This man is reinventing your social networks
Social media and the new world order

This past spring, the world watched with hope and fascination as revolutionary fervor swept aside long-standing dictatorships in the Middle East. These popular uprisings were facilitated in no small manner by the ability of the populace to communicate instantly with each other and the outside world using social media such as Twitter.

Four years ago, Barack Obama launched his presidential campaign on the steps of the Illinois capitol before thousands of supporters and press reporters. In April, he formally announced his re-election campaign with an online video. As an incumbent, he has participated in the first presidential virtual town hall meetings on the Internet from the White House and at Facebook’s Palo Alto headquarters. Last month, he promoted his jobs agenda via a town hall on LinkedIn, merging old school campaigning with new media capabilities.

With over 730 million active users on Facebook, with Twitter logging over 200 million tweets a day, with Google introducing its own social networking platform and attracting 40 million users in its 12-week pre-launch phase, social media is more than a phenomenon; it’s the way in which a huge percentage of the population is voluntarily choosing to connect and share information with others.

That’s why we decided that social media was the ideal topic with which to introduce our re-imagined alumni magazine, Spheres. You’ve told us that while you appreciate alumni and school news, what you most want to see in Spheres is feature articles on the subjects that concern and absorb information professionals today. As a result, we’ve redesigned the magazine to offer more space for articles that reflect contemporary issues in information that impact our society.

In this issue, we explore the influence of social media in the realm of political discourse, its adoption by the public sector, and its implications for our personal privacy now and in the years ahead. We are also pleased to feature a personal interview with U-M alum Bradley Horowitz, one of the creators of Google+ and a member of the SI External Advisory Board.

Pleased as we are to be introducing this new magazine, we realize that it’s probably not the best vehicle for regular communication with you in the fast-changing information field. Therefore, beginning in November, you will begin receiving a monthly, e-mailed newsletter with thought-provoking features that offer you the opportunity to interact online with the author and fellow readers and take part in conversations within the SI community. We believe this will be an exciting new platform that will connect us all in additional, valuable ways.

I invite you to share your reactions to Spheres’ new format with us and I look forward to your participation in our new online forum.

Sincerely,

Jeff MacKie-Mason
Dean, School of Information
Arthur W. Burks
Professor of Information and Computer Science
Professor of Economics and Public Policy

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Social media and the new world order

Spubble:
Informatics student creates special needs app

Inspired by years of volunteer work with a special needs organization, Informatics social computing student Jacob Steinerman and a team of fellow students developed a smart phone app called Spubble for individuals with autism, speech impairments, and other communication issues.

Spubble uses touch-screen technology and categories of icons that can be tapped in a meaningful order to communicate with others.

“The current set of tools available to children with special needs is outdated and inefficient,” Steinerman says. “The goal of Spubble is to fully bring augmentative and alternative communication tools into the 21st century, at a low cost.”

Spubble was released in the iTunes App Store in December and to date has grossed nearly a thousand downloads. Following its release, Steinerman began jotting down other ideas for special education apps.

The mission of his start-up company, MoBlue Technology, is to define what will be “Special Education 2.0”: designing and building apps for special needs individuals and special education.

Says Steinerman, “It is my hope that individuals with special needs enjoy the tools they use to communicate, while looking cool doing it.”

MoBlue Tech is currently looking for dedicated iOS developers (proficient in Objective C), Web and database developers and funding opportunities for app development. Steinerman can be contacted at jastman@umich.edu
We're seeing a lot of usage of Hangouts and a lot of novel usage. We heard a story about someone who conducted a surgery in a Hangout in a rural hospital in Kentucky, dialed into a major metropolitan hospital in Chicago, and they were able to guide the surgeon through a complicated orthopedic surgery. There are all kinds of novel uses of Hangouts that we never imagined.

SI: How does Google expect to benefit from having its own social networking site?
BH: We have done a relatively poor job over the past decade of understanding people. When I type “John Smith” into the Google search engine, we treat that as a sequence of nine characters and we return Web pages that contain those characters. That’s really a disservice to the entity that is John Smith. We think that if we understand people, we can do a much better job of fulfilling our mission in serving users. For example, when most users come to Google today, we fulfill their request in 180 milliseconds. We pride ourselves on how quickly our search engine delivers the best possible results.

But there are a lot of queries where time is not of the essence. If I’m in the market for a mortgage, I don’t need the mortgage in 180 milliseconds. I need a mortgage estimate this month. And so we’ve had a less durable knowledge of who our users are. We want to get to know them, get to know their interests, get to know their relationships, and turn that around as value for them so that we can provide a better, more interesting service. For us, it’s less about building a monolithic social destination, and more about understanding people and in particular our users, and doing great things for them based on that understanding.

SI: Most people still think of Google as primarily a search engine. What are the ways that Google+ is going to be integrated into our search capabilities?
BH: It’s important to understand that Google+ isn’t another experiment like Wave or Buzz. It is in some ways the shortest modularity on Google itself. It’s Google with a tiny little plus sign, to indicate it’s Google plus you, plus your interests, plus your relationships. In doing that, we wanted to say that all of Google will be made better by understanding our users in this way. That includes search and ads and Chrome and Android and YouTube — all of the parts of Google where we interact with users can benefit from this deep understanding. So, it’s not a sideline, independent effort. It is a redefinition of how Google serves its users.

Read the full interview with Bradley Horowitz online at si.umich.edu.
Is privacy an issue if all spaces are public spaces?

This article appeared in the September-October issue of IEEE Security & Privacy (computer.org/security) and is reprinted here with permission of the publisher. The author is jmm@umich.edu.

Today, private lives are lived in public. In the future, all space will be public space. If all spaces are public spaces? What does that mean? What are the consequences of living in public? How do we design for public space? How do we ensure privacy in public space? These are questions that are increasingly relevant as technology advances and our ability to record and share our lives expands.

I claim something similar about privacy: for design purposes, we should design as if all space is public. Sure, privacy-protecting technology is improving all the time, but not as fast as privacy-releasing technology advances. And even more important, people are making behavioral choices to live their lives more publicly, or at least, less privately. The challenge for system designers is in understanding enough about behavior to design safer public spaces in which people can share private information; designers can’t ignore behavior and blame users for not using systems in “intended” ways.

Simple e-mail illustrates this problem. Yes, we have PGP (Pretty Good Privacy) mail, but we might as well accept that essentially no one uses it. It’s great for those who want it, but for most users, designers should think of e-mail as essentially public: once it’s sent, the user can’t control it. Same with texts, social network posts, and so forth. Instead of wishing that people would behave differently, we should try to understand their motivations and behaviors and use that understanding in design.

For those who choose to do so, living in public is risky. It can be embarrassing, or worse. Your designer might lose her job. Your son’s spouse might divorce him. Yet, even when educated about the potential consequences, an increasing number of people choose to take these risks.

Fear, or at least healthy concerns, is an old message. There is a complementary optimistic message: people benefit from sharing their lives. We as individuals can benefit — ditto as families and communities, as a nation, as citizens of the world. By sharing our lives, we can improve business opportunities, increase civility in political dialogue, build bridges across cultural and national divides, radically transform education, and enrich our social lives.

Designers shouldn’t second-guess the motives of those who share.

Because of the risks, people will be better off if system engineers create safe spaces and safe practices for sharing. The National Mall in Washington, DC, is a great public place. There is a great deal of community. It’s a great place, in part, because it’s fundamentally safe. People can enjoy the great personal and social benefits from sharing their lives publicly; if we create safe public spaces.

Public space

That there are many challenges to privacy should not come as a surprise. Some loss of privacy is institutional, thanks to government, commerce, and the media. Closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras are becoming ubiquitous on subway platforms, in grocery stores, at traffic lights and toll booths, and just about everywhere in England. A bureaucrat somewhere might be getting paid to watch you walking down the street, having sex, or throwing away a can.

Much privacy is lost because living our lives publicly has commercial value. For example, Google Satellite shows fairly good images of my wife’s well-tended garden; Google Street View shows the world my front door; and sometimes more revealing information about others’ lives.

If you purchased a house in the past two or three years — or will in the future — there’s a good chance your neighbors or burglars can go to Zillow.com to open a complete set of floor plans, and even see a portfolio of interior photographs. If you own a cell phone, your phone company and the police department have access to your location at a high degree of accuracy — more so if you have a smartphone with GPS.

And yet, CCTV and Google are small potatoes among the forces causing us to live our lives public. The biggest factor outside our control that will make our private lives public is smartphones. Soon essentially everyone on the planet will have a high-definition video camera in their pocket that is connected to the Internet. The media are everywhere, and they are us. Anyone can record you (or take photos, but that’s so 2010) while at a party in your house, yelling at your spouse stopped at a traffic light, or sunbathing on the beach, and then publish it to the world in a blink.

How significant is this? Last semester, one of my colleagues gave his undergraduate an assignment to take a photo or video of something relevant and upload it to the class Facebook page. This required no lab-assistant support: every student in the class already had a Facebook account and a digital video recorder or camera and knew how to upload pictures and videos to the Internet. This probably isn’t surprising in Ann Arbor, Michigan. But 80 percent of Egyptian citizens carry a cell phone.

How long until everyone on the planet has an Internet-connected phone with a camera?

Increased voluntary sharing

So far, I’ve described involuntary ways in which our lives are recorded, tracked, and published. These observations are not new, of course. Samuel Warren and Louis Brandeis made them in a seminal 1890 Harvard Law Review article, “The Right to Privacy.” David Brin brought us up to date in his 1997 book, The Transparent Society. My point is somewhat different. Although cheap, ubiquitous Internet-connected video cameras on smartphones are accelerating the pace of involuntary public sharing, the new, surprising factor is that we’re volunteering to live publicly like never before.

A prosaic example is customer loyalty cards. Grocery store and other purchasing decisions let marketeers sell reports on us that include hundreds of personal details, from age and gender to whether we suffer from adult incontinence and how much liquor we purchase.

Loyalty cards, like Web tracking cookies, are somewhat passive, and many users might not realize they’re providing so much private information. But often, other types of sharing are quite explicit and intentional. A 2010 study found that 10 percent of people under age 25 say they text while having sex (a steady stream of tweets are tagged havingsex) and 24 percent while using the toilet.

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In 1999, Internet entrepreneur Josh Harris wired his apartment with approximately 50 cameras that broadcast all aspects of his life with his girlfriend. In just a few years, reality shows dominate broadcast television. Today, people — you, me, our children — watch our own reality shows. When 20-somethings break up with someone, they post it on YouTube. When people have a full bladder, they tweet it (search #tmi bladder). People publish their travel itineraries on Dopplr and TripIt, and announce their current location on Fourquare, Gowalla, Googles, or Facebook Places. More than 35 million people have revealed their tastes and personal experiences in hotels and restaurants by publishing TripAdvisor or Yelp reviews.

People go online to confess things in public through blogs, special-purpose websites, and Twitter and Facebook: “A Georgetown law student’s life has completely unraveled. His way of dealing with losing his wife, his mistress, his supposed baby, his military assignment, and his secret confession on Facebook.”9

People increasingly want to share their private lives, but they want to do so on a timetable of their choosing. As researchers are discovering, a preference for timing matters.

A recent study 15d. boyd, “Why Youth (Heart) Social Networking Sites,” 2009, a form of steganography — hiding in plain sight — is critical for privacy reasons. If giving things away is the same thing as losing control, the choices made, even resulting in violations of the axioms of rationality. 15b. Snyder Bulik, “Apparently That Text Can’t Wait — Not Even during Sex,” The Wall Street Journal, 17 Oct. 2009; www.goo.gl/7qoYS.

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In a world in which people voluntarily live their private lives in public, we need to work with behavioral science to design and create safe public spaces.
The 2004 campaigns happened to be the year first to draw heavily on the Internet for organizing and fundraising. Although unsuccessful, Howard Dean’s run for the Democratic nomination put in place elements—huge e-mail rolls, large numbers of small online donations, social networking among supporters—that Barack Obama’s campaign would capitalize on, to stupendous effect, in 2008.

In a few short years, the role of social media in campaigns—the fund-raising and organizing power it offers candidates, as well as the sense of personal connection it can lend voters—has been cemented. According to a study by the Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, 22% of online adults used Twitter or sites such as Facebook or MySpace to connect with campaigns in the 2010 elections, and there’s no reason to think those numbers won’t grow in the 2012 presidential race. By comparison, in 2008 only 14% of Internet-using adults reported forwarding or posting political commentary, and 8% contributed money online.

With the spread of social media, more of our online experience is tracked, tagged, aggregated, and personalized. If an educator, well-informed citizen is essential to a flourishing democracy, the tendency of the Internet to present us with more of what we’ve already seen, or selected, or liked, and to filter out what we don’t want, is a worrisome consequence—the much-lamented echo chamber. The polarization that caused Sean Munson to give up blogging in 2004 hasn’t gone away.

Civility in unexpected places

Not long after he ended his blog, Munson noticed, while playing Go online, that political discussions sometimes cropped up among players. Though usually brief, those discussions tended to be more diverse and respectful than conversations found on overly political blogs. Munson arrived at Michigan interested in encouraging diverse discourse and seeking out nontraditional places it might be occurring.

He teamed up with Professor Paul Resnick on a study published this year examining the prevalence of discourse in non-political blogs. They found a “substantial” amount of political discussion in the 8,675 diary, hobby, and fan blogs they surveyed. While they didn’t investigate whether the quality of discourse was less polarizing on these sites than political blogs, they wouldn’t be surprised to discover that’s the case.

“There’s a lot of handwringing about the nature of political discourse online,” Resnick says. “I think partly that’s because we’re looking in the wrong places.” When people gather around some other shared interest, they are likely to be more cordial when politics comes up, in order to preserve those relationships or because they’re unsure of others’ political sympathies.

The political discourse Munson observed on Go-playing blogs was more diverse and respectful than what he found on political blogs. Munson and Resnick created an algorithm, called Sidelines, that reduces the influence of voters by suppressing their votes—sidelining them—for a time after they select an already voted-for item. The authors found that participants who used Digg and Reddit with the Sidelines algorithm installed had an 89% chance of finding something challenging in the results, compared to 50% with results generated by a popularity-only algorithm.

A little too personal

There’s also a lot of handwringing, Resnick believes, about personalization—algorithms used by Google, Facebook, and other sites that, based on what you’ve clicked on in the past, filter out information and show you only what they think will interest you. An alarm was raised this year in The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding from You, by Eli Pariser, former executive director of MoveOn.org. The book, published this year, warns that because of the widespread use of personalization, there are huge swaths of the Internet that we never even see. As an experiment, Pariser had friends type the same search term in Google, and was horrified by their differing results.

In Resnick’s view, the solution isn’t no personalization; it’s good personalization. “What people want is not always more of the same,” he says. “They want the interesting, good-quality things from the opposition. They don’t want the polemic, but people want variety.” What’s needed are better algorithms. Toward that end, Resnick, Munson, and doctoral student Daniel Xiaodan Zhou, conducted an experiment on Digg and Reddit, sites that aggregate news and other content from across the Web. Reader votes determine what appears on the main pages. But, as the authors wrote, “algorithms based solely on popularity may lead to a tyranny of the majority,” a slight input bias produces a large output bias. If a site has 60 liberal readers and 40 conservative readers, all of whom can vote as many times as they want, liberal articles will likely occupy most or all of the front page, which then won’t reflect the true makeup of the readership or offer a variety of viewpoints.

“In practice, we see things like Reddit and Digg being very heavily skewed toward liberal stories,” says Munson. “So conservatives go somewhere else, and people end up more polarized.”

Achieving balance algorithmically

Resnick, Munson and Zhou created an algorithm, called Sidelines, that reduces the influence of voters by suppressing their votes—sidelining them—for a time after they select an already voted-for item. The authors found that participants who used Digg and Reddit with the Sidelines algorithm installed had an 89% chance of finding something challenging in the results, compared to 50% with results generated by a popularity-only algorithm.

Of course, offering a diverse set of links doesn’t mean readers will click on any of them. Resnick and Munson currently are working on methods to make readers aware of bias in articles they’ve chosen — a software add-on for Digg and Reddit that color-codes stories as blue (liberal) or red (conservative), and presents a
with links to articles of the opposite political orientation of the one currently being read.

The voice of the voter
Liking or voting for things is a hallmark of social media, one that politicians and campaigns are tapping to connect with their constituents. For example, Senate Majority Leader Eric Cantor’s office operates YouCut, a site that every week lists three potential spending cuts in the federal budget; the item with the most votes is proposed to Congress.

In the social media age, people now expect to be heard, says David Weinberger, a noted thinker on Web issues and author of The Cluetrain Manifesto and Everything is Miscellaneous: The Power of the New Digital Disorder. He was also the senior Internet adviser on the 2004 Dean campaign. Weinberger was the featured speaker at this year’s John Sely Brown Symposium on Technology and Society at SI on October 3.

In taking advantage of social media, one of the biggest challenges is scalability, says Weinberger. Polling sites such as Cantor’s are all well and good, but what to do with all the pointless information that floods in with the few bits of valuable stuff? “It’s probably why it’s a representational democracy,” he says. “The set of issues you need to know what to cut is enormously complex.” Likewise, citizens may enjoy a frisson of satisfaction when they get a tweet from their member of Congress or vote for something on YouCut, but does one data bit out of billions really amount to an authentic connection? Nonetheless, the passion and volume of political discussion online is too important for politicians to ignore.

Getting heard
The Howard Dean campaign, which built an e-mail list of 800,000, encountered this dilemma, Weinberger says. “They knew how to broadcast down from the top, but they wanted to engage the citizenry as well,” he says. It would be chaos for all 800,000, or even 80,000, to flood the mailing list with messages, so the campaign began connecting its supporters in smaller groups, based on geography or shared interests. Dean dropped out of the race before his fledgling social network had a chance to get up to speed and running, but it demonstrated how conversations among large groups of people can be scaled laterally, says Weinberger.

It works something like this: There’s a forum where some topic — carbon emissions, trade with China — is discussed. A candidate’s policy people monitor the conversation, because their boss wants to be seen as caring about the topic. Over time, a few people emerge as the conversation leaders; they’re committed, outspoken, well-informed. The staff contacts one or two of the leaders and asks for their input, and they do this publicly to demonstrate the candidate’s engagement. Those people, then, become the thread’s representative to the campaign.

“Campaigns are self-interested and focused,” says Weinberger. “They want to get their people elected, and that’s it, so they have every reason to engage with the most passionate, partisan people they can find, and those people show up in these types of online forums.” Handled correctly, he says, this approach can resemble “a vision that our forefathers had for this country — brilliant, engaged citizens’ voices would be heard.”

The tools of social media make it easy to get any voice, brilliant or not, out there. What’s much harder is being heard.

Mary Jean Babic is a freelance writer living in Brooklyn.

The debt-ceiling crisis in Washington this summer infuriated a lot of people, and one of them was new SI grad Jessie Mannisto. Her disgust at the spectacle sent her fleeing to her computer, determined to organize others as fed up as she was. On July 22 she launched the Facebook group Americans for Rational Compromise.

“I didn’t know what I was doing,” says Mannisto. “I was like, ‘I’m mad! I’m creating a Facebook group!’” The tweetering protozone of the Arab Spring served as inspiration. “If they can use social media to bring down corrupt regimes, why can’t we?”

Americans for Rational Compromise sought to be a bipartisan call for elected leaders to come together to avoid financial catastrophe. “[W]e elected you to do the hard work of representing us as the complex, opinionated country we are,” declares the group’s information page. “[If] you have the maturity to compromise, we will praise you, not punish you.”

And since Mannisto happened to be in D.C. for the summer — on a Google Policy Fellowship, based at the American Library Association — she was in a position to act. A physical element figured prominently into her plan: members could write elected officials letters, which Mannisto would print out and personally march over to Congress.

“If I went to the Capitol myself with a book of printed letters, that would make more of an impression than a bunch of e-mails,” says Mannisto.

Within days, two of her fellow ‘11 grads, Morgan Burton and Alexis Antracoli, were assisting from Ann Arbor. They bought Facebook ads for the group; they set up a corresponding Twitter account and Tumblr web site; they promoted the group on the just-launched Google Plus. They banked on the viral nature of the Internet to kick in, producing a thick stack of letters for Mannisto to deliver in time for the fast-approaching debt-ceiling vote, which took place August 2.

It didn’t, in the end, work out as they had hoped. While Americans for Rational Compromise attracted 104 members in a single weekend — a number they cite with pride — no one wrote letters. “I had a few people saying, ‘Where’s the letter I can use?’” says Mannisto. “I was like, ‘No, you write the letter.’”

Next time, she says, she’ll include boilerplate language and also stress that “it’s not just enough to like it; you have to join the conversation.”

Another challenge, says Burton, was distinguishing their group amid the cacophony of social media activity relating to the debt-ceiling crisis in the days leading up to the vote. “With all that noise, it’s very, very difficult to get your voice heard,” she says. “Most of it depends on whether you have influential outlets or, especially on Twitter, influential people pick it up.” None did, though they were thrilled when Jennifer Granholm, former Michigan governor, liked Americans for Rational Compromise. Still, that wasn’t enough for it to become a viral smash.

Antracoli has a hunch that compromise, as a rally cry, “doesn’t quite get people’s blood boiling as much as other things. But,” she adds, “that’s purely my opinion.” Getting people to engage beyond liking something, she learned, proved harder than she would have thought. “We hear how regular people are using social media for marketing and organizing,” she says, “but if you don’t have expertise in those areas, it’s not easy.”

In the end, the clock simply ran out. Congress voted, and although the deal disappointed almost everybody (“This is not compromise,” Mannisto wrote on the group’s page) the country moved on. Mannisto and Burton are now back home — Mannisto in Michigan, Burton in Texas — looking for jobs. Mannisto would like to work in government; Burton is interested in interaction strategies and usability testing. Antracoli has a one-year appointment at the Bentley Historical Library, processing new collections.

They all value the lessons from their summer experiment in social media, and while it didn’t change the world, they’re proud of what their organic, low-funded, seat-of-their-pants Facebook group accomplished in a short time. “It was just three of us students,” Burton says, “trying to make an impact.”

— Mary Jean Babic
Public sector organizations, including government agencies and nonprofit organizations, are turning to social media to engage stakeholders in new ways and improve the ability of people to make positive changes in their communities.

The term “social media” is shorthand for a diverse set of technologies and social practices that share a few common traits. First, they depend on the users of the technology to create the information that’s being shared. Whether that information is a video, a status update, or a comment on a news story, it all comes from the users. Second, social media is based on direct user-to-user interaction. Unlike traditional media where editors and publishers acted as gatekeepers even when interaction was possible, in social media people have few if any barriers between each other.

Another common characteristic of social media is that it typically are constructed of bundles of applications for interaction. Facebook, for example, has asynchronous chat, asynchronous messaging, picture sharing, rating, commenting, and a host of other tools collected into one framework.

### Public sector builds social platforms

The federal government has been utilizing social media to inform and interact with the public for several years. Nearly all federal agencies now have some kind of social media presence. Here in Michigan, both state and local government have been trying to join the bandwagon as well. Most state agencies have a Facebook, Twitter or YouTube presence, and sometimes all three. You can follow the tweets of the Michigan Department of Transportation to get traffic updates, or check out the YouTube feed for the Department of Human Services to learn how to fill out applications for assistance or become a foster parent.

Counties and cities are also using social media. Washtenaw County, home to the School of Information, has Twitter, Facebook and YouTube channels for many of its agencies. The county sheriff’s office has been using social media in multiple ways to engage community members, especially youth. The City of Ann Arbor employs these popular channels to share news and ask people their opinions of events.

Service-oriented nonprofit agencies have begun using social media in similar ways. The Right Place, an organization in Grand Rapids devoted to the economic development of the region, has used social media to organize multiple events, as well as keep its stakeholders informed.

Similarly, the Grand Rapids ArtPrize is a nonprofit organization that promotes a city-wide art competition. Art is placed in venues throughout the greater downtown area and the winner is determined by attendees, who vote using QR codes and mobile phones. In 2010, 200,000 visitors to the event cast just under half a million votes on over 1,700 art installations. Nonprofits of all shapes, sizes and missions have turned to social media to help get the word out and harness the energy of their stakeholders.

All public sector organizations use social media in hopes of realizing the specific benefits. There is a cost to social media, of course, and public sector groups are not known for deep pockets. So what are they hoping to get out of their investment?
- New channels to stakeholders
- Harsembling the “wisdom of the crowds”

A use that does attempt to leverage the features of social media is soliciting large groups of stakeholders to come up with creative solutions to problems faced by the organization. Ways to save money, opinions on whether an area should be commercially developed, or how to stop kids from leaving Michigan are examples of complex problems that these organizations hope to “crowd source.” Large, distributed groups have at times been very successful in coming up with novel solutions to problems. The ability to tap into a large pool of stakeholders is a tempting prize for resource-strapped public sector organizations.
- Delivering services in new ways

Many public sector organizations have attempted to use social media to get the word out and harness the energy of their communities. In these ways, the organizations try to catalyze community action through social media services.

In sum, these organizations are all interested in changing the world in some meaningful way. Their hope is that social media interactions will lead to offline action.

### Barriers to success

Over the past several years, I’ve been involved in a series of projects that have attempted to use social media to enact change in local communities in Michigan. Whether it’s to prevent the “bright flight” of youth leaving the state after high school, promote regional economic development, or provide stronger coverage of environmental news stories in the Great Lakes area, these attempts have had many challenges that hamper the realization of the above goals.
- The cost/benefit problem: Many public sector organizations hope that stakeholders will add content, share knowledge, or engage in action through their social media sites, but they rarely think about what the stakeholders would gain from their participation.
- The top-down/grassroots problem: Most successful social media efforts are grassroots efforts. How can top-down agencies like those in government really lead a grassroots effort? This is also expressed as a question of authenticity in terms of the how the organization sponsoring the effort is interacting with stakeholders. Do they really want the interaction?
- The outcomes problem: Public sector organizations often engage in a social media effort with no clear idea of what their outcomes are for that effort.
- The “Field of Dreams” problem: We like to focus on the big successes in the social media world, but for every Wikipedia there are hundreds of failed social media efforts. Still, there’s a persistent myth that “If you build it, they will come.”
- The “crowd source” problem: Large, distributed groups have at times been very successful in coming up with novel solutions to problems.
- The “wisdom of the crowds” problem: How do we know if we’re successful? What will we actually measure, and how?

The field of social media is still in its infancy, and the outcomes problem will be around for awhile. Still, it’s important to keep these questions in mind as we attempt to use social media to engage stakeholders.

### References

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**Social Media and the Public Sector**

“Nessie” in the river was one of the artworks at the ArtPrize competition. Social media played a large role in voting for contest winners.
SI moves into health field

Health Informatics (HI) is a new graduate program offered jointly by the School of Information and the School of Public Health. The program joins the expertise of the School of Public Health’s faculty in population health, health policy, and individual health behaviors with the School of Information’s expertise in human-centered design, social engagement information and computing, and the development, implementation, and evaluation of information resources. Graduates of the program will be prepared to be leaders and innovators who revolutionize the ways information is used to enable better health.

Health informatics is one of today’s fastest growing professions. As a result of many factors, including innovations in technology and new federal legislation, the health field is undergoing radical transformation. There is an established and increasing need for well-trained health informatics personnel. The health informatics program at Michigan reflects a major national effort to encourage the widespread use of new information tools in health care to increase the quality of care while reducing costs.

Students in this new program learn analytical skills relating to individual health, health care delivery, and population health. Graduates will have mastered concepts and acquired methodological skills from information science; behavioral, cognitive, and organizational science; health policy; and highly powered analytics.

Careers following graduation will depend significantly on the background and expertise of students enrolled in the program. Those with strong technical backgrounds may find roles as application designers and developers, consultants, system analysts, and entrepreneurs. Individuals with analytical and quantitative skills could become quality improvement analysts, data miners, evaluation specialists, or clinical and public health researchers. Policy-minded graduates might be part of a new generation of informatics-enabled policy analysts and engage with ongoing health reform.

The program offers a Master of Health Informatics (52 hours + internship) and Graduate Certificate in Health Informatics (18 hours). Students are already participating in the certificate program, restricted to graduate students enrolled at the University of Michigan. Applications are currently being accepted for the first class of master’s students, who will begin studies in fall 2012.

For more information, visit healthinformatics.umich.edu.

Four join faculty ranks

The SI community welcomed four assistant professors this fall.

Lionel Robert was assistant professor of information systems at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Sam M. Walton College of Business. His research focuses on team collaboration in virtual environments. He was a doctoral fellow and KPMG scholar at the Indiana University Kelley School of Business, where he completed his Ph.D. in information systems. He has written a book, Social Capital and Knowledge Integration in Virtual Teams, and is a member of the editorial board of IEEE Transactions on Professional Communications. His teaching and research will be in the area of information in organizations.

Cliff Lampe focuses on social computing. He earned his Ph.D. in 2006 from SI. He has been an assistant professor and director of graduate studies in the department of telecommunications, information studies, and media at Michigan State University. He also held a joint appointment in AgBioResearch. In 2010, he received an NSF ‘Teaches Scholar Award. His research concerns how social systems and technical systems interact and the outcomes of participating in e-communities.

Julia Adler-Milstein earned her Ph.D. in health policy management at Harvard University, where she was twice awarded certificates of distinction in teaching. Her research focuses on policy and management issues related to information technology in health care delivery. She received the Outstanding Dissertation Award from AcademyHealth, the leading professional organization for health services researchers. She will be contributing to both the information in organizations and health informatics curricula at SI.

Finn Brunton came from a postdoctoral research position in the Department of Media, Culture and Communication at New York University. He works primarily on digital media, particularly adoption, adaptation, misuse, and abuse. He has written and presented on privacy, anonymity, and trust online; mediated subcultures; the unbook; and the design of social networks. He is finishing a book on the history of spam and preparing another on radical agendas and encrypted digital currencies in the 1990s. He earned his Ph.D. in modern thought at the University of Aberdeen.

Former senior federal scientist heads new joint master’s program

Charles Friedman, director of the Health Informatics program, was chief scientific officer of the Office of National Coordinator for Health Information Technology in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services prior to accepting the appointment to head Michigan’s new joint-degree program.

“I was profoundly attracted by the University of Michigan’s distinctive emphasis on game-changing information technologies that will be used by health care consumers — which means all members of society — to promote health and wellness in entirely new ways,” says Friedman. “The graduates of this program will be innovators at the forefront of a revolution.”

From 2007-09, he was the deputy national coordinator for health IT. He also held federal positions as associate director for research informatics and information technology at the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute at the National Institutes of Health and senior scholar at the National Library of Medicine.

Friedman has over 30 years of experience in higher education as a faculty member and administrator at the University of Pittsburgh and the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He led the creation of health informatics programs at both schools.

“We are extremely fortunate to have attracted a candidate of Charles Friedman’s stature and experience to head this cutting-edge program,” said SI Dean Jeff MacKie-Mason. “Our goal is to have the leading graduate program in health informatics in the nation, and we can’t imagine anyone better qualified to help us achieve it.”

From left: Lionel Robert, Cliff Lampe, Julia Adler-Milstein, and Finn Brunton are all new assistant professors at SI this fall. You can hear brief presentations by them on our YouTube channel: youtube.com/si.

From left: Lionel Robert, Cliff Lampe, Julia Adler-Milstein, and Finn Brunton are all new assistant professors at SI this fall.
Professors ask: why do we lend money to strangers?

Most people are familiar with loaning money to a friend or relative, but what motivates someone to loan money to a complete stranger in a foreign country? The findings can also be employed by other online communities that contribute to the public good. Increased participation in lending activities will help realize the World Bank’s goal of eradicating hunger and poverty by 2015.

Adamic among U-M best

Associate Professor Lada Adamic is the recipient of the University of Michigan’s Henry Russel Award in recognition of her scholarship and conspicuous ability as a teacher. This is one of the highest awards the university bestows on junior faculty.

Professors’ papers earn kudos

Associate Professor Paul Conway received the Ernst Powers Award from the Society of American Archivists (SAA) for his outstanding article “Modes of Seeing: Digitized Photographic Archives and the Experienced User.” The award was presented at the SAA’s 77th annual meeting in August. Previous SIA recipients include Ph.D. graduates Magda Ghetu Krause and Professor Elizabeth Yakel.

Conway was also the recipient of the U-M Provost’s Teaching Innovation Prize this past spring, for integrating creative pedagogies into his course “Teaching Ethics of/with New Technologies.” In addition, he is the first U-M professor to publish all of his course materials on Open. Michigan. Conway says he thinks publishing openly is important and encourages other faculty to do so.

One such program is Kiva.org, the first peer-to-peer micro-lending site. Kiva matches creditor lenders with low-income entrepreneurs in developing countries. To date, most of the studies of microfinance have focused on the borrowers. Kiva allows researchers to study the motivations of the lenders, who are able to indicate their reasons for giving when making a loan.

Chen and Mei will be looking at the role social identity plays in lender behavior in an online microfinance community. Among their hypotheses they will test are whether joining a team increases an individual’s lending activity and the amount of their loan, whether people join teams based on the team’s motivations, and whether people choose teams based on the group’s perceived success.

The results will assist nonprofit microfinance organizations such as Kiva to increase their effectiveness by better understanding the motivations of their lenders and suggesting additional strategies for them to employ.

Sharing their passion for SI

Phyllis Mirsky

Annual Fund donor

After graduating from SI, Phyllis Mirsky (AMLS ’65) went on to a distinguished and highly successful 40-year career at the University of California. She began as a health sciences librarian at UCLA Biomedical Library in 1965 and has been recognized as a pioneer in health sciences librarianship.

On giving back to SI, Mirsky says it is a personal ethic she learned from her family.

“Giving back to the community is part of what we all should do,” she says. Rather than giving to a specific program or scholarship, Mirsky always gives unrestricted gifts. She says that “as a library administrator for many years, I know how important the flexibility of unrestricted donations can be for any program.”

Anne Beaubien and Phil Berry

Scholarship donors

Anne Beaubien, a 1970 SI alumnus, was initially motivated to give to honor treasured colleagues who had endowed scholarship funds at SI.

As the representatives for the Sharon A. Hogan Scholarship Fund at the annual SI scholarship luncheon one spring, Beaubien and her husband Phil were so impressed by the caliber of SI students and the importance of the scholarship program that they were motivated to endow their own SI scholarship. “We are mindful of the high costs of graduate education. The need for scholarships is greater than ever,” Beaubien says.

In a career spanning over 40 years, Beaubien has worked in almost all facets of the University of Michigan Library. She has mentored and employed SI students and has also taught at SI. Both Beaubien and Berry stay connected to the school through their student scholarship recipients and enjoy meeting the recipients of both the Anne Beaubien Berry Scholarship and the Sharon A. Hogan Scholarship at the annual SI scholarship recognition luncheon each year.
Mary Benson Muller (AMLS '74) has been appointed the chair of archi-
tecture at the University of New
Mexico School of Law. She contin-
ues to direct the Law Library and IT
Departments as well.

Frost and his wife, Marga-
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ciate dean for academic
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great-grandfather, poet
Robert Frost. The fund
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ts that utilize open
source software, or that
study or promote the open
access movement.

Memorial contributions in his
memory may be made to the
Frost Open Access
Fund by mailing a check
with ‘In Memory of Bob
Frost’ in the memo line to:
Frost Open Access Fund
c/o Andrea Daly
School of Information
4322 North Quad
105 S. Stata St.
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1285

Contributions may also be
made online at www.
giving.umich.edu/give/
si-frost

IN MEMORIAM
Robert Frost, associate
professor of the School of
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26, 2011 after a lengthy
battle with cancer. He’ll
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forthright manner, his
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2000.
Celia Ross (MSI ’99) has a book forthcoming from ALA Editions. She is an associate librarian at the Kresge Business Administration Library at the University of Michigan’s Ross School of Business. Celia and her husband, Jack Simpson (also MSI ’99), have two daughters. Jack was the curator of local and family history at the Newberry Library in Chicago. He is an independent researcher.

2000-2011

Linda Williams (MSI ’00) works in a federal government position in patient safety. She was recently published in Critical Care Medicine and is working on a book chapter.

Avalon Yangchen Hu (MSI ’01) works at R/VA in New York as an interaction designer.

Wendy Mason, (MSI ’01) is starting her third year as a technology/media specialist (K-8) at St. Fabian School in Farmington Hills, Mi.

Susannah Livingood (MSI ’02) is the assistant director of Institutional Research, University of Oklahoma.

Erik Dahl (MSI ’03) is a user experience director at Lextant, the local leader for InDA Interaction Design Association, and the co-founder and organizer/proposer of the 2011 Midwest UX Conference.

B. Sadat Shami (MSI ’03) is a workforce analytics researcher, IBM Corporate Headquarters.

Susan Hooyenga (MSI ’04) is a collections processing assistant with the new Media Preservation Initiative at Indiana University.

Sarah McNitt (MSI ’05) is a study abroad advisor at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio.

Laura Schmidt (MSI ’05) has been working with the Society of American Archivists on a publication due out this fall: “Using Archives: A Guide to Effective Research.” The guide will be published on the SAA website.

Alejandro C. De Baca (MSI ’06) went into the financial sector after SI, and is currently vice-president of modeling and technology at Element Capital Management, a New York City hedge fund.

Michelle Gerry (MSI ’06) became the systems librarian for the Flatirons Consortium (Boulder Public Library, Lafayette Public Library and Mamva Doud Eisenhower Public Library) in Colorado last November.

Emily Campbell (MSI ’07) is a special projects librarian-technical services, at the U-M Library.

Maura Seale (MSI ’07) just started her third year as a research and instruction librarian/bibliographer at Georgetown University and has recently published several book chapters.

Woo Yong Lee (MSI ’07) is a marketing analyst in small business marketing at Google and will move to San Francisco in October 2011 from Tokyo for the same position.

William Cron, Jr. (MSI ’08) married Beth (Panozzo) Cron (MSI ’08) last summer. Beth works as a program specialist for the National Archives and Records Administration and William works as a records manager at the Government Accountability Office.

Aalap Doshi (MSI ’09) has been an interaction designer, business analyst, Michigan Institute of Clinical and Health Research (MICHR), University of Michigan since 2009, and has won several awards for his work there.

Maureen Hanretty (MSI ’09) married Peter Arcuni in Passaic, California in June. In May Maureen joined Autodesk as an interaction designer in the San Francisco office.

Hung Truong (MSI ’09) is starting a new position as a senior software engineer at Threadless in Chicago this October.

Emily Benison (MSI ’10) has been working as a library director at Napoleon Public Library in Napoleon, Ohio since January 2010 to help bring the library into the 21st century.

Kevin Nam (PhD ’10) moved to New England near Boston in October 2010 to start a job at MIT Lincoln Laboratory. A baby girl is on the way!

Michael Shallcross (MSI ’10) was recently hired as an assistant archivist in the Benton/Bentley Historical Library’s new digital curation division.

Annette DuB (MSI ’11) is finishing an internship at the Michigan Technological University Archives in Houghton. She will soon be leaving MTU to begin work for History Associates as a processing archivist.

Bethany Harris (MSI ’11) has been accepted into the National Library of Medicine Associates Fellowship Program, a one-year postgraduate training program with an optional second year. Her class of four began their fellowships in September.
Join us for homecoming! October 27-29

CLASS OF 1961 LUNCHEON
Noon-1:30 p.m.
Thursday, October 27

NORTH QUAD TOURS
10 a.m.-2 p.m.
Friday, October 28

LECTURE BY SI DEAN JEFF MACKIE-MASON
“Do Social Media Matter?”
2:30-3:30 p.m.
Friday, October 28
Henderson Room, Michigan League

SI SOCIAL MASH-UP
6-8:30 p.m. Friday, October 28
Anderson Room D
Michigan Union

GO BLUE TAILGATE AND FOOTBALL GAME
9-11:30 a.m. Saturday, October 29
Oosterbaan Field House, 1202 S. State St.
U-M vs. Purdue
Kick-off: Noon

To register for all events and for more details, visit us on the web:
si.umich.edu/aboutsi/homecoming-weekend