-creation and mapping into these tools makes this much easier for people.

The following patterns—when added to things such as identity, presence, and activities that can include forums, collections, and groups—create a rich suite of tools that we can combine to help bring people together, whether they actually know one another or not.

You should take care to protect your user’s privacy and give them control over who sees where they are located at any given time; be sure to use their location information only in a way that enhances the experience. (Remember the Ethical Dimension we discussed in Chapter 2?)

Being Local

What

The user wants to use online social tools to facilitate offline events and meetings in her location, as depicted in Figure 16-1.

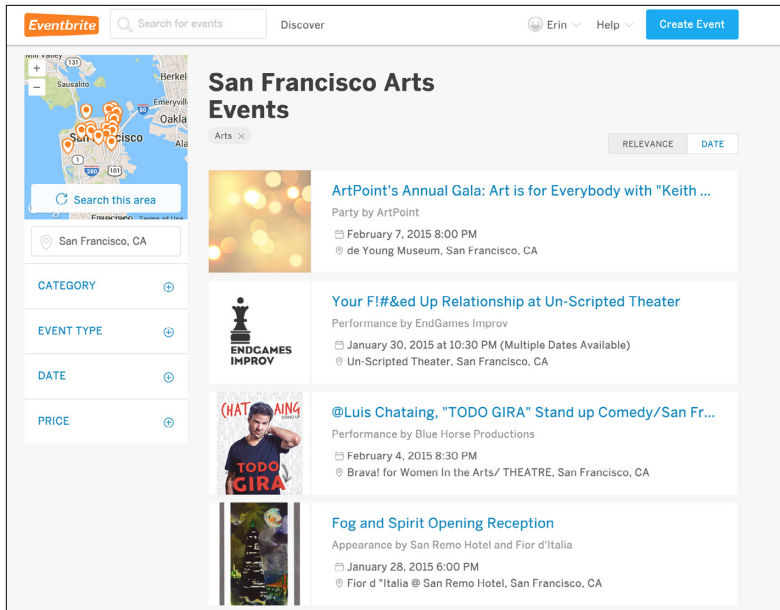


FIGURE 16-1
 Eventbrite (<http://www.eventbrite.com>) focuses on local events.

Use when

- Use the following patterns to bring people together at real locations, offline.
- You want users to be able to plan around real locations, utilizing addresses and maps.
- You want to determine who and what is nearby in real time.

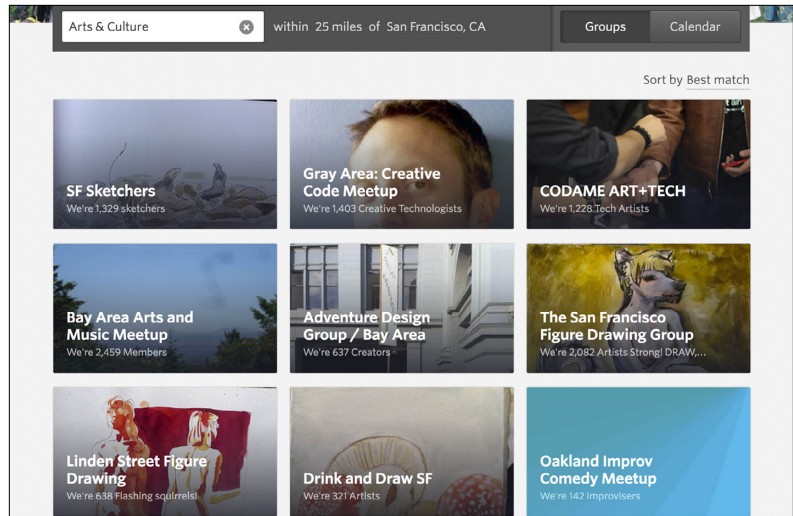
Face-to-Face Meeting

What

The user wants to meet offline with people from his network, in a nearby location, as demonstrated in Figure 16-2.

FIGURE 16-2

Meetup facilitates people meeting in their local areas for a variety of events.



Use when

Use this pattern to help facilitate face-to-face meetings between people.

How

Provide users with a mechanism to create events and invite participants.

PRE-EVENT CREATION

- Give users a method to enter full details of an event, including location, time, date, details, and special considerations, as shown in Figure 16-3.
- Integrate a calendar (see “Calendaring” on page 519) for scheduling time-based events, as presented in Figure 16-4.

Create New Event [Close]

Name

Details

Where

When

Privacy

FIGURE 16-3
An event creation form on Facebook.

Starts

Ends

< **MARCH 2015** > gs (PST)

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

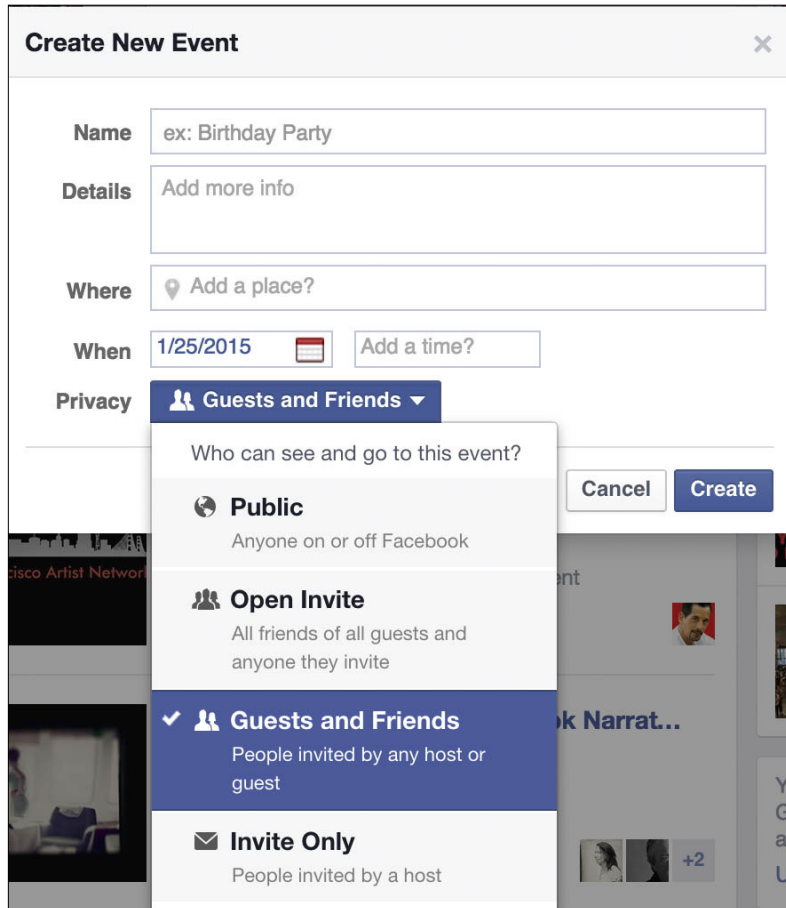
ent

FIGURE 16-4
A calendar picker on Eventbrite.

- Give event creators the option to mark an event as public or private (see Figures 16-5 and 16-6).

FIGURE 16-5

Privacy options on Facebook. Secondary text clearly articulates what each choice means.



Listing privacy

- Public page:** list this event on Eventbrite and search engines
- Private page:** do not list this event publicly

FIGURE 16-6

Privacy options on Eventbrite.

- Provide functionality for users to select locations from a list of places, for example, from city guides, yellow pages, or other directories.
- Consider indicating nearby establishments, such as restaurants, parking, coffee shops, ATMs, or other relevant businesses, which accommodates comprehensive planning.
- Provide the full address, phone number, and other relevant details, such as costs, hours, restrictions, or ambiance.

PRE-EVENT ATTENDEES

- Make it possible for users to RSVP to events. Consider showing RSVPs to other users and indicating attendees from a viewer's network (see Figures 16-7 through 16-9).

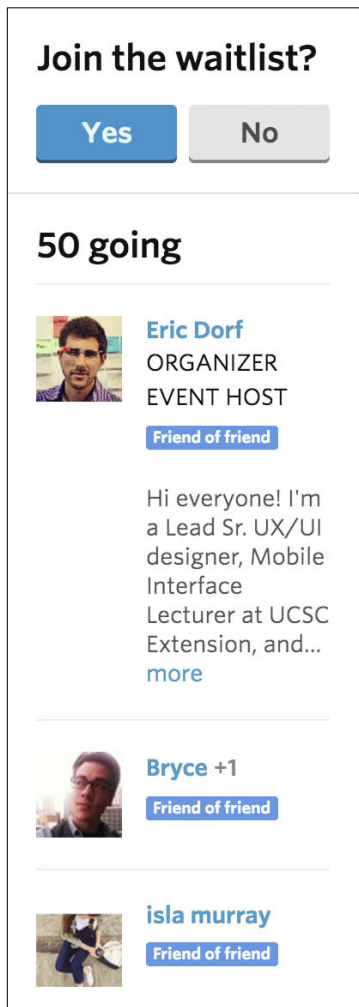


FIGURE 16-7

Meetup shows who else is attending, whether they are in your network or are friends of friends.

FIGURE 16-8

Facebook offers users the ability to join (Yes), decline (No), or waffle (Maybe) when RSVPing to an event.

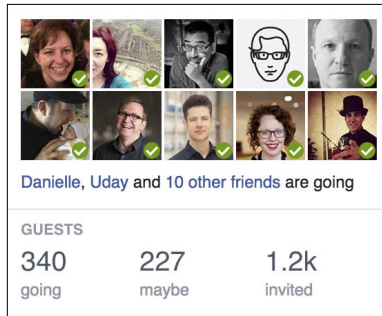
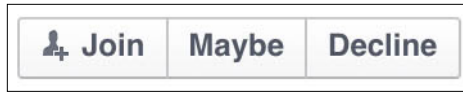
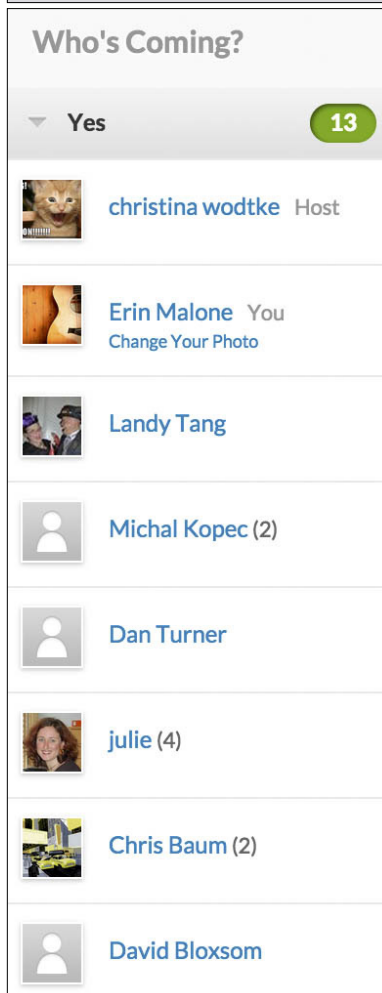


FIGURE 16-9

Evite and Facebook both show attendees, which can encourage others to RSVP “yes” if they see someone they know in the list.



- Consider accommodating public events to which users can invite themselves or follow an event.
- Consider adding capabilities for collaborative content creation.
- Integrate maps for selecting and displaying locations (see “Geo-Mapping” on page 529).
- Include a way for users to indicate a method for receiving alerts or reminders for events (see “Reminding” on page 524).
- Give users the ability to easily invite their network or a subset of their network to an event, as depicted in Figure 16-10. Consider a batch invite process, such as multiselect, for sending invites.

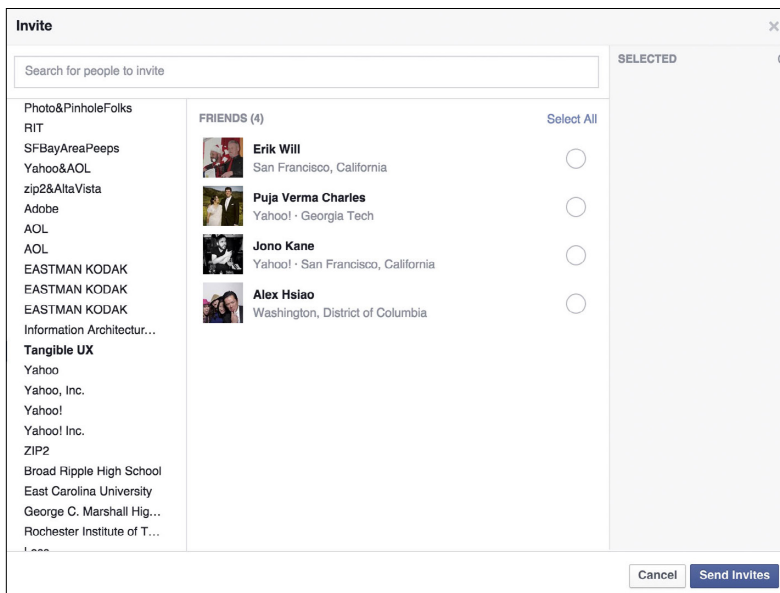


FIGURE 16-10 Facebook presents a user’s network in order to easily create a guest list.

POST-EVENT ATTENDEES

- Provide functionality for users to attach photos to the event..
- If the user attended (or RSVP’d “yes”), show the event in his calendar of past events, as shown in Figure 16-11.

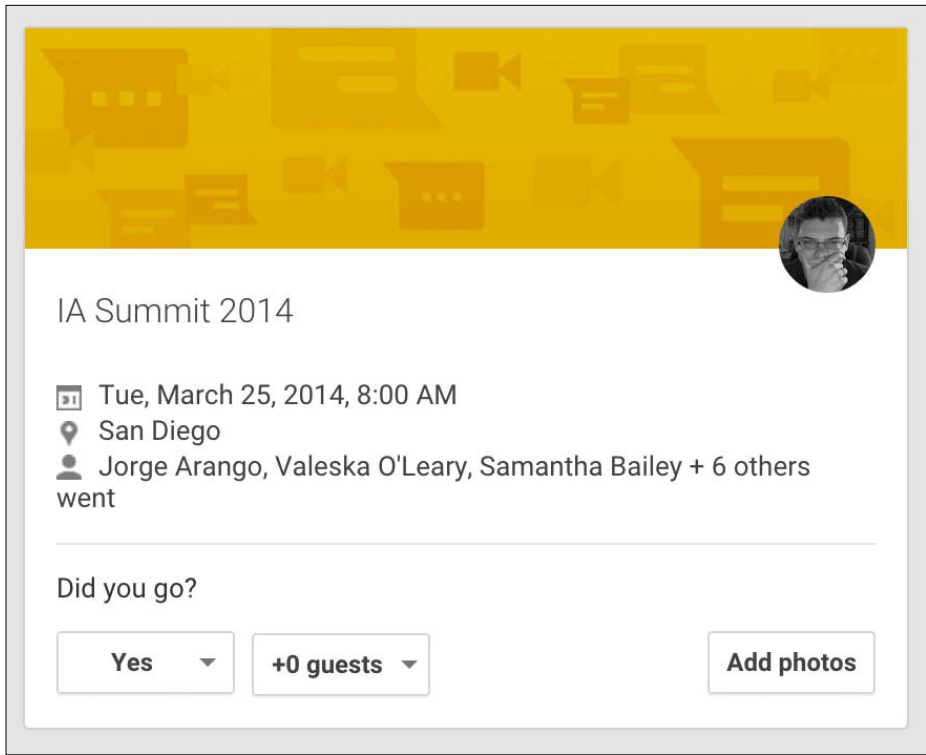


FIGURE 16-11

Google+ asks attendees after an event if they attended and gives them a way to attach photos to the event information.

- Consider asking the attendees to rate the event afterward.

Public events

- Make events searchable by keyword/category, tags, and date.
- Include a mechanism for users to browse through events and filter by keyword/category, tags, and date, as illustrated in Figure 16-12.

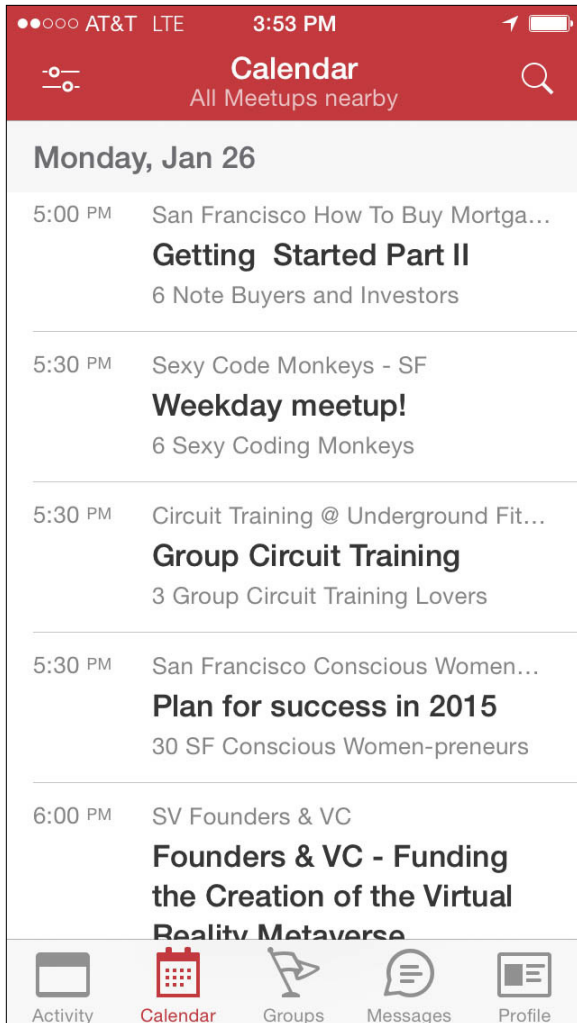


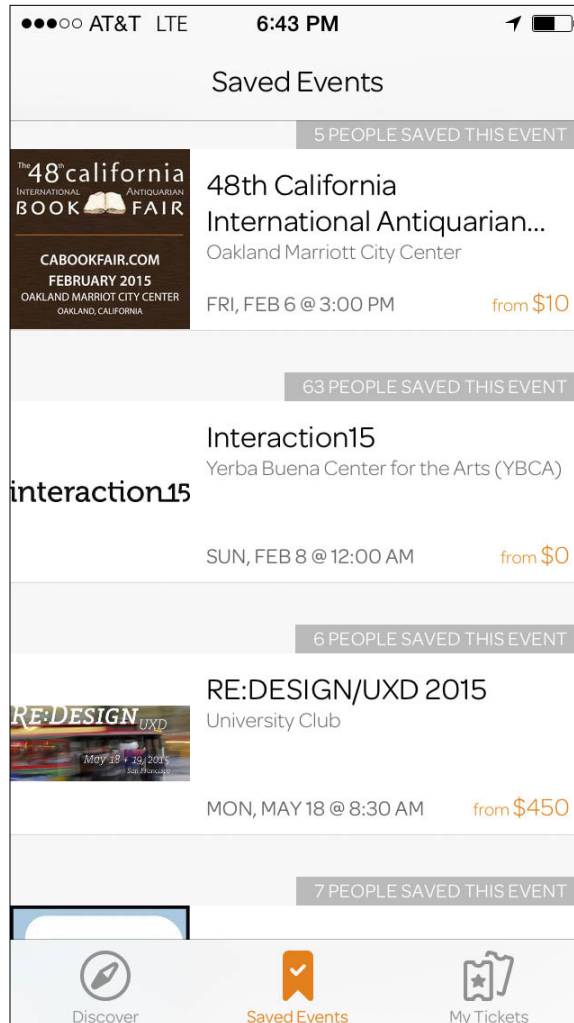
FIGURE 16-12

Meetup features event groups by location and topic (Meetup iOS application).

- Show users a list of events being attended by friends in their network (see Figure 16-9).
- Give users a way to save events they are going to or in which they are interested. (see Figure 16-13)

FIGURE 16-13

With Eventbrite, users can save an event they are interested in—whether they are going or not (Eventbrite iOS application).



SEMI-PUBLIC EVENTS

- Indicate whether the user must be part of the network in order to RSVP or attend the event, as shown in Figure 16-14.

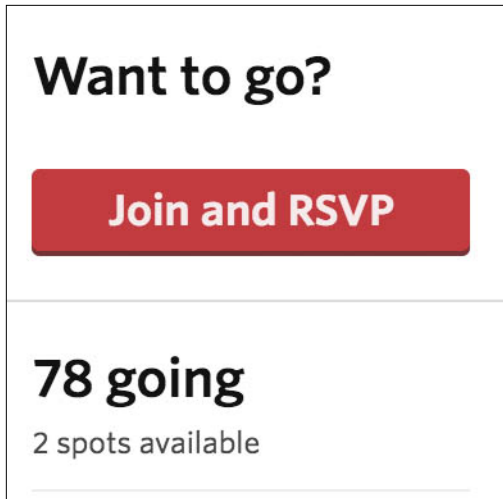


FIGURE 16-14

Meetup combines small interest groups with public events. Users must join the group first in order to RSVP for an event or activity.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Party,” described next

AS SEEN ON

Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>)

Meetup (<http://www.meetup.com>)

Eventbrite (<http://www.eventbrite.com>)

Evite (<http://www.evite.com>)

Google+ (<plus.google.com>)

Party

What

The user wants to plan an event and invite friends to join the party, as shown in Figure 16-15.

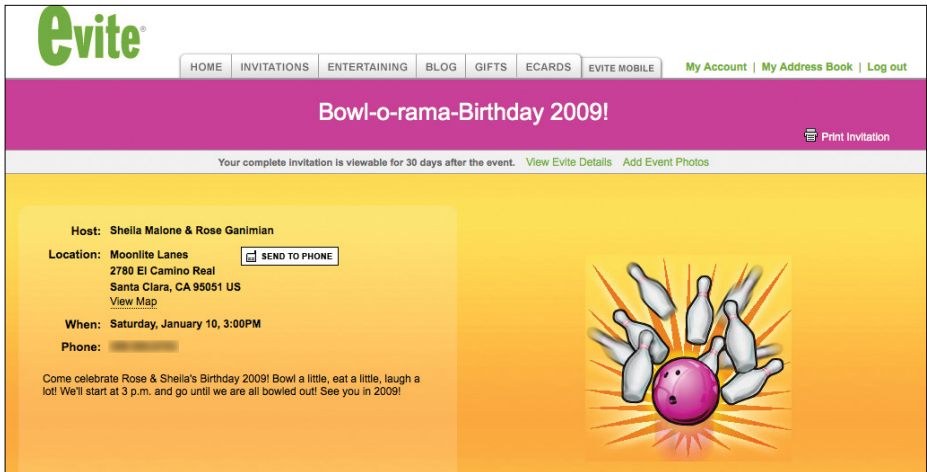


FIGURE 16-15
An Evite party invitation.

Use when

- You want users to be able to create customized and personal invitations for events such as parties.
- You want to replace regular email for party planning.

How

PREPARTY PLANNING

Provide the means for users to enter full details of an event, including location, time, date, details, and special considerations, as depicted in Figure 16-16.

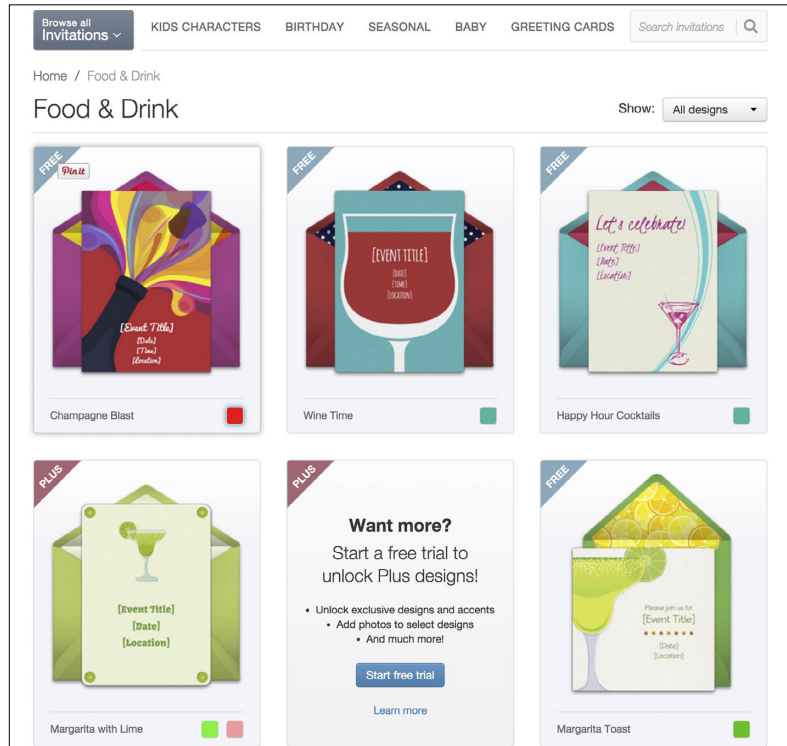
FIGURE 16-16

Event details on Punchbowl (<http://www.punchbowl.com>).

- Use a calendar picker for easy date selection and minimization of data entry errors (see “Calendaring” on page 519).
- Offer to add the event to the user’s calendar (Yahoo!, iCal, Google, etc.).
- Make it possible for event planners to poll invitees through the use of simple polls.

- Provide templates for invitation display. Give the event creator options to choose a theme that is appropriate to the theme of the party, as presented in Figure 16-17.

FIGURE 16-17
Theme selections on
MyPunchbowl.



- The event creator should be able to invite multiple people at a time. Provide a field for adding multiple email addresses.
- The user should be able to select from her desktop address book, as demonstrated in Figure 16-18.

FIGURE 16-18

Punchbowl offers the invitation creator a variety of ways to build a guest list.

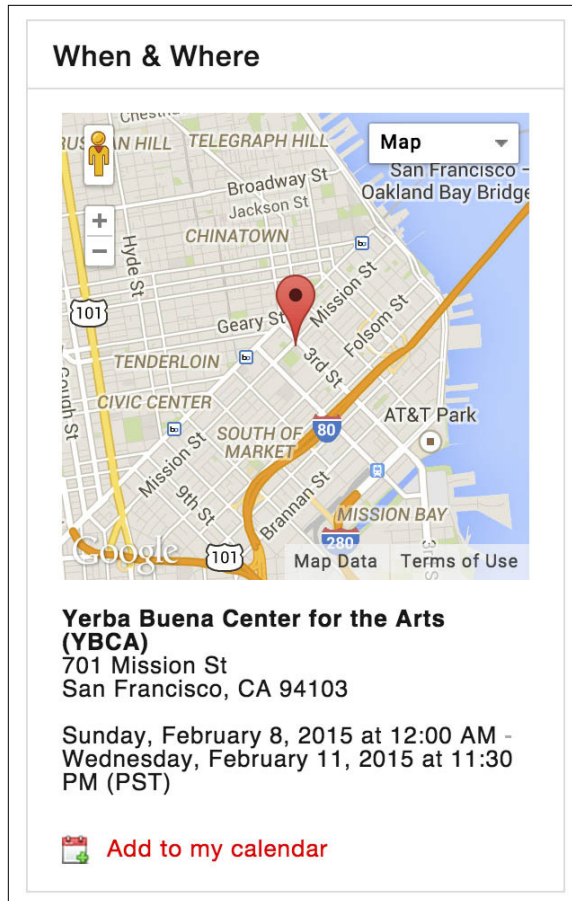
- Provide a way for the user to make guest selections from her online address books and social networks, such as Google, Yahoo!, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter.
- Include an option for the event planner to save the email addresses for later use.

INVITEES

- Offer to add the event to the user’s calendar (Yahoo!, iCal, Google, mobile calendar applications if not native iOS or Android).
- Consider showing RSVPs to others and indicating attendees.
- Show the event on a map, as is done in Figure 16-19.

FIGURE 16-19

Eventbrite integrates maps into the event details.



- Give users the option to get directions to the event.
- Consider indicating nearby establishments, such as restaurants, parking, coffee shops, and ATMs, to accommodate comprehensive planning.
- Show the full address and phone number of the location.
- If the event is at a public location, such as a restaurant or park, show details about the location: hours, ambiance, restrictions, and so on.

AFTER PARTY

- Provide a mechanism for users to upload photos from the event.
- Consider setting up a section for users to leave comments about the party.

WHY

Giving users the tools to create offline events enhances relationships that previously might have existed only online. People want to gather, and they will use whatever tools are available to coordinate the event. Bringing this functionality into your site (if appropriate) will keep users engaged and can create a holistic experience that moves seamlessly from online to offline and back online again.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Face-to-Face Meeting” on page 503

“Calendar” on Page 519

AS SEEN ON

Evite (<http://www.evite.com>)

Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>)

Punchbowl (<http://www.punchbowl.com>)

Eventbrite (<http://www.eventbrite.com> and Eventbrite mobile)

Calendar

What

A user wants to find or submit an event (public or private) based on a date or within a certain date range, as shown in Figure 16-20.

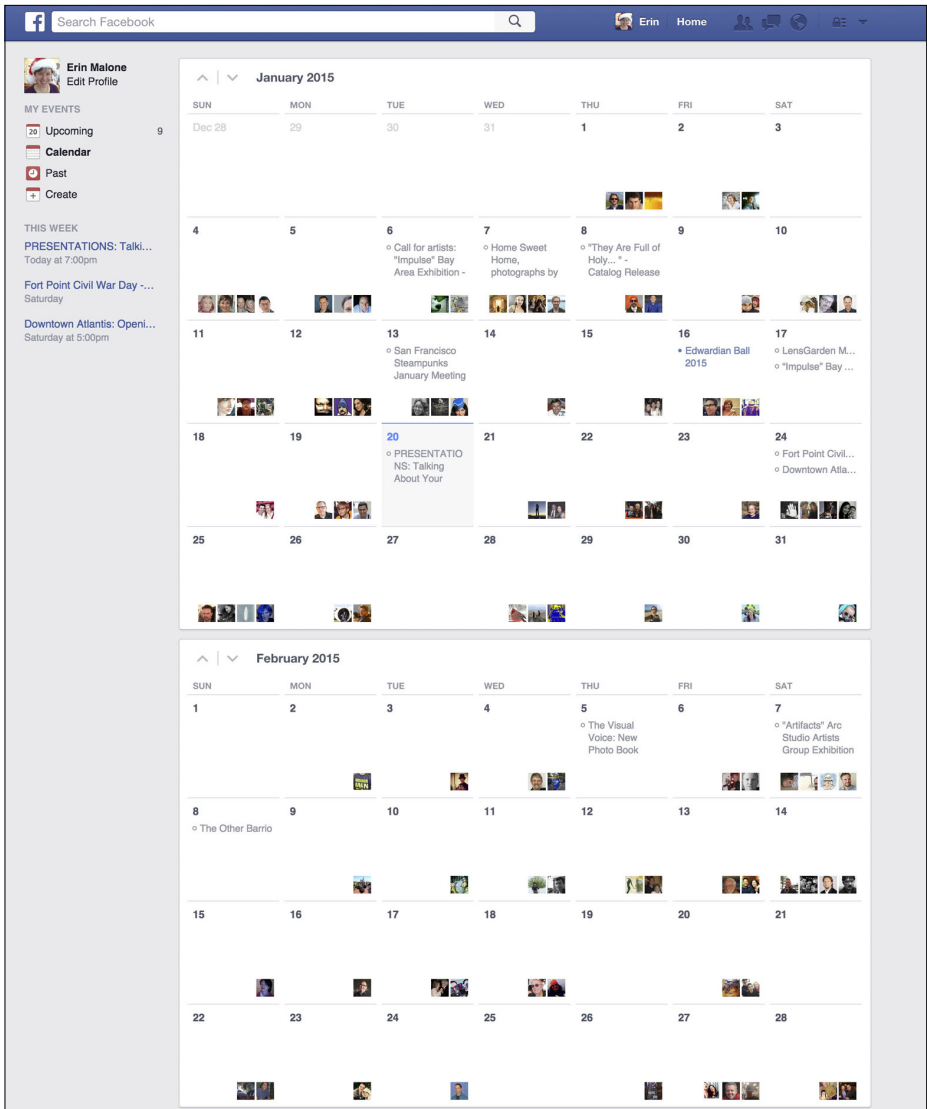


FIGURE 16-20

With Facebook, users can browse events by date.

Use when

- You want to create date-driven events.
- You want to find events by date.
- Use this pattern with “Face-to-Face Meeting” on page 503 and “Party” on page 513.

How

- Make it possible for users to associate an event with a date. You can do this through an event-planning interface or within a calendar interface (see Figure 16-21 and Figure 16-22).

The screenshot shows the Google Calendar event creation interface. At the top, there are navigation buttons: a back arrow, a red 'SAVE' button, 'Discard changes', 'Delete', and a 'More Actions' dropdown menu. The event title is 'Antiquarian Book Fair'. The date and time are set to '2/7/2015 11:00am to 7:00pm 2/7/2015' with a 'Time zone' link. There are checkboxes for 'All day' and 'Repeat...'. Below this is a 'Find a time' button. The 'Where' field contains 'Enter a location'. There is a 'Video call' section with an 'Add video call' link. The 'Calendar' dropdown is set to 'Erin Malone'. The 'Description' field contains 'http://www.cabookfair.com/'. On the right, there is an 'Add guests' section with 'Enter email addresses' and an 'Add' button. Below that, 'Guests can' options are listed: 'modify event' (unchecked), 'invite others' (checked), and 'see guest list' (checked). The 'Event color' section shows a row of colored squares with the first one (purple) selected. The 'Notifications' section has a dropdown menu open showing 'Email SMS' (25 minutes) and 'Pop-up' (10 minutes) with 'Add a notification' link. The 'Show me as' section has 'Available' and 'Busy' (selected) options. The 'Visibility' section has 'Calendar default' (selected), 'Public', and 'Private' options. At the bottom, there is a note about sharing settings and a 'Publish event' link.

FIGURE 16-21

Adding an event to Google Calendar (<http://www.google.com/calendar>).

Create New Event [Close]

Name

Details

Where

When

Privacy

January 2015						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

FIGURE 16-22

Associating an event with a date on Facebook.

- Give the event creator the means to indicate whether the event is public or private.
- Make it so that the calendar event can be shared, whether through direct selections from the user's network, through email, or through RSS, blogs, or other social offerings.

SELECTING A SPECIFIC DATE

When selecting an associated date for an event, give the user the option to either type in the date or choose the date with a calendar picker.

By providing the calendar picker, the user can see the date in the context of other dates and the day of the week, and it ensures fewer data entry errors.

CALENDAR DETAILS

- Provide a title and description field.
- Provide a notes field for URLs and other information.

- The user should be able to associate a location to the event, as presented in Figure 16-23.

Create New Event

Name ex: Birthday Party

Details Add more info

Where Add a place?

When

Privacy

The Regency Ballroom
1300 Van Ness Ave · San Francisco, California · 86,715 were here

The Regency Ballroom for the Edwardian Ball
San Francisco, California · 630 were here

Ocean Beach / Judah St.
San Francisco, California · 2,411 were here

Ocean Beach, San Francisco
San Francisco, California · 71,116 were here

Map showing location on Van Ness Ave, San Francisco, CA. Streets visible include Octavia St, Austin St, Fern St, Post St, Geary Blvd, Larkin St, Hyde St, and Leavenworth St.

FIGURE 16-23
Location selection on Facebook event creation form.

- When the details are complete, display the event in all presentations of the calendar (i.e., list view, day view, week view, and month view).
- Present the title, location, and as much of a description as appropriate for the display. For example, the list view would display most, if not all, of the description, whereas the month view might show only a truncated title.
- Use rollover panels to display the full calendar event without forcing the user to click.

Why

Events are time constrained, and including robust online calendaring tools will make creating parties, events, and face-to-face meetings easier to plan.

Provide enough functionality to be useful without creating an entire enterprise-level application.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Face-to-Face Meeting” on page 503

“Party” on page 513

AS SEEN ON

Evite (<http://www.evite.com>)

Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>)

Google Calendar (<http://www.google.com/calendar>)

Punchbowl (<http://www.mypunchbowl.com>)

Reminding

What

A user needs to know when an event is happening, as demonstrated in Figure 16-24.

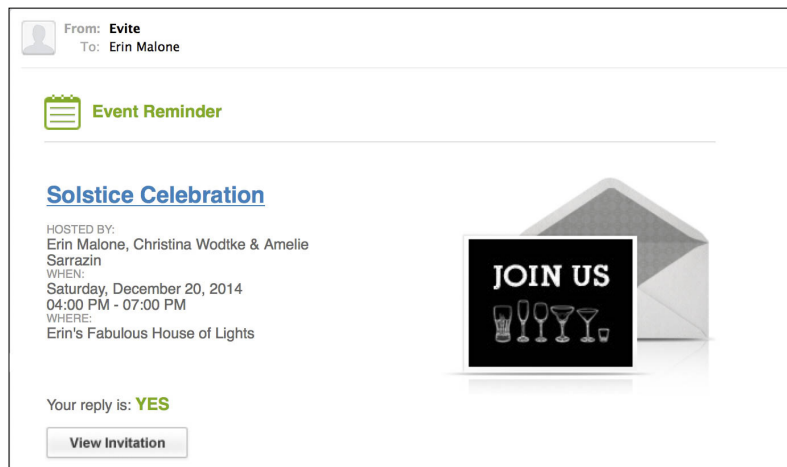


FIGURE 16-24

Evite sends out email reminders about events on the calendar.

Use when

- You want to alert others where an event is happening.
- You want to encourage sending reminders to a mobile device or email account.

How

- When creating an event, give the user the ability to set reminders or alerts about those events.
- If the event creator is inviting attendees, set the reminder to automatically send alerts to the attendees.
- Give the user the ability to select from a preset list of reminder times. For instance, Yahoo! Calendar offers to send reminders from 14 days before the event all the way to 5 minutes before the event. With Google Calendar, you can specify an exact number and then it qualifies that number with minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, etc. (Figure 16-25).

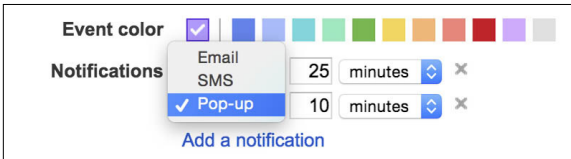


FIGURE 16-25

The Google Calendar reminder setup widget.

- Users should be able to send Reminders to an email address and to mobile devices or added to a social networking profile.
- Consider allowing two reminders to be set, for example, 14 days and 5 days in advance of the event.
- For public events, give people a way to set their own reminders.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Calendar” on page 519

“Face-to-Face Meeting” on page 503

“Party” on page 513

AS SEEN ON

Evite (<http://www.evite.com>)

Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>)

Google Calendar (<http://www.google.com/calendar>)

Geo-Tagging

What

A user wants to annotate a person, place, or thing with a geographic tag, usually in the form of latitude/longitude, which is then translated into an address that can be placed on a map, as demonstrated in Figure 16-26.

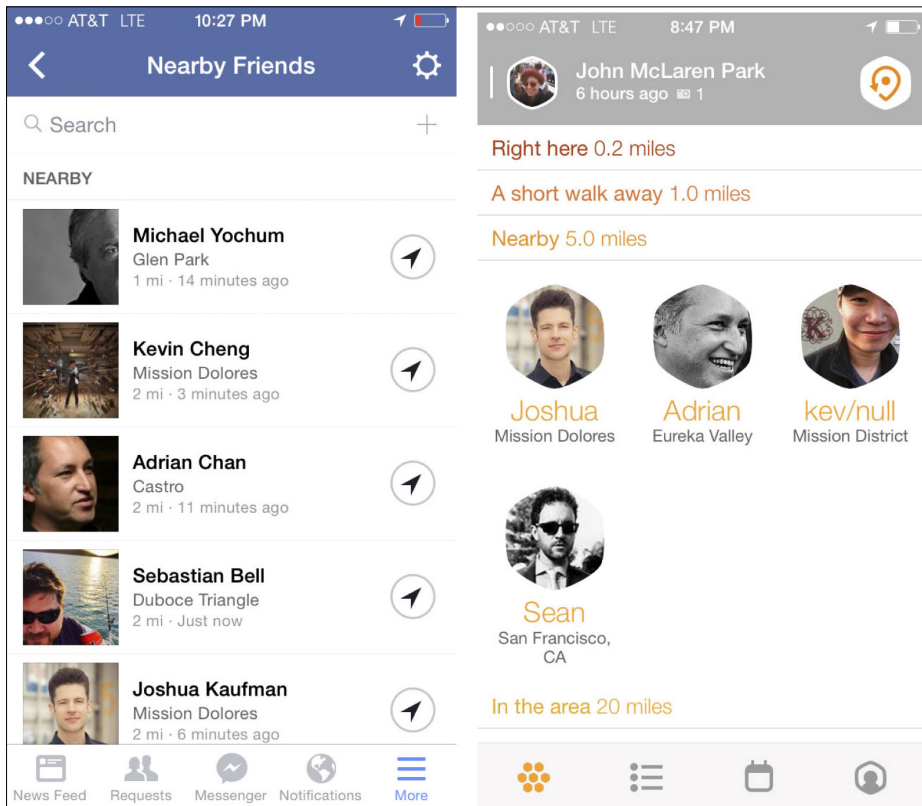


FIGURE 16-26

Swarm and Facebook are just a couple of the many location-enabled applications that show who's around me based on my current location, although neither actually plots people on a map (Swarm iOS application and Facebook iOS application).

Use when

Use this pattern when you want to place objects (people, places, or things) on a map or associate location data with the object.

How

- If the item is a photo and there is Exchangeable Image File (EXIF) data that includes latitude/longitude information, associate that location string with the object, as shown in Figure 16-27.

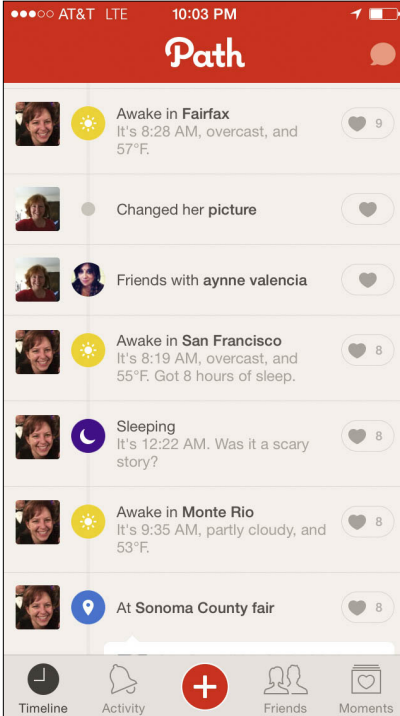


FIGURE 16-27

In the Path mobile application, the user's location is automatically part of their regular status updates.

- Automatically place the item on a map.
- If the item has an address associated with it, such as a business, automatically place the item on a map.
- Give the user the option to associate an address with an object.
- Consider providing users with drag-and-drop capability to place items (photos, listings, friends) onto a map and associate a location with the item.
- Offer an address form so that the user can refine the location. Provide fields for the full address, a city/state combo, or even a zip/postal code. Fields should be optional.

- Give users a method to enter specific latitude and longitude numbers indicating a point on a map as an alternative to picking a spot on a map (Figure 16-28).

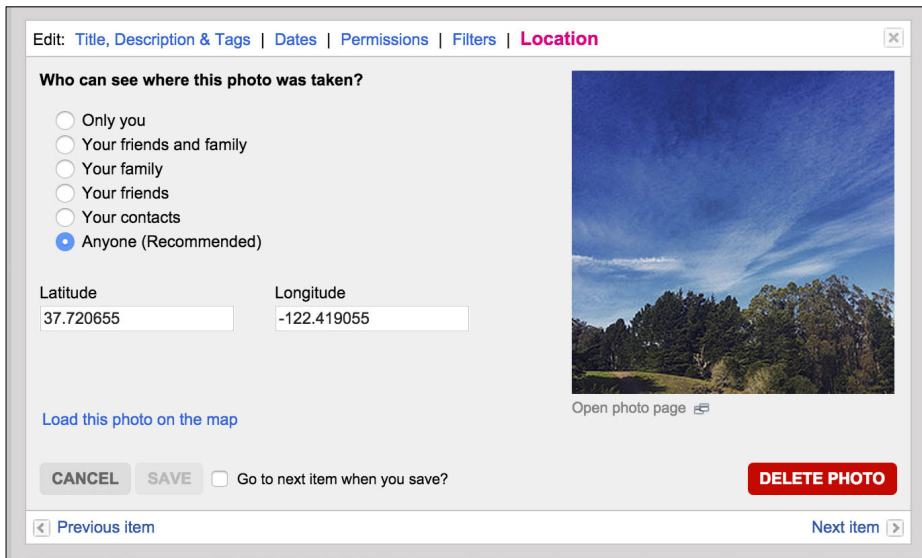


FIGURE 16-28

Adding a photo to a map on Flickr through selection on a map. Latitude and longitude coordinates are presented in the interface if they are known.

- Use the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) format for geo data—for example, geotagged `geo:lat=57.64911 geo:lon=10.40744`. The first item is the tag “geotagged”, allowing all items to be searched from a common tag. The other tags are “geo:lat” and “geo:long”.
- Convert geotags into user-friendly addresses when presenting locations in the interface.
- Clearly indicate how the information will be used and be clear about what is private and what displays publicly.

Why

By offering geo-tagging capabilities for assets, particularly photos and videos, these assets can exist not only in time but also in a context related to the real world. Placing images on a map gives people a sense

that this image really exists and that they might see this, too, if they were to go there. Geo-tagging also announces to a person’s network that she was there, at this spot.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Face-to-Face Meeting” on page 503

“Geo-Mapping,” described next

AS SEEN ON

Path mobile application

Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com>)

Swarm mobile application

Facebook mobile application

Geo-Mapping or Near Me Now

What

A user wants to see where he is, where his stuff might be, or where his friends are in relation to himself or other people and places (see Figure 16-29).

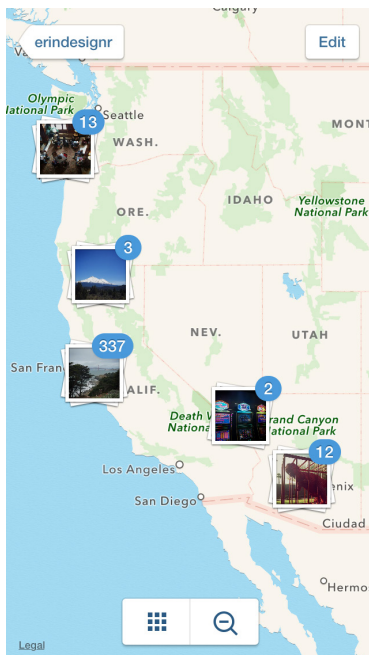


FIGURE 16-29

Instagram images collected on a map using the geolocation information embedded in the image taken with a mobile device (Instagram iOS application).

Use when

- You want to automatically place people, status updates, photos, and other objects on a map.
- You want to show relative distance or related location to the user's current location.

How

- Present the item location with a graphic pointer on the map.
- Display other people or items on the map in relation to the user (if the user is on a mobile device or has indicated his location). Provide search functionality for the user to look for items based on location.
- Give users the option to plot themselves on a map or announce their locations.
- Users should be able to turn off presence or location indicators.
- Show nearby businesses or events of interest relative to a user's location.

GATHERINGS

Using a combination of geo-location and text messaging, users can easily pull together an impromptu gathering. Services such as Swarm and FindMyFriends offer the ability to see yourself and those in your network plotted on a map, as depicted in Figure 16-30.

- Give users an easy way to see where their network is located (with permission, of course; see “The Ex-Boyfriend Anti-Pattern” on page 461) and send out a message or invitation to meet up to those people.
- Include the means for users to send out one message to a pre-defined group of people.
- Consider the option for users to send out one message to a group pulled together on the fly that is based on proximity.

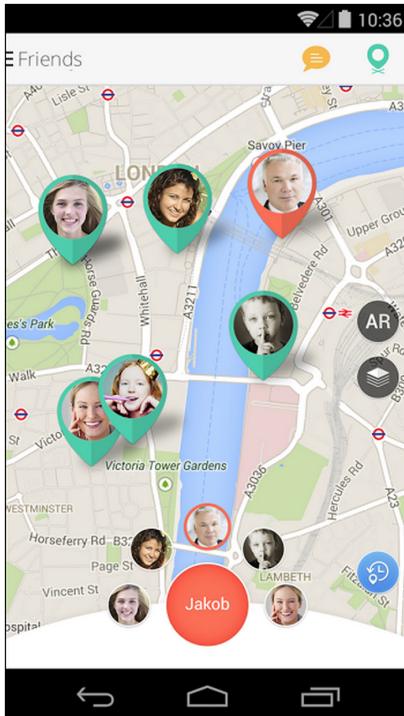


FIGURE 16-30

With the FindMyFriends&Buddies mobile application, users can broadcast their location to their network for impromptu meetups.

Why

Providing easy tools for placing items or people on a map can offer alternative ways to filter objects on a site or application.

Showing items on a map based on current location of a device can provide contextually relevant information and can help support local, face-to-face meetings and gatherings between people.

Showing people in a network on a map can also make it possible for users to avoid accidentally running into people or to go incognito if needed, as illustrated in Figure 16-31.

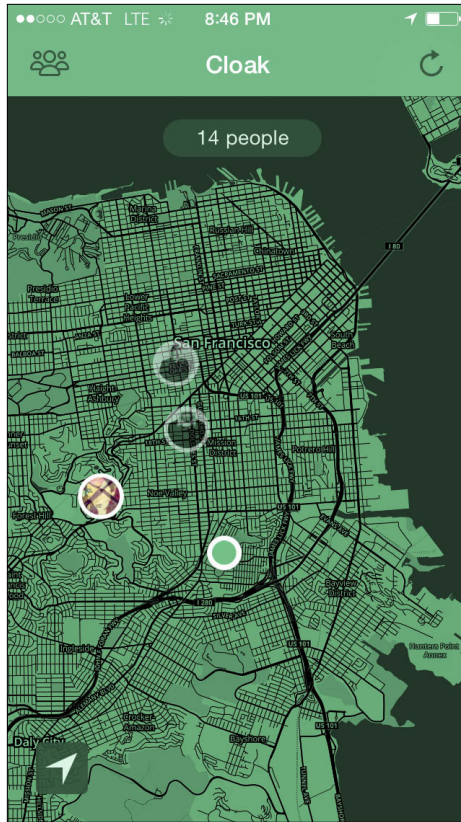


FIGURE 16-31

The Cloak mobile application gives users the ability to see where their friends are, have alerts sent when friends are nearby, or hide themselves from their network.

CONSIDERATIONS

The CTIA, an international mobile industry body, has published a set of best-practice guidelines for location-based service applications (<http://bit.ly/1IKTSiq>). Two fundamental principles guide the document:

User notice

Location-based service providers should inform consumers as to how their location information will be used, disclosed, and protected so that users can make informed decisions about whether to use the service or authorize disclosure.

User consent

After users have selected location-based services or authorized disclosure of their location information, they should have choices as to when or whether location information will be disclosed to third parties. Users also should have the ability to revoke any such authorization. Provide the ability for sharing location at the point of upload, or interaction and not just in settings or other hidden-away interactions.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Face-to-Face Meeting” on page 503

“Geo-Tagging” on page 526

AS SEEN ON

Cloak mobile application

Instagram mobile application

Find My Friends mobile application

Geo-Tracking or Where I’ve Been

What

A user wants to see and share where she has been over time, as shown in Figure 16-32.

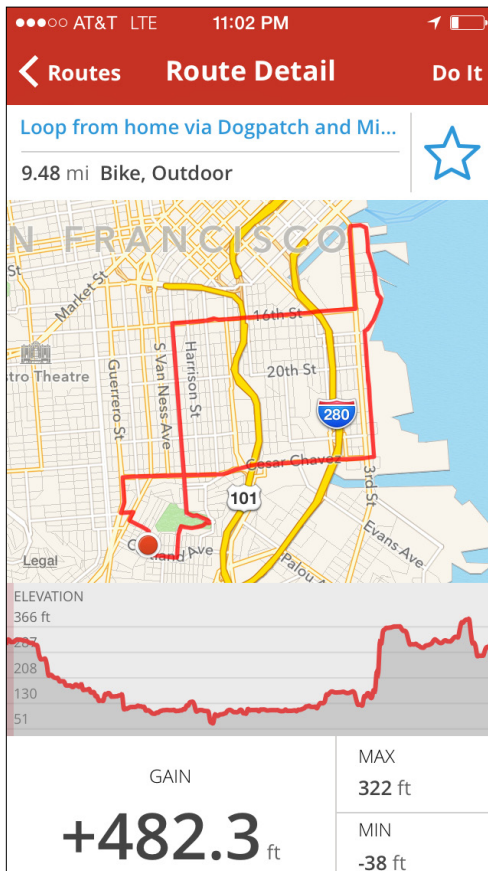


FIGURE 16-32

MapMyRide shows the route traveled by a person on a bike ride. The geo-tracking data collected includes both the route as well as elevation of the ride.

Use when

Use this pattern to track a route over time.

How

- The user should be able to select a starting point or indicate a start time and end.
- Pair route information with elevation. This is becoming more common with data-tracking athletic services and applications.
- Give the user an option to save a route for later.
- Include an option for the user to share her route with friends.
- The user should be able to make her route public or keep it private.

Why

Route tracking is relatively easy with the latest mobile and wearable devices. Route information is just one set of information that has become popular on personal data dashboards and profiles (see “Profile” on page 118). Users are collecting personal data and want to make comparisons of that data over time as well as wanting to track their children or pets.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Profile” on page 118

“Geo-Tagging” on page 526

AS SEEN ON

MapMyRide mobile application

Strava mobile application

MapMyDogwalk mobile application

FindMyKids-Footprints mobile application

Neighborhood

What

A user wants to know what’s going on around her neighborhood, as demonstrated in Figure 16-33.

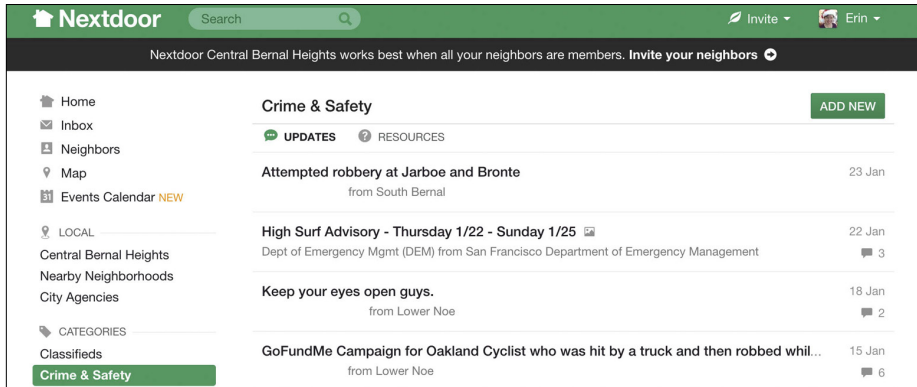


FIGURE 16-33

NextDoor presents news and other content in a private network based on a user’s neighborhood (<http://www.nextdoor.com>).

Use when

Use this pattern when pulling together geographic or place-specific content.

How

- Give users the ability to select a neighborhood for filtering information. The neighborhood boundaries should include relevant location definitions, including zip code, school districts, explicit metadata, or location keywords.
- Present the option to connect to people from the same neighborhood or in nearby areas.
- Provide functionality for people to search by neighborhood, zip code, or other relevant location data, as shown in Figure 16-34.

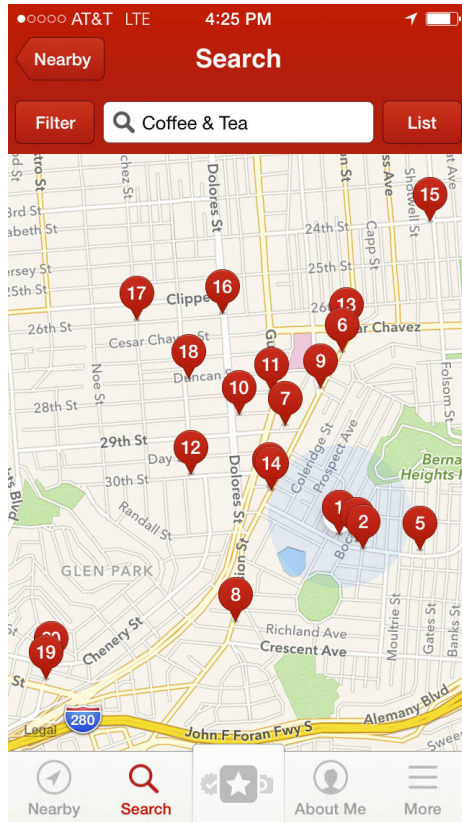


FIGURE 16-34 Yelp's mobile application begins its searching based on the user's location.

- Provide an easy mechanism for users to switch neighborhoods (see Figure 16-35).
- Consider mashing up a variety of interesting and relevant content related to the selected neighborhood. The types of content that can be pulled together include photos, news items, business listings, real estate listings, police blotter announcements, ratings and reviews of businesses, parks and public places, events, and people.
- Display the user's location on a map.
- Display relevant content on a map to indicate proximity to the user.

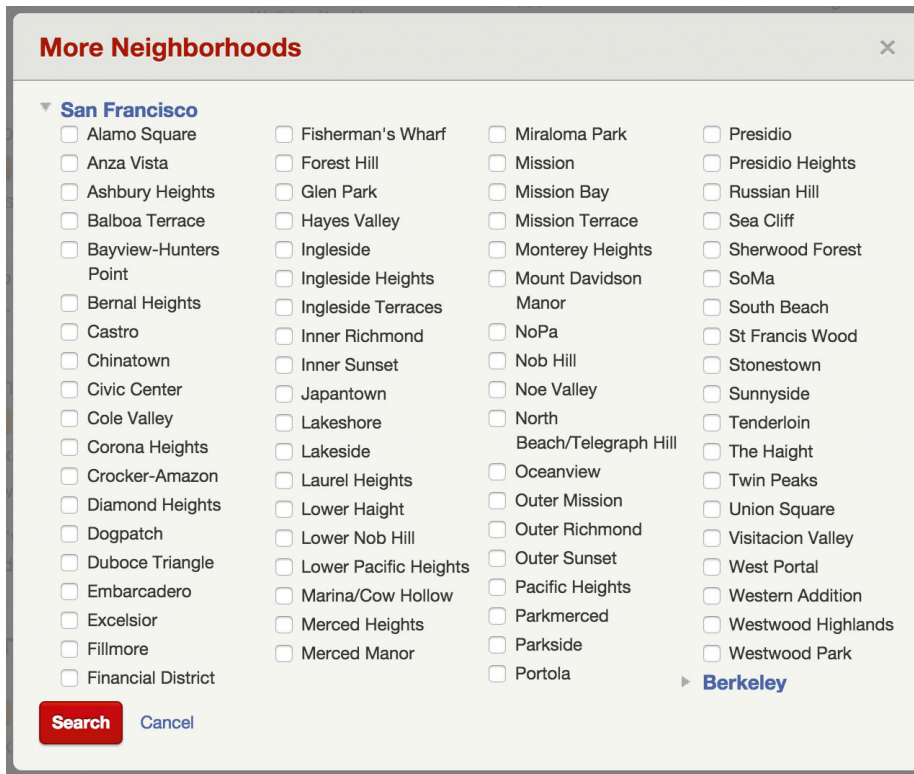


FIGURE 16-35

With Yelp, users can select a specific neighborhood or multiple neighborhoods when searching for an establishment.

Why

Bringing together local information around neighborhoods provides a more relevant experience for people who want to keep tabs on what’s happening nearby. The tools can also support bringing people together who are already close in proximity.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Geo-Mapping” on page 529

“Geo-Tagging” on page 526

AS SEEN ON

Nextdoor (<http://www.nextdoor.com>)

Yelp (<http://www.yelp.com> and Yelp mobile application)

Further Reading

1. Best Practices and Guidelines for Location Based Services, International Association for the Wireless Telecommunications Industry, <http://bit.ly/1IKTSiq>.
2. Sheridan, Barrett. “Digital Hide and Seek: Are you ready for social mapping?” *Newsweek Web Exclusive*, originally published August 14, 2008. <http://www.newsweek.com/id/153197/>.
3. Honan, Mathew. “I am Here: One Man’s Experiment With the Location-Aware Lifestyle.” *Wired Magazine*, originally published January 19, 2009. <http://wrd.cm/1eAzqso>.
4. Masters, Harvey P., ed. “Location Based Services: Developments and Privacy Issues.” June 2014, Nova Science Pub Inc.
5. Gilbertson, Scott. “Take Your Geo-Mashups Beyond Google Maps.” WebMonkey, originally published October 17, 2008.

But Wait...There's More!

THE WORLD OF SOCIAL MEDIA SOFTWARE IS CONSTANTLY CHANGING. Increases in bandwidth, advances in web technology, the browser becoming the operating system, mobile devices that give users instant online access wherever they are and “social”-enabled Internet of Things devices all provide more opportunities for creating interesting, viral, sticky applications that people can't live without. In the time we have taken to write this book, hundreds of new sites and applications have launched in the hopes of spreading and growing like Facebook or Twitter.

What we are seeing is an ever-increasing amount of people experimenting and making mashups with different kinds of social features, interwoven into just about any kind of content or service you can imagine. Some of them are amazingly inventive; others are downright weird. With all these different opportunities and rehashes of social features, just where should designers be paying attention?

The breadth of software being developed for consumers today is only half the story. Opportunities lie with mashups, devices, household items, cars, the office environment, as well as open software. Areas that traditionally have been ghettoized or looked down on by user experience designers for not being sexy to work on like enterprise software or in the wheelhouse of the industrial designer are opening up to the interface designer with amazingly interesting problems to solve. These areas provide rich and interesting challenges to creating social experiences.

Cutting across it all is the need to understand how different age groups are negotiating digital life. As the Baby Boomer generation ages, they bring their need for socializing and communicating with their children and grandchildren, and vice versa. Meanwhile, kids and teens—ever fickle and always looking for the new, cool thing—have high expectations for how they integrate their digital experiences.

The collection in this book is presented as an evolving language, and, as such, is fluid. You can use the patterns one at a time or selectively mix them together to create a rich social experience. We end with a reminder that the subjects of our interfaces are human lives with aspirations, and ethical dilemmas are never far away as we create these frameworks within which people gather, play, commune, and—we hope—thrive.

Corporations Are People, My Friend

Why do Star Trek captains have to say the log date themselves instead of the computer auto-inserting it like any blog? Why does Picard have to keep saying “Tea, Earl Grey, hot”? Because they run Enterprise software.

KEVIN MARKS, IN A COMMENT ON JOHN SCALZI'S GUIDE TO EPIC SCIFI DESIGN FAILS—STAR TREK EDITION

THE ENTERPRISE MARKET IS A SLOWLY WAKING GIANT. Enterprises are gradually moving toward the use of social experiences to enable and empower their organizations. This market has traditionally been ill-served by software that is hacked together from competing providers. Many IT and HR groups figure that their users (their captive employees) can just learn the software and make do. With companies tightening their belts and cutting costs and waste as much as possible, time spent “learning” bad software shouldn't be tolerated. Alternatively, some teams would like to use consumer tools for their work, but many of those services host the user's content and data and are not secure or usable with other tools inside a corporate firewall. In most cases, the IT departments can't sanction this practice for a variety of security and legal reasons. In large corporate environments, using tools outside the firewall for business purposes and storage can result in an employee being fired.

With teams geographically dispersed, tools with social features are needed more than ever inside the enterprise environment. The challenge, however, is that these tools must work behind firewalls, are

generally private and used by a discrete set of people on a smaller scale than many consumer software experiences, and must be secure in ways that is not required for a lot of consumer software.

Some of the core differences lie in the patterns for sign-up, login, identity, profile, friends/relationships, status streams, and community moderation. Activity patterns, such as blogs, wikis, forums, and collaborative calendars, should adjust to work inside the firewall—perhaps with no additional login other than the intranet—and usage might be bound by the roles within a given workgroup.

These requirements provide some interesting challenges for the designer to consider when looking at the array of social patterns to combine into a rich and useful set of enterprise tools.

Implementing Knowledge Management with Social Knowledge in Mind

Early knowledge management solutions treated the organization like a machine. They saw the knowledge itself as information to be squeezed from people's heads, rather than complex memories of cause and effects that are best recalled in response to specific problems or situations.

The failure of many of these early projects highlighted an interesting fact: that much of knowledge work is actually done socially as part of a community. This doesn't mean that information technology community (ICT) tools don't work. It suggests that instead of the tools being central, they should act as enablers of the community, both for communication and collaboration.

Enterprise 2.0 solutions such as wikis, blogs, and tagging are some ways in which the social exchange of knowledge can not only be captured in the transfer process, but also expanded in scope, making it possible for remote employees to enjoy the same level of connection to the community as local members do.

Implementing these tools is not the same as putting in an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system or Document Management System (DMS). It requires a more adaptive approach, including:

- An evolutionary framework that is modified based on the changing business requirements and participation rates. Which applications are being used often indicates which are fittest for the local environment.

- Safe-fail pilots of new solutions. This means small, carefully planned experiments. If they succeed, they can be duplicated. If they fail, their design allows the failure to highlight the cause and point to better solutions.
- Security is also slightly different in this area. A combination of clear guidelines and structured zones or domains for internal and public information should be implemented. Security breaches should be dealt with in a positive way that encourages proper use and doesn't discourage participation.

One of the key productive outputs of enterprise-based social computing is that of serendipity. Often the need for clear ROI to justify IT projects fails to distinguish between quantity and quality content. As such, those who produce the most content are considered more important. Alternatively, social computing tries to make use of Clay Shirky's "Long Tail"; that is, tapping into those people who have little to do with a project or operation, but who could add the one thing that might be the difference between success and failure.

To make the best use of this requires high levels of involvement. The project design and implementation should aim to avoid factors that can discourage participation, such as bad usability and lack of management support. The first one is right in the domain of designers and IT managers. The second should be championed by the project manager through gaining executive support early on, preferably before the implementation begins.

"One solution fits all" is a best-practice mantra from the area of high-volume, low-variability solutions used in mass manufacturing and the like. In knowledge work, where variability and change are the norm, top-down or waterfall solutions are usually not the best way forward. By matching both the applications and the implementation methodologies to the culture of the business unit, you will stand a much greater chance of success.

**STUART FRENCH, KNOWLEDGE MANAGER, DELTA
KNOWLEDGE (<http://www.deltaknowledge.net>)**

Consumer Enterprise Experiences

Gone are the days when impersonal IT departments can impose horrendous "ERP" or any number of other TLA software with archaic unusable interfaces and seemingly no concern at all for the experience

of the end user. This longstanding state of affairs thrived because traditionally the end user has no purchasing power or direct input into the software selection process.

We have entered the era of BYOD (bring your own device) and our workforce increasingly comprises people who have come to expect “consumer quality” experiences in the online products and services (meaning, roughly, “I paid for this crap. It had better work!”). This puts pressure on wannabe disruptive new entrants into enterprise systems, productivity, HR, employee relationship management and so on to live up to increasingly smooth, focused, tactile, satisficing standards of the others apps on their employees, customers, vendors, and supplier’s smartphones.

It is possible that we are being too optimistic about this. We have thought so in the past, but the trends are encouraging.

Workers are Mobile

Fewer and fewer workers today connect to their own information and colleagues from a single stationary workstation. Oh, you might have a cube and you might even leave your laptop there overnight, but you are also looking at email on your phone in the line for coffee and you might be getting Slack alerts on every device you own.

It’s the people who are mobile, not the devices per se. Your job, if you want to make social software that is valuable and effortless (and thus adoptable at all in the first place), is to ensure that you are everywhere, in browsers and where necessary in native apps, and connecting to as many effective communication, alert, notification, and cross-pollination channels as you can handle (see Figure 17-1).

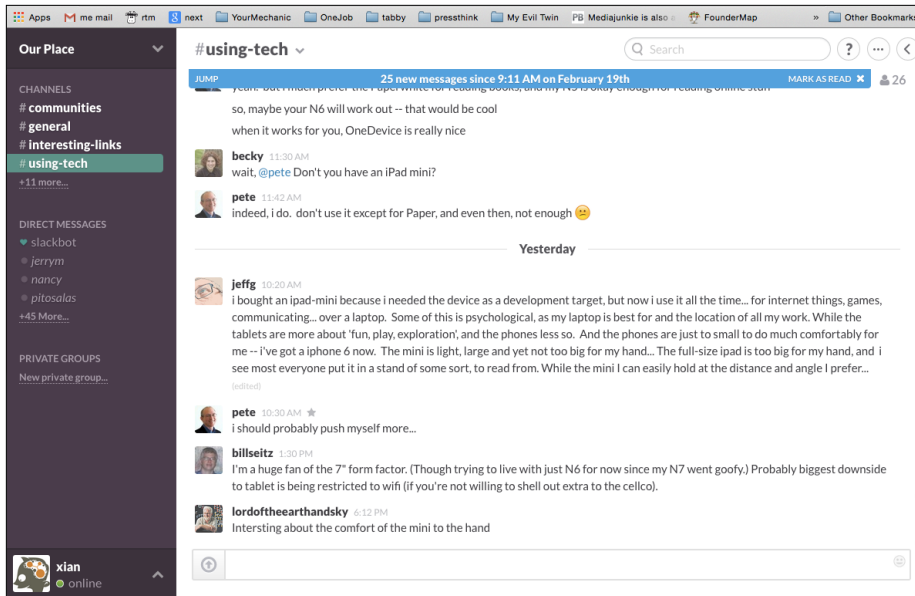


FIGURE 17-1

As of this writing, the dominant player in enterprise social at this exact moment is Slack, which sometimes seems to be taking over the entire knowledge-work economy.

Single Sign-On

In the corporate environment, there should be no need for signing up, because the user is already an employee and part of the system. Designers should take advantage of existing security and sign-up mechanisms, including username, password, and any security measures, such as RSA tokens. After the user is signed in, the social tools should reflect his identity to himself and to others (see “Identity” on page 112).

The Corporate Identity and Profile

First of all, the designer should consider how much of the basic social networking foundations need to be a part of the system. In most corporate environments, there is an intranet and an internal employee lookup system, such as Lightweight Directory Access Protocol (LDAP), which gives employees information about role, title, email address,

phone number, location, and other information about their fellow colleagues. This information is often managed and generated by the HR and IT departments and is a source of truth in terms of data.

Any social tools built for this environment should pull in this existing profile and identity information rather than duplicate it, such as is demonstrated in Figure 17-2. You should not require users to create another profile. At the same time, as our reviewer Laura Klein helpfully pointed out, “users should also be able to control the information shared with their coworkers. Even basic information, such as assigned gender, can be something that a person doesn’t want to share with his or her coworkers.”

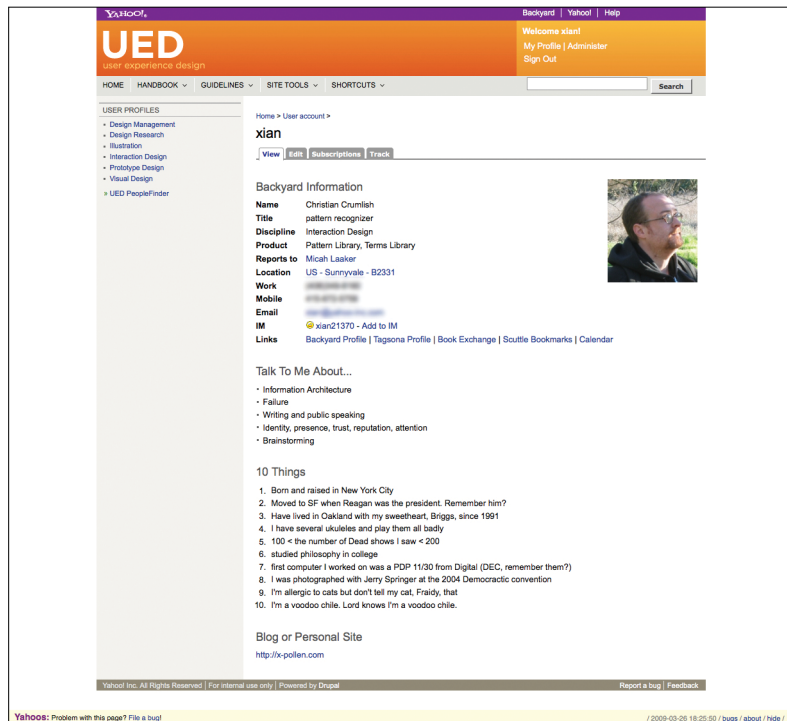


FIGURE 17-2

The user experience design (UED) team at Yahoo! (at the time of this book’s first edition) had its own intranet, but tapped into the main Yahoo! internal system for identity information, including username, reporting structure, phone numbers, and email. The UED intranet itself allowed users to add more personal information to help build teams and strengthen relationships across workgroups.

Contacts and Relationships

In many corporate intranets, employees can see where a person falls in terms of her reporting structure or workgroup. There is an inherent set of relationships available in the reporting structure information, but this is not necessarily the most useful people list for users in terms of collaborative software.

The useful people list in an enterprise social context is the listing of the relevant workgroup, regardless of reporting structure. In most cases, the group or project leader can put this together. The functionality of walking the social graph to find and add friends to the list is not as vital in the enterprise situation, but there can be value in being able to pull together a network that is divergent from the hierarchical reporting structure or workgroups. Displaying the work group or members list in a collaborative situation is useful, and “Publicize Relationships” on page 454 can work for this situation.

What Is the Social Object?

As with any social design project, you must identify the social object around which you are going to build activities and connections. Note that you start much higher on the engagement scale when folks are working together in a committed environment. The presumption is that collaboration is a key goal, and so the social object might be documents, plans, roadmaps, deliverables, or things such as projects and teams.

What Are the Jobs to be Done?

A version of Clayton Christensen’s “jobs to be done” theory applied to software design proposes that rather than investing in UX instruments such as personas and scenarios, that the better approach is to interview potential customers and understand the jobs they need to get done and how they do them today. From that, as the theory goes, you can focus on improving their ability to get these jobs done without understanding them as a theoretical people.

Thus, the basic model of a “job story” (versus a user story) is, “When I am [in some situation], I want to [do something] so I can [get an expected outcome].” There are schools of thought that bring in forces (just as with Alexander’s patterns) and the affective experience of the

person doing the job. That is, how they feel doing it: When are they happy or in the flow? When are they frustrated, angry, annoyed, or discouraged?

Whether or not you go all in on this approach to figuring out what to build for your customers, the underlying framework makes a great deal of practical sense when you are making something for folks who have work to do.

The Status/Activity Stream

A shared dashboard for the workgroup that shows the latest changes or activity within the context of the enterprise solution is a good way to utilize the status or vitality stream in the corporate environs.

Users of the system will want to know at a glance where activity is happening, what conversations are happening, who last worked on a document, or whether a collaboration event has been scheduled.

Designers need to be mindful of the delivery mechanisms for the status stream within the enterprise environment. People get a lot of email already, and consideration needs to be made for whether an action pushes out both a vitality notice to the stream as well as an email, or whether the user will be responsible for continually checking in to see what's happening.

Communicating Without Email

A perennial holy grail of enterprise software is to kill email. Sometimes, this is expressed in a maximalist sense: to get rid of all email period. Most people don't want this necessarily, but they do want to avoid clutter, noise, unproductive and inconclusive discussions about important decisions, and so on.

Thus, one enduring opportunity being chased in the social space for work is a communication medium that is separate and usually rather different from email (although, in the end most of these systems reserve the right to send you more email after all). The most common paradigm seems to be chat.

In the old days, it was said that eventually every piece of software evolves to the point at which it can send email. We might be entering an era in which every application offers you another chat window to

monitor (and of course the risk of an embarrassing “oops, wrong window” faux pas when you type or paste a message intended for one type of correspondent with another type entirely).

Slack, for example, is taking the enterprise social world by storm with a beautifully designed, smartly interoperative experience built around Internet Relay Chat (IRC) at its core.

Quip set out to reinvent documents for the mobile era and seems to be providing customers more with chats focused around shared document or whiteboard spaces.

Google Docs provide places for comments and live chats.

Facebook has its own chat window and independent app, of course.

Yammer and Chatter enable “public” conversation (in the sense of “Many Publics” on page 275). Figure 17-3 shows the rich variety of communications that are available in Salesforce’s Chatter app.

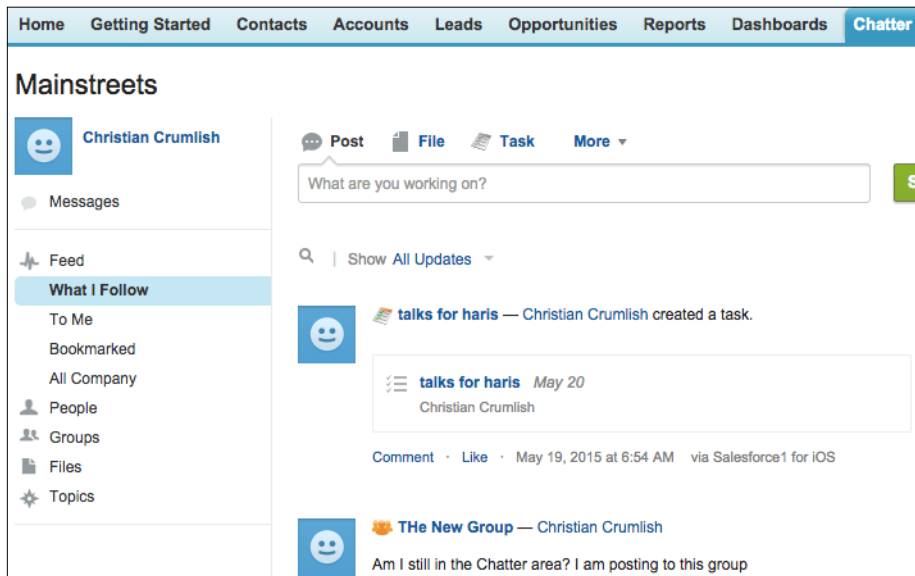


FIGURE 17-3

Salesforce’s Chatter product provides forms of public conversation as well as instant messaging (chat) and private groups. It also provides opportunities to collaborate around documents and other objects.

No one seems to have killed email yet. (In fact fax machines persist in some zombie-like half-life, and I believe there are still some active telegraphs chattering away somewhere.)

Administration and Moderation

Administrators and moderators of these types of social experiences don't have to deal with the large amounts of bad behavior that can often disrupt a discussion or other social environment in the public at large, but this kind of behavior can still take place in the enterprise world. The difference here is that users cannot hide behind a pseudonym, and their interactions are tied to the workplace and often to work performance.

Tools for various levels of permissions and roles might still need to be developed. In this context, different levels of authorship or ownership might be tied to the hierarchical role in the company and some data-editing might be limited to certain levels in the system. For legal reasons, many companies never delete anything. They can archive it or hide it, or that option might be given only to the highest level of administration in the system.

Wikis and forums and other collaborative tools still need to be moderated, if only to clean things up, keep files and documents organized, and generally keep projects or tasks moving.

In short, features such as favorites, ratings, reviews, and reputation are not necessarily needed within the enterprise. Users are captive, so they don't need to be led along the social ladder of participation, but many of the tools can be helpful. Features such as tagging and collecting can be valuable for finding and sharing information in an ongoing fashion, or for finding people in the organization who might be experts on a specific topic.

Ratings, reviews, and reputation should be scrutinized for their value in the specific organization. There are potential social and cultural barriers for utilizing and participating in ratings and reviews in the enterprise. People might be hesitant to proactively rate or review work or documents in a public forum for fear of repercussions affecting their status, their employment position, and their annual reviews. The ramifications of these tools for the people and the business should be carefully considered before spending the time and effort to implement them.

Social Media in the Enterprise

Five years, or five decades?

The past five years have seen more change in the way organizations consume and share knowledge resources than in the last five decades. Extremely powerful software and hardware resources are available today at a fraction of the cost. Mobile devices are ubiquitous, and most enterprises support some form or another of Bring Your Own Device (BYOD). The “Internet of Things” is no longer an abstract concept peddled by network hardware vendors—intelligent sensors in devices are now generating meaningful, actionable data. Employees are more exposed and attuned to a technology ecosystem that didn’t even exist a few years ago.

From being content with automating individual processes and delivering decision support systems with a multitude of enterprise apps, organizations have had to suddenly grapple with a disruptive technology environment that’s changing on a daily basis. Employees access social networks and millions of smartphone apps regardless of corporate guidelines. The lines between consumer and enterprise user experience have blurred faster than anyone imagined!

Keep pace, or fall by the wayside!

In the span of just a few years, corporate solutions such as intranets, internal wikis, and instant messaging systems are proving to be grossly insufficient in delivering the kind and quality of experience users have come to expect. With the increased exposure to exceptionally well designed apps on the web, and therefore their smartphones, users are turning to Software as a Service (SaaS) platforms for their ease of deployment, simplicity, and ease-of-use. Enterprise systems are so far just playing catch-up, and barring a few exceptions, not doing a very good job at delivering stellar experiences.

Whether it is the marketers reaching out to newer audiences online, prospective employees using social media to find new opportunities, corporate HR trying to keep a lid on online sentiment indices, or customers taking to Twitter and Facebook to vent their feelings, social media has significantly altered the enterprise app landscape in the past few years.

Enterprises have to respond to the changed environment quickly by embracing the archetypes shown by social networks when designing corporate applications. Users expect enterprise apps to be engineered, or reengineered, to provide better collaboration and communication, foster innovation, and support them as they deal with complex decisions. Organizations that understand this fundamental shift in user expectations stand to benefit immensely in the coming years. At the same time, compartmentalized legacy applications within the enterprise space will see real, measurable negative bottomline impact in the coming years.

Federated interactions

Social networks are breaking the barriers that corporate IT systems have so painstakingly created over the years. Customers, employees, and partners routinely use social media, cutting across organizational hierarchies, to resolve immediate issues. In fact, in most cases, more work is done through these ad hoc interactions and collaborations than traditional, structured IT systems.

The concept of “Organisational Knowledge” has also evolved rapidly over the last few years. Whereas the traditional knowledge management systems have done a good job with storing and codifying “explicit” knowledge gems, “tacit” knowledge is spread across a number of social media platforms, blogs, instant messaging, and video-conferencing platforms. Successful knowledge management systems will bring these diverse touchpoints within a common reference framework, enabling users to tap into organizational knowledge from any touchpoint, regardless of their location or the device being used.

From a 9-to-5 environment most large enterprises built over the last few decades, customers expect customer service 24x7 on the medium they choose. In an age in which both positive and negative sentiments can propagate to millions of other users within minutes, being able to call upon organizational resources to respond quickly can make all the difference between success and failure. From proactive social media engagement policies and quick response capabilities, to building systems that are friendly, comfortable and natural for users to work in, IT groups also need to ensure compliance with regulatory requirements as well as security of the digital assets.

Conclusions

SaaS applications are bringing the best user experiences of consumer apps into the enterprise. Ease-of-use and design simplicity were not even an objective in most corporate application design exercises until very recently. These have increasingly become a priority because of the realization that stellar customer experience and high engagement levels have a direct bearing on favorable business outcomes.

Users expect seamless, connected experiences across their social networks and enterprise systems, on devices and channels they want. The need is for enterprise IT infrastructure and systems to aid decision-making for end users, and not get in the way. The focus needs to shift from delivering disconnected pieces of software to delivering optimized application environments and experiences in which users can do their jobs faster and better!

**HARJEET SINGH GULATI, PRINCIPAL CONSULTANT,
UXINSIGHTS, CHANDIGARH, INDIA**

Other Tools

Communication tools—text, video, and voice—play a bigger role than in consumer software and should be integrated into the everyday workflow.

Collaborative tools—wikis, blogs, and group calendars—should be at the forefront of an enterprise social experience (see Chapter 12).

Ultimately, people are there to get work done together, and the enterprise tools should help facilitate that collaboration and sharing, regardless of the organizational structure.

Further Reading

1. “Jobs to be Done.” <http://bit.ly/1KBiUGP>
2. Klement, Alan. “Replacing the User Story with the Job Story.” <http://bit.ly/1KBiW1q>
3. Klement, Alan. “5 Tips for Writing a Job Story.” <http://bit.ly/1KBiZdE>

Designing Around Openness

Instead of authority-based decision-making, we relied on a process we called “rough consensus and running code.” Everyone was welcome to propose ideas, and if enough people liked it and used it, the design became a standard.

After all, everyone understood there was a practical value in choosing to do the same task in the same way. For example, if we wanted to move a file from one machine to another, and if you were to design the process one way, and I was to design it another, then anyone who wanted to talk to both of us would have to employ two distinct ways of doing the same thing. So there was plenty of natural pressure to avoid such hassles. It probably helped that in those days we avoided patents and other restrictions; without any financial incentive to control the protocols, it was much easier to reach agreement. This was the ultimate in openness in technical design and that culture of open processes was essential in enabling the Internet to grow and evolve as spectacularly as it has. In fact, we probably wouldn't have the Web without it. When CERN (<http://nyti.ms/1IL3ARJ>) physicists wanted to publish a lot of information in a way that people could easily get to it and add to it, they simply built and tested their ideas. Because of the groundwork we'd laid in the R.F.C.'s, they did not have to ask permission, or make any changes to the core operations of the Internet. Others soon copied them—hundreds of thousands of computer users, then hundreds of millions, creating and sharing content and technology. That's the Web.

STEPHEN D. CROCKER, AUTHOR OF THE FIRST REQUEST FOR COMMENTS BUILDING BLOCK OF THE INTERNET, FROM AN OP-ED IN THE NEW YORK TIMES (<http://nyti.ms/1IL3RUJ>)

THE HISTORY OF SOCIAL software includes a drumbeat—or rather, a wave, a recurring theme, an attractive asymmetric strategy for non-dominant players typically referred to as “open.” Open source, open protocols, open stacks, from time to time, nearly everything claims to be open. Open as opposed to closed, or private, or proprietary. Apple was closed, so Windows was open (in some sense). iOS is closed, so Android is open. AOL was closed. The Web was open. But the terms are used loosely and imprecisely and represent marketing positions as often as they do legitimate architectural strategies.

Play Well with Others

A friend of a friend told me that “APIs are the biz dev of Web 2.0,” and there’s some real truth to that, especially if you mean open APIs. (An *API*, or *application programming interface*, is a set of protocols for interacting with an application from without.)

Internal APIs are essential to the development of any true platform, but open APIs unlock the potential of a third-party developer community, taking your project into realms far beyond what you could commission or build yourself.

The Internet has always thrived on openness: the open (and social) process by which its fundamental protocols (such as the TCP/IP stack) were developed (on the basis of “rough consensus and running code”), the open source operating systems and programming languages that have fueled and sustained its growth, the open interlinking of netnews nodes to create the anarchic and resilient Usenet, the open linking customs of the World Wide Web, the open editing norms of successful wikis... I could do this all day.

Of course, today everybody pays homage and lip service to the concept of openness. Everyone says they’re open, or trying to be open, or getting more open, but there are many ways to be open and there are many degrees of openness, and frankly, “open” isn’t the ultimate value that inherently trumps all other concerns. As with any software architecture of a user experience design project, there are inevitable trade-offs. Great fortunes have been built on lock-in, by keeping switching costs high, and by not allowing users complete control over their own data.

What Does It Mean to Be Open?

The word “open” is jam-packed with meaning for those in the software/web services landscape, and as the term proliferates, it can be increasingly difficult to find two folks who agree on its definition. For some, “open” is associated with “free”; for others, it is associated with flexibility and utility outside of its original location.

Because of the lack of agreement on its definition, it can be useful to think of “openness” as a construct with various edges. These edges follow a 13-point spectrum that begins on the technology side (and the developer experience), moves into the world of data, and then ends with the user experience.

It is important to note that none of the following points described on this spectrum are meant to be independent or incompatible. Rather, think of this spectrum like time theory: it can be bent, twisted, and collide with other points on the spectrum so that any product or service could be none, one, many, or all of the facets described.

Open source

Free to use, decentralized, and (generally) highly reliable, this software movement seems to drive most folks’ definition of “open.” (Examples include projects such as PHP, OpenOffice, and Hadoop.)

Open infrastructure

Emerging as a new kind of openness, “cloud computing” has opened a pay-as-you-go, only-what-you-need approach to technology. (Examples in this area include Google App Engine, Microsoft’s Azure, and Amazon’s EC2 and S3 services.)

Open architecture

By defining a specification for how others can plug into your product, anyone can modify and extend your product. (A popular example of this is the plug-in framework of Mozilla Firefox.)

Open standards

A community-powered, consensus-driven approach that aims for a goal of interoperability, whether for software or hardware. (You can find examples of these standards throughout the Web’s very fabric: HTML, CSS, XML, and JSON.)

Open ontology

Add value to the Web by surrounding your data with semantic meaning, so that software can make meaningful connections. (RDFa, also known as Resource Description Framework in attributes, and microformats best exemplify this element.)

Open access

By providing APIs, third-party developers and partners can include your data/service into their products. (Examples of open access include Twitter, Yahoo! BOSS, and eBay.)

Open canvas

Your product can become a vehicle for third-party content by opening portals into other products—while keeping users on yours. (The most popular example of this element is Facebook’s application platform and the ever-growing usage of OpenSocial APIs.)

Open content

The user becomes the editor by programming self-relevant content that comes to you when it’s ready. (My Yahoo! pioneered this space, but other RSS readers such as Google Reader, NetVibes, and NetNewsWire are similar strong examples.)

Open mic

The product’s content is populated entirely by users, not by the product team. Users own their content, and products support the making/discovering of content. (You Tube and WordPress share both an affinity for mid-name capitalization and an approach that centers almost exclusively on user-generated content.)

Open forum

Users form a rich web around content by contributing ancillary data, ratings, reviews, ranking, conversations, and link submissions. (Examples of community driven content layers of significant user value include Netflix’s ratings/reviews and Digg’s content-ranking system.)

Open door

The user is welcomed and embraced as a product decision-maker in this corporate bizarro world. (Think Get Satisfaction’s customer-driven customer service or Craigslist’s revenue model determination process.)

Open borders

Settings and configurations become portable. Import/export is the requirement, and users are not locked into a single product, and can come and go as they please. (As an example, OPML, aka Outline Processor Markup Language, is used extensively to manage the export and reimport of users' RSS feed subscriptions and groupings.)

Open identity

The user is the owner of her identity and information, meting out bits to services/products as she finds it appropriate. This is in opposition to the near-universal approach of surrendering control of user information at every service with no central means of management. (OpenID, fittingly, best illustrates the idea of Open Identity, alongside its Attribute Exchange extension.)

These 13 points illustrate many of the different concepts that flesh out the term “open.” And, although many are compatible and complementary, it is rare to find any one product or service that exemplifies all of these elements.

Why is that? Although being open can be a competitive advantage, it can also have what some would list as disadvantages. It can force constraints by which the competition isn't hindered, determine product direction, outsource key infrastructure, or free previously proprietary information. Fortunately, there are no horror stories available of companies who bet the bank on open only to be cannibalized by the competition; rather, there are many success stories to the counter.

It is also important to note that all these points require a level of investment and effort beyond what not being open entails. One could easily argue, however, that this time/cost is quickly recouped (in terms of PR, customer support, brand affinity, product extension, and more). Existing companies and products attempting to move toward any of these facets will therefore face more hurdles and obstacles (whether real—i.e., technology—or imagined—i.e., internal politics) than those with no existing baggage.

In the end, being open can mean a number of different things, some of which are dependent on the nature of the product and some of which are the choice of the product's owners. Regardless, though, product owners should understand the marketplace's open vocabulary, and consciously steer that messaging to users and the press around the points it has embraced (and have articulate answers in response to those points it does not embrace).

Doing so can keep open as the intended advantage for a product, rather than as a weapon against it.

MICAH LAAKER, PRODUCT DESIGN FOR IDENTITY AT GOOGLE

For the sake of this discussion, let's look at four clusters of open patterns and principles:

- Embracing open standards
- Sharing data outside of the bounds of your application
- Accepting external data within the sphere of your application
- Two-way interoperability

To be clear, we're not religious about any of this: if a proprietary protocol or technology or model works best for you, use it in good health and gain whatever benefits you can get, but be aware of what you might be giving up in exchange. Where possible, though, we've found that the more you can build your app upon the rock of proven, well-implemented, open standards and technologies, the easier it is to participate fully in the social potential of the Web and the always-on digital environment in which we now live.

The Open Stack, the Social Stack

Throughout this book, we've lamented the Password anti-pattern and the pain of refriending the same people on multiple networks. Over the last few years, many community-developed protocols have arisen to facilitate interoperability, building upon each other wherever possible. To the extent that you can take advantage of the solutions that are already out there, you'll be able to focus on the value you're trying to add to the ecosystem: the unique killer service your app provides.

Open Source

What can I say about open source technology that hasn't been said before? The Internet thrives on open source, and many of the most successful startups and powerhouses run open source languages on open source operating systems. But even if you're fully convinced to use free software that you can patch yourself instead of expensive, opaque software, you still have choices. Will you contribute your code back to the community or essentially create a forked-off cul-de-sac that you'll end up maintaining single-handedly? Will you pay employees to contribute to open source projects that may benefit your competitors? These decisions aren't easy to make, and there's no single answer for everyone, but take the time to think through these puzzles.

Opening Out

Often the first step in “going open” is to open out to the rest of the Web, to make your content and features available elsewhere. It can be easier to sell the idea of extending the reach of your data than perhaps to permit others to play in your own sandbox. As always, there are trade-offs.

When you enable your content to appear in contexts you don’t control, you lose a little bit of mastery over the presentation of your brand. You’ll need to weigh the pros and cons to determine what to do, but recent history—as in the great success of RSS as a simple syndication format—tells us that limiting your expanse to the servers and hosts and sites you control directly is a risky proposition when the rest of the Web feels more and more like a free-for-all.

Successfully opening out means providing ways for external applications to consume and add value to your data, either public data or data your users have affirmatively authorized for this additional service.

Badging

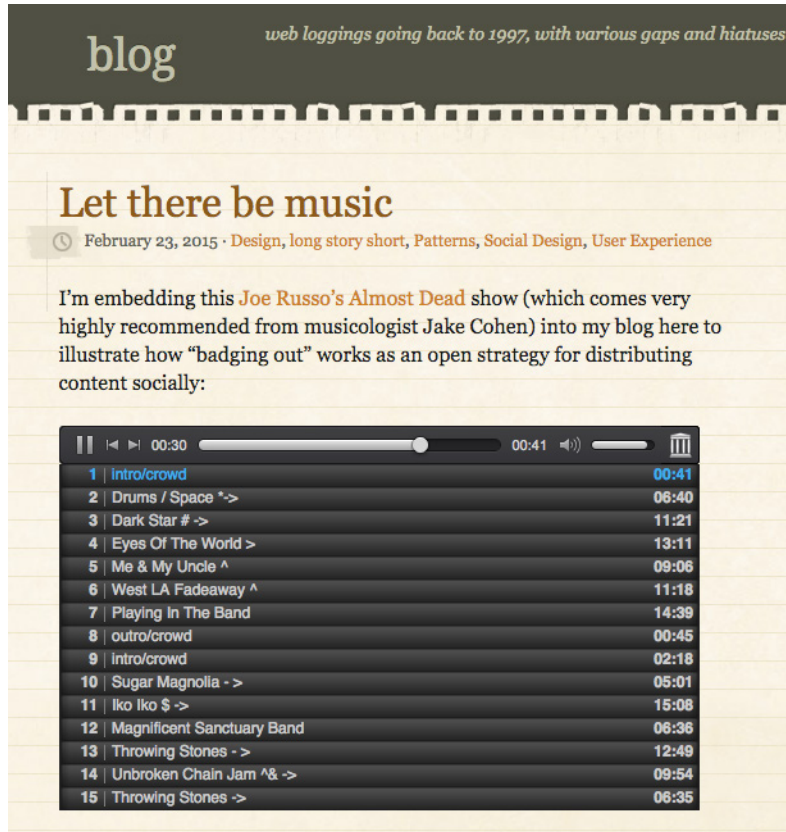
Not to be confused with the reputation or “gamification” strategy of offering users badges for achievements, this pattern refers to encapsulating social content in the form of a dynamic “badge” embedded elsewhere online.

WHAT

Badging out is one of the easiest openness patterns. It involves packaging up information—frequently personalized information—in a portable format that can be copied and pasted into the template of another site so that content from your service can cleanly appear elsewhere on the Web (see Figure 18-1).

FIGURE 18-1

Offering to generate an “embed code” or badge is a simple way to make your content available away from your own site. In this case, a playlist from Archive.org is embedded in my blog.



Perhaps the canonical example of this pattern’s success is the way YouTube’s simple embedding code enabled it to piggyback on the popularity of MySpace as members of the latter site shared videos with one another (having found it much easier to embed YouTube videos than those from any other service). MySpace briefly considered banning YouTube embeds from its service, but by then it was too late.

This pattern is also known as “(External) Module,” “Badges,” “Badging Out,” “Embed Codes,” “Codes,” and “Widgets.”

USE WHEN

Use this pattern when the user wants a way of taking his content from your social site and sharing it elsewhere.

HOW

- Provide your user with a way to collect the data that he wants to share on another site.

- Generate a snippet of sanitized code that contains access to the data from your site.
- Let the user cut and paste the code from a textbox to paste into the other site (see Figure 18-2).
- Later, when another user accesses the other site and the page loads in the browser, the embedded, sanitized code executes and retrieves the personally selected data from your site for display as an embedded module or widget.

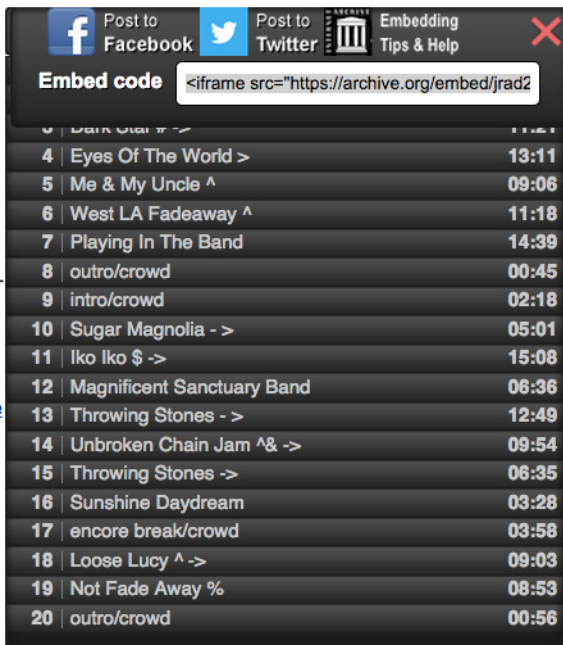


FIGURE 18-2

Archive.org generates a snippet for me to copy and paste into my blog, so that I can embed this playlist there.

WHY

Giving your users a simple snippet of code for embedding in another site is one of the easiest ways to facilitate organic awareness of your site. Any user who creates a badge and embeds it on her blog or Facebook page is in effect advertising your site for you. Users provide an invitation for their visitors to explore the data or content being shared from your site by clicking through the badge and visiting.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Embedding” on page 285

Open Standards (Semantics and Microformats)

What

Microformats and other established semantic markup and data-structure formats make it possible for third-party developers to write applications that consume and manipulate the data you're generating, as illustrated in Figure 18-3.

The figure is a screenshot of a web page titled "Sample vCard". It is divided into three sections by dashed horizontal lines. The first section, titled "Here is a sample vCard:", contains a text block with the following vCard data: BEGIN:VCARD, VERSION:3.0, N:Çelik;Tantek, FN:Tantek Çelik, URL:http://tantek.com/, END:VCARD. The second section, titled "and an equivalent in hCard with various elements optimized appropriately. See hCard Example 1 for the derivation.", contains a code block with the following HTML: <div class="vcard">, Tantek Çelik, </div>. The third section, titled "This hCard might be displayed as:", shows a rendered link: "Tantek Çelik" with a small globe icon to its right.

FIGURE 18-3

By the simple virtue of marking up your presented data with microformats, third-party developers can employ machine reading and semantic interpretation of that data.

Use when

Use this pattern when you're designing templates and parsers for your data feeds, streams, sources, and pages.

How

- Wrap any data you publish on the Web with semantic markup, using the common emerging standards (notably, RDF and microformats) as a ready way of sharing it in a structured format.
- Broadcast your public content in a readily consumable format by marking it up with commonly accepted semantic formats, including but not limited to RDF, microformats, and POSH.

- Another site accesses your site using arbitrary URLs to read your public content.
- Wrap the content in a standard, sanitized format so that the other site can blend it with its own data.

Why

Third-party developers will improvise unreliable screen-scraping routines in order to consume, structure, mash up, and distribute your content if it is displayed in public, dressed in semantically meaningless markup.

RELATED PATTERNS

“Authorize” on page 90

Opening In

Incoming interoperability is the mirror image of outgoing. It involves the ways in which you support bringing in and building on data generated externally to your system and either found in public or authorized by your own users. If you’re willing to host or display content generated elsewhere and useful to your own users, you can enrich the experience you provide and perhaps even coopt their need to see that content elsewhere.

There are two approaches you can take to opening “in,” importing content on a single or routine basis, or providing an interface element that can display dynamically updated content

Import

Just as providing badges enables site users to export content from your site and have it appear elsewhere on the Web, openness is a two-way street, so you can strengthen the appeal of your own environment if you give your users a mechanism to import their own data from elsewhere on the Web into your site (see Figure 18-4).

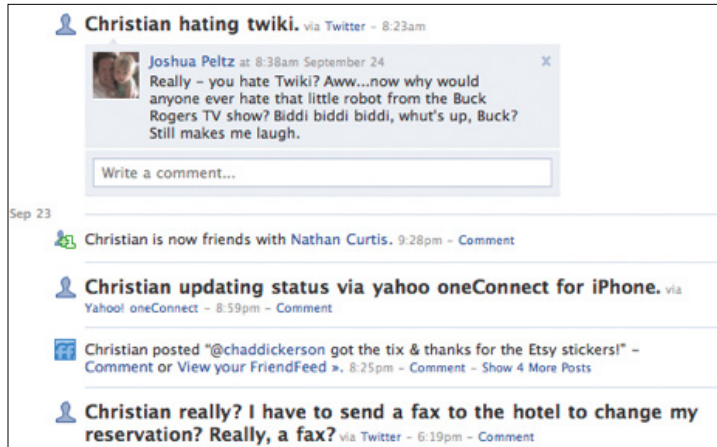


FIGURE 18-4

An application on Facebook systematically imports and consumes status updates from Twitter, turning them into Facebook status updates (with some rules and exceptions) and displaying them on Facebook, giving Facebook users the benefit (or annoyance) of additional information that would otherwise not flow to them.

This pattern is also known as “Consume Feeds.”

What

Much as we may dream of building one site to rule them all, it’s much more likely that our site participants will continue to live at least part of their lives elsewhere, creating content and forming relationships outside of our site.

Use when

Use this pattern when designing the formats and structures of your social objects. Allow the flexibility of open content and data modules to enhance the overall user experience. Allowing offsite content to inter-mix (even if only with side-by-side widgets) lets your users truly make the experience their own.

How

- Invite your users to provide credentials (or simply URLs for public data) to retrieve third-party data from a third-party site.

- Use the credentials or URL to connect to the third-party site, authenticate and/or authorize if required, and retrieve the third-party data.
- Optionally blend the incoming data with your existing data.
- Present the data to the user.

Why

Instead of trying to fight or ignore the sad fact that our users have lives outside of our site, we can instead invite them to aggregate their content inside of our site by providing easy ways for them to import content generated elsewhere.

Hosted Modules

What

Making your own content and services available “off network” is beneficial, but it’s only half the story. Without opening your own environment to third-party modules, you deny your users opportunities for experiences that can be improved by greater inventiveness and competition.

Use when

Use this pattern when your core services are strong and healthy, you’ve given outside developers the ability to build on and enhance all of your incoming and outgoing hooks, and you feel confident enough to permit external developers to create services mixing your sources with others that are hosted on your own site.

How

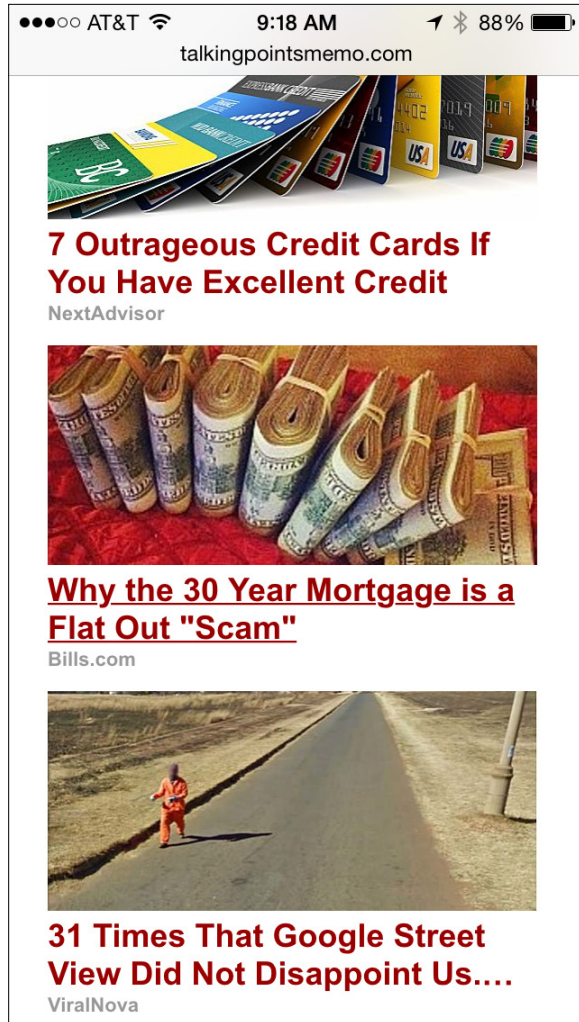
Another site creates a module/app that includes access rights to data.

The module is uploaded to your site, scanned for safety, and stored for later use.

This pattern is seen most often these days as embedded advertising from one news site to another, often via the “listicle” style of teaser headlines and eye-catching thumbnail images, as demonstrated in Figure 18-5.

FIGURE 18-5

If the only modules you embed on your site are really ads, then you may be sending your readers off to some disappointing links (as with these tacky ads at Talking Points Memo). Better to partner with purveyors of fine content worthy of your own domain!



Going Both Ways

As you can see, opening out and opening in involve much of the same thinking, but from the opposite side of the table. To fully embrace the “flow” of the Web (and perhaps avoid being routed around), explore the possibility of being open in *and* open out.

Be the glue. Don’t try to own everything. Create more value than you capture. Don’t build an application when a feature will do. If you solve one particular flaw in the social workflows of today, people (and data) will flow across your bridge.

Open APIs

What

You have a suite of interesting solutions and a collection of data. You recognize that others can create new and unforeseen solutions with the data if it is exposed through an API, as shown in Figure 18-6.

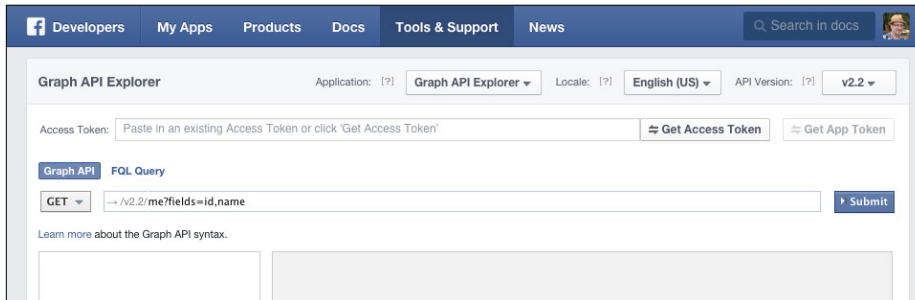


FIGURE 18-6

Exposing your APIs to outside developers (as with Facebook’s Graph API) is a fundamental form of openness that can enable your social service to operate as part of a larger ecosystem, rather than as a backwater unto itself.

This pattern is also known as “Data Sharing.”

Use when

Use this pattern when developing your site’s architecture, when conceptualizing the ecosystem your service will live in, and when deciding which APIs or which aspects of your existing APIs to expose to the public.

How

Wherever possible, expose APIs that enable outside developers to extend the value of your core service.

Each case will have its own issues of data security, privacy, what gets shared, authentication, authorization, and so on. Terms of Service provide a legal framework for safe data sharing practices, but a rule-based permission system must be in place to enforce rules mechanically.

Some services must be opened on a read-only basis. This may frustrate your third-party developers, but if it can be justified as better than no access at all to data and connection information, then it may still be worth offering.

Why

What's good for the goose is good for the gander. If your site can be enriched by the import of data from outside sources, your data can also provide value to your users when you allow them to take it into their environments and experience it in convenient contexts.

AS SEEN ON

Facebook API (<http://bit.ly/1KBjYe2>)

Flickr APIs (<http://www.flickr.com/services/api/> and <http://code.flickr.com/>)

Google Maps APIs (<http://apiwiki.twitter.com/>)

Twitter API (<http://wiki.developers.facebook.com/index.php/API>)

Yahoo! APIs (<http://developer.yahoo.com/everything.html>)

Further Reading

1. How to Build the Open Mesh (presentation), <http://bit.ly/1IL4Swd>
2. How to Build the Open Mesh (unbook wiki), <http://buildtheopen-mesh.com/>
3. Joseph Smarr at Web 2.0 on the New “Open Stack,” <http://bit.ly/1IL4UEg>
4. Microformats.org, <http://microformats.org>
5. OpenSocial, <http://code.google.com/apis/opensocial/>
6. The Open Stack: An Introduction (YDN blog), <http://yhoo.it/1IL4Y71>
7. The Open Web Foundation, <http://openwebfoundation.org/>
8. Using Open Protocols, <http://bit.ly/1IL50vB>

Epilogue

Limitations encourage creativity.

Never rue the limitations of a design problem—a too small site, an inconvenient topography, an overlong space, an unfamiliar palate of materials, contradictory requests from the client...Within those limitations lies the solution to the problem.

**MATTHEW FREDERICK, 101 THINGS I LEARNED IN
ARCHITECTURE SCHOOL, #97**

And In the End...

IN THE PRECEDING PAGES, we have covered patterns about self (Identity, Presence, Engagement, and Reputation), patterns about social objects (Collecting, Sharing, Broadcasting and Publishing, Feedback, Communication, Collaboration, and Social Search), and patterns about the social graph and location (Personal Connections, Community Management and Place, Geography, Location). We have shared patterns about community management, licensing, and open standards. We have also given you some food for thought in a set of overarching principles: Talk Like A Person, Design for Everyone, Be Open, The Ethical Dimension, and others.

And finally, we acknowledge that not everyone is designing social web interfaces for the average consumer in the United States. There are facets and contexts of delivery medium (web, mobile, devices, objects, appliances, wearables, and even spaces); business or consumer; age

(youth, elderly, everyone in between); and other factors that will color how you approach your design and what patterns to pay attention to and which to leave in the toolbox.

The landscape of social interactions is as broad as it is deep, and complicated and flavored by different delivery mechanisms, contexts, and user types. Designing for this space is complicated but also a lot of fun. It's important to remember that the social experience can be quite extraordinary, even with the simplest of interfaces (remember the BBSes we mentioned in the beginning?). Pick and choose thoughtfully, and put the patterns together like a recipe or a poem, knowing that you can always start simple and expand as you go. Much of what we can do as designers is really about building a space for something to happen and then getting out of the way.

Are We Building a Better Internet? (v.2)

For the first edition of this book, six years ago, the authors asked me to share my views on the ethical component of design patterns. It was a topic about which I ranted frequently and I was relieved to excise my demons in a short essay. The crux of the essay was that we should ask ourselves if our design decisions were making the Internet a better place. Would we be heroes or villains if every site on the web mimicked our design decisions? Would we usher in a peaceful Internet populated by important conversation (and kittens)? Or, would we create a dark alley populated by predators and evil doers (and kittens)?

I still stand behind this assertion. It is of paramount import that we consider the memetic implications of our design decisions. For a more verbose version of my original essay, grab a first edition of this tome from your local rare books dealer (or you can read it online at www.matte.org/awbabi.php).

These days, I focus my ethical fears far less into the future. We no longer need a crystal ball to guess how our design decisions are affecting society. We can see our impact almost in real time. We can see it all around us... that is, if we look up from our devices long enough to notice.

My fear of the memetic power of sloppy design patterns has been overshadowed by my fear that we are becoming too darn good at hacking humans.

We use all sort of euphemisms to describe this design trend. Whether you call it *gamification*, *growth hacking*, or a *Skinnerian Smörgåsbord*, these design patterns are the dominant design of all social interfaces. The most impressive digital design minds of our time have become experts at manipulating human behavior. We've figured out how to get visitors to read more stories in a news stream, spam their friends promoting our products and mindlessly click meaningless icons.

These human-hacking patterns themselves have no moral compass. They can be employed to encourage healthy eating habits. Or to deal with depression. Or even to help make energy-efficient decisions. That's where we come in as product builders. We must be the moral compass.

If we aren't willing to take on this burden, there's no reason for corporations to slow down. Consumers are spending an inordinate amount of time zoned-out in their products, becoming unpaid spokespeople for their brands, and volunteering piles of personal data for little in return. The ethical problem is that we (and, yes, I do include myself in this we) celebrate products that cause us to rollover first thing in the morning and grab our phones like a dog sniffing dog reunited with his cocaine-scented woobie.

The idea of hacking humans to do our bidding is not a new phenomenon, nor limited to technology (see *also* politics, consumer products, amusement parks, etc., etc., etc.). Yet, as with all trends, technology has accelerated the evolutionary cycles. In just a few short years of hacking, we've become more efficient at getting people to mindlessly read pop-news than we ever had at getting them to buy Corn Flakes.

The costs of hacking humans is always high. The side effects include a consumerist society obsessed with fitting in, keeping up and—when the pain from the first two is too great—tuning out.

Sure, the same was said for every new form of media including video games, television, radio, and even books. In their respective times, these activities were considered the fruit of the devil and would rot the brains of a generation; they encouraged the “lazy youth of today” to drop out from society and become couch potatoes; and, yes, I know I sound like I'm shouting “get off my digital lawn, you crazy kids.”

I am not, by any stretch, a Luddite. On balance I believe that the benefits of technology in general (and social products in particular) far outweigh their drawbacks. However, as we all fight for a wafer-thin slice of the Internet pie, we too often lose sight of how our decisions are affecting people's lives.

We are training an army of drug-addicted consumers who will do anything for the next hit of dopamine. But, hope is not lost. I am optimistic that the same brilliant product builders who have hacked humans for their bidding will find ways to hack them to be independent contributors to the greater good.

Perhaps we can create a community of anonymous contributors that promotes therapeutic honesty while eliminating bullying and all forms of hate-speech. Or a commenting system that writers actually want to read; one that rewards thoughtful and respectful disagreement while making trolling impossible. Or, even user profiles that highlight our human multitudes rather than flatten us into easily digestible two dimensional caricatures. Surely, the generation of product builders who invented the listicle can figure out one of those patterns.

Human hacking should be considered another tool in our toolbox. It's up to us, as craftspeople, to determine how to wield it. The human-hacking patterns populating our favorite social sites are likely a necessary step in the Internet's evolution. Stay tuned for the third edition of this book which will include my next essay: "How human-hacking patterns unlocked the potential of the beautiful Internet (or how this grumpy old man learned to love the crazy kids on his digital lawn)."

MATTE SCHEINKER, *matte.org*

The collection of patterns in this book is just the beginning of a conversation. What started on whiteboards, in barcamps, and on listservs is collected in this book and on our site wiki. We invite you to join us at our website, <http://www.designingsocialinterfaces.com>, to continue the conversation. We are interested in hearing your stories about designing for this space and what patterns have been most successful, which ones still need more work, which ones we missed in the update, which should be tossed out entirely because the world has moved beyond them, and which even newer and emerging interactions might be added to the library as our scope of designing for social expands beyond the screen.

As we mentioned in the beginning, we approached this as a pattern language, and like any language, this is a living, evolving, and ever-changing beast.

As Christopher Alexander writes in *A Pattern Language*:

This language, like English, can be a medium for prose or a medium for poetry. The difference between prose and poetry is not that different languages are used, but that the same language is used differently. In an ordinary English sentence, each word has one meaning and the sentence too, has one simple meaning. In a poem the meaning is far more dense. Each word carries several meanings; and the sentence as a whole carries an enormous density of interlocking meanings, which together illuminate the whole.

The same is true for pattern languages. It is possible to make buildings by stringing together patterns in a rather loose way. A building made like this, is an assembly of patterns. It is not dense. It is not profound. But it is also to put patterns together in such a way that many many patterns overlap in the same physical space; the building is very dense; it has many meanings captured in a small space; and through this density, it becomes profound.

Why not try for that lyric quality, the quality without a name, in the spirit of Alexander?

[*About the Authors*]

Christian Crumlish leads product and user experience teams to deliver amazing cross-channel experiences.

He is VP Product at 7 Cups of Tea (7cups.com), and a mentor at Code for America. He was director of product at CloudOn, co-chairs the monthly BayCHI program, and has been director of messaging products for AOL, curator of the Yahoo design pattern library, and a director of the Information Architecture Institute.

He is the author of the bestselling *The Internet for Busy People* and *The Power of Many*.

He has spoken at BarCamp, BayCHI, South by Southwest, the IA Summit, Ignite, Web 2.0 Expo, PLoP, IDEA, Interaction, WebVisions, the Web App Masters Tour, the Italian IA Summit, UX Lisbon, MobileCamp Chicago (remote track), UX Israel Live, and at Web Directions South (Sydney), East (Tokyo), and @media (London).

Erin Malone has over 20 years of experience leading experience design teams and designing websites, web and software applications, social experiences, and systemwide components and best practices. At Tangible UX, she leads user experience projects for several Fortune 500 companies as well as a host of startups.

Prior to Tangible, she spent over four years at Yahoo!, building and managing the Platform User Experience Design team, which was responsible for creating the Yahoo! Design Pattern Library and for providing design expertise to the popular YUI (Yahoo! User Interface Library). Additionally, she led the redesign of the Yahoo! Developer Network, oversaw the redesign of Yahoo!'s registration system, and worked on other cross-company initiatives including community products and the social platform.

Before Yahoo!, she was a Design Director at AOL with teams working across community and personalized products, Creative Director at AltaVista where she launched the AltaVista Live portal and their community offerings. She built first generation entertainment guides and community tools at Zip2 for national newspaper partners including the *NY Times*, *San Jose Mercury News*, and early websites for AOL greenhouse partners. She began her Silicon Valley life working at Adobe on its first website.

She has led workshops and given talks at several conferences, including the IA Summit, Interactions, WebVisions, Web 2.0 SF and NY, BayChi, EuroIA, the German IA Konferenz, The Design Writing Summit, and at CCA (California College of Arts).

She was a founding member of the IA Institute, former chief editor of *Boxes and Arrows*, and the author of several articles.

[Index]

Symbols

1-5 scale ratings. *See* Ratings (Stars) pattern

A

abuse, addressing. *See* safety
Academia Stack Exchange community, 194
account identifier (DB key), 116
activities, around social objects, 230–232
activity streams, of users, 175–177, 266
Adams, Paul, 454
Adding Friends pattern, 437
Add/Subscribe pattern, 244–247
administration
 of communities, 484–487
 for enterprises, 550–553
 of groups, 468–469
age groups, design variations for, 469–475, 540
“aha moment”, 98
Airbnb application, 68
Alexander, Christopher (author)
 A Pattern Language, 12, 22, 23
 A Timeless Way of Building, 23, 25
Amazon website, 199, 78, 218
ambient intimacy, 182–184
annotations, 37–38. *See also* comments; metadata
anonymity. *See also* privacy
 compared to ephemeral sharing, 272
 lacking, in The Well, 4
anticipatory content, 420
anti-patterns, 14–15
 Cargo Cult anti-pattern, 48–50
 Ex-Boyfriend anti-pattern, 461–463
 Haight-Ashbury anti-pattern, 50–51
 Lord of the Flies anti-pattern, 52
 Password anti-pattern, 89–90
 Potemkin Village anti-pattern, 486–487
Anti-Patterns: Refactoring Software, Architectures,
 and Projects in Crisis (Brown et al.), 14,
 22

API (Application Programming Interface), , 405,
 569–570
Apple app store, 76
Application Programming Interface. *See* API
arguments, 374–375
Ask Questions pattern, 43–45
associate, 425
asynchronous conversations, 357–358
Attribution pattern, 148–150
authentication. *See also* passwords; usernames
 Fingerprint/Bio pattern, 76
 LDAP, integrating, 71
 Password anti-pattern, 89–90
 PIN pattern, 74
 Sign-In Continuity pattern, 77
 Sign-In pattern, 68
 Sign Out pattern, 79–82
 Sign-Up or Registration pattern, 59–60
 Two-Factor Authentication pattern, 73
authorization
 Authorize pattern, 90–91
 OAuth, 90, 92
availability, 163–164
 Availability pattern, 167–171
 stealth mode, 170–171
Avatar pattern, 150–155
Avedon, Richard, 111
awards, 200
 Collectible Achievements pattern, 200
 Peer-to-Peer Awards pattern, 204–206

B

backchannel, 368–369
Badging pattern, 561–563
BarkBuddy application, 329
Basecamp, 383
Beck, Kent, 13
Being Local pattern, 502–503
Benkler, Yochai, 403

Berners-Lee, Tim (author, *Weaving the Web*), 3, 25, 379

best practices, 11. *See also* social patterns

beta releases, 93

bio authentication. *See* Fingerprint/Bio pattern

Bitzer, Don, 5

Blab Video Messenger, 84

Blendr, 435, 477

blogging. *See also* publishing

- Bloggging pattern, 292–298
- cross-posting, 301
- microblogging, 300
- presence created by, 161
- for projects, 384
- Statuscasting/Microblogging/Updates pattern, 177–178
- video blogging, 299–300

Bloggging pattern, 292–298

Bookmarklet pattern, 264–265

bookmarks

- Bookmarklet pattern, 264–265
- social bookmarking, 284–285

boyd, danah, 8, 275, 474

boyfriends/girlfriends. *See* one-on-one relationships

Brand, Stewart, 4

Brilliant, Larry, 4

broadcasting, 291–300

- Bloggging pattern, 292–298
- cross-posting, 301
- microblogging, 300
- podcasting, 298–299
- Statuscasting/Microblogging/Updates pattern, 177–178
- video blogging, 299–300

Brontë, Charlotte, 291

Brown, William (author, *Anti-Patterns: Refactoring Software, Architectures, and Projects in Crisis*), 14, 22

Buddy List pattern, 172–175

Building Web Reputation Systems (Farmer; Glass), 216, 227,

Bumble, 478

Burnett, Gary (author, *Information Worlds: Social Context, Technology, and Information Behavior in the Age of the Internet*), 371

businesses. *See* enterprises

BuzzFeed website, 262

C

Calendar pattern, 519–520

calendars

- for events, 519–520
- for projects, 383

CAPTCHAs, 66, 269, 341

Cargo Cult anti-pattern, 48–50

caring culture, 190

Carroll, Lewis, 57

Cars.com website, 337

Casual Privacy pattern, 270

Chatter, 549

Circles of Connections pattern, 446–454, 449

clichés, social patterns as, 21

Cloak, 532

cloud, uploading to, 285

Codes pattern. *See* Badging pattern

cohort, 425

cold start issues, 51, 58, 89

collaboration, 379–381. *See also* conversations

- Collaborative Editing pattern, 388
- Collaborative Filtering pattern, 493–494
- Crowdsourcing pattern, 399–400
- culture that encourages, 190
- Edit This Page pattern, 393–394
- licenses for, 309–315
- Manage Project pattern, 381–382
- Suggestions pattern, 392
- The Wiki Way pattern, 396
- Voting pattern, 385–386

Collaborative Editing pattern, 388

Collaborative Filtering pattern, 493–494

colleague, 425

Collectible Achievements pattern, 200

collecting, 233–234

- Add/Subscribe pattern, 244–247
- Displaying pattern, 242
- Favorites pattern, 238
- Find with Tags pattern, 252
- Saving pattern, 234
- Tag Cloud pattern, 254–256
- Tagging pattern, 247
- types of, 233–234

collective governance, 487–491

combative culture, 190

Comments pattern, 339–340. *See also* feedback communication. *See also* broadcasting; conversations; publishing

- in enterprises, 548–550
- synchronous versus asynchronous, 357–358

communities, 8

- building, 488–491, 492–493

- Collaborative Filtering pattern, 493–494
 - collective governance, 487–491
 - culture of. *See* culture
 - group moderation, 491–493
 - history of, 3–6
 - managing, 483–487
 - norms for, 484–485
 - Potemkin Village anti-pattern, 486–487
 - Report Abuse pattern, 496–499
 - role models for, 485–486
 - Community Building on the Web: Secret Strategies for Successful Online Communities (Kim), 22
 - Competitive Spectrum pattern, 189–191. *See also* culture
 - confidant, 425
 - connections, 425. *See also* relationships
 - Consume Feeds pattern. *See* Import pattern
 - Contact Cards (Identity Cards) pattern, 144–145
 - contacts, 425
 - context
 - of metadata, 407–408
 - Conversational Search pattern, 418–420
 - Conversation pattern, 39–41
 - conversations, 355–376
 - arguments, 374–375
 - Conversational Search pattern, 418–420
 - Conversation pattern, 39–41
 - flame wars, 374
 - Forum pattern, 359–360
 - Group Conversation pattern, 369–374
 - interpretations of meaning in, 356–357
 - Meta-conversation pattern, 358
 - Private Conversation pattern, 366–367
 - Public Conversation pattern, 363–364
 - response notifications, 375–376
 - sign-in required for, 358
 - sock puppets, 375
 - synchronous versus asynchronous, 357–358
 - vendettas, 375
 - cooperation. *See* collaboration; culture
 - Copyleft pattern, 313–314
 - Copyright pattern, 314–315
 - cordial culture, 190
 - corporations. *See* enterprises
 - cowpaths, paving, 28
 - Craigslist, 488
 - Creative Commons pattern, 311–313
 - Crocker, Stephen D., 555
 - cross-posting, 301
 - Crowdsourcing pattern, 399–400
 - Crumlish, Christian (author, *The Power of Many: How the Living Web Is Transforming Politics, Business, and Everyday Life*), 9, 13
 - CTIA, location-based application guidelines, 532
 - culture
 - Competitive Spectrum pattern, 189–191
 - leaderboards harmful to, 214–216
 - Lord of the Flies anti-pattern, 52
 - No Joking Around pattern, 45–46
 - CultureBy website, 160
 - Cunningham, Ward, 13, 397
 - Curry, Ian, 183
 - Cybersex/Sexting pattern, 479–480
- ## D
- dashboard
 - for blog authors, 296
 - for enterprise users, 548
 - for groups, 467
 - Personal Dashboard pattern, 137–138
 - for project management, 383, 400
 - Data Sharing pattern. *See* Open APIs pattern
 - dating. *See* one-on-one relationships
 - DB key (account identifier), 116
 - dead.net website, 487
 - Designing for the Social Web (Porter), 22, 82
 - Designing Interfaces (Tidwell), 13, 22
 - designing social interfaces. *See* user experience design
 - Design Patterns: Elements of Reusable Object-Oriented Software (Gamma; Helm; Johnson; Vlissides), 13, 22
 - design patterns for social interfaces. *See* social patterns
 - devices, interactions between, , 15
 - Digital Youth Project, 470
 - direct sharing. *See* private (direct) sharing
 - discussion lists. *See* Forum pattern
 - discussions. *See* conversations
 - disemvoweling, 342
 - display image, 142–144
 - Displaying pattern, 242
 - display names. *See* public identifiers
 - Disqus website, 362
 - Dodgeball, 462
 - Doodle website, 102
 - Dropbox, 270
 - DrumPants sensor kit, 17

E

- early adopters, 51, 58, 59
- eBay website, 209
- editing
 - Collaborative Editing pattern, 388
 - Crowdsourcing pattern, 399–400
 - Edit This Page pattern, 393–394
 - Suggestions pattern, 392
 - The Wiki Way pattern, 396
- Edit This Page pattern, 393–394
- “Elements of User Onboarding, The” (Hullick), 101, 109
- Ellison, Nicole B., 8
- email
 - enabling full functionality of, 46–47
 - enterprises trying not to use, 548–550
 - finding people from address book, 432
 - sharing content using, 269
- email addresses, as login identifiers, 62
- Embed Codes pattern. *See* Badging pattern
- Embedding pattern, 285–286
- endorsements. *See* Testimonials (Personal Recommendations) pattern
- engaging users, 57–59
 - common mistakes, 98–100
 - Fingerprint/Bio pattern, 76
 - PIN pattern, 74
 - Reengagement pattern, 103–109
 - Sign-In Continuity pattern, 77
 - Sign-In pattern, 68
 - Sign Out pattern, 79–82
 - Sign-Up or Registration pattern, 59–60
 - Two-Factor Authentication pattern, 73
 - Welcome Area pattern, 101
- Engeström, Jyri, 230
- enterprises, 541–554
 - activity streams for, 548
 - administrators and moderators for, 550–553
 - BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) in, 544, 551
 - collaboration within, 547, 553
 - communication within, 548–550, 553
 - dashboards for, 548
 - future of social media in, 551–553
 - knowledge management, 542–543
 - mobile workers in, 544
 - organisational knowledge of, 552
 - security requirements, 541–542, 543
 - single sign-on for, 545
 - as social communities, 541–544, 551–553
 - social objects for, 547
 - status for, 548
- environment, 171
- Ephemeral Sharing pattern, 271–272
- errors
 - allowing recovery from, 30
 - Self-Depracating Error Message pattern, 41–43
- ethical considerations, 52, 572–574. *See also* privacy; safety
 - licenses, 309–315
 - Rights pattern, 305–306
- Etsy application, 241
- evaluations. *See* reputation
- Eventbrite website, 503, 505, 506, 512, 518
- events, 501–538
 - Being Local pattern, 502–503
 - Calendar pattern, 519–520
 - Face-to-Face Meeting pattern, 503–504
 - Geo-Mapping (Near Me Now) pattern, 529
 - Geo-Tagging pattern, 526
 - Geo-Tracking (Where I’ve Been) pattern, 533
 - Neighborhood pattern, 535–537
 - Party pattern, 513–514
 - Reminding pattern, 524
- Evite, 514, 524
- Ex-Boyfriend anti-pattern, 461–463
- External Module pattern. *See* Badging pattern

F

- Facebook
 - availability, 171, 173
 - bookmarklet, 265
 - consuming data from Twitter, 566
 - enterprise communication, 549
 - events, 505, 506, 508, 509, 520, 522
 - filtering, 411
 - friends, 426, 428, 433, 439, 471
 - groups, 464
 - notifications, 303
 - online presence, 161
 - private conversation, 367
 - profile, 131, 273
 - registration, 59
 - searching, 431
- Facebook Connect, 112
- Face-to-Face Meeting pattern, 503–504. *See also* events
- Fahey, Christopher, 22
- family, 425
- fans, 425, 441–442
- Farmer, F. Randall (author, Building Web Reputation Systems), 118, 227,
- Favorites pattern, 238
- FBI’s 10 Most Wanted List, 219

- feedback, 317–322. *See also* rankings; recommendations
 - accountability for, 319
 - analyzing, 322
 - Comments pattern, 339–340
 - displaying, 319
 - lifespan of, 338–339
 - Multifaceted Ratings pattern, 336
 - ratings. *See* ratings
 - recognition for, 322
 - Reviews pattern, 343
 - Soliciting Feedback pattern, 347–353
 - Thumbs Up/Down Ratings pattern, 327
 - Vote to Promote pattern, 323
 - Voting pattern, 385–386
 - Feedly website, 245
 - filtering
 - blocking users, 459, 461
 - Collaborative Filtering pattern, 493–494
 - Filtering pattern, 410–411
 - findability, 407
 - Find People pattern, 425–426
 - Find with Tags pattern, 252
 - Fingerprint/Bio pattern, 76
 - firewall, 541–542
 - first win, 99–100
 - flame wars, 374
 - Flickr, 31–34, 35, 96, 271, 426, 441
 - Flipboard application, 255
 - Flirting pattern, 476
 - following, 425, 440–441
 - followers, 425
 - Following pattern, 409–410
 - Forum pattern, 359–360
 - Franklin, Benjamin, 355
 - Frederick, Matthew, 571
 - French, Stuart, 543
 - friends, 423–425. *See also* relationships
 - Adding Friends pattern, 437
 - Buddy List pattern, 172–175
 - invitations from, 82
 - ranking each other, 221–223
 - testimonials from, 135
 - Frolov, Diane, 423
- G**
- games
 - including in social interfaces, 223–227
 - learning from, 47–48, 55, 224–225
 - Social Games pattern, 226–227
 - Gamma, Erich (author, Design Patterns: Elements of Reusable Object-Oriented Software), 13, 22
 - Geddes, Martin, 163
 - generative design, 28
 - Geo-Mapping (Near Me Now) pattern, 529
 - Geo-Tagging pattern, 526
 - Geo-Tracking (Where I’ve Been) pattern, 533
 - Gibson, William, 159
 - gifts, giving, 272–274
 - Gillmor, Dan, 379
 - girlfriends/boyfriends. *See* one-on-one relationships
 - GitHub, 384
 - Give Gift pattern, 272–274
 - Glass, Bryce (author, Building Web Reputation Systems), 186, 216, 227, , 339
 - Gmail, 95
 - GoodReads, 455
 - Google+, 349, 510, 434, 446, 448
 - Google accounts, 73
 - Google Alerts, 220
 - Google Calendar, 521, 525
 - Google Chat, 452
 - Google Docs, 549
 - Google Play store, 319, 320, 321, 322
 - Grab Magic, 18
 - Greenberg, Sheldon S., 233
 - grinding, 209
 - groups
 - collaboration with. *See* collaboration
 - Group Conversation pattern, 369–374
 - Groups pattern, 463–469
 - Gulati, Harjeet, 10
- H**
- Haight-Ashbury anti-pattern, 50–51
 - Hangouts, 452
 - hashtag, 251
 - Helm, Richard (author, Design Patterns: Elements of Reusable Object-Oriented Software), 13, 22
 - Hinton, Andrew, 279
 - Hootsuite website, 351
 - Hosted Modules pattern, 567–568
 - HowAboutWe website, 133
 - Hughes, Tom, 31
 - Hulick, Samuel (author, “The Elements of User Onboarding”), 101, 109
 - human voice, patterns for, 38–46
 - humor, avoiding, 45–46

I

icons. *See* images
identifiers, 116–117
identity, 55. *See also* users
 Attribution pattern, 148–150
 Avatar pattern, 150–155
 elements of, 113
 Identity Cards (Contact Cards) pattern, 144–145
 portable, 111–112, 155–156
 Profile pattern, 118
 Reflectors pattern, 140
 tripartite identity pattern, 116–117
 usernames (login identifiers), 62–63, 112–113
 user’s control of, 113–118
 user’s ownership of, 111–112
Identity Cards (Contact Cards) pattern, 144–145
IFTTT (If This Then That), 406
images
 Avatar pattern, 150–155
 display image, 142–144
 Send/Share Icon pattern, 260–261
Import pattern, 565–566
inappropriate content, reporting, 496–499. *See also* safety
incompleteness, deliberate, 27–34
information worlds, 371–374
Information Worlds: Social Context, Technology, and Information Behavior in the Age of the Internet (Jaeger; Burnett), 371
Inline Editing pattern. *See* Edit This Page pattern
Instagram, 429, 529
interaction design patterns. *See* social patterns
internationalization
 with Send/Share icon, 264
 with Terms of Service, 307
 with thumb ratings, 333
Internet Relay Chat (IRC), 549
intimacy, ambient, 182–184
invitations, 82
 for projects, 383
 Receive Invitation pattern, 83–84
 Send Invitation pattern, 85–88
IRC (Internet Relay Chat), 549
“Is Harriet Klausner for real?” (Porter), 227,
Ito, Mizuko, 183

J

Jaeger, Paul T. (author, Information Worlds: Social Context, Technology, and Information Behavior in the Age of the Internet), 371

Johnson, Ralph (author, Design Patterns: Elements of Reusable Object-Oriented Software), 13, 22
jokes, avoiding, 45–46
Jones, Matt, 35
judgments. *See* reputation

K

Karasic, Shara, 491
keywords, attaching to objects. *See* tagging
Kim, Amy Jo (author), 4
 Community Building on the Web: Secret Strategies for Successful Online Communities, 22
 “Putting the Fun in Functional: Applying Game Mechanics to Social Media”, 224, 227
knowledge management, 542–543
Koenig, Andrew, 14

L

Laaker, Micah, 559
Labels pattern, 198–200
“Lacking Control Increases Illusory Pattern Perception” (Whitson), 356–357
LDAP (Lightweight Directory Access Protocol), 71
Leacock, Matt, 10
Leaderboard pattern, 210
legal considerations
 licenses, 309–315
 Rights pattern, 305–306
 Terms of Service pattern, 306–308
levels, 191
 Labels pattern, 198–200
 Named Levels pattern, 191–192
 Numbered Levels pattern, 195
licenses, 309–315
lifecycle, usage, 81
Lightweight Directory Access Protocol (LDAP), 71
LinkedIn, 103, 123, 130, 135, 136, 440, 457
Live Real-Time Sharing pattern, 281–282
local events. *See* events
localization. *See* internationalization
location. *See also* events
 content based on, 535–537
 CTIA guidelines for using in applications, 532
 geo-capable devices, 502
 geo-mapping, 529
 geo-tagging, 526
 geo-tracking, 533
 privacy regarding, 502, 532
 specifying, for events, 507, 518

as status indication, 166
W3C format for geo data, 528
login identifiers. *See* usernames (login identifiers)
Lord of the Flies anti-pattern, 52

M

MacLeod, Hugh (author, “Social Objects for Beginners”), 403
magazines, virtual, 301–302. *See also* publishing
Malone, Erin, 13
Manage Project pattern, 381–382
Managing Incoming Updates pattern, 180–186
MapMyRide, 533
maps. *See* location
Marks, Kevin, 541
Match.com website, 368
McCracken, Grant, 160
Mechanical Turk, 399
Mediajunkie blog, 293
Medium blog network, 302
Meetup, 436, 463, 467, 504, 511, 513
mental models, clarifying, 29
message boards. *See* Forum pattern
Messina, Chris, 180
Meta-conversation pattern, 358
metadata. *See* social metadata
metadesign, 28
microblogging, 177–178, 300
microformats. *See* Open Standards pattern
Misfit Shine fitness tracker, 18
mistakes. *See* errors
moderators
 for enterprises, 550–553
 for forums, 362
 for groups, 491–493
Module pattern. *See* Badging pattern
mood, 154, 166. *See also* status
Multifaceted Ratings pattern, 336
MySpace, 471

N

Nadeau, Ted, 187
Named Levels pattern, 191–192
Near Me Now pattern. *See* Geo-Mapping pattern
Neighborhood pattern, 535–537
New York Times website, 268
NextDoor, 535
No Joking Around pattern, 45–46
norms, 484–485
notifications, 375–376, 491. *See also* Reengagement pattern
Numbered Levels pattern, 195

O

OAuth, 90, 92
objects, social. *See* social objects
offline events. *See* events
Okabe, Daisuke, 183
OkCupid, 132, 443, 459
onboarding mistakes, 98–100
one-on-one relationships, 424, 475–476
 Cybersex/Sexting pattern, 479–480
 Ex-Boyfriend anti-pattern, 461–463
 Flirting pattern, 476
 terms for, 425
online communities. *See* communities
online presence. *See* presence
online presence indicators (OPIs). *See* Availability pattern
Open APIs pattern, 569–570
openness, 47, 555–570
 Badging pattern, 561–563
 Hosted Modules pattern, 567–568
 Import pattern, 565–566
 Open APIs pattern, 569–570
 OpenSocial standard, 130, 134
 Open Standards pattern, 564–565
 sharing content or features externally, 561–563
 types of, 556–560
 using external content internally, 565–567
OpenSocial standard, 130, 134
Open Standards pattern, 564–565
OPIs (online presence indicators). *See* Availability pattern

P

Pack website, 104
palimpsests, 35–38
Pandora, 328
partners. *See* one-on-one relationships
Party pattern, 513–514
Passive Sharing pattern, 288–289
passwords
 creating, 63–67
 Password anti-pattern, 89–90, 560
Pattern Language, A (Alexander), 12, 22, 23
patterns for user experience design. *See* social patterns
Pave the Cowpaths principle, 28
Peer-to-Peer Awards pattern, 204–206
Personal Dashboard pattern, 137–138
Personal Recommendations (Testimonials) pattern, 135
Petco website, 334
phatic communication, 159–160, 183

- phishing, 89
- PIN
 - for shorter authentication, 74
 - for two-factor authentication, 73
- PIN pattern, 74
- Pinterest, 67, 83, 86, 242, 263, 284, 431, 458
- PIP application, 63, 70
- PLATO (Programmed Logic for Automated Teaching Operations), 5
- Pocket application, 237, 247, 252
- podcasting, 298–299
- Points pattern, 206
- Polls pattern. *See* Voting pattern
- popularity, 50–51. *See also* feedback
- portable identity, 111–112, 155–156
- Porter, Joshua (author)
 - Designing for the Social Web, 22, 82
 - “Is Harriet Klausner for real?”, 227,
- Potemkin Village anti-pattern, 486–487
- Powazek, Derek, 357
- “Power Laws, Weblogs, and Inequality” (Shirky), 198
- Power of Many, The: How the Living Web Is Transforming Politics, Business, and Everyday Life (Crumlish), 9
- practices. *See* best practices
- presence, 159–174
 - actions associated with, 163–172
 - ambient intimacy, 182–184
 - availability, 163–164, 167–171
 - Buddy List pattern, 172–175
 - continuous activity of, showing, 182–186
 - defining, history of, 161–163
 - environment, 171
 - future of, 163
 - history of (activity streams), 175–177
 - Managing Incoming Updates pattern, 180–186
 - Signs of Life pattern, 184–185
 - status, 163–167
 - Statuscasting/Microblogging/Updates pattern, 177–178
 - stealth mode, 170–171
 - User Gallery pattern, 185–186
- principles of user experience design, 11, 25–27. *See also* social patterns
 - email, enabling full functionality of, 46–47
 - games, learning from, 47–48
 - identity management, 112–118
 - incompleteness, deliberate, 27–34
 - interactions between devices, 15
 - mental models, clarifying, 29
 - onboarding, 98–100
 - openness, maintaining, 47
 - palimpsests, 35–38
 - Pave the Cowpaths, 28
 - Talk Like a Person, 38–46
 - taxonomies, strict versus fluid, 31–34
 - for wikis, 397–398
- privacy, 7–8
 - of location, 502, 532
 - of user’s profile, 115, 124–130
- Private Beta pattern, 93
- Private Conversation pattern, 366–367
- private (direct) sharing, 266–267
 - Casual Privacy pattern, 270
 - Ephemeral Sharing pattern, 271–272
 - Give Gift pattern, 272–274
 - Send This pattern, 267
- private group conversations, 370
- profile. *See also* identity
- Profile pattern, 118
 - claiming profiles, 127–130
 - contextual information, 127–130
 - decorating options, 126–130
 - OpenSocial standard, 130, 134
 - privacy considerations, 124–130
- Programmed Logic for Automated Teaching Operations (PLATO), 5
- projects, collaborating on. *See* collaboration
- Proposed Changes pattern. *See* Suggestions pattern
- Public Conversation pattern, 363–364
- Public Domain pattern, 309–311
- public group conversations, 370
- public identifiers (display names), 117
 - creating, 120
 - editing, 142
- Publicize Relationships pattern, 454–455
- public sharing, 275–279
 - Live Real-Time Sharing pattern, 281–282
 - multiple publics, 275–276
 - Reposting pattern, 282–283
 - Share This pattern, 279
- publishing, 301–316. *See also* blogging
 - Copyleft pattern, 313–314
 - Copyright pattern, 314–315
 - Creative Commons pattern, 311–313
 - cross-posting, 301
 - licenses, 309–315
 - Public Domain pattern, 309–311
 - Rights pattern, 305–306
 - Terms of Service pattern, 306–308
 - Timestamp pattern, 302
 - virtual magazines, 301–302

Punchbowl, 515, 517
“Putting the Fun in Functional: Applying Game Mechanics to Social Media” (Kim), 224, 227

Q

questions, asking, 43–45
Quip, 549
QuizUp application, 196
Quora website, 323

R

Rangaswami, JP, 230
rankings, 206. *See also* Voting pattern
 by friends, 221–223
 Leaderboard pattern, 210
 Points pattern, 206
 Top X pattern, 216–219
ratings, 317–339
 accountability for, 319
 analyzing, 322
 displaying, 319
 lifespan of, 338–339
 Multifaceted Ratings pattern, 336
 Ratings (Stars) pattern, 334
 recognition for, 322
 of reviews, 346
 Thumbs Up/Down Ratings pattern, 327
 Vote to Promote pattern, 323
Ratings (Stars) pattern, 334
Read-Write Web pattern. *See* Edit This Page pattern
Real-Time Search pattern, 416
RebelMouse website, 177
Receive Invitation pattern, 83–84
recommendations
 Recommendations pattern, 412–415
 Testimonials (Personal Recommendations) pattern, 135
Reddit, 360, 494
Reengagement pattern, 103–109
refindability, 407
Reflectors pattern, 140
registration. *See* Sign-Up or Registration pattern
Reichelt, Leisa, 184
relationships, 377, 423–425
 age groups, different needs for, 469–475
 benefits of, greater than effort, 449
 blocking, 459
 bookmarking, 443
 bozofilter for, 461

Circles of Connections pattern, 446–454, 449
 complex nature of, 451
 conceptual models for, 452
 Ex-Boyfriend anti-pattern, 461–463
 family, 425
 Find People pattern, 425–426
 focusing benefits of, 450
 friends, 423–425
 Adding Friends pattern, 437
 Buddy List pattern, 172–175
 invitations from, 82
 ranking each other, 221–223
 testimonials from, 135
 Groups pattern, 463–469
 ignoring requests for, 443–446
 implicit and explicit, 441
 long-term nature of, 450
 one-on-one relationships, 424, 475–476
 Cybersex/Sexting pattern, 479–480
 Flirting pattern, 476
 terms for, 425
 one-way following, 440–441
 ostracizing, 460
 Publicize Relationships pattern, 454–455
 solving people’s problems, 448
 two-way relationships, 439–440
 types of, 425
 Unfriending pattern, 458–461
Reminding pattern, 524
Report Abuse pattern, 496–499
Reposting pattern, 282–283
reputation, 187–199
 awards indicating, 200
 behavior influenced by, 188–189
 Collectible Achievements pattern, 200
 Competitive Spectrum pattern, 189–191
 context of, 188
 Labels pattern, 198–200
 Leaderboard pattern, 210
 levels indicating, 191
 monitoring, 220–221
 Named Levels pattern, 191–192
 Numbered Levels pattern, 195
 Peer-to-Peer Awards pattern, 204–206
 Points pattern, 206
 rankings indicating, 206
 Top X pattern, 216–219
response notifications, 375–376
Reviews pattern, 343
Rights pattern, 305–306
role models, 485–486

S

- Safari for iOS, 260
- safety
 - of community voting systems, 325
 - disemvoweling, 342
 - Lord of the Flies anti-pattern, 52
 - moderation, for forums, 362
 - Report Abuse pattern, 496–499
 - with user comments, 342
- Saving pattern, 234
- scheduling
 - events, 519–520
 - projects, 383
- Scheinker, Matte, 574
- search
 - Conversational Search pattern, 418–420
 - Find People pattern, 425–426
 - Find with Tags pattern, 252
 - Real-Time Search pattern, 416
 - social search, 415–416
- security
 - Authorize pattern, 90–91
 - for enterprises, 543
 - Fingerprint/Bio pattern, 76
 - firewall, for enterprise environment, 541–542
 - Password anti-pattern, 89–90
 - passwords, 63–67, 71
 - phishing, 89
 - PIN pattern, 74
 - Two-Factor Authentication pattern, 73
- Self-Depracating Error Message pattern, 41–43
- semantics. *See* Open Standards pattern
- Send Invitation pattern, 85–88
- Send/Share Icon pattern, 260–261
- Send This pattern, 267
- sensors
 - authentication using, 77
 - creation of content by, 38
 - role in interactions, 17
- Sexting pattern. *See* Cybersex/Sexting pattern
- Share This pattern, 279
- sharing, 259–290
 - activity streams for, 266
 - Bookmarklet pattern, 264–265
 - Casual Privacy pattern, 270
 - Embedding pattern, 285–286
 - Ephemeral Sharing pattern, 271–272
 - Give Gift pattern, 272–274
 - Live Real-Time Sharing pattern, 281–282
 - multiple publics, 275–276
 - Passive Sharing pattern, 288–289
 - private (direct) sharing, 266–267
 - public sharing, 275–279
 - Reposting pattern, 282–283
 - Send/Share Icon pattern, 260–261
 - Send This pattern, 267
 - Share This pattern, 279
 - social bookmarking, 284–285
 - uploading to the cloud, 285
 - Shirky, Clay (author, “Power Laws, Weblogs, and Inequality”), 4, 37, 198
 - significant others. *See* one-on-one relationships
 - Sign-In Continuity pattern, 77
 - Sign-In pattern, 68
 - Sign Out pattern, 79–82
 - Signs of Life pattern, 184–185
 - Sign-Up or Registration pattern, 59–60
 - SixDegrees website, 6
 - Skype, 185
 - Slack, 549
 - SlideShare, 239, 243, 287
 - SMS. *See* text messages
 - Snapchat website, 42
 - social bookmarking, 284–285
 - Social Games pattern, 226–227
 - social interfaces, designing. *See* user experience design
 - social media, 8, 8–11, 403
 - “Social Media in Plain English” (Common Craft), 10
 - social metadata, 405–409
 - social networking, history of, 6–8
 - social objects, 10, 229–232, 403–404
 - activities associated with, 230–232
 - anticipatory content, 420
 - collecting. *See* collecting for enterprises, 547
 - Filtering pattern, 410–411
 - Following pattern, 409–410
 - Recommendations pattern, 412–415
 - searching. *See* social search
 - sharing. *See* sharing
 - tagging. *See* tagging
 - “Social Objects for Beginners” (MacLeod), 403
 - social patterns
 - about, 1, 12–14
 - anti-patterns, 14–15
 - as clichés, 21
 - combining, 19–22
 - general application of, 27
 - history of, 10
 - Adding Friends pattern, 437
 - Add/Subscribe pattern, 244–247
 - Ask Questions pattern, 43–45

Attribution pattern, 148–150
 Authorize pattern, 90–91
 Availability pattern, 167–171
 Avatar pattern, 150–155
 Badging pattern, 561–563
 Being Local pattern, 502–503
 Blogging pattern, 292–298
 Bookmarklet pattern, 264–265
 Buddy List pattern, 172–175
 Calendaring pattern, 519–520
 Cargo Cult anti-pattern, 48–50
 Casual Privacy pattern, 270
 Circles of Connection pattern, 449
 Circles of Connections pattern, 446–454
 Collaborative Editing pattern, 388
 Collaborative Filtering pattern, 493–494
 Collectible Achievements pattern, 200
 Comments pattern, 339–340
 Competitive Spectrum pattern, 189–191
 Conversational Search pattern, 418–420
 Conversation pattern, 39–41
 Copleft pattern, 313–314
 Copyright pattern, 314–315
 Creative Commons pattern, 311–313
 Cybersex/Sexting pattern, 479–480
 Displaying pattern, 242
 Edit This Page pattern, 393–394
 Embedding pattern, 285–286
 Ephemeral Sharing pattern, 271–272
 Ex-Boyfriend anti-pattern, 461–463
 Face-to-Face Meeting pattern, 503–504
 Favorites pattern, 238
 Filtering pattern, 410–411
 Find People pattern, 425–426
 Find with Tags pattern, 252
 Fingerprint/Bio pattern, 76
 Flirting pattern, 476
 Following pattern, 409–410
 Forum pattern, 359–360
 Geo-Mapping (Near Me Now) pattern, 529
 Geo-Tagging pattern, 526
 Geo-Tracking (Where I've Been) pattern, 533
 Give Gift pattern, 272–274
 Group Conversation pattern, 369–374
 Groups pattern, 463–469
 Haight-Ashbury anti-pattern, 50–51
 Hosted Modules pattern, 567–568
 Identity Cards (Contact Cards) pattern, 144–145
 Import pattern, 565–566
 Labels pattern, 198–200
 Leaderboard pattern, 210
 Live Real-Time Sharing pattern, 281–282
 Lord of the Flies anti-pattern, 52
 Manage Project pattern, 381–382
 Managing Incoming Updates pattern, 180–186
 Meta-conversation pattern, 358
 Multifaceted Ratings pattern, 336
 Named Levels pattern, 191–192
 Neighborhood pattern, 535–537
 No Joking Around pattern, 45–46
 Numbered Levels pattern, 195
 Open Standards pattern, 564–565
 Party pattern, 513–514
 Passive Sharing pattern, 288–289
 Password anti-pattern, 89–90, 560
 Peer-to-Peer Awards pattern, 204–206
 Personal Dashboard pattern, 137–138
 PIN pattern, 74
 Points pattern, 206
 Potemkin Village anti-pattern, 486–487
 Private Beta pattern, 93
 Private Conversation pattern, 366–367
 Profile pattern, 118
 Public Conversation pattern, 363–364
 Public Domain pattern, 309–311
 Publicize Relationships pattern, 454–455
 Ratings (Stars) pattern, 334
 Real-Time Search pattern, 416
 Receive Invitation pattern, 83–84
 Recommendations pattern, 412–415
 Reengagement pattern, 103–109
 Reflectors pattern, 140
 Reminding pattern, 524
 Report Abuse pattern, 496–499
 Reposting pattern, 282–283
 Reviews pattern, 343
 Rights pattern, 305–306
 Saving pattern, 234
 Self-Deprecating Error Message pattern, 41–43
 Send Invitation pattern, 85–88
 Send/Share Icon pattern, 260–261
 Send This pattern, 267
 Share This pattern, 279
 Sign-In Continuity pattern, 77
 Sign-In pattern, 68
 Sign Out pattern, 79–82
 Signs of Life pattern, 184–185
 Sign-Up or Registration pattern, 59–60
 Social Games pattern, 226–227
 Soliciting Feedback pattern, 347–353
 Statuscasting pattern, 177–178
 Suggestions pattern, 392
 Tag Cloud pattern, 254–256
 Tagging pattern, 247

- Terms of Service pattern, 306–308
- Testimonials (Personal Recommendations) pattern, 135
- The Wiki Way pattern, 396
- Thumbs Up/Down Ratings pattern, 327
- Timestamp pattern, 302
- Top X pattern, 216–219
- Two-Factor Authentication pattern, 73
- Unfriending pattern, 458–461
- User Gallery pattern, 185–186
- Vote to Promote pattern, 323
- Voting pattern, 385–386
- Welcome Area pattern, 101
- social search, 415–416
 - anticipatory content, 420
 - Conversational Search pattern, 418–420
 - pivoting, 420
 - Real-Time Search pattern, 416
- social structure. *See* culture
- sock puppets, 375
- Soliciting Feedback pattern, 347–353
- SoundCloud website, 139, 299, 456
- Stars pattern. *See* Ratings (Stars) pattern
- status
 - for enterprises, 548
 - for people, 163–167
- statuscasting, 160, 162
 - Managing Incoming Updates pattern, 180–186
 - Statuscasting/Microblogging/Updates pattern, 177–178
- stealth mode, 170–171
- Strava application, 200, 210
- StumbleUpon website, 65
- Subjective Search pattern. *See* Conversational Search pattern
- Subscribe/Add pattern, 244–247
- success states, 100–101
- Suggestions pattern, 392
- Surveys pattern. *See* Voting pattern
- Swarm application, 210, 462
- synchronous conversations, 357–358

T

- Tag Cloud pattern, 254–256
- tagging
 - Find with Tags pattern, 252
 - Geo-Tagging pattern, 526
 - hashtag, 251
 - Tag Cloud pattern, 254–256
 - Tagging pattern, 247
- Tagging pattern, 247
- Talk Like a Person principle, 38–46

- taxonomies, strict versus fluid, 31–34
- Telepocalypse blog, 163
- Terms of Service pattern, 306–308
- Testimonials (Personal Recommendations) pattern, 135
- text messages
 - impromptu gatherings using, 530
 - two-factor authentication using, 73
- Thumbs Up/Down Ratings pattern, 327
- Tidwell, Jennifer (author, *Designing Interfaces*), 13, 22
- Timeless Way of Building, A (Alexander), 23, 25
- Timestamp pattern, 302
- Tinder, 330, 479
- Tippins, Robyn, 493
- Top X pattern, 216–219
- Tracked Changes pattern. *See* Suggestions pattern
- Trello website, 101
- tripartite identity pattern, 116–117
- Trulia website, 336
- Tumblr, 60, 145, 283, 410, 445
- Twitter
 - authorization, 91
 - contact cards, 145
 - Favorites, 240
 - followers, 304, 441, 442, 460
 - following, 430, 440
 - online presence, 162
 - public and private conversations, 364
 - reposting, 282
 - safety, 52
 - statuscasting, 178, 566
- Two-Factor Authentication pattern, 73
- Two-Way Web pattern. *See* Edit This Page pattern

U

- Unfriending pattern, 458–461
- Universal Edit Button pattern. *See* Edit This Page pattern
- Untapped application, 193
- Updates pattern. *See* Statuscasting pattern
- uploading to the cloud, 285
- usage lifecycle, 81
- user experience design
 - best practices for, 11
 - history of, 3–10
 - patterns for. *See* social patterns
 - principles of. *See* principles of user experience design
- User Gallery pattern, 185–186
- usernames (login identifiers), 62–63, 69–70, 112–113, 117

users. *See also* communities
authentication of. *See* authentication
blogging by. *See* blogging
collaboration of. *See* collaboration; conversations
collecting by. *See* collecting
dashboard for. *See* dashboard
early adopters, 51, 58, 59
engaging. *See* engaging users
feedback from, soliciting. *See* feedback
identity of. *See* identity
invitations for, 82
mental models of, clarifying, 29
online presence of. *See* presence
registration of, 59–60
relationships between. *See* relationships
reputation of. *See* reputation
status of, 163–167

V

Vander Wal, Thomas, 408
van Welie, Martijn, 13
vendettas, 375
video blogging, 299–300
Viégas, Fernanda, 38
Vimeo website, 288
virtual magazines, 301–302. *See also* publishing
Vlissides, John M. (author, Design Patterns: Elements of Reusable Object-Oriented Software), 13, 22
voice, patterns for, 38–46
Vote to Promote pattern, 323
Voting pattern, 385–386. *See also* rankings

W

W3C (World Wide Web Consortium)
geo data format, 528
identity system specifications, 155–156
Ward, William Arthur, 317
Wattenberg, Martin, 38
Waze application, 191
Weaving the Web (Berners-Lee), 3
Web 2.0, 6, 9
WeChat application, 350
Weinberger, David, 37
Welcome Area pattern, 101
Well, The (online community), 3, 4
WhatsApp, 169, 451
Where I've Been pattern. *See* Geo-Tracking pattern

Whitson, Jennifer (author, “Lacking Control Increases Illusory Pattern Perception”), 356–357
“Who’s Here Now?” pattern. *See* Availability pattern
Widgets pattern. *See* Badging pattern
Wiesel, Elie, 259
Wikia website, 208
Wiki projects, 380
Wiki Way pattern, The, 396
Wilson, Kenneth G., 35
Winer, Dave, 379
win, first, 99–100
WordPress application, 297
Workspace pattern. *See* Manage Project pattern
World Wide Web Consortium. *See* W3C
“wow moment”, 99

X

Xbox Live GamerScore website, 209

Y

Yahoo!, 485
Yahoo! Messenger, 170
Yammer, 549
Yelp, 203, 204, 344, 537
YouTube, 26, 52, 80, 300, 327

Z

Zapier, 406
Ze Frank’s website, 380