

ORGANIZING MEMORIES – THE EXAMPLE OF FLICKR



For some time I have been promoting collaborative information building and sharing.

Philip put me on to Flickr – a photo store and share site. You can upload your pictures from camera phone or computer and organize them, keep them private or share them with others. You can “tag” them or part of an image with labels – and this is where it gets very interesting.

Thomas Vander Wal coined the term “folksonomy” – a conflation of “folk” and “taxonomy”, to refer to the “bottom-up” organisational categories that emerge when individuals tag or describe information and images and those tags are pooled.

Clay Shirky and others have argued that folksonomies that use tags – “user-created metadata” – are the only cost-effective way to generate order in large dynamic systems such as the net. Critics insist this will never yield the clarity of controlled classifications

administered by professionals. Each approach has strengths. Folksonomies bring structure to the chaos of the net, but you'd probably be happier if your doctor used a more controlled database when it came to figuring out if you had a life threatening disease.

The folksonomy discussion inspired David Sifry, founder and chief executive of blog aggregator/search site Technorati to launch its "Tags" service. Searching on a particular tag (eg China) calls up all links loaded under that tag on del.icio.us, all photos using it from Flickr and all blog posts categorised under that word. Sifry admits that categories that bloggers choose for their posts are broader than tags. But users can add tags to their posts on top of their categories, and he suggests that people might start to change the way they categorise blog posts to take advantage of Technorati Tags. For example, an Irish blogger has suggested that if his compatriots all tagged their posts with "irish blog", it would generate an Irish group blog on the relevant Technorati page, without anyone having to do anything more.

[Guardian Link]





Bottom-up self-organizing networks.

Archaeological relevance –

Too much top-down organizing of data, for example in the use of standardized forms for recording things found, tends to pre-determine what is found. This art of anticipation means you end up finding what you were looking for.

Consider instead the possibility of systems like Flickr – load stuff up and see what people make of it all. Do it right and all sorts of unexpected patterning/connection/order will emerge and, as important, will change as more gets added.