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Making Your Library More Delicious

Ellie Dworak
Boise State University

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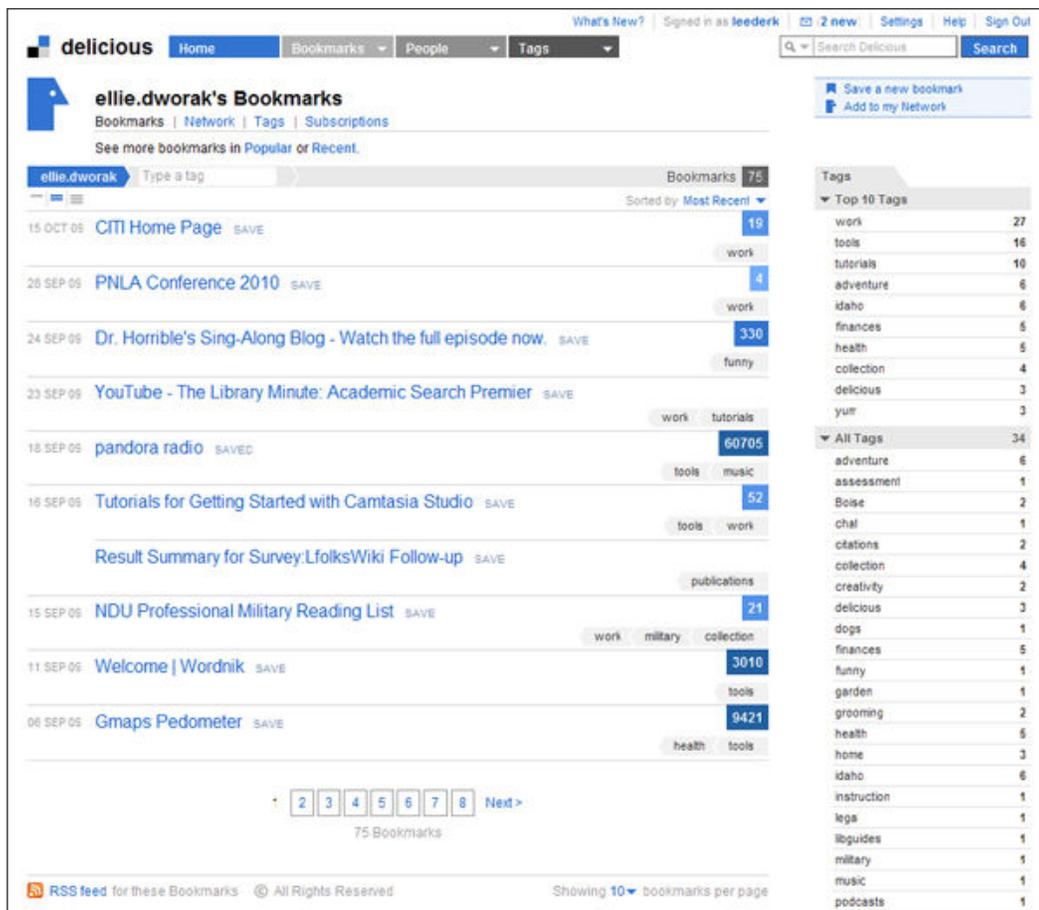
by Ellie Dworak

Sometimes there are too many new words floating around. And sometimes, the same old words have new, perplexing meanings. So it is with “social bookmarking” and “delicious.” I thought I had the bookmarking thing down—I save things that I like so that I can get back to them again, right? And I know what it means to be social—that’s what I do on Saturday night after I’ve recovered from the work week. But what are the two of them put together? And what is this thing called “Delicious?” This column will cover those topics and give you a toolkit for learning more.

Social bookmarking? Why?

So what is this thing that we call social bookmarking?

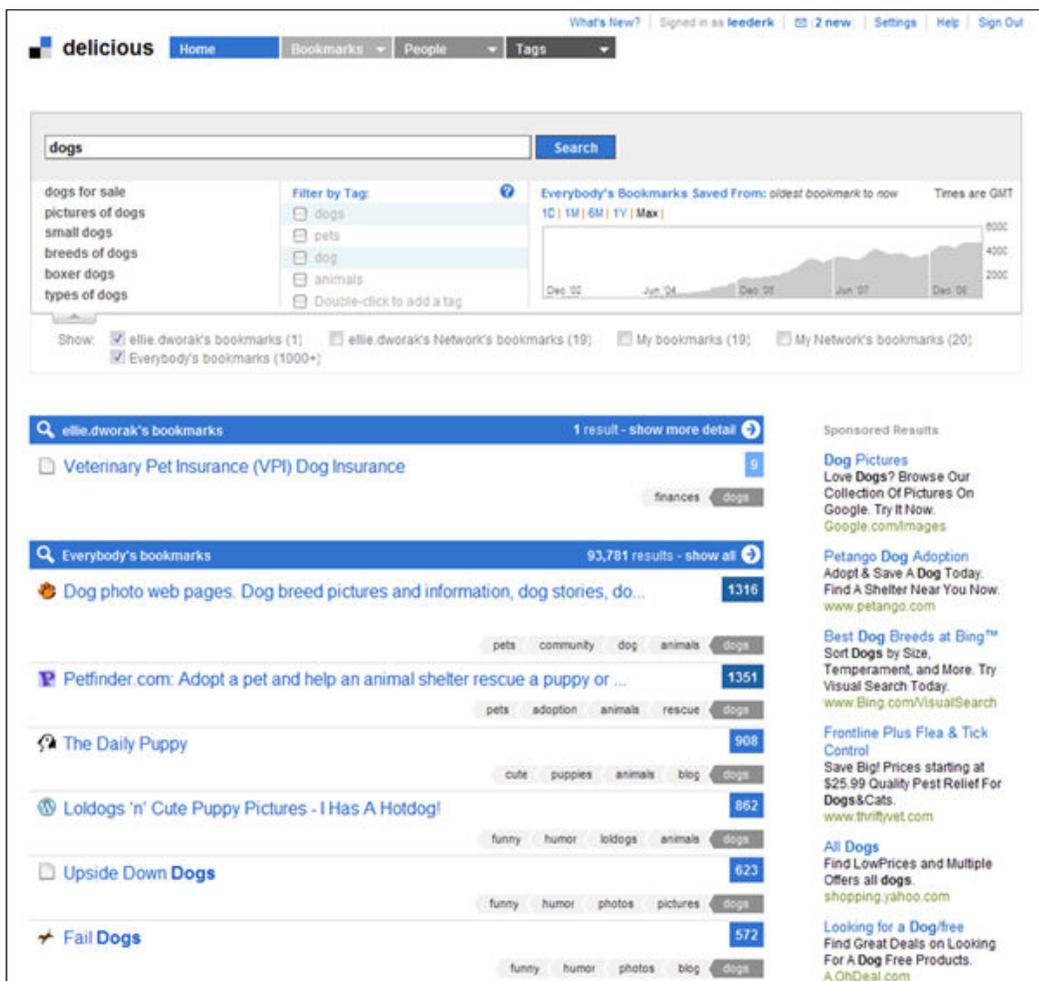
Traditionally, bookmarks have been browser-based, which means that you have to be sitting at your own computer to get to them. Social bookmarking sites such as del.icio.us are web-based, so you aren’t tied to a particular computer. With Delicious you set up an account on a website (sort of like an email account) and then log in anytime, from anywhere, to get to your bookmarks. Here’s a picture.



You can see in the above screen shot that each of my bookmarks takes up one line and that I have about ten pages of links. I can also search my links (see the search box in the top right corner) or browse through them using the tags (along the right hand side of the page) that I assigned. We'll talk about tags a little later.

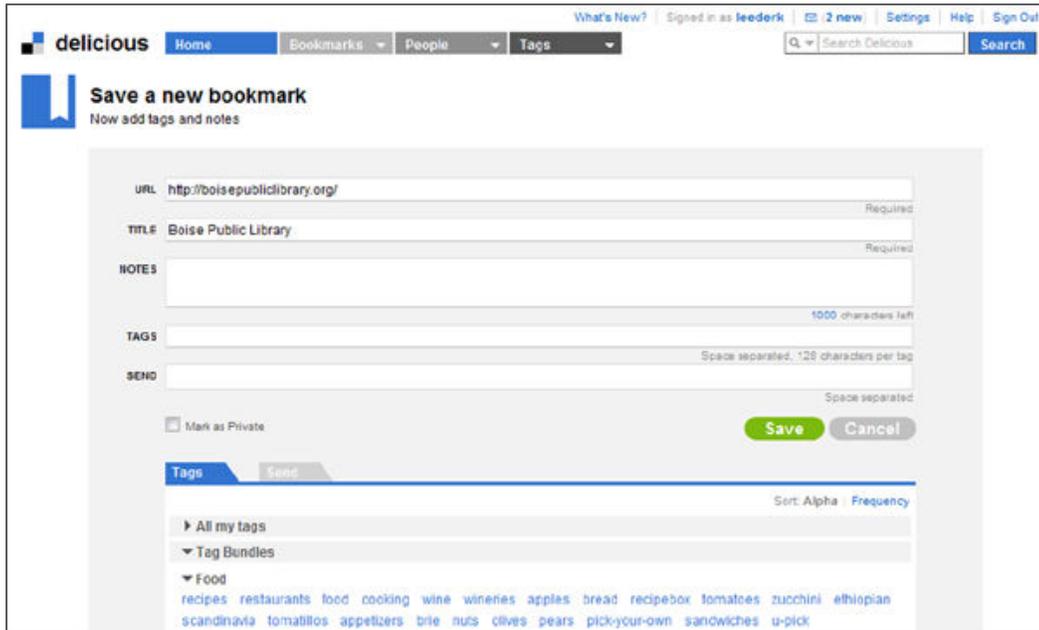
I find the fact that I can get to my Delicious bookmarks (and save new ones) from anywhere to be incredibly useful as a librarian, because I do my work at several locations (my office, the reference desk, a library classroom, and home, the occasional conference venue, etc.). But what makes social bookmarks *social* is the fact that these bookmarks are shared. If I love, for instance, hot springs in Idaho, I can find other Idaho hot springs websites by browsing the links of other Delicious users.

How does that work? There are several ways. First, I can use that search box. When I search my bookmarks, I automatically search the bookmarks of other users. Second, when I browse my tags, I can see other people's bookmarks with the same tags. Finally, I can use serendipity—if I bookmark something, I can see who else has it bookmarked, and then see what that user also has bookmarked. If I find somebody who has a lot of cool bookmarks, I can subscribe to an RSS feed of their bookmarks or add the person to my network. Let's take a look.



In this example, I've done a Delicious search on "dogs." I could have been more specific, of course, because you can see (in rather small type on the blue bar that says "Everybody's bookmarks") that I got a lot of results. One of them is mine, and 93,781 of them belong to other people. Each of these divided areas on the page is the title of a website (with the link to get to it), the number of people who have that website bookmarked (in blue, on the right) and the tags associated with it (in grey, under the number). I can click on any one of these items to continue exploring—if I click on the tags, I'll find more websites with that tag. If I click on the number of people, I'll find a list of users that I can explore to see more websites they've bookmarked. Et cetera. It's a lot of fun, actually!

“But wait,” some of you might be thinking “that’s OK when you’re talking about dogs, but what about privacy? Do you really want people to know who your doctor is?” Not to worry, whenever I save a link, I can always select the “Mark as Private” box so that it’s a private bookmark. Here’s what the “save” box looks like, by the way.

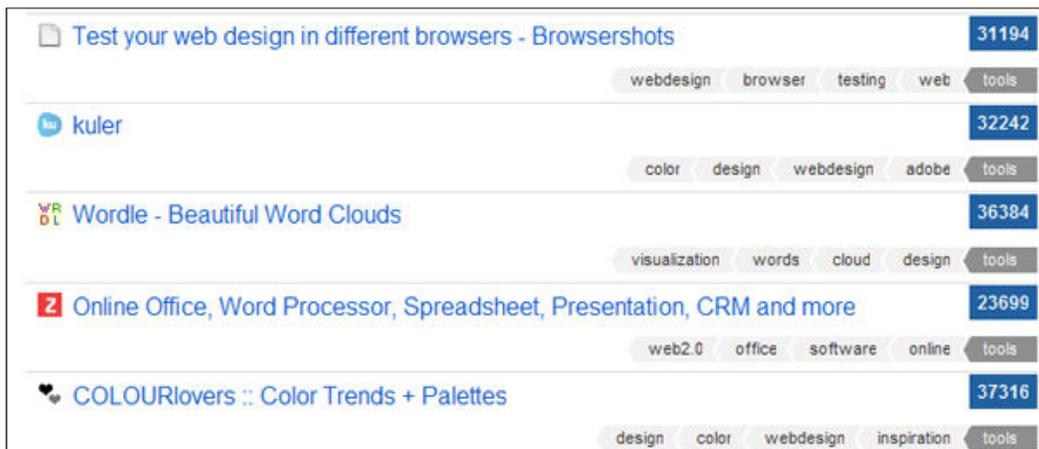


This image shows something else that I really love about Delicious—that I can add notes to my bookmarks. So if I want to remember why I’m bookmarking something (or I want others to have more information), I can type something into that box.

Tags, Tags, Tags

Tags have come up a few times in this column, and I want to spend a bit of time talking about them. You’ve probably run into tags in a few places: if not with Delicious, then somewhere else such as Flickr, Library Thing, or Worldcat Local. As you probably know, tags are just free text key words that users can assign to an item (in the case of Delicious, a bookmark). Because tags are not controlled vocabulary, they are less reliable than, say, Library of Congress Subject Headings or Dewey Decimal Classifications. I can’t be sure that if I use the tag “dog training,” for instance, I will find all other bookmarks on this topic, because somebody else might have used “dog trainers” or even “canine trainers,” or something else I haven’t thought of. However, tags are also more flexible than official cataloging systems, because they are individualized. I can tag a bookmark with words that are meaningful to me, not just with headings that describe what the site is actually about. Further, unlike traditional bookmarks, where I can create folders and sub-folders, I can give each bookmark as many tags as I wish.

Here’s an example:



In the above list of five bookmarks, you can see that all of them are tagged with the word “tools” (the tag is a darker grey because it’s the tag I searched for). But these bookmarks also have some other tags, showing that tags don’t limit my organization system in the way that folders do. Tags are like magic folders that allow the same item to be in several of them at once!

Delicious is great for storing your personal bookmarks and discovering new ones, but it can also be used as a tool for sharing bookmarks with library patrons. For example, you could use Delicious to create readers advisory lists, with links to the catalog record. Or you could create lists of resources on a topic (such as job hunting, or genealogy research). Because Delicious is easy to use and free, it can liberate your subject experts from having to learn web coding skills or rely on those who have them.

To get started, go to www.delicious.com and set up a free account. Then start to bookmark things, browse other bookmarks, and have fun! Want more information? The toolkit below lists a number of useful resources.

Your Delicious Toolkit

Bookmarks inSuggest

<http://bookmarks.insuggest.com/>

Suggests bookmarks based on the ones you already have.

Delicious Libraries

<http://angelacw.wordpress.com/2007/06/04/delicious-libraries/>

This is a regularly updated list of libraries using Delicious, as well as a quick overview of the possibilities.

Library Subject Guides Using Delicious

<http://www.swissarmylibrarian.net/2007/07/28/library-subject-guides-using-delicious>

This guide shows you how to make dynamic subject guides using Delicious.

Look Up a URL

<http://delicious.com/url/>

Enter any URL and see who has bookmarked the site, and when.

SPLAT Introduction to Tagging

<http://splat.lili.org/splat101x/tagging>

Our friends at the Special Projects Library Action Team have provided a great guide, with lots of visuals, to tagging. Includes Delicious and several other tag-oriented web tools.

Ellie Dworak is the Reference Services Coordinator at Boise State University. She moved to Boise a year ago from San Diego State University, where she managed a 1000+ page Web presence and other library automation projects. As a public services librarian, she is an advocate for usable, accessible online tools.

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