Post-it Notes for Web Content

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Why do we use Post-it notes? To remind ourselves of something. We like them because they are so flexible – you can scribble notes and reminders on them and they're easy to find, reorder and change. Today Post-its are so ubiquitous that you have to think hard to remember what life was like before they were invented.

In this article, I will be introducing and describing three similar tools for linking or sharing content: Declara, Stackly and Pocket (there are others, to be sure, but these three looked the most interesting from my trawl). All three could all be described as Post-it notes for the Web: you can make notes about websites you have seen, then reorder your notes and come back and find them again. All three tools were created for academic and educational publishing. The nature of academic publishing is to share what you have discovered or created, and so tools that enable users to join A with B can provide valuable productivity benefits. Of course, discovering content of value and wanting to share it with others is universal across all sectors. All three use recommendation engines – tools that automatically suggest content that is linked in some way to pages you have selected before. Two were launched as recently as this year.

Declara

[Declara](#) is the newest of the three services, launched on 7th April. It combines an online playlist and a recommendation engine, and states proudly that its role is to "make it easy to discover, share and organise knowledge." Users can tag pages and share recommendations. After creating a collection of web links – to documents, content, websites or people – users can search for related content using the Declara search engine. The Declara app places a small icon on your browser bar, and clicking on the icon adds the current page to your collection.

Figure 1 Example of a Declara Collection

Having browsed through the collections, you can then opt to follow any of them (see Figure 1). When these collections are updated, Declara sends you an update notification.

Collections can be open (public) or private. Open collections are, as you would imagine, shared with everyone, while private collections can be opened to as many users as you would like. Individual content items can be annotated (creating what Declara calls "insights") and those can be shared with other people.

It might be surprising, based on the above, that Declara calls itself not a link-management tool but a "predictive learning company", which analyses user behaviour to predict recommendations. It makes use of a "Cognitive Graph" that identifies what you might like to learn, based on what you already know (which includes social media). It appears to be a text-mining recommendation engine with some social media features added.

Stackly

Stackly is another recent service (launched in March 2015), developed by HighWire, the US company that provides hosting tools for many journal publishers. As you would imagine from a company that provides tools for academic users, it is presented as an academic tool, but there is no reason why it should be restricted to academic use.
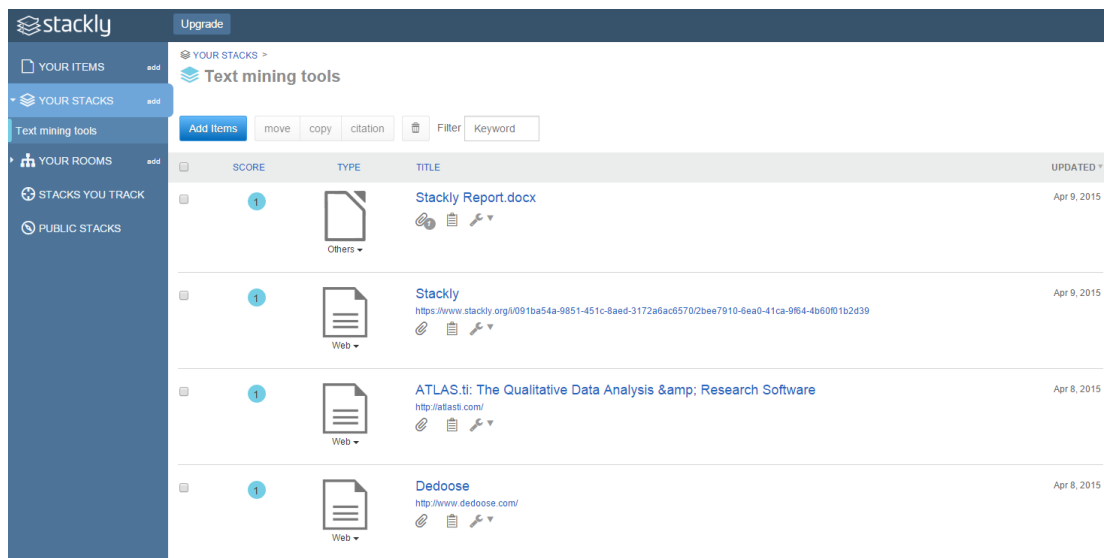
Figure 2 A Public stack

Like Declara, Stackly has public and private collections, although Stackly calls collections "stacks". Public stacks are free, while private stacks are payable. Stacks can be grouped into "rooms", which are collections of stacks (I fail to understand the analogy here, although I suppose many rooms are full of stacks of things). The service is for personal use, but Stackly provides a paid model for teams to collaborate with each other. Clearly, HighWire believe it has some relevance to journal publishers, since it provides useful tools for them to disseminate information about their journal, and certainly some HighWire journals have a Stackly icon on their journal home page. However, Stackly seems to have more in common with the two other services here than with journal promotions – such a link seems almost peripheral.

Pocket
Pocket is the granddaddy of these three, a service for storing and sharing content (it was launched as "Read It Later", which gives some idea of what it does). It has a similar look and feel to the other two apps, although Pocket presents itself as a more general-purpose tool than primarily for academic use. Its strapline is "When you find something you want to view later, put it into Pocket." This seems to sum up Pocket quite well. However, Pocket has the added feature of not requiring an online connection to view the saved content – it remains in your Pocket collection. As might be expected from a service founded as long ago as 2007, Pocket has more users than Stackly and Declara put together – they claim 17 million registered users. An integral feature of Pocket appears to be that it has apps for mobile devices, and certainly making a note of something on your mobile or tablet seems like a good motivation for using Pocket.
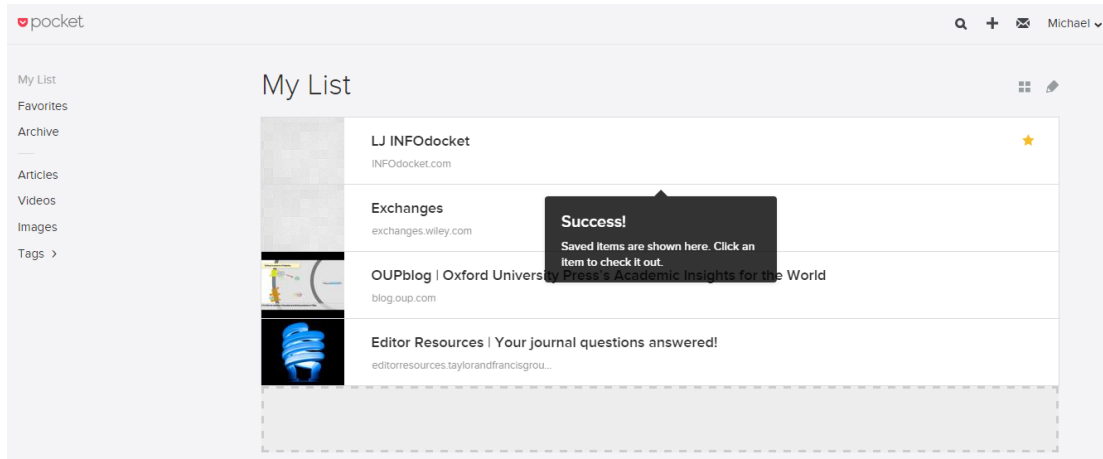
Figure 3 Pocket Personal list

Like the other two services, Pocket has a free basic service and a paid premium offering. It provides two benefits for premium members:

- Content can be saved to a permanent library – hence it will still be available even if the web page is altered. This could be a brave attempt to make a feature out of a limitation, since many people would want to keep the web page in its current, latest version – something that would be more difficult to achieve with an offline store
- Pocket suggest automatic metadata to catalogue your content, although as a user you can edit and change these tags

Conclusions

What is the appeal of all these tools? They are all simple to use; they have all gained the endorsement of attracting substantial external funding, which suggests that investors think they are a good idea. The idea seems to be to circulate links, in the way that Twitter sends "signposts" of websites and events, for example.

They all resemble Twitter in that they can simply be signposts to other content, but at the same time, all of them are an attempt to get beyond Twitter, by providing more graphical indications of the content they are describing.

However, they are not formal citation tools like Endnote or Mendeley. Although each service provides tools for linking content within each service, that is, from one user-based collection to another, most users will probably not want to restrict their searches to what other users of Declara, Stackly or Pocket have found - they will want to keep searching the Web. Hence although these tools are useful ways of noting things you like, none of them has sufficient appeal for a user to want to use them as a means of communicating with others for more than an occasional share of a specific list. I can't imagine any of these services becoming a genuine community, in other words, unlike Facebook or Twitter.

The arrival of three rival services within a few years suggests that Post-it notes for the Web meet a genuine need. Unfortunately, the chances are that either all three will fail to

achieve substantial use, or that (more likely), one will become dominant, and the others fade away. None of the three has the convenience of the real Post-it note - if only that could translate to the screen.