EDITOR'S SUMMARY

Managing perceptions about personal and professional information on the social web is the focus of this Bulletin issue. Contributors offer insights on analyzing our personal presence online to determine whether it accurately reflects ourselves as we intend and on actively creating a personal knowledge profile. We can gain some control over our personal information and its unintended spread by separating social networking with personal information from professional web content and using privacy settings. The importance of user monitoring and participation is emphasized in observations about personal health records. Tools are being developed to limit software that accesses context-aware personally identifiable information. Information sharing and reuse can perpetuate false information, though content analysis of tweets about a series of events shows that irrelevant and contradictory Twitter comments fade rapidly from circulation. Knowledge management within organizations is spotlighted to explore how enterprises learn, grow and are affected by each other in a competitive environment. The many examples presented demonstrate the urgent need to actively manage the proliferation of personal and professional information on social networks.

KEYWORDS

personal information    accuracy
social web               false information
information management  Twitter

NOTE: This special section is presented by Special Interest Group/Knowledge Management (SIG/KM). Five of these papers were presented at the recent ASIS&T Annual Meeting at a SIG/KM workshop entitled Knowledge Management of Social Networks [1]. Two papers of particular relevance to the topic of this issue (Sarabia & Obeso and Al-Fedaghi) were also selected and added from presentations made at 2010 International Conference on Knowledge Management (ICKM 2010) [2].

In this age of web-based knowledge and information transfer we must be aware of how we are perceived both from a personal and professional viewpoint. Multiple social networks – from Facebook to LinkedIn – are available for everything from personal communication with family and friends to having notable colleagues write recommendations for us to enhance our chances of finding good jobs. All of these networks allow us to “paint” an image of ourselves, thereby dispersing and managing knowledge about us.

We want some of the information or knowledge that we input onto a social network to be viewed only by personal friends, while other information is intended for potential employers. To accomplish our intent we must be careful about our security settings and where and how we publish our information. Facebook, Flickr and similar sites are social networks that are designed to let us communicate and share information such as opinions, photos or stories with our friends and family members, but if our settings are incorrect, these sites will also share our information with friends of friends and possibly the public. If we make negative comments about our jobs on social networks, we need to make sure that bosses, co-workers or even potential employers do not see these statements. With these issues in mind, Donyelle Murdock helps us analyze our presence on the web and think about how we want to represent ourselves through our personal information profile.

To control our personal information profiles, particularly our professional profiles, it may be useful to organize personal information through outside, non-web, means such as resumes. In their article, Teresa Jones and Deborah Swain suggest that we can then import that designed information into our
social network account. Even making more than one account for specific proposes is useful. Jones and Swain also make many practical suggestions about how to maintain a positive, professional image. In particular they emphasize that if you wish to communicate your professional face on the web, LinkedIn is an important tool.

Like Murdock and Jones & Swain, Denise Bedford discusses techniques to organize and present views of ourselves on the web, emphasizing the concept of personal knowledge management (PKM). She discusses how to develop a profile and determine and enforce privacy levels that would be appropriate to various kinds of information about us that might be incorporated into such a profile or controlled through it. However, some of these techniques are conceptually easy to design, but not so easy to apply.

As we organize our personal information, privacy is a major consideration. Sabah Al-Fedaghi discusses being context-aware about our information in applications such as ubiquitous computing and how the privacy levels of such data might be determined. He develops tools that could be used by requirements analysts to make such decisions, but warns that these tools may sometimes fail to adequately manage personal data. Even if we are careful to monitor the information that we publish, we cannot know how it will appear in the context of current events.

Information on social networks can have much wider ramifications than just its impact on our personal information management issues. Many of the social networks available are designed for different communication techniques; for example, Facebook is generally used for communicating stories, events, articles seen and other information that can be quite lengthy; Flickr permits users to organize and display photos and videos; and Twitter allows the publication of short text messages (as well as links and snapshots). Each of these networks (and there are many more) may be used for purposes that their designers never imagined. In the article contributed by Emma Tonkin, Heather Pfeiffer and Greg Tourte, the authors look specifically at Twitter’s use during the London riots in the summer of 2011. They analyze what information we share out in the public, wondering whether there is evidence that social networks are used for inappropriate purposes. They observe that, even though the popularity of the source of a tweet affects how often it is retweeted, users do not retweet information that violates their own belief systems. Even though there are widespread claims, notably from politicians and the traditional media, that social networks perpetuate false information and communication that causes unrest in society, the analyzed results do not support this claim.

The last two articles in this special section give specific examples of places where knowledge is managed and organized in the world today. Social networking, imitation and information sharing are not just interpersonal phenomena, but inter-organizational as well. Maria Sarabia and Maria Obeso discuss how knowledge can be used for learning within small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Knowledge gained through employees as well as through heads of companies can affect the business. Making educated guesses about how competitors are operating can also affect how well a business does. These two forms of knowledge, internal and external, can then be learned by the enterprise in order to improve the company’s performance down the road.

Finally, while many businesses have now taken to operating and providing information online, governments at all levels are also heavily involved. Charlene Johnson and Deborah Swain explore the sensitive topic of electronic patient records by describing how veterans in the United States can manage their medical data totally online. They emphasize the security and access requirements necessary to protect this data for its specific user.

In conclusion, social networks present challenging knowledge management issues at all levels – for individuals, organizations, communities, businesses and governments. In this issue we emphasize the personal aspect and point out that all of us need to be conscious and active in knowing what information exists about us in social media and in managing to see that the information is protected with the appropriate levels of security and privacy. As the Bedford and Al-Fedaghi articles illustrate, there is also an extensive research agenda around these issues, as there is around the broader social implications discussed by Tonkin, Pfeiffer and Tourte. ASIS&T SIG/KM asks interested researchers and practitioners to join us in exploring these important developments.