



Networks ↔ web-based tools

A number of powerful web-based tools facilitate and support healthy networks. Some examples:

Building **social ties**:

Social networking sites allow users to represent, build and maximize relationships. www.myspace.com, www.linkedin.com

Publicizing the **common story**:

Blogs permit people to easily share information. www.blogspot.com, www.typepad.com, www.wordpress.com

Creating a **communications grid**:

RSS and bookmarking tools allow readers to access, filter and prioritize information. Instant messaging (IM) tools provide an indication of presence, permit short one line questions and provide free and cheap telephony. www.netvibes.com, <http://de.licio.us>, www.skype.com

Sharing **resources**:

Wikis provide a collaborative and efficient space to create documents and resources. www.wikispaces.com, www.wetpaint.com, Google Docs

Establishing a **clear purpose**:

Clear and efficient communications and strong social ties through the tools above set the stage for identifying clear purpose.

Find out more on the following pages...

Supporting networks through web-based tools

A number of online tools support the functioning of healthy networks. These tip sheets introduce some of those tools, and provide the basics on how to get started.

What are networks?

A network is a social structure made of nodes (individuals, organizations or ideas) that are linked in one or more specific ways, for example by values, visions, ideas or kinship. Networks provide tremendous opportunities for more effective advocacy.

Characteristics of effective networks:

- **Strong social ties:** Core actors in the network must know each other. They must be familiar with each other's talents, motives, skills, reputation and personalities. The familiarity will in turn build trust and reliance between actors.
- **Common story:** Participants must understand the unifying values of the entire network. The core actors must know each other's common motivating story, along with the language that resonates with other network members.
- **Communications grid:** All networks "live" on the strength of one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many conversations and exchanges. The network communications grid must have the ability to filter feedback, sort the delivery of messages and segment audiences across organization, geography and time.
- **Shared resources:** The network must be able to manage resources and apply assets to coordinated network tasks.
- **Clarity of purpose:** Networks must to be able to design, synchronize, converge, test and hone specific detailed efforts. They must be able to evaluate, rank and refine purposes and tasks.



Netcentric Campaigns

1212 New York Ave. #300
Washington, DC 20005

www.netcentriccampaigns.org

Contacts:

- Marty Kearns, 202 464 5352. marty@netcentriccampaigns.org
- Tom Glaisyer, 646 483 0314. tom@netcentriccampaigns.org
- Karen Showalter, 202 464 5359. karen@netcentriccampaigns.org

RSS: Managing the news on the web

What is RSS?

RSS stands for *Really Simple Syndication*. It is essentially a type of “web feed” used to publish frequently-updated content like blogs and news. These feeds can contain either summaries or the full text of the content. Users subscribe to feeds from their favorite webpages, directing them to an “aggregator”. The “aggregator” periodically refreshes the feeds, pulling in any new content.

How RSS strengthens networks:

Communications grid:

Draws information from a wide range of sources, and/or focus on the critical items.

Strong social ties:

Keeps users up to date on colleagues’ publications without overwhelming their email.

Clarity of purpose:

Often blog-like publishing can float relatively informally “trial balloons” and allow an open discussion around possible paths.

Shared resources:

Some tools can be used to create a common set of RSS feeds within an aggregator so that new recruits can easily learn the full scope of publishing within a community.



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RSS enables web users to subscribe to content on the internet, effectively **pulling** what is most interesting to them into a personalized webpage. Content can be pulled from many sources at the same time, and it can be tailored to the user's specific interests.

RSS also enables users to more effectively **push** their content, by offering subscriptions to updates and materials they publish on their website.

How can RSS support your work?

RSS users can easily pull content from many sources into one convenient location, ultimately making it **easier to find, read and use the latest information**. RSS saves time and energy, and broadens the number and impact of sources you can access to support your work. For example, you could pull RSS feeds from major news outlets on “Iraq”, effectively establishing a personalized webpage with all of the latest news on Iraq - without wasting valuable time scouring many different websites.

RSS feeds are also an important way to **promote your work**.

Enabling your website visitors to subscribe to your pages through RSS effectively creates “subscribers” to your site. New posts and updates will automatically appear on those subscribers’ aggregators.

RSS is also a powerful way for networks and coalitions to **pool work** in a single location. Groups can effectively establish “community bulletin boards” where the latest updates from member organizations are automatically fed. See the Connect US Community webpage as an example.

Considerations:

Subscribers expect a certain amount of new material.

What is Firefox?

Firefox is a popular cross-platform web-browser which supports Microsoft, Mac and Linux systems. Its expanded ability to support add-ons makes it a logical choice for those hoping to use progressive web-based tools like tags to support their work.

Helpful features include: add-ons; built-in spell check; sessions restore; and web feeds

<http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/>



Universal feed icon

RSS in action: Bank Information Center webpage

The Bank Information Center (BIC) uses both outgoing and incoming RSS feeds to amplify its ability to effectively reach its partners.

The organization established outgoing feeds for each of its several dozen regional, institutional and policy-focused webpages. As BIC covers five regions and at least as many institutions, enabling website visitors to effectively filter the information they receive from the organization is critical.

The BIC website also pulls its calendar through a feed from www.ifiwatchnet.org – an online community of organizations monitoring the international financial institutions. The feed enables BIC to automatically feature an updated list of events.

BIC staff had heard of RSS, but had limited understanding of how or when to use it. After walking through the benefits of the tool with Netcentric Campaigns, they asked their website designer to install the feeds. Now, RSS is one of the main ways the organizations gets new information to partners.

Check out BIC's RSS feeds:

www.bicusa.org/rss.

Getting started with RSS

Remember, you can set up incoming or outgoing RSS feeds. Incoming feeds are the equivalent of subscriptions to your favorite (RSS enabled) web content, pulled to your personalized webpage (aggregator). Outgoing feeds are subscriptions to your web content that you offer others.

Subscribing to incoming feeds:

1. Set up an RSS aggregator. This is the place to which you will pull your RSS feeds (effectively your personalized webpage). There are a large number of good, free aggregators available, including www.Netvibes.com and www.Google.com/ig www.pageflakes.com. **We will discuss how to set up a Netvibes page.**
2. Netvibes requires the Mozilla Firefox 2.0 web browser. Download the browser from <http://www.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/> if it is not already installed on your computer. Mozilla is a popular, cross-platform browser we recommend in general.
3. Set Netvibes as your default RSS reader. Follow this path: Tools -> Options -> Feeds -> Netvibes. (Note that if you have Firefox you must use this patch: <http://blog.netvibes.com/?2006/10/25/83-firefox-2-and-netvibes>. Click on the "Click here to add Netvibes as a default engine to the built-in Web read feeder" link.
4. Subscribe to your favorite feeds. You have probably noticed this small orange "universal feed" icon on many webpages. This is a common way of letting web visitors know that an RSS feed is available for that page. This button appears in the URL window for webpages, as well as on specific pages.

Setting up outgoing feeds:

1. Feeds can be easily established on any website. Some blogging applications like Typepad and Wordpress do this automatically. In many cases, the website administrator will have to establish feeds.

Tips and tricks:

- Consider installing feeds from the major bloggers in your field, partner or competitor organizations, or for keyword searches
- **Make the most of your feeds.** Your feeds should be clear, easy to find and frequently updated. See feedburner.com



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Wikis: Working better together

What are wikis?

Wikis are web applications allowing many users to easily and collaboratively create and update webpages.

Many large public sites use this technology to facilitate conversation. You have probably heard of Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia based on Wiki software. There are thousands of other public wikis, including Congresspedia (a wiki about the US congress), Lostpedia (a wiki about - you guessed it - the television series Lost), and many others.

Wikis can also be established and personalized for groups or organizations. One way to do this is to establish pages on the large open wiki platforms such as www.wikia.com. Alternatively, the administrator of your organization's website can set up a wiki on your own site or using a shared wiki service

How wikis strengthen networks:

Strong social ties:

Build ties as groups more efficiently work together on shared resources.

Shared resources:

Facilitate efficient development of shared resources within groups. And they can be used by the community well after the people who created the content have moved on.

Clarity of purpose:

More efficient resource development can help groups better identify their purpose and objectives.

Wikis are friendly platforms for collaboratively developing documents. They enable multiple users to view and edit documents at the same time. Users can review edits made by others, discuss changes and even revert to earlier drafts.

Public wikis facilitate public production of information. They can be important places to influence public debate or key issues.

Private wikis enable groups and coalitions to easily and efficiently collaborate online.

Consider what kind of wiki you want. Do you want to spark public conversation on a timely issue? Wikipedia or another public wiki is probably the best venue. Do you want a restricted or entirely private conversation on a strategy or document? Then setting up a personalized wiki is probably the best answer.

Starting your own wiki

Getting started with a hosted Wikispaces wiki...

Wikispaces.com hosts very functional hosted wikis. Public and protected (edits restricted) wikis are free. Private wikis cost \$5/month. Try setting one up for practice.

1. Go to www.wikispaces.com. Click on the "Make a new space" link on the top left.
2. Name your space, and choose the security level. The 'members and permissions' link allows you choose whether your page is public, protected or free.
3. Click on the 'edit' link to begin adding content. Note the other tabs. 'Discussion' is a space for debate on wiki page content.

Or perhaps you want to build your own wiki, either on a hosted site or your own website. Following are questions to help you get started...

Choosing a wiki platform:

Hosting

You can build a wiki on your own website or use a hosted wiki. Some pros and cons of each:

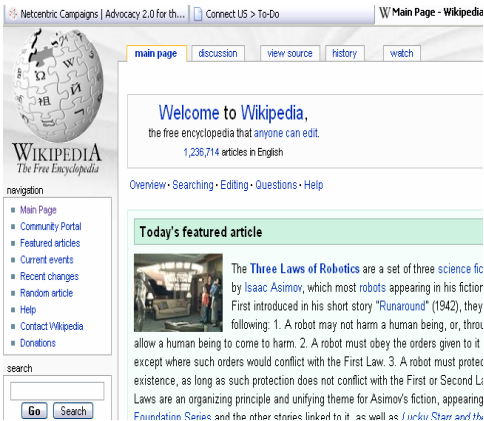
- Hosted wikis live on a wiki website, for example Wikispaces. Users can control who can view and/or contribute to the wiki. Administrators have some albeit limited ability to format the wiki, and it's not possible to have a dedicated URL. Example: <http://wikiran.wetpaint.com>



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Who will contribute to and/or read your wiki?

- Will it be private or public? If it's open to public contributions, you'll want certain features like 'page history', which enable administrators to undo unwanted changes if necessary.
- Do your contributors understand wiki markup language or HTML code? Neither is hard to learn. But you might look for a wiki with WYSIWYG (what-you-see-is-what-you-get) functionality - similar to MS Word – if your contributors are entirely unfamiliar with either.



Wikipedia has disproven many initial fears about the quality of collaboratively-developed content

What's your final product?

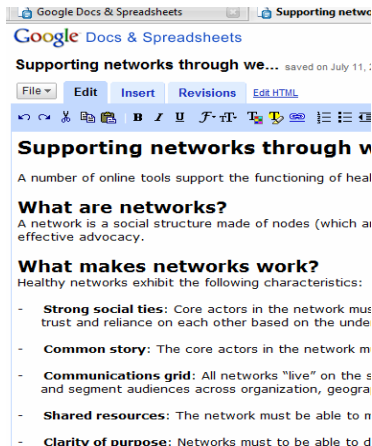
Is the wiki the final product? Or will you extract the content and use it in another form? If the wiki is your product, you may want a platform that enables you to build an attractive structure around your content, including your organizational logo, contact information, links to other websites, etc. Although it is usually possible to do a minor amount of branding on a hosted wiki, you'll have many more options with a wiki installed on your own website. See US Policy World (www.uspw.org) as an example of a nicely formatted wiki installed on an organizational website. See WikIran (<http://wikiran.wetpaint.com>) as an example of a hosted wiki with attractive but limited formatting.

Other considerations

- Attachments: Impossible with some low-end wiki solutions.
- Submission by email capabilities could be useful.
- Comments: Some wikis list comments at the bottom of the page, while others use a talk page.
- Cost: Setting up a personalized wiki on your website will cost some money. The software can be free, but you'll need a designer to modify it to suit your needs, as well as design work on the layout of the wiki.

So which platform should you use?

Now that you have a better sense of what you're looking for, investigate wiki platforms that will best serve your needs. Wikimatrix.org is a handy site that enables users to sift through hundreds of wiki platforms to find one that suits their needs. Some popular platforms include Wikispaces, Mediawiki, Wetpaint, Confluence and Social Text.



Google Docs is another popular tool for collaborative content development. It is simpler than a wiki, but it doesn't allow page-to-page linking.



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Getting started with public wikis

Thousands of public wikis discuss as many topics and themes. Wikipedia, the wiki encyclopedia, is perhaps the most well known. These might be good places to influence public discussion of an issue.

Let's take a quick look at how to use the popular public wiki **Wikipedia** (www.wikipedia.com). Wikipedia currently features almost 2 million articles in English, and many more in other languages.

Open the Wikipedia website (www.wikipedia.org). Browse for interesting key words or topics. Try editing the page on your hometown, or an issue you're working on. Editors don't need to have a Wikipedia account, although setting one up will link your edits to you (edits made without an account are linked to IP address).

Wikipedia pages have a basic structure you'll notice on many wikis. There are four tabs on the top of each page. 'Main page' displays current content; 'discussion' exposes debate between contributors on content; 'edit this page' allows visitors to add or edit content; 'history' details edits that have been made to the page. Click 'edit content' if you want to contribute to content on a page. Remember that content should be neutral.

Considerations:

- **Spam.** The greatest fear with wikis is that they are easily attacked by spammers. This is not always the case, depending on how open the wiki is. Some large sites like Wikipedia use some sophisticated technologies and an army of volunteer editors to track and control these activities.
- **Public or private?** A page on a public wiki with unrestricted access like Wikipedia will be viewed and edited by others. Wikipedia is a public space that seeks to provide a neutral point of view on any issue or piece of general knowledge. Contributors are supposed to add to, challenge, enhance, etc. content – that's part of the beauty of a collaborative resource. However, organizations developing a strategic document probably aren't interested in allowing everyone to add or even view their content. Many private wiki tools offer varying levels of security, from allowing public viewing but restricted editing of pages, to wiki pages that are completely private.
- **Quality.** Many assume that lots of contributors will lead to messy or inaccurate content. This is not the case! Lots of engagement actually encourages quality, as can be seen on Wikipedia and elsewhere.

Wikis in action: WikIran

WikIran is a collaborative project using a 'wiki' web application to more effectively share information, resources and actions across the US and around the world. The project's goals are to: better US-Iran relations; prevent a military attack on Iran; and promote a better understanding of the Iranian people and culture.

WikIran was launched as a low-cost way to increase communication and collaboration between a network of organizations concerned with these issues. Prior to the launch, groups often found it difficult to quickly share information and intelligence not only within the network, but to a public audience also concerned with these issues. Contributors can now instantly post and collaboratively develop documents, strategy papers, meeting report-backs and more on WikIran.

The utility of WikIran was put to the test during the network's "In District Lobby Days" earlier this year. The wiki featured tips on scheduling meetings with Members of Congress, talking points, and facts on key issues – all developed by contributors to the site. Site administrator Carah Ong notes that the wiki was critical to many groups' successful involvement in the effort. "The wiki is really about empowerment," Ong says. "The wiki allowed collaboration between groups inside and outside the beltway, as well as it made possible grassroots citizen engagement who might not have otherwise worked together or even had the opportunity to be involved in the effort."

The wiki, like all new technologies, certainly has its challenges. "Some people are still grappling with how this technology works and benefits them," Ong notes. The greatest obstacle is encouraging contributions. But active members trust that the energy already created through the site will soon sell the remaining skeptics on its value. Currently 51 people are active contributors.

Other examples:

- <http://balancedsecurity.wikispaces.com/> (3-D Security Initiative)
- <http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Congresspedia>
- <https://nitrogen.packard.org/default.aspx>

What are Skype and IM?

Skype and Yahoo Instant Messenger (IM) are free and easy ways to talk with or send messages to colleagues over the internet. These tools also enable users to quickly see if colleagues are online and available to chat. These are fast ways to get better connected with those you work with on a frequent basis. Ultimately, they help build and strengthen your communications grid - a critical component of a healthy network.

How Skype and IM strengthen networks:

Strong social ties:

Permit people to interact with each other as if they were in adjacent offices no matter where they are located.

Communications grid:

Facilitate fast and efficient contact.
Reduce the "cost" of interactions through fewer voicemail games of ping pong, or one line emails.

Shared resources:

Directory of IM ids provides an easy way for someone new to a community to connect.

Getting better connected with Skype and Instant Messenger

How can Skype and IM support your work?

We are increasingly overloaded with emails. Many people receive hundreds of emails a day, effectively cluttering their ability to read or respond quickly to important messages. Skype and IM enable users to **send quick messages which prompt immediate replies**. This can be invaluable to colleagues needing to make quick and efficient contact - if only to schedule a time to speak by phone or in person.

Skype and IM are also **easy and free/low-cost ways to phone** colleagues. Many international campaigners use these tools to cut the potentially high costs of international phone calls. Both also offer videophone.

Considerations:

- **Visibility.** Setting privacy controls is a good idea, unless you want to be publicly visible. Being publicly visible may enable old friends to contact you, but it may also open the door to spammers. (Skype: File menu->Privacy settings-> Allow only those in your contact list to call you). Also, carefully consider your online status. Being online will tell others that you're available. That's the point, and something you generally want to do. But if you're not available - for example, you're rushing to finish a project and can't actually talk at that moment - you may want to temporarily change your status to unavailable.
- **Save conversations.** Neither service enables users to keep records of conversations; thus, it may be a good idea to copy and paste conversations into save-able file formats for future reference.
- **Appropriate use.** Carefully consider how you use these tools. Both tools are best used as a way to ask quick questions or establish meetings. They're not appropriate for all uses.



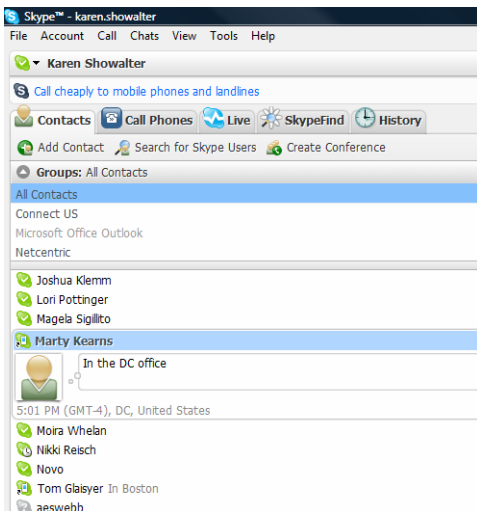
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Getting started with Skype

Skype and Yahoo Instant Messenger both offer free text communication. Skype also offers free/low cost telephone and video. We will discuss how to set up Skype.



Skype toolbar button. In your address book, this button indicates that contacts are online.



Skype homepage

1. Download Skype at www.skype.com. When a dialogue box opens, click 'Save file'. Remember where you save the file – the desktop is a good place.
2. After the download has finished, open the file and follow the Set Up Wizard to complete installation.
3. Launch the program by clicking on the Skype icon on your desktop or toolbar.
4. Set up your profile through the 'File' tab. Use the message box for important notes, for example that you're traveling. Account -> Setting enables you to change your password and preferences.
5. Notice the three tabs: 'Add contact', 'Search for Skype users' and 'Create conference'. 'Add contact' enables you to add friends and colleagues you know are using Skype. 'Search for Skype users' enables you to search for friends or colleagues using name or email. 'Create conference' allows you to invite up to 8 other Skype contacts to a text or voice chat.

Tips and tricks:

- **Actively share your information** with friends and colleagues. Add new contacts to your Skype address book.
- **Sort your contacts into groups**, making them easier to find.
- **Encourage coworkers to sign up for Skype**. This will make interoffice communications more efficient.



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Building your community through online social networking

What are social networking sites?

A social network site focuses on the building and verifying of online social networks for communities of people who share interests and activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others.

Most social network services are primarily web-based and provide a collection of various ways for users to interact including: chat, messaging, email, video, voice chat, file sharing, blogging, discussion groups, and so on.

See a list of social networking sites: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_social_networking_websites

How social networking sites strengthen networks:

Strong social ties:

Allow users to keep up to date on the professional path of colleagues, and support the development of new relationships.

Communications grid:

Provide a means for distributing messages through trusted relationships.

Shared resources:

Stronger social ties facilitate effective resource sharing.

How can social networking support your work?

Establishing strong social ties with colleagues is a critical component of successful advocacy. These sites allow you to quickly learn a lot about a person whom you've never met and enable you to choose how best to build a relationship. This is particularly useful for people new to a community. Finally, these sites enable you to quickly harness the power of those contacts, and in turn their contacts.

Considerations:

- **Privacy.** At their core all these sites require a person to share information about themselves and who they know. In fact, this is in some ways the currency they trade in.
- **Identity.** For people who are intensely private or separate their personal from their professional the idea of identifying yourself on password protected sites or openly on the internet may not be something they are comfortable with.

Sites:

- Professional networks: [www.Linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com) (Alternatives: Very similar but with a larger population of business focused people in Europe <http://www.xing.com/>)
- www.facebook.com - friends network
- www.blackplanet.com - African American
- Networks with a non-profit focus:
 - www.omidyar.net/home - a community started by the founder of EBay around changing the world
 - www.zaadz.com a community of "conscious capitalists infused with spirituality."
 - <http://www.takingitglobal.org> Youth with a global social action focus
 - www.Change.org a tool that aims to foster loose networks around social action.
 - <http://www.wiserearth.org> – community interested in non-profits



Getting started with LinkedIn and Facebook

Explore some of the sites mentioned above. Think about who you want to network with, and where they can be reached. We will discuss how to set up two popular options: the professional networking site LinkedIn and the social networking site Facebook.

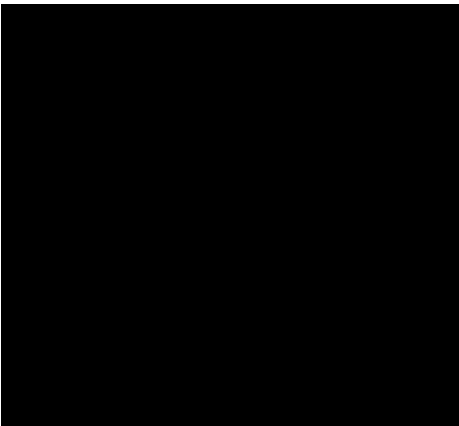
Your Network of Trusted Professionals

You are at the center of your network. Your connections can introduce you to 975,600+ professionals — here's how your network breaks down:

1 Your Connections Your trusted friends and colleagues	407
2 Two degrees away Friends of friends, each connected to one of your connections	10,900+
3 Three degrees away Reach these users through a friend and one of their friends	964,300+
Total users you can contact through an Introduction Your network also includes 25 RootsCamp Participants.	975,600+

2,304 new people in your network since March 10

LinkedIn lists second and third degree connections. These are powerful resources. In this example, 400 contacts open the door to almost 1 million second and third degree contacts. That's some address book!



Source: Comscore

LinkedIn:

1. Set up an account on LinkedIn.com. Be sure to complete the 'Experience and Industry' and 'Education' profiles. As LinkedIn is a professional networking site, these details are important ways to find and meet colleagues. You can continue to edit your profile through the 'My Profile' tab once you're signed in. You can maintain public and private (accessible to contacts) profiles.
2. Search for friends and colleagues using the 'search' field or 'expand your network' tabs. Invite them to join your network.

Facebook:

1. Register at www.facebook.com. You'll be asked for education and professional information. These details are important ways to find friends and colleagues.
2. Edit your profile using the 'Profile' tab at the top of the page.
3. The 'friends' tab enables you to see the latest news from your friends pages. This is also fed onto your Facebook homepage.
4. Join regional, college or professional networks through the 'networks' tab. These are important ways to make and sustain contact with friends and colleagues.
5. Build out your profile using the 'friends', 'groups', 'events' and 'marketplace' tabs on the left.

LinkedIn Tips and tricks:

- Actively invite new contacts to connect. Mention where you've met in your invitation.
- Use 'advanced search' feature to search by industry, keyword, job title and more. See who's doing what in your field.
- Import your Yahoo, Gmail or Outlook contacts to see who's on LinkedIn (under 'my contacts').
- Claim your name as your URL (go to "edit my public profile"). This is a great way to boost your Google rating.
- Get information about potential employees or employers through the "one-click reference" feature. Build bridges.
- Promote causes through LinkedIn for Good.



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Sparking new conversations through Blogs

What are blogs?

Blogs are web pages that operate somewhat like a diary or journal, in that the author writes frequent, usually informal, and usually personal statements or reactions on topics or events. Weblogs effectively provide internet users with a public forum or soapbox that can be accessed instantaneously by others.

How blogs strengthen networks:

Communications grid:

Ease of publishing combined with the informal writing style on many blogs results in information being shared more quickly than otherwise.

Social ties:

Blog rolls allow authors to indicate their interest in and collaboration with others in a low cost way. Moreover blog posts that allow comments or quote others can build an open conversation around an issue or policy.

Shared resources:

Posts and conversations provide a valuable learning resource for people new to the field.

Common story:

Provide a personal account or perspective, thus strengthening the common story and understanding around an issue.

Blogs can be easily maintained by anyone with a basic understanding of the internet and email. Although technically simple, blogs have an important and increasing impact on public discourse. The ability to easily post information, combined with easy subscription, monitoring and commenting tools, creates great opportunities for dialogue.

The number of weblogs totaled approximately 70 million in March 2007. That number is estimated to double every six to nine months, with approximately 120,000 blogs created every day.

How can blogs support your work?

Weblogs provide individuals and organizations with a powerful, public space to voice their opinion and perspectives. Authors are able to "tell the story" behind issues; many blogs appeal to new and larger audiences because of this personal and engaging approach. Hearing the voice of someone experiencing the real impacts of a policy is a tremendous addition to a higher-level campaign on that policy.

Considerations:

- **Expectations.** Think carefully about how much time you have to devote to your blog. Having a blog sets expectations: you should write at least two new blog entries per week.
- **Audience.** Understanding your audience will help you understand appropriate tone, style and content for your blog. Is your audience highly-educated, looking for deeper expertise on technical issues? Is your audience in high school? Do you even know? It's ok (and not uncommon) to not really know your audience is at first. You'll continually refine your tone as you figure it out (perhaps through stats tracking, for example).
- **Contributors:** You must also consider who you will allow to write comments. Can anyone comment? Do they need an account, and if so will you require only an email or an entire profile? Your decisions in this area will affect your ability to edit postings after-the-fact, as well as encourage postings in the first place (too much security might discourage people).
- **Authors:** A blog sets certain expectations for readers. You should plan on posting at least 2-3 times per week. Is this feasible for your group? Another advantage of blogs is that they personalize issues. Your organization's Executive Director could write for your blog; so could your organization's interns. Both probably have very valid, interesting things to say. And don't assume that the intern's blog won't be as - if not more - interesting! Blogs can also be a good



for volunteers and constituents to voice their opinions. Regardless of who posts, it's important to make their identity clear.

- Consider what the **appropriate content** is for your blog.

Getting started with blogs

1. Decide whether you want a hosted solution or to set up your own software. Some options:
 - www.blogger.com. This is a free and easy-to-use hosted platform. Users need to be able to edit html code.
 - SixApart offers two hosted solutions based on the same software: www.typepad.com and www.moveabletype.com. They are easy to use and relatively low-cost (\$120 per year). Given their popularity, many online services provide automatic integration.
 - Wordpress (www.wordpress.org) offers both open source software and a hosted solution. The software is flexible and many plug-ins are offered to extend it. The hosted solution offers limited flexibility and does not permit customizing the url.
 - Set up a blog on a larger community space such as www.vox.com or www.livejournal.com. Both enable users to build relationships with others using the tool. Live journal provides the possibility of blogging privately to a limited audience. Vox is a more modern service and aims to support the formation of affinity- and geographic communities.
 - Configuring your blog so that it (1) looks appropriate for the content you wish to publish and (2) projects the image you wish to communicate to readers.

2. Find your voice.

Spend time finding your voice. Practice writing posts. Learning the proper tone, content and style for your blog takes time! Practice, ask for feedback, refine and sharpen your skills. Some general tips:

- Watch for and **emulate styles you like!**
- Watch for **lingo and jargon**. It's usually a good idea to avoid technical language, acronyms, etc. - lest you turn off some readers.
- Careful with the **length**. Try to avoid posts over 600 words in length - any longer and people will stop reading.
- Write **declarative, strong statements** when possible. Wishy washy posts aren't usually that interesting.
- Write in the **first person**. Make the post personal.
- Don't be afraid to **pose questions and think through issues**. If you only write on what you absolutely know, you may not end up writing very much.

Blogs in action: The 'Labor is Not a Commodity' community blog

The 'Labor is Not a Commodity' blog is a collaboration between the International Labor Rights Forum, STITCH, and US Labor Education in the Americas Project, supported by Netcentric Campaigns. The three organizations were interested in increasing the visibility of their individual issues through the blog, as well as strengthening the ties between their groups.

Maintaining the blog is relatively easy. It was built using low-cost Typepad software, and a staff member at one of the organizations oversees the site. Posting responsibility is divided between the three organizations; the plurality of voices posting also adds to the richness of the site. The 'comment' feature is particularly popular, and sparks conversation between changemakers on key issues.

The three organizations also direct more traffic to the site than any one of the groups could alone. Analysis of site statistics also shows that industry staff are frequent readers.

Certainly, the blog has its challenges. The groups have realized that posting isn't enough; they must also devote significant energy to outreach. They are actively seeking out new ways to link with other sites and resources.

Check out the blog at
<http://laborrightsblog.typepad.com>

- **Spelling and grammar** do make a difference. Although blog posts are usually meant to be informal, many readers will find sloppy grammar distracting.
- Keep the general journalistic principle of writing in **inverted-pyramid** style. Start with the most broadly appealing, essential facts, moving into more detail throughout the post.
- Offer **sources and links** to more information. Readers will often click on the first link in the post, so make sure it's the most important one.
- Write posts that are **interesting and new**.
- Use **anecdotes, humor and stories** whenever possible. Try to be a good and engaging storyteller.
- Consider how you want to use **menus and sidebars**. If your blog stands alone (is not connected to an organization website), you may want to include some static pages giving background on the issue, or links to such pages on other websites.
- If you enable comments on your blog write posts that will encourage people to respond...make it easy for people to engage.
- **Don't** re-purpose press releases without adding additional detail. A blog is not the same thing as a website.

3. Promote your blog!

Remember that you have to **actively promote your blog**. And don't be discouraged if things start out slow.

- Register your blog with Technorati and Google blog search to ensure that it is "crawled" and indexed by the major blog search engines.
- Set up Google Analytics to track useful visitor statistics.
- Use Feedburner to set up RSS feeds that can be tracked. This will enable visitors to subscribe to your blog. Feedburner also includes Feedflares - a service that allows visitors to easily tag your posts.
- Enable readers to chat through your blog page.
- Consider search engine optimization tricks like "Google Adwords"
- Email other bloggers, press and colleagues announcing the blog. Ask bloggers to add your blog to their blogroll (and offer to do the same). Ask colleagues to link to your blog on their site.
- Generate permanent URLs, enabling easy and clear linking to specific posts



Storing knowledge collaboratively – Social bookmarking

What are social bookmarking sites?

Social bookmarking websites allow users to store and share bookmarks on the web, instead of inside their browser.

What are tags?

Tags are one-word descriptors that you can assign to your bookmarks on del.icio.us. They're a little bit like keywords but non-hierarchical. You can assign as many tags to a bookmark as you like and easily rename or delete them later. Tagging can be a lot easier and more flexible than fitting your information into preconceived categories or folders.

How social bookmarks strengthen networks:

Shared resources:

Create shared knowledge accessible by anyone.

Communications grid:

Permit users to do the modern day equivalent of clipping an article and sending it through the mail instantaneously.

Social ties:

Users can build social networking communities to collaboratively tag all the news items on a certain topic.

Common story:

Allow more democratic and popular classification of web-based resources, ultimately enabling communities to promote their analysis and view of the world – both within communities and beyond.

Bookmarking websites through the internet has several advantages. First, users can **access their bookmarks from anywhere** - home, work, the library, etc.

Second, users can **publicly share bookmarks**, so friends, coworkers, and the public can view them for reference, amusement, collaboration, or anything else. (Note that you can also mark bookmarks on some services as private -- only viewable by you -- if you like.)

Finally, users can **find other people on social bookmarking sites who have interesting bookmarks** and add their links to your own collection. Everyone on del.icio.us chooses to save their bookmarks for a reason. Users can see whether two people have chosen to remember a link, or whether it was useful enough for a thousand people to remember -- which may in turn help them find things.

How can social bookmarking support your work?

- Research - Writing an article? Researching an industry? Use del.icio.us to keep track of the sources you find online.
- Influence the discourse around key topics. Bookmarking allows popular classification of webpages. Keywords identified by webpage administrators are no longer the only terms identified with that site! Check out what others have tagged as "capitalism". You may be surprised!
- Linklog - Save bookmarks to interesting websites and add a bit of commentary to create a lightweight linklog. Then, use linkrolls or the daily blog posting feature to include your del.icio.us bookmarks on your blog or website.
- Collaboration - Friends, coworkers, and other groups can use a shared account, special tag or their del.icio.us networks to collect and organize bookmarks that are relevant -- and useful -- to the entire group.

Considerations:

- **Privacy.** If you are a private person consider whether you want to tag things in such a way that people can identify you as the owner of the id.
- **Personal versus work uses.** Consider where you will mix tags for personal and work against the same id.

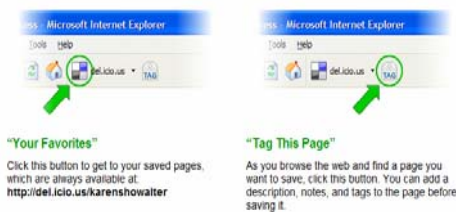


Getting started with social bookmarking sites

Del.icio.us and Digg are two popular bookmarking sites. We are going to explain how to get started on Del.icio.us.

1. Set up an id on <http://del.icio.us>. Install the Del.icio.us buttons on your toolbar.
2. Consider using the Firefox browser extension for easy tagging (visit www.mozilla.com)
3. Import bookmarks or favorites saved in your current browser by clicking on File -> Import.
4. Actively add new tags using the browser buttons installed during registration (and explained on the left). Click on the square logo to see your tags at any time.

Using Del.icio.us browser buttons



Tips and tricks:

- **Share the link to your del.icio.us page** with friends and colleagues.
- **Take advantage of your Del.icio.us network.** Click on the 'your network' link at the top of your page. Type in the names of other del.icio.us users you'd like to add to your network (making you their 'fan'). Remove people from your network by clicking the 'x' next to their name. Your network is public by default, although you can easily change your settings through your network page.
- **Share new tags with friends** through the 'for:username' field. Your recommendation will appear in your friend's 'links for you' page (at the top of their del.icio.us page).
- **Display details about your network on your website or blog** using a network badge (<http://del.icio.us/help/networkbadges>).

