

LibraryThing and the Library Catalog: Adding Collective Intelligence to the OPAC

The Goal: Enhancing the Catalog with Web 2.0 Technologies

Web 2.0 theorists argue that Internet technologies now allow us to harness the “Wisdom of the Crowd” in unprecedented ways. Successful online experiments such as Wikipedia demonstrate that the collective knowledge of millions of users can produce reference works that are more comprehensive than traditional reference sources produced by a small group of experts. Similarly, “folksonomies,” which use the judgment of the crowd to organize documents, have worked extremely well on popular Web 2.0 sites such as Flickr, del.icio.us, and LibraryThing. By collecting and analyzing the private descriptions – the tags – that users add to their own photos, URLs, and books, these sites generate valuable metadata about public documents and resources.

Traditional library OPACs lack mechanisms for collecting the knowledge of library patrons. The classification schemes used to organize library collections rely on the expertise of a small group of specialists with detailed knowledge of the Dewey Decimal system, the Library of Congress classification system and the Library of Congress subject headings. Although this system works well as far as it goes, a Library 2.0 catalog that could generate additional metadata from the wisdom of library patrons would enhance the value of the OPAC. An library catalog that could point users to “recommended” titles in the collection based on the reading habits and descriptions of their fellow patrons would be a great benefit to many readers.

The Problem: Library communities are too small to achieve critical mass

For the past few years, OPAC vendors have worked hard to add Web 2.0 features to traditional library catalogs. Many OPACs now allow users to rate and review library books. Some OPAC vendors also have begun to experiment with user generated tags. So far, however, these features have been underused and have added little value to library catalogs. There seem to be at least three basic problems with this approach:

- The community served by any one library is too small to achieve the critical mass required for effective folksonomies. The more people that generate tags the more valuable a folksonomy becomes. However, library users are fragmented into thousands of small communities served by thousands of local libraries.
- Libraries are late-comers to the game of rating and reviewing books. Amazon already has become the dominant player in the world of user-generated book reviews. It is hard to play catch up when most people already think of Amazon.com as the place to go to read and write amateur reviews.

- In successful Web 2.0 sites such as del.icio.us and LibraryThing users have a private incentive to tag their own collections. The site then compiles private tags to generate public metadata. So far, there is no private incentive for library users to add descriptions to the public catalog. As group, library users might benefit greatly from a folksonomy, but individual patrons have little motive to catalog books for others.

A Solution: Using Folksonomies Created by LibraryThing Users

LibraryThing, www.librarything.com, offers libraries an elegant solution to these barriers to developing Next Generation catalogs. LibraryThing.com already has achieved critical mass and has become *the* place that readers go to catalog and organize their own collections of books. There are thousands of LibraryThing users who have tagged millions of books on the site. Consequently, LibraryThing has harvested a rich collection of user-generated metadata about books that it presents in tag clouds and uses to make recommendations.

The screenshot shows the LibraryThing website interface. At the top, there is a navigation menu with options like 'Your library', 'Add books', 'Your profile', 'Tags', 'Suggestions', 'Search', and 'Tools'. The main content area displays the book 'Everything is miscellaneous : the power of the new digital disorder' by David Weinberger. The page includes a book cover, a 'FIND AT...' section with various retailers, 'EDITIONS, BY POPULARITY', and 'USER-PROVIDED COVERS'. The central part of the page lists tags used to describe the book, such as 'classification', 'folksonomy', 'information architecture', and 'web 2.0'. Below the tags, there is a section for recommendations from LibraryThing's machine, listing eight related books. The page also features social information options like 'back to catalog', 'Social information', 'Book information', 'Conversations', and 'Swap this book'.

For a fairly small fee, LibraryThing now is allowing libraries to use its collective wisdom in local library catalogs. By adding LibraryThing widgets to their OPACs, libraries can use LibraryThing tags to generate links between related books in their own collection.

Examples:

Danbury Public Library: <http://cat.danburylibrary.org/record=1263104>

Danbury was the first library to add the LibraryThing widgets to its catalog. The LibraryThing data is integrated almost seamlessly into the record display. Depending on their OPAC vendor, libraries have a great deal of freedom in controlling how and where the widgets display in the record. The links use the ISBN search interface of the catalog to take patrons to “similar books.”

DANBURY LIBRARY CATALOGS

All Items | Movies, Music & Audio | Kids & Teens | Language Center | Your Account | Statewide Catalog

What's New | Books & Reading | Movies, Music.. | Search the Web | Research Your Topic | Events | Homework Help | Community

SEARCH our Catalog & Website [Advanced Search](#) [Search Tips](#)

RECORD #

Limit search to available items

Author: [Surowiecki, James, 1967-](#)

Title: **The wisdom of crowds : why the many are smarter than the few and how collective wisdom shapes business, economies, societies and nations / James Surowiecki**

Publisher: New York : Doubleday : 2003

LOCATION	CALL #	STATUS
Main floor books	303.38 SUROW	CHECK SHELVES
Main floor books	303.38 SUROW	CHECK SHELVES

Descript: p. cm

Bibliog.: Includes bibliographical references

Subject: [Consensus \(Social sciences\)](#)
[Common good](#)
[Group decision making](#)

ISBN: 0385503865

Similar Books

- [The paradox of choice : why more is less / Barry Schwartz](#), by Schwartz, Barry, 1946-
- [Emergence : the connected lives of ants, brains, cities, and software / Steven Johnson](#) by Johnson, Steven
- [The tipping point how little things can make a big difference / by Malcolm Gladwell](#) by Gladwell, Malcolm, 1963-
- [Blink : the power of thinking without thinking / Malcolm Gladwell](#), by Gladwell, Malcolm, 1963-
- [The long tail : the revolution changing small markets into big business / Chris Anderson](#) by Anderson, Chris, 1961-
- [Freakonomics : a rogue economist explores the hidden side of everything / Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner](#) by Levitt, Steven D
- [The innovator's dilemma : when new technologies cause great firms to fail / Clayton M. Christensen](#) by Christensen, Clayton M

Tags

business [collaboration](#) [collective intelligence](#) [complexity](#) [crowds](#) [culture](#)
[decision making](#) **economics** [ideas](#) [innovation](#) [management](#) [marketing](#)
psychology [science](#) [social](#) [social networking](#) [social psychology](#) **social**
science [society](#) **sociology**

LibraryThing Tags and Recommendations in Danbury PL Catalog

San Francisco State University Library (Coming Soon)

San Francisco State will be the first or second Academic library in the United States to add the LibraryThing widgets. Note that San Francisco uses a visual cue to distinguish between information derived from LibraryThing and information housed in the catalog. Libraries control display through CSS. Note also the differences between the LC subject headings and the LibraryThing tags, which are simultaneously available to the user.

Investigator Catalog

Home | New Search | Library Account | Suggest a Purchase | Contact Us | Help Databases | EReserves | ILLiad

Start Over | Request Hold | Save to Book Bag | MARC Display | Limit & Sort | Another Search | Search LINK+ (Search History)

TITLE infotopia View Entire Collection System Sorted Search
 Limit search to available items

Result page: Previous Next Print Version

Author [Sunstein, Cass R.](#)
Title **Infotopia : how many minds produce knowledge / Cass R. Sunstein.**
Publ/Date Oxford ; New York : Oxford University Press, 2006.
Subject [Personal information management.](#)
[Knowledge management.](#)
[Internet.](#)

Link to:
[Table of contents only](#)
[Publisher description](#)

Availability Details

[Permanent link to this title](#)

Descript xi, 273 p. : ill. ; 22 cm.
Notes Includes bibliographical references (p. 231-258) and index.
ISBN [0195189280](#) (cloth)
Standard # [9780195189285](#)

LibraryThing Recommends
[The wealth of networks : how social production transforms markets and freedom](#)
[Code](#)
[Wikinomics : how mass collaboration changes everything](#)
[From counterculture to cyberculture : Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the rise of digital utopianism](#)
[Expert political judgment : how good is it? how can we know?](#)

LibraryThing Tags
[crowds](#) [decision analysis](#) [economics](#) [education](#) [hayek](#) [hd](#) [hypertext](#) [information](#) [society](#)
[innovation](#) [internet](#) [knowledge](#) [law](#) [media](#) [organization](#) [technology](#)

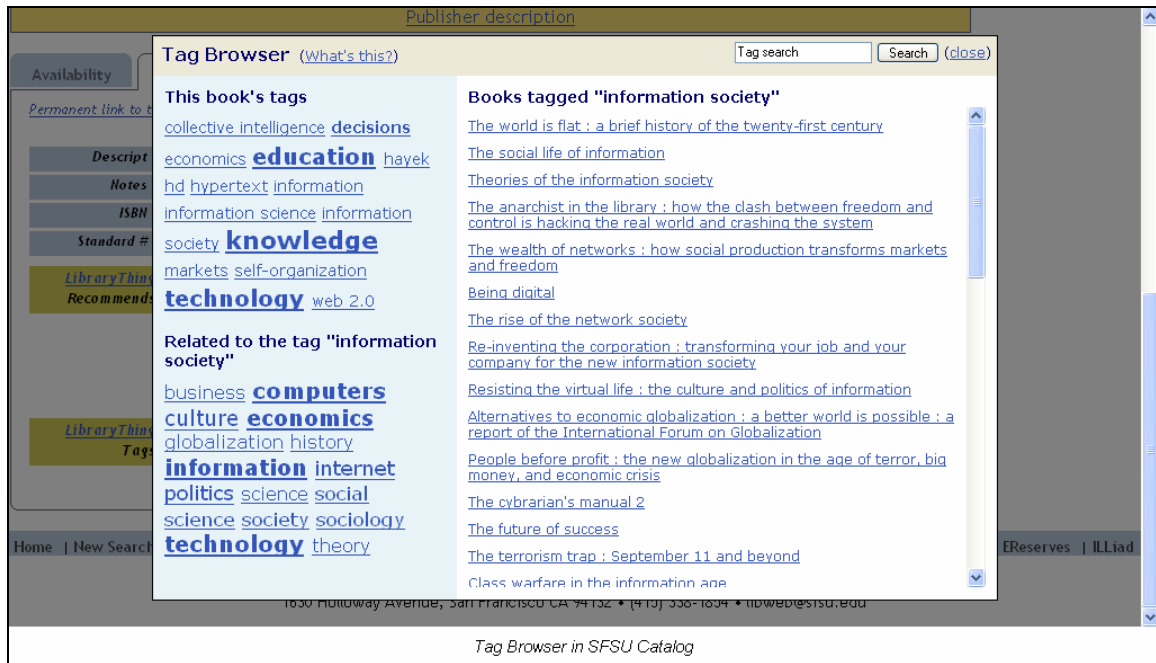
Home | New Search | Library Account | Suggest a Purchase | Contact Us | Help Databases | EReserves | ILLiad

J. Paul Leonard Library @ San Francisco State University
1630 Holloway Avenue, San Francisco CA 94132 • (415) 338-1854 • libweb@sfsu.edu

LibraryThing Tags and Recommendations in the SFSU Catalog

The Tag Browser

This is what happens when the user clicks on a tag in the SFSU catalog. All of the links point to other books in the library catalog. It uses JavaScript to make the catalog more interesting and interactive for library patrons.



Implementation

Most of the work required to set this up is done by LibraryThing, but there is some work for the OPAC administrator. There are four basic steps in the process from the perspective of the library.

1. Sign up for a library account: <http://www.librarything.com/forlibraries/>
2. Upload a file of the ISBNs in the library catalog to LibraryThing. LibraryThing prefers a delimited (tab, pipe, or comma) file that includes ISBN, Title, and Author. LibraryThing will compare the file to its collection of ISBNs. (see p. 6)
3. Configure the widgets on the LibraryThing site. Libraries have control over how many tags and recommendations will appear in record. They have access to CSS to control the display, and they have the power to turn the widgets on and off (see p. 6).
4. Add the widgets to the record display in the library catalog. The widgets are added by adding a link to a JavaScript file that LibraryThing writes specifically for each library that signs up for the service. The location of the widgets in the display is control by div tags that are added to the html of the record display page.

LibraryThing **for Libraries** SFSUL / San Francisco State University Library [sign out](#)

[Your account](#) | [Upload ISBNs](#) | [Configure](#) | [Get HTML](#) [FAQ](#) | [Tour](#) | [LibraryThing Home](#)

Upload ISBN/Title/Author File

Upload a delimited file with (at least) ISBN, title and author, in any order.

Browse (Max. 100 MB)

or URL

Delimiter

What about other formats?

Depending on situation, we also accept CSV, MARC and ISBN-only formats. Contact us for details.

Be kind to our servers.

If uploading more than 150,000 items, we'd appreciate if you could avoid the 11:00am-3:00pm (Eastern US) rush period. If uploading more than 500,000 items, discuss it with us in advance.

Uploading ISBNs to LibraryThing

LibraryThing **for Libraries** SFSUL / San Francisco State University Library [sign out](#)

[Your account](#) | [Upload ISBNs](#) | [Configure](#) | [Get HTML](#) [FAQ](#) | [Tour](#) | [LibraryThing Home](#)

Configure Widgets

Configure widget options here. You can configure widgets before or after pasting the HTML into your OPAC.

You have complete control over the appearance of your widgets, via CSS. However, if you'd like a place to start, we've put together CSS templates for common OPACs:

[III WebPac/WebPacPRO](#) | [Horizon Information Portal](#) | [Geac PLUS](#)

Similar Books On Testing Off

[Configure](#)

<p>Show <input type="text" value="6"/> recommendations (max)</p> <p>List Format <input type="text" value="One per line"/></p> <p>Title Format <input type="text" value="Title"/></p> <p>If title not retrieved <input type="text" value="Get titles from another library"/></p> <p>Advanced Options</p> <p>HTML tags <input type="text" value="<DIV>"/></p> <p>Custom CSS <input type="text" value="div.ltfl_label { width: 13.6%; float: left; font-weight: bold; font-style: italic; font-size: 80%; text-align: right; background-color: #d1c854;"/></p> <p>HTML if success <input type="text" value='<div class="ltfl_label"><p>LibraryThing Recommends</p></div><div>'/></p> <p>HTML if failure <input type="text"/></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><input type="button" value="Save"/> <input type="button" value="Cancel"/></p>	<p>Preview (update preview)</p> <p>LibraryThing Recommends</p> <p>Harry Potter and the chamber of secrets (Book 2)/ by J.K. Rowling ; illustrations by Mary Grandpré</p> <p>Harry Potter and the prisoner of Azkaban (Book 3)</p> <p>The magical worlds of Harry Potter : a treasury of myths, legends, and fascinating facts</p> <p>Ultimate unofficial guide to the mysteries of Harry Potter</p> <p>The sorcerer's companion : a guide to the magical world of Harry Potter</p> <p>Mugglenet.com's What will happen in Harry Potter 7</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(Show HTML)</p>
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Other editions and translations On Testing Off

[Configure](#)

Tag widget and tag browser On Testing Off

[Configure](#)

Select a preset style for your OPAC

Configuring the Display of the LT widgets

Interesting Reading:

Surowiecki, James (2004) *The wisdom of crowds: why the many are smarter than the few and how collective wisdom shapes business, economies, societies and nations.*

Weinberger, David (2007) *Everything is miscellaneous: the power of the new digital disorder.*

Sunstein, Cass R. (2006) *Infotopia: how many minds produce knowledge.*

Keen, Andrew (2007). *The cult of the amateur: how today's internet is killing our culture.*

Mann, Thomas (2007). "The Peloponnesian War and the Future of Reference, Cataloging, and Scholarship in Research Libraries" Prepared for AFSCME 2910: The Library of Congress Professional Guild representing over 1,600 professional employees <http://www.guild2910.org/Peloponnesian%20War%20June%2013%202007.pdf>

Mathes, Adam (2004). "Folksonomies - Cooperative Classification and Communication Through Shared Metadata" <http://www.adammathes.com/academic/computer-mediated-communication/folksonomies.pdf>

Thingology: A blog about LibraryThing's philosophy of tagging:
<http://www.librarything.com/thingology/>

Wikipedia on Folksonomies: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folksonomy>

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