
MeAGGREGATOR - ABSTRACT

*Karsten Oster Lundqvist, Shirley Williams, Patrick Parslow, Michael Evans, Keith Baker
(University of Reading)*

Abstract:

The native Internet users have their material and information scattered on multiple systems and places. This can lead to difficulties in transition situations, because it can be difficult to present the material in an attractive manner for the future interested stakeholders. The material can also be lost because the Internet user does not have control of the storage of it, and sometimes the material changes due to the dynamic nature of the internet, but the user would like to use a particular static state of the material for the future.

One of the features of ePortfolio systems are to store material for future use, but it has been assessed that existing ePortfolio systems caters badly for the diversified nature of information on the Internet. The aim of the Me Aggregator tool is to create a system which can do this.

The Me Aggregator has five main features:

- it provides a tool for students and staff to manage the online communities (e.g. blogs, wikis, forums, MySpace, research based etc.) that they are already part of, through advanced use of content aggregation technologies such as RSS,
- it gives them seamless access to academic content in institutionally-owned systems,
- it gives them a new space in which to create academic-related content, which can subsequently be remixed with their personal content in any way they wish,
- it provides access to a new source of academic online communities that will foster links across disparate groups of students and staff who may not normally meet, yet share similar interests,
- and it will provide a large social network of students and staff through which the dissemination of ideas can more easily flow. The nature of this network should be ongoing, so that membership of communities are not terminating when a specific course ends.

Furthermore, through enabling the free remixing of content of their own and other people's content, the Me Aggregator becomes a valuable information management tool in its own right, encouraging its adoption, and so bootstrapping the notoriously difficult process of populating a social network application.

The following is an example of a typical user who would benefit from a fully functioning Me Aggregator:

Pete is a final year undergraduate student studying for a degree in Computer Science. Before he came to university he was working as a programmer for a SME and throughout his degree he has continued to work for them, full time in the vacations and a nominal 10 hours per week in term time. As part of his degree he is undertaking a major project and taking several modules which are assessed by both coursework and exams. For two hours per week he is employed by the university as a demonstrator to support first year programming practicals. With other of the demonstrators he participates in an online community to offer extra help to those who find programming difficult. He is passionate about technology, and has also set up a community for a specific technology and organises occasional events where guest speakers present topics.

The way in which Pete works is an example of prosumption, he is both a producer and consumer of learning resources.

Pete already keeps a blog on Live Journal, he blogs, mainly, about his passion technology, but he also blogs about his course, his demonstrating and his work. For one of his pieces of coursework his lecturer requires that he keeps a blog on ethical issues related to software engineering. The lecturer wants to use the facilities offered by her VLE to comment and grade this work, currently Pete would have to use the blogging facility in the VLE, he would prefer to use his own provider.

As it is his final year Pete is considering what his future plans are, he enjoys working with his SME he is considering his options and is considering both applying for a graduate entry both with a large organisation or continuing on to a higher degree. He is developing his ePortfolio to make applications, furthermore he wishes to know that the material continuously will be available to him.

He uses various other technologies as part of his everyday life: MSN Messenger to chat to his friends, Skype to talk to his brother in America, Flickr for sharing photos, YouTube for sharing videos, del.icio.us for bookmarking, IE7 for aggregating RSS feeds, Writely for shared writing, Microsoft Exchange for his email (his university and personal mail are forwarded to his work account, with employers permission).

His university uses a SITS based system, Pete can use a web based system to access information relating to himself, the process he has to undergo to change his personal details is very laborious. The university also offers an online timetable, this has a separate interface and Pete has not found a way to get data from the timetable into his calendar.

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Author

Karsten Oster Lundqvist
University of Reading
Whiteknights
Reading
RG6 6AY
United Kingdom
k.o.lundqvist@rdg.ac.uk

Shirley Williams
Patrick Parslow
Michael Evans
Keith Baker