Recent challenges to traditional approaches in information management

Outline of today’s lecture

1. New approaches to IM, from personal IM to folksonomies
2. Some examples
3. Implications for IM

Personal information management

An issue that has grown with the mass adoption of PCs
Suddenly we realise that we have all begun to accumulate enormous collections of files — files that we may need to retrieve again at some later stage
The rise of the ‘mass amateur’

‘the gap between what can be accomplished [IT-wise] at home and what can be accomplished in a work environment has narrowed dramatically over the last ten to fifteen years.’

‘The whole of the mainstream media has started to look towards an undercurrent of individual amateur creation because of the creativity that’s bubbling up from this previously unknown swathe of humanity. Mass-amateurisation is EVERYWHERE.’

(Coates 2003)

Personal information management (PIM)

PIM arises in a variety of contexts:

- Files on our PCs
- E-mail
- Web bookmarks

Sorting e-mail at work

Maureen Mackenzie (2000, 2002) has looked at the use of e-mail by American business executives:

- not only to communicate, but also
- to organise and store information ‘for future use’
Sorting e-mail at work

Mackenzie concluded that those she interviewed often organised their e-mail according to four broad categories:

- Immediate need
- Task management
- Environment scanning
- Perceived future need

‘Keeping found things found’

We all have extensive lists of browser bookmarks or ‘favorites’ – how do we use them once they’ve been compiled?

‘Once found, how are things organized for re-access and re-use later on? What can be done to avoid the need to repeat the entire search process?’

Blogs

‘A weblog (usually shortened to blog, but occasionally spelled web log) is a web-based publication consisting primarily of periodic articles (normally in reverse chronological order) … Blogs range in scope from individual diaries to arms of political campaigns, media programs, and corporations. They range in scale from the writings of one occasional author, to the collaboration of a large community of writers. Many weblogs enable visitors to leave public comments, which can lead to a community of readers centered around the blog …’

The impact of blogs on information management

Blogs have already shown that Google’s claim to retrieve information above and beyond human interference is debatable

Together with folksonomies and tagging, they are changing how we think about classification as well

---

Tagging

- Tags are descriptions of document attributes (keywords) assigned by online users
- Their use has emerged in an unplanned but widespread way
- Their growing popularity has led some to call tags ‘metadata for the masses’ (Merholz 2004)

---

Folksonomies

- involve the sharing of tags, as a means of developing classification systems for collective use
- as classification systems tend to be flat rather than hierarchical in structure
- are a new phenomena, and arguments continue as to their nature, scope and possibilities
- are sometimes called ‘ethnoclassification’ or ‘collaborative classification’
Social software, which makes all this possible, has spread rapidly in recent years, in part on the back of the broader open source/free software wave.

“Social software” is about making it easy for people to do other things that make them happy: meeting, communicating, and hooking up.

(Zawinkski 2005)

Flickr

‘Flickr - almost certainly the best online photo management and sharing application in the world - has two main goals:

1. We want to help people make their photos available to the people who matter to them.
2. We want to enable new ways of organizing photos.’

http://www.flickr.com/about.gne

del.icio.us

‘del.icio.us is a social bookmarks manager. It allows you to easily add web pages you like to your personal collection of links, to categorize those sites with keywords, and to share your collection not only among your own browsers and machines, but also with others …’
43 things

‘Why would I want to do someone else’s goal?’

‘Other people often have great ideas. You can get inspiration from others. Adopt a goal as your own or set up your own goals from scratch. Either way, 43 Things can help you document your success, share information, and make progress on what matters to you most.’

http://www.43things.com/about/view/faq

Technorati

‘Technorati displays what’s important in the blogosphere - which bloggers are commanding attention, what ideas are rising in prominence, and the speed at which these conversations are taking place ... All this activity is monitored and indexed within minutes of posting. Technorati provides a live view of the global conversation of the web.’

http://www.technorati.com/about/

Implications for IM?

The ‘mass amateurisation’ of information classification and retrieval with social software raises serious questions for information management as both an academic discipline and as a professional practice
Implications for hierarchical classification?

To the extent that their primary function was to store objects within a physical space, hierarchical classification schemas were already on the back foot even before the arrival of social software (indeed, since the emergence of digital documents).

Implications for controlled vocabulary?

Hierarchical classification schemas commonly privilege favoured terms to describe holdings as one means to improve information retrieval (controlled vocabulary).

As we’ve seen, folksonomies tend to have little interest in the development of controlled vocabularies.

Implications for professional intermediaries?

It seems as if everybody is an expert now on information seeking and management: why would we still need information professionals to advise us?
Harnessing social software in organisations?

There’s been a reasonable amount of discussion of late as to whether (and how) blogs, folksonomies and suchlike might challenge information use and management in organisations.

Not everyone is convinced:

‘If you want to do something that’s going to change the world, build software that people want to use instead of software that managers want to buy.’

(Zawinkski 2005)

4. Further reading


