

their planning for next year. We hope to see many more people at LILAC 2006!

## Outguessing yourself!

### Chris Armstrong, Information Automation Limited

As librarians and information people, I suppose that we are steeped in the organizing knowledge and managing information tradition, and it is second nature to catalogue, file and store. When we come across a new resource or an article that we may want to read, or read again, later we store it away – either physically or virtually.

Of course, we develop strategies for coping with the information overload that we call down on ourselves. We organize bookmarks into groups or folders and we do the same with emails; we use Reference Manager or Procite, ... and, increasingly a whole gallery of new tools like Furl, which stores web pages in an online archive, and Spurl, which stores bookmarks online so that we may use them from any PC at which we happen to find ourselves. Both Furl and Spurl also facilitate the sharing of resources.

In the last issue of *eLucidate*, Mary Ellen Bates (<http://www.ukeig.org.uk/content/newsletter/elucidate/eLucidate2-1.pdf>) wrote about Furl (<http://www.furl.net/index.jsp>). I first used Furl about six months ago ... and just like a child with a new toy, I 'furl'd' web pages at every opportunity for the first few weeks and then – so that I could find them again, without trouble, when I needed them – organized them into folders too. This, of course, as some sort of magic addition to my normal, and quite extensive set of bookmarks. You have probably guessed that I never returned to most of them again! Since then I have discovered Spurl

(<http://www.spurl.net/>), del.icio.us (<http://del.icio.us/>), de.lirio.us (<http://de.lirio.us/rubric>), Connotea (<http://www.connotea.org/>) and others. Some, like Connotea, are targeted at the "scholarly user".

Essentially, these tools allow users to store bookmarks online, share them with the world at large or mark them as private, flag them as 'Explicit' (Spurl), categorise them (place them in folders) and/or tag them with a few keywords – both of the latter so as to enable easy retrieval and the grouping together of similar items, and finally to use RSS to alert you to changes or new material in the same category that has been added by some unknown user. A sort of focused serendipitous retrieval!

These new tools have themselves been categorised! But, in keeping with their essentially uncontrolled nature, no single name has emerged. At the Information Architecture Summit in March 2005, the panelists in the Sorting Out Social Classification session highlighted a number of terms beside 'social classification': folksonomies or folk classification, ethnoclassification, and distributed indexing were all suggested. The central theme being the creation of a central resource by its users.

To me, there seems to be a couple of small troubles with these tools. These are more in the nature of 'worries' than major failings, but they are worth discussing, nevertheless. Despite its apparent derivation, folksonomies are not very closely linked to taxonomies – there is, at present, no control over the tags that users add. I may use 'publishing' while you use 'publishers' and someone else uses 'publisher' – your choice may be for 'keywords' while others use 'descriptors' or 'controlled vocabularies' – I may use IA or CM where others go for 'information

architecture' or 'content management' and so on. Immediately this brave new world begins to lose its glamour for those of us brought up with a more formal approach to information retrieval. The problem is obviously the one that all indexers experience – using terms to describe the resource which will also be used by searchers at some later date.

In January, Louis Rosenfeld – one of the panelists – wrote in his blog ([http://louisrosenfeld.com/home/bloug\\_archive/000330.html](http://louisrosenfeld.com/home/bloug_archive/000330.html)) that folksonomies “don't support searching and other types of browsing nearly as well as tags from controlled vocabularies applied by professionals. Folksonomies aren't likely to organically arrive at preferred terms for concepts, or even evolve synonymous clusters” and he repeated this during the summit debate. Another point of view is put by Stewart Butterfield, one of Flickr's (one of many social-networking sites that allow the sharing of photographs – <http://www.flickr.com/>) co-founders who suggests that “the job of tags isn't to organize all the world's information into tidy categories. It's to add value to the giant piles of data that are already out there” (<http://www.wired.com/news/technology/0,1282,66456,00.html>) ... but, to my mind, it's a limited value if retrieval is only randomly successful. The good news is that Connotea, at least, are considering the implications and possibilities of controlled language tagging. They will, of course, have to come up with a new derivative name: perhaps “folksaurus” may do!

The other 'niggle' is to do with folk indexing, too; and brings me full-circle to the point I made at the beginning of this piece: information overload and strategies – and whether they succeed. In the latest issue of *Information Research* (Volume 10 No 3 April, 2005 – [\[3/infres103.html\]\(http://informationr.net/ir/10-3/infres103.html\)\), Harry Bruce has an article on “Personal anticipated information need”. Tom Wilson summed it up in his editorial as, “related to the habits we have of retaining and storing \(or bookmarking\) information sources that we think may be of relevance to us in the future. Personally, I gave up doing that a long, long time ago, when I realised that my chances of accurately predicting future need were pretty close to zero. ... I now assume that, if something catches my attention as of possible future use, I'll be able to find it again.” I begin to think – and I speak as someone using three shared bookmarking tools, with similar but not identical sets of bookmarks on the three computers I use, who runs a personal bibliographic database with some 4,000 records in it, and who tidies emails into subject-based folders \(which do not coincide with the file-structure on my computer!\) – that there may be something in this! However, my concern lies not so much in my ability to find the item again, but in remembering that I had found it in the first place! Now that would be an IR tool to come up with!](http://informationr.net/ir/10-</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

## **Making seven intranets into one.... and then personalizing the content**

**Helen Day, MyStoreNet Project,  
Boots Group plc, Nottingham, UK**

This article was presented at Online Information 2004 (<http://www.online-information.co.uk>) and first published in *Online Information 2004, 30 Nov-2 Dec Olympia Grand Hall, London, UK. Conference Proceedings: 28<sup>th</sup> Online Information Conference*. pp. 161-173. UKeIG are grateful to Learned Information Europe and the author for permission to republish here.