

Bookmark Your Business

**Boost Your Traffic By Harnessing
The Power Of Social Bookmarking**



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Introduction

The World Wide Web has grown by leaps and bounds over the years. Each day – with every hour and every minute – it is growing even bigger and increasingly complex. Anything and everything that you imagined is just a click away. Many of us can no longer imagine a life without it. Indeed, already thousands of people already make their living from the World Wide Web. With the growth and spread of the internet, specialized techniques aimed at developing businesses on the web have also developed.

Despite all of the technological development, however, the basis of the global economy is still the same – buying and selling. For the producers to advertise and to make their wares available they need to market it.

Consumers also need a place where they can exchange their money for the goods and services they need. In the modern world, the primary marketplace is increasingly becoming the internet. 'Internet marketing' is the crux of all Internet-based businesses and is increasingly important for other businesses as well. There are few businesses of decent size that do not have a presence on the internet.

However, the dynamics of marketing on the internet is very different from 'regular' marketing. Offline, we use things like billboards, the sides of buses, adverts on television and radio, salespeople etc. to market our products. If you are on the other side of the buying 'equation', that is, a consumer, you learn of new products through these marketing tools. More often than not, we do not have a choice about what and when marketing information is available to us. In most cases we cannot choose to ignore the huge billboard on the road or the side of the bus unless you decide to drive with your eyes closed – but that is not something that is generally encouraged. You could change the channel when adverts show up on your favorite TV or radio show – but it is more than likely you will hear or see it again.

With marketing on the internet, the dynamics are a somewhat different. The internet is vast and intricate. It is an intense web of information that needs some skill to navigate, but if you do so, you can rest assured that your needs will be met. The internet gives you more choice. You can choose which website to click on or ignore. This means that the average internet user or anyone looking to do business on the net tends to be a little smarter than someone who does not use the internet for business. To market to a more intelligent set of buyers, the seller also has to elevate his/her game and be a smart marketer. You need to have an extra edge to make your business or website stand out amongst the millions out there.

It is said that word-of-mouth is the strongest marketing tool. For example, friends starting a new shop, café or blog will most probably tell you to 'spread the good word.' We are more likely to believe our friends and peers than a stranger on the television or radio. This is because we know our friends/peers well and we often share the same concerns, needs and tastes as the people around us. If something is good enough for them, it is good enough for you.

Word of mouth could be defined as the passing of information verbally, sometimes recommendations, but most commonly it is just general information. It is usually informal. Word of mouth was traditionally considered to be a person to person, face to face conversational characteristic. However, as modes of communication changed, phone conversations, text messages, blogs, chats, message boards and emails are also a part of 'word of mouth'. Notwithstanding how it works or what channel it goes through, word of mouth is probably the most personalized form of marketing and the strongest.

A related marketing concept is that of the opinion leader. In any social organization there is a 'leader', one who is respected and held in esteem by the rest of the group. This could be for a variety of reasons – age, intellect, intelligence, or access to information. It could also happen in any setting – work, school, home, bar etc. There may be different opinion leaders according to subject. For example, when talking about the efficiency of washing detergents, the family is more likely to follow the opinion of the mother. At work, we generally tend to follow the opinion of the boss, simply because he/she knows more, is better qualified or more experienced. At least in theory, there should be some reason why we respect what the opinion leader has to say and then follow it.

What we need to remember when marketing on the internet is that internet users are a community. Internet users will therefore often have faith and confidence in their fellow net users. If, for example, a fellow blogger recommends an interesting blog to you, then you are more likely to visit the blog. Social networks are, therefore, becoming more and more important in the internet marketing world. Networks of like minded people create an easy target market for the marketer. Communications within this target market grouping about a certain product or website are even more crucial to internet marketing. It is the 'word of mouth' of the World Wide Web.

Networks come in various forms on the World Wide Web. They have proved to be popular across all imaginable barriers of age, gender, social class, ethnicity, nationality etc. A social networking group is defined by the focus on building communities of people who have something in common such as interests, activities, business, educational background,

region etc. Some of the popular social networking websites in the English speaking world are Facebook, MySpace and Bebo, whilst in Asia, Friendster remains the most popular social networking website. Social networking websites allow the users to chat, message, video chat, voice chat, share files and links, write blogs and join discussion boards. These are just the major basic applications that social networking websites allow.

Social networks are therefore likely to become a key resource for all kinds of businesses. For example, they can work for small entrepreneurs and businesses by providing them with a specific contact base. This enables the business in question to easily locate their desired target market and build their contact base. Social networking websites have also become key customer relationship management tools for sellers, and, increasingly, companies are using these social networking websites to advertise. More and more businesses are now global entities – and online business and advertising is a great way of reaching millions of people who populate the desired target market.

Besides social networks, social bookmarking is another key element of internet marketing and directing traffic to a particular website. Social bookmarking is also important to individual users on the internet, such as the blogs written by you and me. It helps you guide more traffic towards your website. It allows your website to be indexed and more likely to be accessed by fellow internet users, because it works in a way similar to the way that word of mouth works. It involves the recommendations of other internet users about a particular website. There are many kinds by social bookmarking services available - and each one works just a little bit differently or deals with a different type of content. For example, some social bookmarking websites follow blogs, others follow news stories. Let's take a look at what social bookmarking is and how it works.

Social Bookmarking

Internet Bookmarking

In the same way that you insert your bookmark on the last read page; or into an interesting article or passage you come across – you can also bookmark your favorite websites. Internet bookmarks are the web page locations or URLs that are retrievable. Bookmarks are a feature of all internet web browsers. The bookmarking function allows you to save an internet address that you have visited. They are saved by name, rather than by address. This makes it easier for you to recognize and access it later. The web links that you save are known as 'Favorites' in Internet Explorer. The bookmark option is usually found in the top browser menu. However, along with the bookmarking methods that are a built in feature of your favorite web browser, there are also many external applications that help you save, catalogue and access your web bookmarks.

Social Bookmarking

Following on from and building on simple browser based internet bookmarks, we come to shared bookmarks. These are a means for bringing together internet users who share similar interests. Using social bookmarking, such users can pool their resources on the web, and this is what social bookmarking is all about at its most basic level. The bookmarks are not stored on a particular computer but they are instead created and stored on a remote web server. They are effectively stored on an external website that can be accessed anywhere.

Social bookmarking websites are also a kind of social network. It is a means by which users can search, share, organize and store web pages that have bookmarked by themselves or other people. It simply refers to the various web based applications that allow you to store a record of your web bookmarks online, rather than saving them in 'favorites' on your computer at home or in the office. Therefore, these bookmarks are usually public although this will vary between the different social bookmarking services available. Some may allow bookmarks to be saved privately only, that is they are shared only with certain people in groups or networks of your choosing, etc.

Users who enjoy access to a particular social bookmarking site can view the bookmarks chronologically, by categories (tags), through a search engine or just randomly. Tags are most commonly used on social bookmarking websites.

At a slightly higher level, for the purpose of sorting and filtering the many bookmarks on a social bookmarking website, they are grouped under broad categories. These categories are what are most commonly termed

tags. They may be words or phrases which can help you find the same link later and also provide a list of similar websites with the same 'tag'.

Tags are nearly the same as keywords, yet they are slightly different. When keywords for a web page are created, you are trying to match the words or phrases to the information you are looking for, and of course you hope that this will yield the results you need.

However, suppose when you enter the words 'celebrity gossip'. You will get thousands of unrelated websites that simply contain the words 'celebrity gossip' somewhere in their content. Tags are categories not keywords. They are labeling a certain 'type' of website, not searching the website content for the keywords – which may actually yield many useless results.

Many of the social bookmarking services actively encourage you to organize your bookmarks by way of tags instead of folders as in browsers. Bookmarks are categorized according to tags and include information about how many people have tagged that bookmark.

Similarly, most of the leading social bookmarking websites create web feeds for their database of bookmarks which enables users to be instantly aware of the latest bookmarks that may be of interest to them as they are saved, shared and tagged by users.

Social bookmarking services have grown increasingly popular. Many websites have added features like rating and comments regarding the bookmarks, emailing bookmarks, etc.

The Basics of social bookmarking

What is it?

No doubt, everything you have read so far has given you some indication of what social bookmarking sites are and what they do. Let's try to break it down into even simpler terms. Social bookmarking is the practice whereby you can save your bookmarks to a public website and tag them according to content, type etc.

In order to create your own collection of social bookmarks or be able to view others', you must register with the social bookmarking website in question first. The site will allow you to store bookmarks, make tags, decide upon which of your tags should be made public and which should be kept private. Some social bookmarking will do periodic checks on the bookmarks to make sure that the links still work, and as suggested, those visiting social bookmark websites can perform searches by keywords, popularity or person.

Who does it?

Social bookmarking is useful for just about any one who uses the internet avidly and loves information. Social bookmarking is particularly appropriate and useful for pooling resources from research from around the world.

How does it work?

Social bookmarking is a new way of organizing information and categorizing resources, making everything easier to access in the process. The person creating the bookmark must assign a tag or a group of tags to each link or resource. This creates a user directed and defined classification of information. Social bookmarking services show who created particular bookmarks and also give access to other bookmarks created by the same person. Users can therefore make social connections with other users interested in the same topic by following these tags. As a user you can also see how many people have used a particular tag and search amongst all the resources with the same tag. Over time, users of a particular community site tend to develop a unique set of key words to describe their resources. This is known as 'folksonomy'.

Why is it important?

Social bookmarking gives users a unique opportunity to express their own personal take on information and resources, as well as on the organization of these resources. The process of social bookmarking allows people of similar interests and tastes to locate each other and create a sort of online cyber-community.

It follows that using folksonomy as a tool for research allows you to benefit from the insights and research of other users, and this helps you find information relevant to what you are looking for, as well as topics that are not directly related (such as those that show up in key word searches). For example if your search is based on cars, you may also notice that other users found some connection between cars and car repair services, and this could prove to be a valuable connection and resource for you, either personally or on a business level. Furthermore, the collections of these folksonomies keep changing and are therefore generally up to date. Social bookmarking also allows users to rank tags and this acts as a collaborative filter of sorts and enables you to find your most relevant results.

Where is it headed?

Social bookmarking is not a technological marvel, and indeed the technology behind it is quite simple. The basic idea on which social bookmarking is built, that is tagging, is now spreading into other applications as well such as email and multimedia files. As the net

gradually moves away from 'formal' taxonomies and terminology, it will change the way that online communities come together and interact. The horizon of resources available on the internet is changing, new ways of classifying information are constantly emerging and much of it is user directed and controlled. Keeping this in mind, it is more than likely that in the future, the organization and function of databases may change as well.

Why use it?

The most obvious advantage of using social bookmarks is accessibility. You can access your favorite websites from any computer and even from your mobile phone! You could argue that if you wanted to access any kind of information, you could simply enter key words into any search 'engine' and gets thousands or even millions of results, but that is exactly the problem.

No matter how fast or how many results a search engine may yield, it is still selected by a computer. In essence, computer software is trying to determine the meaning of your search. On the other hand, bookmarks are the result of discerning, deliberate human action. Furthermore, such bookmarks within a social bookmarking service are usually focused upon a certain topic or attract a certain kind of user.

For example, if you and I share an interest in celebrity gossip, then you are likely to benefit from my bookmarks list much more so than running a search in one of the major search engines.

Besides that, you will also have a certain 'word of mouth' recommendation about the site. You don't have to waste time figuring out which is a good website to catch up on the latest Hollywood gossip – you would simply log on to the social bookmarking website and choose from recommendations by fellow gossip-holics.

Perhaps this is the most important advantage of social bookmarking. It has the ability to incorporate human intelligence. Furthermore, a community of like minded people can help you sort between good and bad content. This is something that search engines try to figure out by way of algorithms but is difficult to achieve.

Using Social Bookmarking For Your Website or Weblog

With the millions of blogs and websites competing for the time and attention of internet users, social bookmarking can be a huge help in getting your website or blog noticed. Social bookmarking has proved to be one of the top techniques to promote your website and guide traffic towards it, and the beauty is that it is actually quite simple to do.

The first thing on your checklist should be visiting a few of the top social bookmarking websites, such as [Digg](#), [del.icio.us](#), and [Furl](#). If you are really clueless about social bookmarking websites, then do a simple search engine search and you will get a ton of results. Sign up for a free account at the social bookmarking website of your choice, and when you do so, you will get to select a 'button' that you can add to the end of each of your blog posts. What this does is enables users to bookmark your blog or website easily.

For example, if a visitor likes your website and is a member of the social bookmarking service 'Digg', he/she can click on your button and this will lead them to the Digg website where they will have to log in. After that, your blog post, article or website will appear as a bookmarked URL. This also gives the visitor the ability to post a comment on your post and this can prove to be very beneficial to your website in terms of traffic.

The more people that click on the social bookmarking link for your website, the more links you will have on the website pointing back to you website. This should increase the traffic on your website when people logging on to Digg are looking for posts relevant to them and find your site bookmarked. Also, as more and more people visit your website they may also social bookmark it themselves, either on the same social bookmarking network or on other sites, both of which will lead to even more bookmarks leading back to you.

However, just registering yourself with a social bookmarking service does not mean that your job is done. You shouldn't simply stop after pasting a button under your blog posts and expect everyone to remember to click. You must become an active member of these social bookmarking sites.

What is meant by 'active' is that you must actively visit the social bookmarking site in question and find topics that relate to you or your online business. This allows you to bookmark, post and add comments of your own.

Believe it or not, this really does increase the traffic on your website. If you bookmark some one's website, it is likely that they will also

bookmark your site, and there should soon be a network of links pointing back to your site.

How to Make Social Bookmarking Work For You

Here are some methods that you can employ to get the most benefit from social bookmarking. Many of them focus on how to organize your information so that your website shows up in more and more search results:

- When you create a blog post, make sure that the keyword phrase is as close to the beginning of the post as is possible. When you bookmark the post, use the title of the post and tag the keyword as well. This is great for search engine results. In fact, doing this is often termed search engine 'bait'!
- Stay active on the social bookmarking website and bookmark every post. As mentioned before, social bookmarks are bait for the search engines, and this is an opportunity that is not to be wasted.
- Social bookmarking leads to more people reading your articles, posts etc., and over time this will create additional credibility for you. It can also lead to repeat traffic, referrals, sales, newsletter sign ups, comments on your blogs, emails from readers etc. In order to make the most of the social bookmarking website, you need to have all these functions working for you.
- Interaction is your biggest and most potent weapon in social bookmarking. Links back to websites rely on being bookmarked and getting read. With advancing technology, you can add video, audio, RSS feeds etc to get more and more interaction on your website and eventual links back to your website.
- The content on your website must be good. There is no substitute for good quality content when it comes to generating traffic. You must ensure that you get quality links as well, because the links that you receive on your website must be from reliable sources and have to do be relevant to your content.
- Related to the point made earlier about having good content is the fact that search engine spiders are always crawling good websites. Increasingly, social bookmarking websites are becoming a favorite of search engines. This is because there is a human element to social bookmarking. People are actively involved in organizing and tagging their favorites. This is a strong indication that the web page is extremely relevant to the search, much more so than a simple keyword search.
- When using social bookmarking you should work towards improving your search ranking. Get as many people – ideally those with similar interests – to bookmark your web site. The best way to

encourage people to come back to your website is to provide great content and make it easy for people to bookmark your website.

Social Bookmarking Sites To Try

Digg

www.digg.com is a popular website that involves elements of social bookmarking and blogging. It places an emphasis on science and technology but has recently expanded to include categories such as politics and entertainment. The latest stories and websites are submitted by registered users and editorial control is democratic. This means that news stories and web site links are submitted by users and they are only moved to the front page of Digg based upon a user-controlled ranking system.

This is how it works. Users can view all the stories or link that their fellow users submit. If a story gets enough 'diggs' it gets promoted to the front page of the Digg website. If it doesn't get enough 'diggs' it remains in the 'digg all' area, where it will eventually be removed. A post may also be removed if enough users report a problem with the link.

All the content on the Digg website is free.

Originally Digg carried fifteen categories in which to submit stories. These were deals, gaming, link, mods, robots, security, technology, design, Apple, Linux, music, hardware, movies, programming, software and science.

However, Digg was recently revamped and the previous categories have now been worked into the six new categories, which are: technology, science, world & business, sports, entertainment and gaming – with each category having sub-categories.

On Digg, users can discover web content from just about anywhere. Whether it's the biggest names on the web or the most obscure blog from the other side of the world, you will find it on Digg.

There are no editors on Digg. The editing is done by all the users together. The users together determine the value of the content that is available. All the content is user driven – from the blog posts to the pod casts.

Once you submit your post, it is instantly visible to all Digg users. If your submission is a good one and it gets enough Diggs, it gets promoted to the front page of the website. There it is available for viewing by millions of users around the world. Since Digg is all about sharing and making discoveries, users can also build conversations around the content that is posted. Digg provides users with tools to comment on and discuss topics they are passionate about. When you go through Digg, you will quickly realize the benefit of working through the lens of other users who have the same interests as you, simply because it acts as a content filter. This

ensures that you only get the most interesting, relevant and unique information.

Using Digg: Making it Work For You

Simply sign up for a Digg account at digg.com and take off from there.

Whenever you want to submit an article, video or pod cast, just post it for people to see and it will show up immediately in the section called 'Upcoming Stories'. Here, other Digg members can see it and 'digg' it if they like it.

A 'digg' is a vote for your post that recommends it to other users. If your submission receives enough diggs, then it gets promoted to the front page of Digg.com. The next step up the ladder of popularity is to make it to the Top 10 list on the homepage.

The more people who digg your post, then even more people are likely to click on it. If it's good for them, it's good for the next user as well. On the other hand, if a submission is no good and does not receive enough diggs it will remain in the 'Upcoming Stories' section and stays there until it gets deleted. So you have to be at the top of your game to make sure that your post does not get deleted. To do this, you must stay active on the website.

You must take part in the collaborative editing process that Digg is essentially based upon. You should digg posts that you like because it means that other users will also digg your posts and create better visibility for your post. You can also share your digging history with your friends.

You should make an effort to 'bury' any bad links, that is, links that have irrelevant information or duplicate entries. This keeps the spam out and ensures that users get only relevant information. This helps you gain credibility and in turn build an invaluable network. You can invite your friends or make new ones on Digg. This lets you view what others are digging and help you find mutually beneficial resources. You can even share a link with friends who are not on Digg by emailing it to them. Most importantly you must share your opinions and make them heard on Digg. This is only way that you gain credibility for yourself and create more link-backs to your website, thereby generating more traffic.

Technorati

www.technorati.com The word technorati is a combination of the words technology and literati. The mainstay of technorati is blogs. Technorati is basically concerned with the world 'live' web, as opposed to the World Wide Web. The world 'live' web is that part of the World Wide Web which is constantly being updated and is interactive. Technorati searches for and organizes independent, user generated content, whether it is blogs,

videos or pictures. This kind of 'personal' media is also sometimes referred to as citizen media.

Before examining the workings of technorati, let's take a look at blogs as they are the basis of technorati. A weblog or blog (as it is commonly known) is a kind of daily diary or journal but it is online. Blogs are a very powerful tool of communication. They may be very personal and not actually trying to achieve an audience at all, whilst on the other hand, they could be vying for mass viewing. In any case, blogs are quite influential. They reflect a wide variety of opinions and topics, and they are as varied as the millions who write them and read them. Millions also respond to these blogs and are influenced by them.

Within the blogging community, bloggers connect to other bloggers on a regular basis. This means that they are engaged in an interaction that is almost like an open conversation. This is where technorati comes to fore.

Technorati tracks blogs and the conversations around them, and it rapidly indexes these links. The world live web is buzzing with activity that many are entirely unaware of.

For example, every day over 175,000 new blogs are created. These blogs are updated regularly as well. There are 18 blog updates per second – which means that there are 1.6 million posts being made every day. This could be a gold mine of potential visitors to your website.

Using Technorati: Making It Work For You

Technorati's mainstay is the blogs that people create.

You can sign up for a free account and start posting your blog pages to Technorati straight away. You can also create a user profile for yourself, so that others can get to know you and your interests and help you to network better. The site also includes news, and is broken down into these two main categories – news and blogs. There are topical categories as well, and these include business, entertainment, lifestyle, sports, technology and photos. Each topical category has blogs and news items related to it.

As a member, you can 'favorite' the blog or posting of a fellow user. You could even 'favorite' the user. This means that you are giving them a 'thumbs up' for all of the posts made by that user. Imagine how many link backs it can create to your website if people favorite your profile or even your posts in the same way.

Technorati also makes a distinction between the most 'favorited' blogs and the top commented-on blogs. So this brings a greater number of blogs to people's attention.

If, for example, the aim of your blog is to spread information, it may not garner too many comments but it may be a favorite of many users. On the other hand, blogs that are more opinionated and interactive will invite much more commenting.

The 'popular' page on the website displays the top five blogs, the ones that have been voted as 'favorite' by the most people, and it also provides a link to the top one hundred favorite blogs. It also shows the number of people who have voted the particular blog as favorite. The 'popular' page also lists the top five blogs that have the most comments made about them and provides a link to the top one hundred most-commented-on blogs. This page shows the number of comments made about a post as well.

del.icio.us

www.delicious.com Just like any other social bookmarking site, del.icio.us is a collection of people's favorites. These favorites are yours and those of many others like you. Whenever you find an interesting article, blog, music, recipe, review or just about anything else, then you can simply save it to del.icio.us. This makes your favorites accessible from anywhere, not just your computer.

Furthermore, you can share these favorites with the people around you, whether they are family, friends or coworkers, and you can even build your very own community of like minded individuals on del.icio.us. Del.icio.us also opens up the window to the best content on the web, so that you don't have to sift through the thousands of search engine results. Everything on del.icio.us is someone's favorite, and this already acts as a content filter so you know that you are only getting the best resources and most appropriate website shown to you. Users can, as always, browse the numerous tags to search for what they want.

Using del.icio.us: Making It Work For You

Del.icio.us is basically a social bookmarking website that enables you to save your bookmarks online. You can use it to your advantage to get maximum exposure for your website or blog. It gives you access to the links that other people have tagged as favorites and this provides you with an insight into what kind of content people are looking for and how to position your website in relation to this content. You can assign one word descriptors to your posts; that is, tags. Tagging allows greater flexibility – since you can give a post multiple tags and increase your chances of being viewed.

The following are some of the major reasons why people visit del.icio.us and my suggestions for harnessing the power of its extremely large visitor base to increase traffic to your website:

- Many people searching social bookmarking websites are looking for information or doing research. If your website is information based, then use the site to pick up tips on what kind of information people need most, so that you can post accordingly. Stay active in the 'tags' that directly or indirectly relate to your own website. Only when you post comments actively will people comment on your posts, thereby creating a network of back links and opening up new business avenues.
- Many people now do a considerable part of their buying and selling on the internet. For example, people commonly choose presents on the internet and have them delivered. They even have their own wish list posted on the net and share it with others. This can be a gold mine if your online business is product sales based. Trawl the wish list tags to get an idea of what people are buying. If you find a wish list that's looking for what you are selling, drop them a message and tell them you can help. If the user finds you and your service helpful, they are likely to recommend your product to others as well. This could open up a treasure trove of visitors and buyers on your website.
- Many of us listen to pod casts – whether it is news, music, reviews or entertainment. There is a considerable market for pod casts. If you are in the business of developing pod casts, make sure you check out the mp3 and podcast tags on del.icio.us to see what people are listening to now.
- The internet is also fast becoming a popular travel resources center. People are buying bus, rail and air tickets online. They are choosing destinations and hotels online. And when it comes to traveling, word of mouth is a great marketing tool. People are likely to trust information from people who have been to the place, used the same airline etc. If your online business is travel related, it would be a good idea to get yourself acquainted with the travel and other related tags. Become an active member, help people organize the travel and get the benefit of guiding traffic to your travel based website at the same time.
- Creating a link log can also help you immensely and is quite simple to do. Make sure you comment on other users' blogs as well and they will comment on yours, thus creating a network of links that point back to your website.
- You can also use del.icio.us as a tremendous networking tool and also for pooling resources and completing projects that need collaborative work. Groups of people can use a shared account. They can use special tags for their own work and share relevant

bookmarks that will be useful to the entire group. You can, in fact, basically organize your tags and resources in any way that you want.

Stumble Upon

www.stumbleupon.com StumbleUpon is just a little different from the other social bookmarking websites (actually they are all just a little bit different from each other). It works as a browser plugin to let you 'stumble upon' and rate websites, articles, blogs, photos, videos etc. A person using StumbleUpon is known as a 'stumbler', and when you come across an interesting web find you just click the Stumble! Button on your tool bar and add it to your StumbleUpon favorites. All the functions that you would normally use in social bookmarking are made available on your browser with StumbleUpon.

StumbleUpon is a great way to discover exciting new content on the web in a relatively random fashion, as well as sharing your finds with your friends. When you click the button on your browser, StumbleUpon generates web page matches according to your preferences. The pages displayed are those that have been recommended by your friends or other users of Stumble that have interests similar to you.

Using StumbleUpon: Making It Work for You

To use StumbleUpon all you need to do is to sign up for a free account and then download the free browser plug in. Once this is installed and activated, then StumbleUpon chooses which new website will be displayed depending on the ratings you assigned to previous pages, or on ratings of websites by your friends and the sometimes perhaps even based upon the ratings of other users on StumbleUpon who have the same interests as you. So, if people in your network give your website thumbs up, more and more people are likely to visit it.

The content on StumbleUpon is based on a rating system that allows users to give thumbs up or thumbs down to a website, so it is an entirely recommendation based system that makes extensive use of social networking principles. It also has a one click blogging system, and users can rate a blog with a thumbs up or thumbs down decision.

What StumbleUpon actually uses is called collaborative filtering. This is an automated process that makes active use of the opinions of the people using the system. It also takes into account the personal preferences that come about from machine learning. This creates a virtual community of people who are connected to each other, and over time this community should become ever more closely linked because of the new linkages being added every day.

The website updates each user's personal profile, which is a blog style record of the sites that that particular user has rated. Then, StumbleUpon generates peer group networks of users that are connected by similar interests, and it is these social networks that organize the distribution of the content on StumbleUpon.

What happens is that users of StumbleUpon only get to view the pages that have been recommended by their friends or those who have similar interests.

Instead of just giving a site a thumbs up or down, you also have the option of leaving comments on the website, and this will also appear in the user's profile/blog. This way of discovering content on the web is becoming surprisingly close to automating the word of mouth marketing function.

Stumblers have the chance to rate and review the blogs created by their peers, and, as a Stumbler, you could also join certain interest groups as well to further increase the interactivity of your account. These are community forums created to discuss specific topics wherein users post comments in such a way that it becomes more like a discussion board.

StumbleUpon claims to have a certain edge over conventional search methods, and some of these could be crucial to increasing your website's visibility and directing traffic towards it.

Using search engines often means that we have to carefully sift through pages and pages of seemingly relevant content, but often these results are nothing more than somewhat irrelevant keyword matches which may be far from what you are looking for.

Using StumbleUpon, however, you can be sure that if the content on your website is good, then people who are genuinely interested in what you have to say will see you.

Members have also come to trust content on StumbleUpon, since members are taken directly to matches that are sorted according to interests and preferences. They are more likely to visit your site if it is visible on StumbleUpon.

Like most other social bookmarking sites, StumbleUpon uses technology that is essentially driven by humans. By using a combination of machine learning and human opinions to yield search results, StumbleUpon delivers content that is highly relevant and appropriate, so that the user gets a high quality website every time they search for something and they come to trust this pattern. This means that when your website shows up on StumbleUpon, it will almost automatically have greater credibility.

StumbleUpon is quite easy to use too, so it could work for you, even if you are just learning the ropes of social bookmarking. Also, if your target audience is not exceptionally good at understanding the workings of the internet and social bookmarking, StumbleUpon is a good place to start. Users can add your website to their favorites with a simple click and they also have the opportunity to pass your link on to others in their online community. They can also give feedback or make comments. This creates an inevitable network of visitors to your website. StumbleUpon lists nearly five hundred topics that users can choose to list as their interests and preferences. This allows you to get your website known in different circles and communities of users.

The internet just keeps getting bigger and more complex each day. Information is also constantly changing. StumbleUpon has a dynamic approach keeping fully abreast of all of the freshest sites, blogs and articles on the internet. It filters tons of information on the website to bring content to its visitors. So if you have created a new website, you can promote it and invite feedback and comments on it by using StumbleUpon.

Furthermore, the more active you are on StumbleUpon, the more visibility you will gain, because StumbleUpon compiles a list of its most active users, and this gives extra exposure to those who are very active and helpful. It also shows you people on StumbleUpon who are geographically close to you.

Fark

www.fark.com Fark.com does not obviously seem to be a social bookmarking website. It is a humorous look at pop culture and the news, and is widely read by people as an entertainment site. However, it is one of the most powerful social bookmarking sites around, and has the power to drive massive amounts of traffic to any website.

Fark is, in essence, a community based website.

Its creator Drew Curtis designed it so that it allows users to comment on a batch of articles and news items that are updated daily. A seven day archive is also available for comment. Links to the articles or news items are submitted by registered Fark members which are then approved (green lit) or disapproved by the site administrators. Whether the links are approved or not, they can still have comment threads around them. Moderators monitor the discussion boards and any content that violates posting guidelines is removed.

Another variation of Fark is Totalfark. This is a premium version of Fark and requires a \$5 monthly fee, whereas Fark is totally free. The advantage of Totalfark is that members have an online community and

can take part in active and energizing discussions. They can comment on all posted links, not just the green lit ones.

In fact, the links submitted by this sub-community are not really meant for being green lit and are displayed on Fark but reserved for comment and discussion by Totalfarkers. However, they may be green lit if they are particularly interesting, funny or embarrassing. This is particularly useful for you if you are looking at Fark from a social bookmarking perspective. If your blog is about any of the categories which Fark discusses, you can promote it heavily by posting links and inviting comment. However, you must be careful. Your link must be good quality because the average Farker is intelligent and discerning.

Furthermore, the administrators will soon work out if you are spamming. As mentioned before, there is no substitute for good content to drive traffic to your website, but once you build up credibility for your site, you can be assured that people will visit your website or blog for their daily fix.

Using Fark: Making It Work For You

You sign up for a free account on Fark and create a profile for yourself which is visible to other users. You can upload a picture and write a short bio about yourself, and you should do so, because this is important when trying to build up a community of like minded people to direct to your website. The Fark categories include Not News, Sports, Business, Geek, Showbiz, Politics, Videos and Voting. So, all of the news and infotainment articles that you could ever hope to read are listed here. Fark describes itself as a new aggregator website and an edited social networking website, which receives about 1800 to 2000 links each day from users.

As suggested earlier, if your aim when using social bookmarking is to get people to visit your blog or website, then you should understand that each day, out of the 2000 odd submissions that Fark receives, only about fifty make it to the main page. So there is a high chance that your submission will not make it.

However, the kind of interaction you are seeking can be found on Totalfark. Furthermore, all the submissions that feature on Totalfark are archived in their entirety and not just limited to a seven day archive. Totalfark also allows for greater interaction and connectivity.

Users can, for example, add other users as 'favorites'. You can highlight posts made by your friends in any color you like and of course they can do the same for you. Every time someone 'favorites' you, it creates a link back to your website. Not only can you 'favorite' your friends, but you can also do the same for your favorite posts and links as well.

Fark also has a voting feature where users vote on a particular humorous idea and whether it works or not. This is a great way to get people on your site, that is, if your link makes it to the voting section.

One of the most unusual distinguishing features of Fark is the tags given to the stories by the submitters themselves. They are displayed right next to a cleverly funny headline and carry a link to the actual story, as well as to the forum that is discussing the story. Next to the article you will find a number in parentheses. This indicates the number of comments that have been made about the story, and the more comments a story gets, the more likely people are to visit it.

The Top Rated Social Bookmarking Websites

Below are the top thirty social books marking websites. These have been ranked by a combination of Inbound Links, Google Page Rank, Alexa Rank, and U.S. traffic data from Compete and Quantcast. There are no exact measures of traffic but these numbers no less give us some idea about the market share of each these social bookmarking players.

1. The single biggest social bookmarking website on the internet is Digg. www.digg.com
2. Digg is followed by Technorati www.technorati.com
3. Next in line is del.icio.us – one of the senior players on the social bookmarking scene <http://delicious.com/>.com
4. The fourth largest social bookmarking site is Propeller. www.propeller.com
5. Then we have StumbleUpon – rounding up the top five social bookmarking sites around. www.stumbleupon.com
6. Reddit. You can check it out at www.reddit.com
7. Next up is the most hilarious social bookmarking site you will find and it's called Fark. If you are into pop culture, you need to make it to www.fark.com
8. MyBlogLog – which obviously specializes in blogs. www.mybloglog.com
9. Slashdot is aimed at the techie population. Its tag line goes like this 'for nerds, things that matter'. www.slashdot.org
10. Kaboodle completes the top ten of the biggest social bookmarking websites around. This is aimed at those looking to buy things on the internet – shopping! You can share notes about products and stores at www.kaboodle.com
11. Bloglines tracks blogs, news and feeds. It is still quite a busy site in terms of traffic www.bloglines.com
12. Newsvine encourages users to post the latest news items from around the world at www.newsvine.com. It becomes a one stop shop for all kinds of news.
13. Blinklist is a very simple and easy to use social bookmarking website. It sticks to the basics of creating and sharing bookmarks. www.blinklist.com
14. Netvouz allows users to have their own personalized bookmark page. Like Blinklist, it is also quite simple. www.netvouz.com

15. Clip the highlights with Clipmarks. It shows the most popular and recent 'clippings' from the web by submitters.
www.clipmarks.com
16. Then we have Furl at number sixteen, which claims to be 'your personal web file' It allows the same features of bookmarking, tagging and sharing. <http://www.furl.net/>
17. Mister Wong lets you do your social bookmarking in several languages, so you can make use of resources that may or may not originally be in your language. www.mister-wong.com
18. dzone. This is aimed specifically at web developers
www.dzone.com
19. Magnolia. This simply lets you find websites and build a community with users who have the same interests.
<http://www.ma.gnolia.com/>
20. Rounding up the top twenty social marking sites we have Tailrank. Tailrank tracks the hottest news in the blogosphere at
<http://www.tailrank.com/>
21. Shoutwire has several topical categories. www.shoutwire.com
22. Simpy is a very simplified social bookmarking website.
www.simpy.com
23. BlogMarks promises users a hassle free way to save their bookmarks and share them too. www.blogmarks.com
24. Faves – which used to be known as BlueDot.us. Faves builds personalized pages for its users based on preferences and interests. <http://faves.com>
25. Spurl lets you upload bookmarks from your computer on to the social bookmarking website. www.spurl.net
26. Spotplex contains social bookmarks in multiple languages.
www.spotplex.com
27. Linkswarm is a humorously written social bookmarking tool but with all the same features. www.linkswarm.com
28. Spotback also involves collaborative filtering. www.spotback.com
29. PlugIm. www.plugin.com
30. Rounding up the top thirty list on the best social bookmarking websites is appropriately called MyBookMarks.
www.mybookmarks.com

Using Your Social Bookmarks to the Fullest: Ping!

By now you know that how much social bookmarking can do for you. It is a phenomenon that has the potential to drive huge amounts of traffic to your website. The World Wide Web is dynamic, as we saw when discussing the world 'live' web. It focuses on websites, blogs articles and videos that are constantly being updated.

Especially when considering your blog, it is vitally important to stay on top of the traffic game by making sure that search engines have the latest knowledge of it instead of relying on the search engines to do all the work to find you, since search engines have several million blogs to sift through every day.

So, you should do whatever you can to 'help' the search engine search results by informing them every time you update your blog. You do this by sending a 'ping' to the major directories every time you add a new posting to your blog.

The technology behind the ping function is, however, not new or solely related to blogging. It is, in fact, a simple program that has been used for many years as a way of making sure that a certain IP address actually exists and is able to accept requests from remote machines.

'Ping' is sometimes also used as a verb – to 'ping' is the act of using the ping program or command. Sending a ping is almost like running a sound check on the computer that you are trying to test. Using the ping program or command is also commonly used to figure out how much time it takes to get a return response from the host. A ping can also help you learn the numeric form of the IP address of the host computer, simply from the domain name.

That was the original 'technical' meaning and usage of a ping.

Let's make sense of it for our own use. In simple terms 'ping' implies 'getting attention for' or checking the presence of another party that may be online. A ping works by sending information or a 'pack of data' to a particular address and then waiting for the correct anticipated response.

In fact, the word 'ping' has interesting roots. The technical computer term for the program is Packet Internet or Inter-Network Groper – hence the acronym PING. Ping is also the term used for the sound of a returning sonar pulse used by submariners.

The ping function is also relatively commonly used for validating the existence of an emailing list. This sort of ping involves sending a message to the mail server service of the members of a specific email list

requesting an acknowledgement code or ACK. This ensures that all the emails listed are both live and valid.

This is done before sending a genuine real life e-mail message in order to confirm that all of the addresses on the list are reachable and not dummy addresses. So, this form of ping is not sent to you personally, as this kind of e-mail validation takes place strictly in the background without your knowledge. It is a behind the scenes communication between the computer that sends the ping and your email host's mail server computer.

However, if you have your own mailing list, it enables you to make sure that you are not sending newsletters, updates, promotions etc to email addresses that either did not exist in the first place, or have since become dead or dormant.

Pings have become increasingly important to bloggers as a part of their efforts to keep search engines informed about their latest updates. Bloggers inform the various search engine and aggregation services such as social bookmarking websites by sending a ping to these service providers. It is simple notification that basically says – I've just updated m, blog - care to check it out?

Once the service receives an appropriate ping signal from a website, it is taken as a confirmation that something has been updated on that blog or website. The service then visits the blog or website in question and immediately indexes any new content it discovers. In this way, it could be suggested that a ping is like an 'invitation to visit' more than anything else!

Having the ability to actively 'ping' an update message to all of the major directories means that search engines no longer need to regularly visit blogs to discover new changes. Pings allow bloggers to make the first move by informing search engines of changes when they happen. This allows search engines to be more efficient by reporting and showing updated links as soon as they happen. It also means that blogs are indexed on time.

For you, it means that new content on your website is presented to the public in a more timely fashion whether you rely on search engines or social bookmarking websites for your traffic. When you send a ping to the social bookmarking website where you are registered, it knows immediately that there is some interesting new material out there and puts it forth for their users to view. As we saw in the social bookmarking site reviews earlier, many of them highlight the latest posts made, so the more you can post regular updates to your site, the more it is going to pay you to ping your social bookmarking website. This is because an

increasing number of more 'new' posts also means an ever-increasing number of links back to your website.

Most of the blog authoring tools automatically ping a server every time you update an existing post or create a new one. The blog authoring tool sends a signal to one or more ping servers. The ping server receives these signals from many thousands or millions of these events, with the number obviously depending on the number of updates made to blogs. The ping server then creates a list of the blogs that have new, updated material.

One thing that you should be aware of is that many of the big players in the blog search engine business use their own proprietary ping servers and software.

Whilst this works excellently for the blog search engine itself, it does not necessarily provide you with the maximum benefit. This is because it effectively creates a conflict of interest between the blogger who wants his/her post to remain visible for as long as possible to generate maximum exposure and publicity, and the web service owner who wants his/her search engine to be updated with the latest blog posts as quickly as possible.

As a result of this conflict of interest, bloggers have had to find independent ways of pinging their blog to the search engines and blog directories, and this has led to the development of ping servers that can ping several proprietary ping servers at the same time. This ensures that the blog gets the most publicity possible and it is updated on several search engines rather than just on any individual one.

Here are a few of the many independent ping servers that you can utilize the services of:

- Pingomatic: Find it at www.pingomatic.com. You will see that it is an extremely simple website. You just have to enter the URL for your social bookmarking website along with its name. Below that is a list of the web services that ping-o-matic can ping for you, so all you need to do is choose which services you want to inform of your updates. You could also just enter the URL for your website or blog directly. Ping-o-matic updates all of the major web services such as Weblogs, FeedBurner, My Yahoo!, Technorati, NewsGator etc.
- Kping: Find it at www.kping.com Kping is also a free ping service that lets you ping up to 57 different services at the same time, and once again includes all the most important services and directories such as Weblogs, Technorati, NewsGator, TopicExchange, StrategicBoard and many more.

Conclusion

The Internet is the most vibrant commercial market place in the world today. It is where almost every one goes to buy, sell, bargain, promote, publicize and advertise.

And yet, at the moment we are merely scratching the surface, and the ultimate possibilities that the web may be able to offer us are essentially endless.

The world is your potential market no matter what it is that you are selling. Whether it's old shoes or an opinion, there are people out there on the internet who want to know about you and your stuff.

While the possibilities are endless, you nevertheless need to do some work in order to harness the power of the internet and market your product much more efficiently, because you must understand that the current competition is intense, and it is only ever going to get more so. There are millions of websites out there competing for the attention of users around the world, and you have to make an effort in order to grab your share.

In this book, I have described how you can boost the traffic to your website by harnessing the power of social bookmarking. Ideally, you should already have accounts with many social bookmarking websites, so that your audience is not going to be limited to the members of one particular social bookmarking website that you happen to like.

Being a member of many sites will allow you to integrate your various social bookmarking activities still further, thus making your bookmarks, blogs and websites accessible to the users of as many social bookmarking community sites as possible.

Social bookmarking communities are websites that are relatively easy to use, which are nevertheless extremely effective for driving large numbers of extremely targeted new visitors to your site in record time.

Social bookmarking is, therefore, something that you must start doing as soon as possible if you have not already done so.

But, the great news is that it is not at all difficult. Follow the easy steps to social bookmarking that I have laid out for you in this book and you are well on your way to website traffic gold!