

Using Social Bookmarking to Organize the Web

by Kristin Fontichiaro

Have any of the following situations ever happened to you? If so, then social bookmarking may be a solution to your needs.

- You took a computer workshop but misplaced the list of URLs that the facilitator distributed. You mutter, “I visited all of the sites during the workshop. Why couldn’t I just have an online record of where I went?”
- Your bookmarks or favorites list was wiped out when your computer was re-imaged or replaced.
- You work at many computers and wish you could access the same list of bookmarked favorites from each.
- You’d like to make a pathfinder or list of recommended resources for a class, but it just takes too long to update the media center webpage. Isn’t there a faster way to save sites for classroom use?
- You and your friends share many mutual interests, and you’d like a way to be able for them to access the same websites you like. Is there an easy way for them to visit your updated list?
- Your students are using the Web to research but haven’t kept track of the sites they have visited.

What Is Social Bookmarking?

Social bookmarking is the process of saving and sharing favorite URLs using online storage tools. When you use this technique, your favorite sites are saved to a website, not the browser, and you can access them from any computer. This makes them ideal for itinerant educators or for students and teachers who work at multiple work stations. Web-based bookmarking also protects your favorite sites if your hard drive fails, your computer is re-imaged, or your district is upgrading its computer equipment.

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The “Social” in Social Bookmarking

The best-known social bookmarking sites are *Del.icio.us* (<http://del.icio.us> or <http://delicious.com>) and *Furl* (<http://furl.net>). These sites are referred to as social bookmarking because the user has the option of sharing his or her saved sites with other users. After registering and customizing account settings, users of *Del.icio.us* and *Furl* receive a unique URL, a webpage where all of the saved URLs marked “public” appear.

In a school setting, social bookmarking can be a quick way for library media specialists to create and keep an updated Web pathfinder, without any knowledge of HTML or Web programming needed. Students working in collaborative groups will also find it useful to track one another’s Web resources via these public pages.

If you choose to create a single social bookmarking site to track sites for your personal and professional life, you may not want your students to have access to all of your links. In this case, you may wish to make your account private, meaning that the saved URLs can only be seen when you log in and will be hidden to the general public.

Getting Started

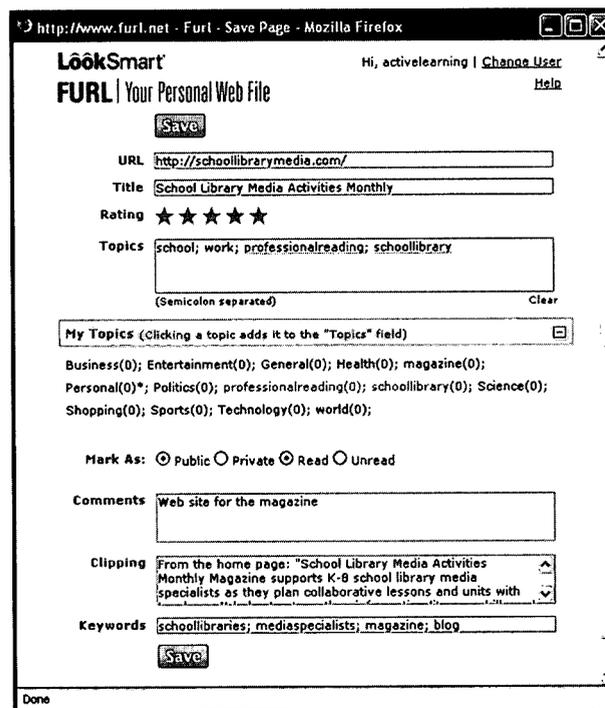
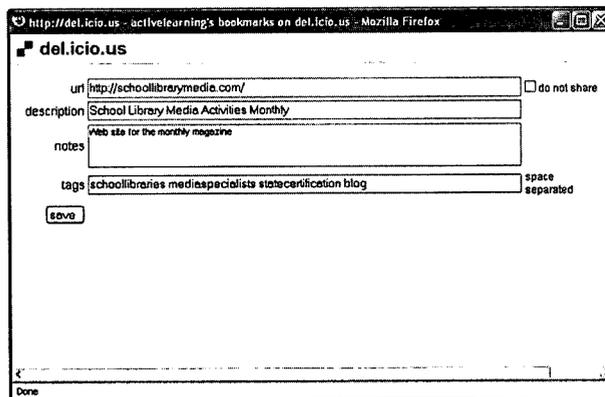
Both *Del.icio.us* and *Furl* offer free accounts. Follow the onsite instructions to create an account. For personal safety reasons, avoid using student or school names for usernames.

If possible, install the site's buttons on your browser's toolbar so you can quickly add a site to your collection. If you have already accumulated a large number of bookmarked favorites on your Internet browser, follow the instructions for uploading them into your Web account. Be sure to select the public/private settings that match your personal comfort level.

Describing What You're Saving

Another feature of social bookmarking is that it allows the user to customize the descriptive information along with the URL. (See screen shots from *Del.icio.us* and *Furl* at right.) Depending on the Web tool, users can assign keywords or tags (e.g., *civilwar* or *crispusattucks*), sort the saved site into a larger topic area (e.g., *socialstudies*, *English*, or *science*), rate the quality of the site (e.g., *Furl's* five-star scale), add a descriptive phrase (e.g., "Shows how the new Food Pyramid is different from the previous one"), or save a quote from the site (e.g., perfect for student researchers). Adding descriptive information along with keywords drawn from their personal vocabulary helps users more quick-

ly find a site among their saved sites. For example, *Del.icio.us* lists all of the user's keywords on the right-hand side of the screen and, by default, lists the newest saved posts first. Looking for all of the Web addresses you've saved about blogging? Just click the "blogging" keyword, and all posts tagged with that word will be displayed.



Drawing on the Collective Knowledge of Other Users

While social bookmarking sites help users keep track of their own content, the sites also let users search for information. When a site

is saved on a social bookmarking site, the site tracks how many others have saved the same site and displays that information next to the bookmarked information. As a result, users can search social bookmarking sites to find websites that have been identified by other users. This can be an indicator of the quality or effectiveness of the site's content.

An example would be a computer programmer who searches *Del.icio.us* first when faced with a technology challenge. He or she types the question into the home page's search box, analyzes the search results, and then visits the sites that have been saved, with those most frequent first. He figures that if a site was saved by many others, it is probably useful. While this Google alternative is not foolproof, it can help students access relevant surface Web information quickly.

Conclusion

Whether you like to share what you've found online or keep it to yourself, social bookmarking offers a wide range of options for helping educators and students navigate and organize online resources. Social bookmarking is an excellent way to make sense of the Web. 🖱

Join Kristin Fontichiaro on the *SLMAM* Library 2.0 blog (<http://blog.schoolibrarymedia.com/>).

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