



When the Web Talks Back

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ITS Emerging Technologies Group



Social Software

Social Software allows people to connect or collaborate by use of a software program or suite of programs on a computer network. Our talk will focus on Web enabled Social Software:

- Personal Weblogs (*i.e.* Blogs)
- Group Weblogs (*i.e.* Group Blogs)
- Wikis



Current State of Blogging

Currently, blogging is “outsourced” at Penn State. We don’t provide a central facility which is tied into our ITS infrastructure. Our presenters are evidence of this:

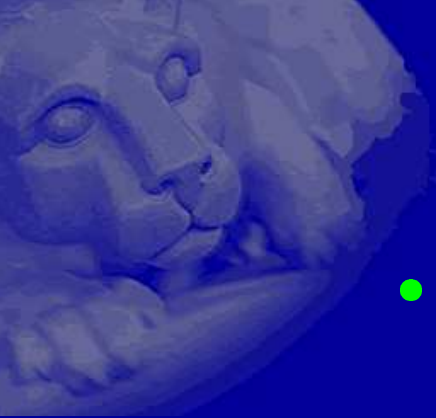
- Mark Earnest —
<<http://www.markearnest.net/>>
- Michael Bérubé —
<<http://www.michaelberube.com/>>
- Jim Leous —
<<http://aset.psu.edu/~leous/blog/>>



Personal Blogging psublog

Personal blogging is designed with the following goals:

- Leverage existing IT infrastructure
- Scalability — written in C
- Easy to use end user interface



Features of psublog

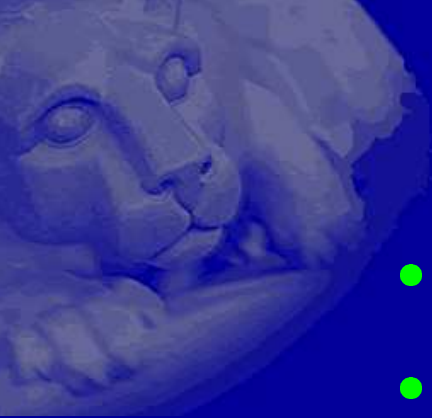
- blog entry creation with familiar MS Word type buttons for text manipulation (xinha)
- individual blogger's entries, preferences and configuration are stored using their own PASS space.
- access to blog entries (*i.e.*the ability to read) is determined by ACLs on files — audience could be everyone, members of a class, or only an individual instructor.
- personal data should be easily portable to other blogging services (XML)
- generates RSS feed



Group Blogging with cLog

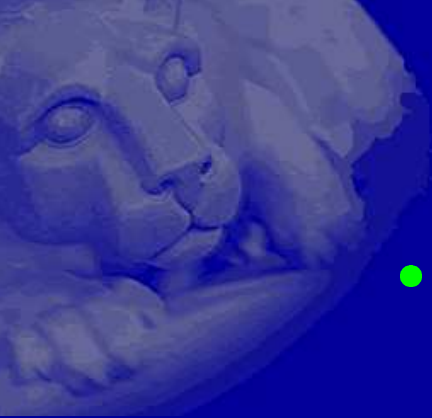
The goal was to create a group blog similar to the Slashdot site. Some design considerations are:

- Performance and Scale — written in C with a MySQL DB on back end
- Extensible — HTML is contained in template files. Database is handled through an abstraction layer so back end can be changed out w/o rewriting
- Simple — It is what it is. Simple end user interface.
- Integration with existing infrastructure — Leaves authentication up to the Web server. Easily integrates with WebAccess, Shibboleth, etc. Future plans include LDAP querying for user information when new accounts are created.



cLog Design (cont'd)

- Topics — supports administratively managed topic areas
- Threaded discussion — ability for users to comment on each posting and organize comments into threads
- RSS feed — generates an RSS version 2.0 feed for syndication
- Group based security — functions and pages are controllable by administrator defined groups. These currently exist in the cLog DB but could be read from LDAP.



Where/How is cLog used?

- SlashET — Emerging Technology News and Discussion — Open to all to read. Anyone with a PSU access account can comment on news postings. All ET employees can post news.
- SlashETS — Prototype ITS ETS Reporting Weblog — Viewing, news posting, and commenting restricted to ETS employees
- SlashTL — ET Team Leaders Reporting Weblog — Open to all of ET to read, posting restricted to ET Team Leaders
- markearnest.net — Mark's Weblog — Open to all to read, only Mark can post

Who is this man?

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Michael Bérubé, Professor of Literature, Author, and Blogger.



What's a Wiki?

“The smallest on–line database that could possibly work” – Ward Cunningham

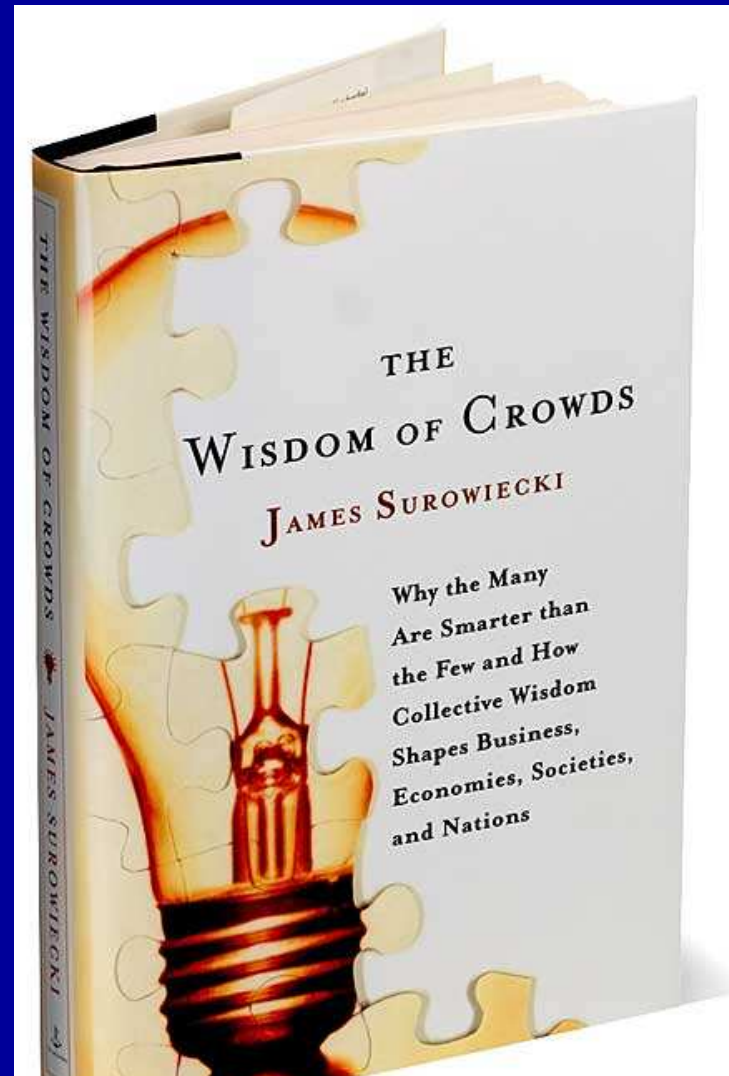


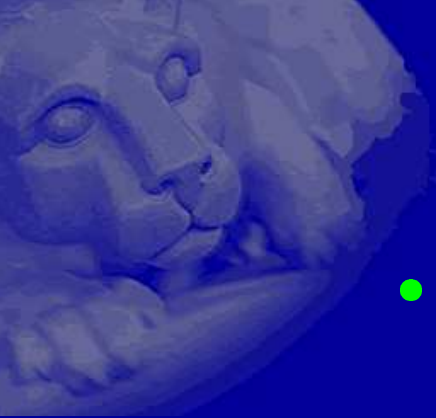
No Really...What's a Wiki?

- A group editable Web space
- A collaboration tool
- A knowledge management database which leverages the *Wisdom of Crowds*

H.L. Mencken was Wrong

“No one in this world, so far as I know, has ever lost money by underestimating the intelligence of the great masses of the plain people.” — H.L. Mencken





The Wisdom of Crowds

- Google — PageRank and Markov Chains aside, what Google actually does it to measure the “goodness” of a search based upon how good others think the page is. This may be one of the best examples of how the many in aggregate determine what others are looking for.
- Who Wants to be a Millionaire? — The crowd was right 91% of the time; the “experts” were right about 65% of the time.



Wikipedia

Wikipedia is a Web-based, free-content encyclopedia which is edited collaboratively by volunteers. It is actually a collection of hundreds of independent language editions, with the English language edition having over 570,000 articles (05/24/2005).

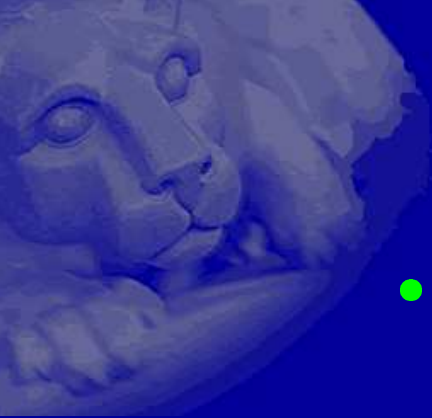
- How it works — MediaWiki
- Why it works — *The Wisdom of Crowds*
- Who cares about this stuff? Why would anyone do this?



What Could ITS Do?

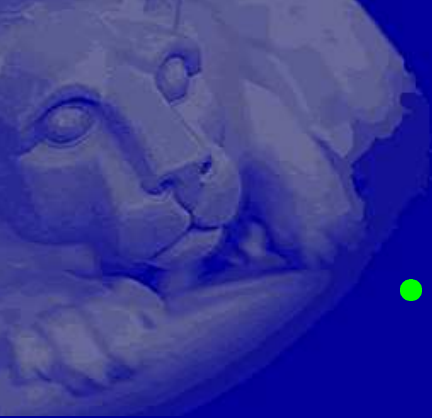
We could create an ITS Knowledge Management Framework which would be:

- open to full-time and part-time ITS employees for reading and writing
- open to all Penn Staters (read only)
- have some moderation
- include a self-actualizing ITS skills database



What needs to be done?

- Single sign–on integration → MediaWiki login/account
- How do we “export” a read–only copy to everyone?
- How do we “moderate?” Who “moderates?”
- Do we integrate it with the LDAP directory?



Where Could We Use Wikis?

- Project Sites — Let the developers flesh out ideas (*e.g.* The LionShare Wiki)
- Running a service for instructional purposes (*e.g.* Rich Doyle's Composition classes)
- Student organizations — continuity management
- Peer advising



Questions?

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