

The New Wave of Bookmarks

February 2005 Search Tip of the Month from Mary Ellen Bates

Every good researcher maintains at least a small collection of bookmarks of her favorite web resources. It's the virtual equivalent of the "ready reference" shelf of books that librarians use to answer the majority of their questions. And some researchers (and you know who you are) have bookmark files that run into the hundreds. While it is nice to have handy access to key resources, it can be difficult to manage and, more importantly, find information buried in a large bookmark file.

A new solution to this problem is Furl (<http://www.furl.net>), a "social bookmarking" service. What is social bookmarking, you ask. The idea is similar to the social networking services such as *LinkedIn* or *Orkut*, or *Amazon.com*'s "people who bought this book also bought these books." If other people have bookmarked the same site you just bookmarked, perhaps you would be interested in seeing the other sites they bookmarked as well.

I am not convinced that this is an efficient resource discovery technique, but the features of Furl have certainly caught my attention. In a nutshell, Furl lets you bookmark pages to the Furl site, annotate the bookmark, and assign keywords ("controlled vocabulary" to us librarians) to the bookmark. Furl not only stores that information in your My Archive area of its site, but it also archives a copy of the page as it exists when you bookmark the page. Whoa! That means you can, in essence, build your own mini version of the Wayback Machine (<http://www.archive.org>). While the personalization features of MyYahoo, MyJeeves and other search engines offer some annotated-bookmark features, these are generally tied to marking pages found through a web search results page, and none of the my-[search engine] archives the full text of the page being bookmarked.

What else can you do with your "Furled" pages? You can run a search of your bookmarks, which actually goes out and searches the current version of all the bookmarked pages, not just your annotations of that page. Work with me here... what that means is that you can build your own searchable version of the web, or at least that corner of it that you are particularly interested in. (If the search terms don't appear in any of your Furled pages, Furl returns the first 300 search results from a *LookSmart* web search.)

You can also choose to search the universe of Furled pages – not just your own but those of all other Furl members. The search results page shows the links to Furled pages and a snippet showing your search term in context, the number of other Furl members who have Furled the page (an interesting indication of the

relative influence of that page, at least within the Furl community), and a link that lets you add that page to your own Furled bookmarks. One more click and you can see comments people made when ~they~ furled the page; again, a potentially useful perspective into what other Furl members are thinking. Interestingly, the results of an entire-Furl search are relevance-ranked based on PeopleRank (note the similarity in naming to *Google's* PageRank). The more Furl members that Furled the page, the higher its PeopleRank.

So, what do I use Furl for?

* I see a thought-provoking article and think, "hmmmm, looks interesting, but I'm not going to have time to read it in the next few weeks. It's likely to disappear from this newspaper's site before then. Rather than print it off, I'll just Furl it and read the archived copy later."

* I am conducting web research and want to save a large collection of white papers, reports, or other resources. While I can save them to my own computer, I want a copy on another server that I know is backed up daily.

* I see a web site that I know I will need to use in a month or two. My short-term memory isn't what it used to be; I would rather Furl it, with a long note reminding myself of why I care about this, than try to find it a month from now.

* I am preparing for a presentation that includes demonstrations of web sites. While I can build an HTML page of the URLs I want to show, loading the bookmarks on Furl ensures that, even if the site I want to show is down, I can show the archived page from my Furl collection. I can even filter my Furled bookmarks by topic; for a recent presentation, I loaded all my bookmarks into Furl and tagged them with a topic name of "Melbourne 2005". When I started my talk, I just filtered the bookmarks for that topic and the attendees never had to see my other Furled bookmarks.

* I want to share my personal view of the web with others. While I could always set up a blog, a different approach is to let my friends and colleagues subscribe to an RSS feed of the Furled bookmarks (and my associated annotations) I chose to make publicly available.

I can think of a number of other uses for Furl, but I encourage you to head over there and try it out yourself. One suggestion, though: while you can set the default so that your Furled bookmarks are marked private, play nice and publicly bookmark the resources you value and that do not violate confidentiality (that is, that don't disclose anything to your organization's competitors if they see you have bookmarked it). For example, if your company is considering entering a new market, it would be best not to disclose the bookmarks pertaining to that market. For other

bookmarks, though, share them with others. The continuing value of Furl is not only in its personal web features but in the shared knowledgebase and recommendation system of the social bookmarking network.

Note that another social bookmarking service that has gotten some good reviews lately is *del.icio.us* (yes, that's the URL: <http://del.icio.us>). It offers some nice features if you are interested in seeing what other people have bookmarked, including an RSS feed of bookmarks added to *del.icio.us* on a specific topic. However, as Joshua Schachter, the creator of *del.icio.us* concedes, "This system is pre-pre-alpha; many features have yet to be added. Additionally, many, many bugs remain. Please be careful." (That sounds like those signs you see in gift stores: you break it, you buy it!)

My primary objection to *del.icio.us* is that there is no straightforward way to keep your bookmarks private. The strong default is to share your bookmarks and their associated "tags" with other subscribers. While I understand that this is the way that a social bookmarking system grows, to virtually require that all bookmarks be public reduces the system's usefulness for many researchers. If Schachter adds the ability to set the user default to private, rather than public, bookmarks, and if *Del.icio.us* gets past pre-pre-alpha, it would be a real competitor to Furl.

An RSS feed for my Search Tip of the Month is at <http://www.batesinfo.com/tip.rss>

What's New in Search Tools or "Alas Poor Google..."

This article is based on presentations given by Karen Blakeman at the ISG Meeting "To Google or not to Google" on 23rd November 2004, Cambridge UK and the Information Masterclass at Online 2004, Tuesday 30th November.

This review of what has been happening over the last year looks at Google's new features, the alternatives to Google (and yes there are plenty!), and desktop search (a really hot topic at present).

What has Google been up to? <http://www.google.com/>

Apart from its stock exchange listing, Google seemed to go into hibernation during the summer of 2004. There was little in the way of new features and it looked as though its database was not being significantly updated. Then, in response to the launch of Microsoft's new beta search engine, Google doubled its database to 8 billion pages and a new numeric range search was added to the Advanced Search page. It did not stop there, though. Google then launched Google Print, Google Scholar, Google

Libraries, Google Desktop Search and Google Suggests to name but a few.

Google Print <http://print.google.com/>

Google Print is aimed at publishers both large and small. Books are supplied by authors and publishers as hard copy and are scanned in by Google. Type in a search in the format 'books about.....' and Google lists those that match at the top of the results list. It appears that there is a maximum of three books per search but that could just reflect the number of books that have been supplied by publishers. Google displays an image of the page in the book that mentions your terms the most, and you can view a maximum of two pages either side. There are also links to bibliographic information, to book stores or the publishers own site where you can buy the book.

The Google Print programme is now being expanded to include selected books from the libraries of Harvard, Stanford, the University of Michigan, and the University of Oxford as well as The New York Public Library. Google Print only works on the Google.com site and not on any of the country versions.

Google Scholar

Google Scholar (<http://scholar.google.com/>) enables you to search for "scholarly literature including peer-reviewed papers, theses, books, pre-prints, abstracts and technical reports from all broad areas of research." A wide range of academic publishers are covered such as professional societies, pre-print repositories and universities, as well as scholarly articles available across the web. There is no source list so it is down to guesswork and experience in working out what is covered.

The advanced search options are limited to author, journal and date of publication. The author search is a bit hit and miss and varies depending on the format in which you type the name. 'K H Blakeman' and 'KH Blakeman' (without the space between the K and H) give different results.

Google Scholar automatically analyses and extracts citations. This means that your results may include citations of older works, books or other off-line publications. The results are listed by relevance, which is a disappointment for those of accustomed to sorting this type of literature search by date, author etc. Google Scholar is still in beta so there is hope that at least a date sort will be added.

Google Suggests

Google Suggests can be found on the Google Labs page (<http://labs.google.com/>). Simply start typing in your search and Google comes up with a list of suggestions for completing your strategy together with the number of results each will give. My search on gin