

Web 2.0

Phil Bradley

Pinterest – a new take on an old idea

We're all used to the idea of bookmarking services by now. People who use more than one machine (a desktop and laptop at home perhaps, or a machine at work and one at home) are going to want to share bookmarked pages back and forth, which is where the value of resources such as Diigo (<http://www.diigo.com>) or Delicious (<http://www.delicious.com>) have come into play. Simply bookmark the page or resource that you're interested in, move to your other machine and get access to them via your single bookmark account. Well, Pinterest does the same sort of thing; it lets you save, store, and mark stuff that you find online, which you can put into folders and share with friends. It's got the same focus that other bookmarking services have in that you can see what other people have done, you can comment on their saved material and they can comment on yours. No change there - the big difference is that Pinterest is primarily designed for images rather than webpages, and although you can also bookmark videos the vast majority of people use it for images of one sort or another.

However, while there are similarities between the services, Pinterest (which I pronounce as Pin-terest, rather than P-interest) has a much friendlier, more social feel to it. It's also, within

a very short space of time, gathered a lot of users who it would be fair to say have previously shown little interest in bookmarking and sharing resources. There are a number of subject areas that have proved extraordinarily popular, such as crafting, recipes and fashion, but there are also a lot of librarians and other information professionals who are using the service and 'pinning' items that interest them.

So, before we look at how you can use the resource, let's consider why you would want to. Hopefully your appetite will have been wetted enough to then decide to get to grips with the service for yourself. Firstly, as with any bookmarking service, you will have access - via the search option - to resources that real live human beings think are useful, handy, interesting or amusing enough to actually spare a few moments of their time to bookmark. Consequently, you're much more likely to get access to good or high quality resources - much more so than you'll get if you use a more traditional image search engine embedded in something like Google. In fact, if I'm not going to use Flickr to find an image that I'm after, I'll probably now go straight to Pinterest as my second choice. Google search is slipping further and further down my list of

choices, currently languishing somewhere behind the Bing image option.

A second really useful way of using Pinterest is to quickly shortcut your way to a website, weblog or other similar resource, without having to hack your way through countless results returned by websites. Each image that is pinned will link back to the original source in most cases, and a simple mouse click can take you straight there. Admittedly, there's a certainly amount of serendipity and luck involved - that marvellous picture of a Welsh castle could potentially take you to a blog page from an Australian who was over here on a visit and just liked the picture she took. However, if you're looking from a slightly more casual viewpoint and you just want to find a particular recipe, or browse through some possibilities, Pinterest is going to be a good resource to try.

The third reason why Pinterest is worth using is to find out who is working in a particular area, or who has at least got a considerable interest in something particular. They are the ones who will be finding images, bookmarking them and discussing them with other people. If you want to find some librarians who are doing interesting things, just run a quick search on Pinterest and you'll find them in large numbers!

Fourthly, it's a brilliant way to store images. I previously had to use a bookmarking service such as Delicious or Diigo, and try and remember to tag the bookmark with something like 'infograph' or 'image', but with Pinterest this isn't necessary. I can simply click on the folder that I've created, and all the images are laid out before me, allowing me to chose the one that I want to use very quickly.

Finally, it's a great insight into the things that your friends and colleagues like. I've discovered that some colleagues really enjoy watching science fiction because they've bookmarked images from particular shows for example.

The last reason that I'll give is that Pinterest is fun. I'm a firm believer in having fun when using resources, and this one gives you that in abundance. It's dangerously easy to while away an hour or so and the urge to say 'just five more minutes' is hard to resist.

There are disadvantages to the service of course - nothing is perfect. First of all, it's still in beta test, so while you can take a look through it, if you want to make proper use of it, you'll need to grab an invite from someone, but if anyone is in need, please email me at philipbradley@gmail.com and I'll happily send you an invite over! Secondly, you need to use either Facebook or Twitter in order to set up a validated account, which I find annoying and unnecessary. However, once the account is validated you can log in using email and password if you prefer. The images that you bookmark also cannot be marked as private - everything is very open, so if you have a secret crush on an actor or actress, think twice before pinning dozens of images of them! Finally, some images do go viral, and while this in itself isn't a bad thing, seeing the same image over and over again in your friends image streams can be a little irritating. One last point - you're bookmarking an image that's on the web, on a webpage that you don't have control over. If the owner decides to delete the image you're going to lose it. If it's an important image you would be best off contacting the owner to ask if you can take and keep a copy to use in the future.

Well, having gone through the pros and cons of Pinterest, let's take a look at it. You can take a look at my page at <http://pinterest.com/philipbradley/> and you'll see that I have various folders for things such as Library propaganda posters, funny images, infographics, and so on. You can also search for subjects that interest you to see what other

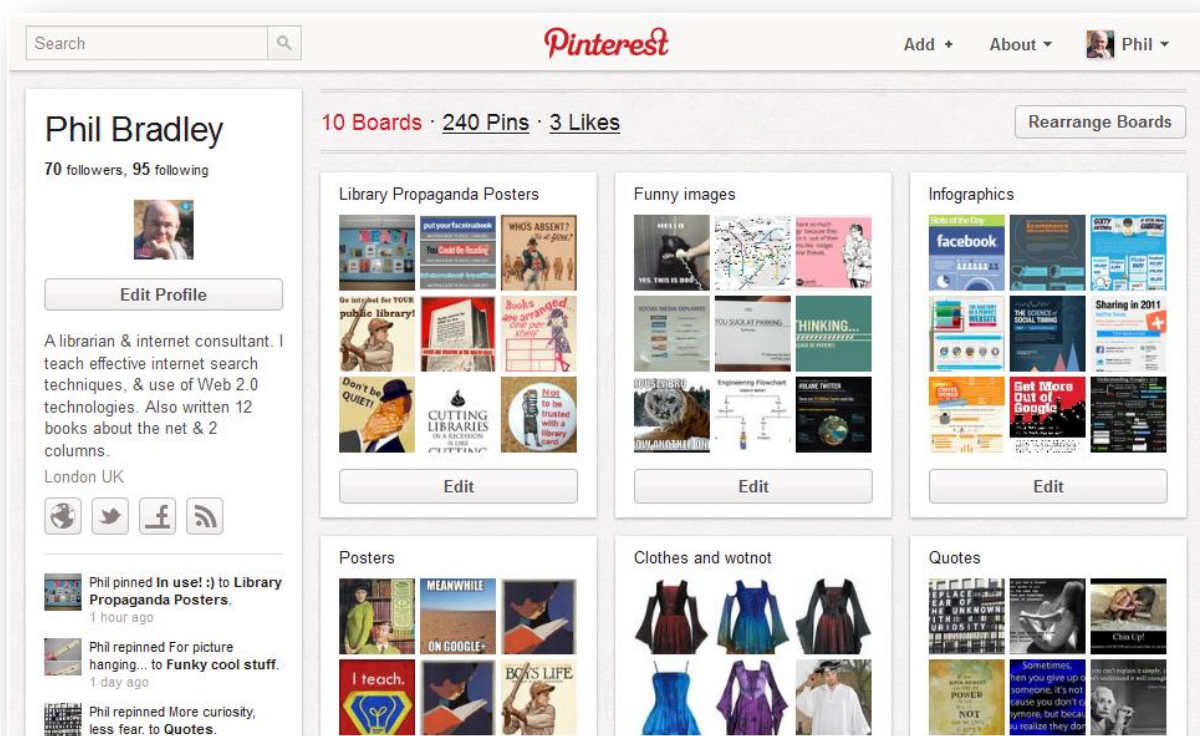


Figure 1 Phil Bradley's Pinterest page

people have pinned. You can see my page in figure 1.

When you run a search you'll see the image(s), descriptions, names of people who have added images and the folders they have put them into. Figure 2 shows the results of a search on 'books'.

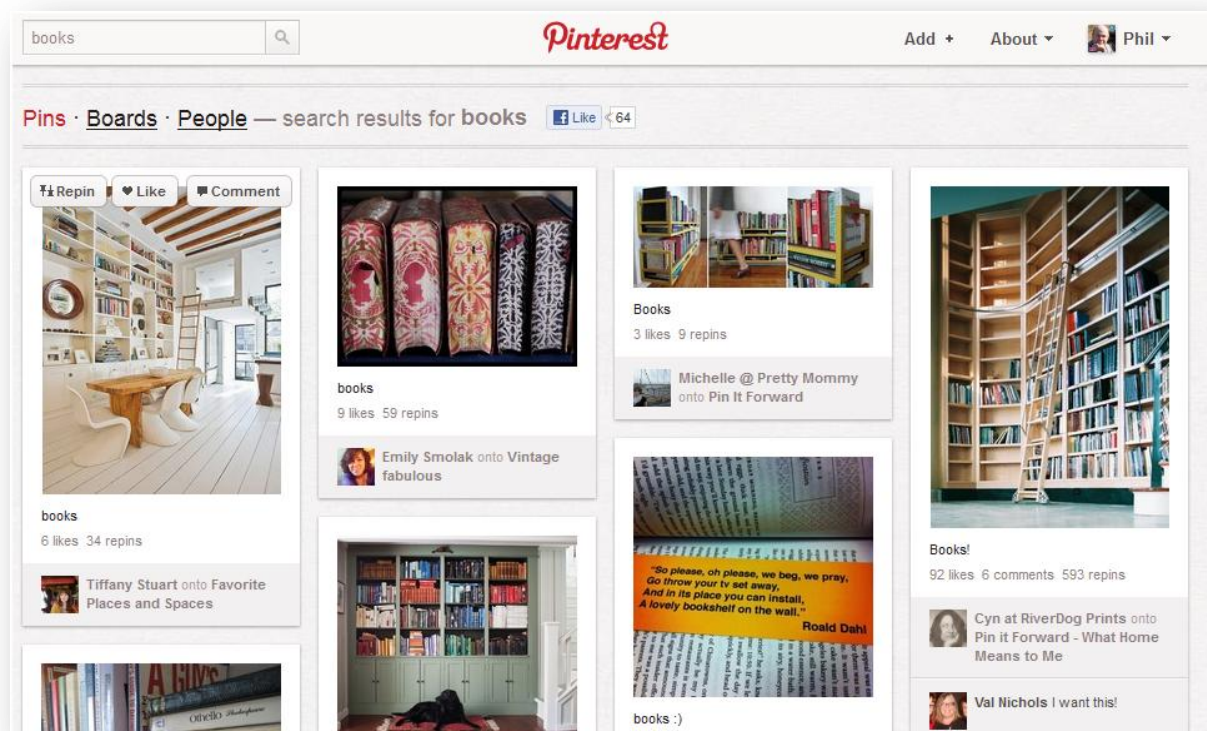


Figure 2 Search on "books"

Once you have an account you can repin an image, which means that you can copy it into one of your own folders, 'like' the image, or comment on it. You can also tweet out an image to your followers, embed it or email it. You can also report images, but Pinterest has taken a very firm stance on 'adult' images and it does not allow them at all - I've certainly never seen anything inappropriate, and I would be happy for the aged maiden aunt to look through the images without worrying, but that's obviously your own call, of course.

As you would expect from a bookmarking site, you can add a bookmarklet to your browser bar, so that you can simply click on it once you find an image that you like, and Pinterest will find every image on a page and you can pin the one that you want. Unfortunately, you cannot choose a number

in one go, so it's a bit labour-intensive at the moment if you want to save several images! Another limitation is that it doesn't work with any images on Facebook - down to Facebook rather than Pinterest I'm sure. Pin the image into the folder of your choice, add a few words description and you're done. If you want to look through the collections of the people who you are following, just click on the Pinterest logo in the top middle of the screen, which will also give you the option of searching through several pre-existing subject folders.

In summary, it's one of those 'why didn't I think of it?' resources, which has really taken off very quickly. I also shudder to think how I tried to manage before it came along, and I thoroughly recommend it. Give it a go!