A Quick Look at Popular Internet Tools
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Introduction

This guide was created to help our users understand some of the technology that is now available on the Internet and how it has impacted the way in which we learn and communicate. Since many of our users come from academic institutions, we will focus on how this technology is changing the academic landscape. The goal of this guide is to expose the reader to the purpose of technology without getting into the setup process for each tool. This guide also provides links to tools and resources useful for further exploration.

What’s has changed about the Internet?

In simplest form, users have changed the way in which the Internet is used in everyday life. Businesses now strive to understand the rules of the Internet to mold their services instead of treating it like just another distribution channel. Businesses have moved to the Internet to stay in step with the changing demographics of their customer bases.

The technology on the Internet enables participation, communication, organizing and sharing from all economic, social, and political levels. In education, the Internet has brought about a change in pedagogy at many institutions of higher education. Users are not only learning from the traditional sources but they are also learning from each other using tools on the Internet. Most of the technology behind the tools is not new but the ways in which the tools are leveraged are definitely new and exciting.

Roles on the Internet

Users of the Internet can take on many roles. The tools covered in this guide allow users to play these different roles.

The roles are:
- Viewer (browsing and searching)
- Contributor (acting as reviewer or commenter)
- Guide (pointing others to Internet content or resources)
- Communicator (communicating and forming ties with other people)
- Content Creator (Creating and sharing content)
- Organizer (providing opportunities for collaboration and discussion)
Web Browsers

What is it?
It’s a tool used for viewing and interacting with content on the Internet. Web browsers have been around since the early 90’s. Users from all walks of life use this tool and it has become the most popular tool for “using the Internet.”

Why is it significant to teaching and learning?
This tool has become universal as the method by which to reach the vast variety of information and services on the Internet. It has revolutionized the way in which we relate to each other and how information and services are created, distributed, and manipulated in our world. It is the portal thorough which we see most of the Internet’s offerings. All Internet roles can be played through this tool. The new aspect of this tool is that it has grown to organize and enhance our online experience.

Show me!
Demonstations: Tabs, History, Zoom Feature

Extensions or plug-ins can enhance the power of the web browser. You can add plug-ins to Firefox by selecting Tools -> Add Ons and clicking Get Add ons.
Let’s take a look at one. Cooliris Extension: http://www.cooliris.com/
The appendix has a list of other popular web browsers.

Search Engines

What is it?
In order for a web browser to be useful, you need to be able to find the information or services that you are looking for. Search engines serve that function. Most people are familiar with generic search engines such as Google (www.google.com), Yahoo (www.yahoo.com), MSN (www.msn.com) and Ask (www.ask.com)

Why is it significant to teaching and learning?
Knowledge is power and knowing how to find that knowledge is powerful. The way in which we learn has been changed by the Internet and the tools we use. Search engines help scholars find relevant information quickly.

The appendix contains URLs to lists of search engines for specific tasks.
Blogs

What is it?
A blog (a contraction of the term "Web log") is a web site usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order. (Wikipedia – Blog - accessed 2/2/2009)

Blogs are used to communicate with other users. This information can take the form of news columns, ongoing diaries, vacation logs, open discussions, general web sites, and forums to organize and educate.

Why is it significant to teaching and learning?
This tool can play a role for the students and the instructors when used in an academic setting. Blogs can be used to teach/demonstrate how any user can publish content that causes a reaction and further communication. Some writing courses have students maintain a blog on a subject of interest which others can respond to. This interaction can force deeper thought on the subject matter and lead to further research. Imagine having a blog about some issue related to another country and having people from that country respond. The student learns how what they write can impact others around them. Blogs can also become e-portfolios for their work. Student can read blogs posted by their instructors and comments by other students taking a course. Instructors benefit from blogs by posting instructional materials, posting administrative information for the class, and sharing knowledge. Through the search features on blog sites, users can find other blogs that are related to their interest and gain new insight or challenge another user’s views of a topic.

Show me!

Demostration: Let’s look at a blog and search other blogs on the site.

Link to legal guide for blogging: http://www.eff.org/issues/bloggers/legal
Seven things you should know about blogs: http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ELI7006.pdf
The appendix has a list of other popular blogging sites.

Micro Blogging

What is it?
Micro-blogging is a form of multimedia blogging that allows users to send brief text updates (say, 140 characters or fewer) or micromedia such as photos or audio clips and publish them, either to be viewed by anyone or by a restricted group which can be chosen by the user. These messages can be submitted by a variety of means, including text messaging, instant messaging, email, digital audio or the web. (Wikipedia – Micro-blogging - accessed 2/2/2009)
The content of a micro-blog differs from a traditional blog in that it is typically more topical, smaller in aggregate file size (e.g. text, audio or video) but is the same in that people utilize it for both business and individual reasons. Many micro-blogs provide this short commentary on a person-to-person level, or share news about a company's products and services. (Wikipedia – Micro-blogging - accessed 2/2/2009)

**Why is it significant to teaching and learning?**
Imagine a global water cooler where you can participate in short exchanges and follow what other people are doing, thinking and feeling. It is an important communication tool in the sense that users are able to communicate very quickly on their own timeframe.

Twitter can be a viable tool for forcing users to be brief and to the point—an important skill in thinking clearly and communicating effectively.

**Show me!**
Demonstration: Twitter [http://www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)

Seven things you should know about Twitter: [http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ELI7027.pdf](http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ELI7027.pdf)

**Wiki**

**What is it?**
A wiki is a page or collection of Web pages designed to enable anyone who accesses it to contribute or modify content, using a simplified markup language. (Wikipedia,11/2/2008)

Wiki showed up around 1995 and have changed the way in which content is created. In the past a small group posted content which was read by larger groups. Today, many people can add or change content on a wiki. One would think that chaos would in sue with so many people changing content on a wiki. It is true that change wars can occur but the change process can be moderated if necessary.

**Why is it significant to teaching and learning?**
Wikis can be used as a collaborative space for work or research. Brown University uses Wikis for websites and projects. Some are public while others are private requiring a login. Imagine a website that is easy to edit and everyone on a project can make changes to. This is the power of the wiki.

As wiki contributors, we are content producers instead of just the customers. Wikis demonstrate how information is shared and modified by a group over time. They are great for collaboration and organizing information.

Wikipedia is a very popular public encyclopedia that the world can edit. Since the fact checking is done by the world, incorrect information does not stay long but Wikipedia should not be used as a primary source for academic work.

Seven things you should know about Wikis: [http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ELI7004.pdf](http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ELI7004.pdf)
RSS Feeds

What is it?
Web syndication refers to making web feeds available from a site in order to provide other people with a summary of the website's recently added content (for example, the latest news or forum posts).(Wikipedia, 11/2/2008) RSS is one of two formats used for web syndication. RSS feeder readers are applications used to gather and organize these feeds for viewing.

Why is it significant to teaching and learning?
Instead of users having to check web sites for new information, RSS applications gets the information and tells them what is new on the site. Imagine browsing one list that tells you everything new on your favorite sites. It’s a big time saver and you are made aware of late breaking news. The ITG web site uses RSS feeds.

Seven things you should know about RSS: http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ELI7024.pdf

The appendix contains an URL to a list of RSS Readers.

Specialized Content Hosting

Specialized content hosting provides space for users to upload content for the online community to view, review and rate.

Podcasts

What is it?
Podcasts: A podcast is a free video or audio series — like a TV or radio show — that you download. (Apple, 11/2/2008) They are usually distributed via web syndication.

Why is it significant to teaching and learning?
Podcasts provide a method for users to listen and view content on their own terms. Since podcasts are very easy to make, users can become content producers and share their content with the online community. iTunes U is a great example of how institutions are leveraging podcasts to teach and provide content to their community no matter the time of day or where viewers are located. http://www.apple.com/education/itunesu_mobilelearning/itunesu.html

YouTube

What is it?
YouTube (www.youtube.com) has become synonymous with video sharing. This is another example of a tool that you can be a viewer or a content creator. This tool allows for videos to be uploaded and shared online.
Flickr

What is it?
Flickr (www.flickr.com) is a great site for finding content and sharing photos.

Slideshare

What is it?
Slideshare (www.slideshare.com) is a great site for finding content and sharing presentations online.

Google Docs

What is it?
Google Docs (www.google.com/docs/) aims to provide a virtual desktop for Internet users to store documents. This tool will also allow you to specify who has access to your content. Combine those two features and you end up with a nice collaboration tool that is available anywhere you have access to the Internet.

Why is it significant to teaching and learning?
Regular user as content producer is the primary significance of these tools. Instead of relying on content to come from the traditional sources, Internet users can produce their own content and distribute it directly to other Internet users.

Facebook

What is it?
Facebook gives people the power to share and makes the world more open and connected.

Millions of people use Facebook everyday to keep up with friends, upload an unlimited number of photos, share links and videos, and learn more about the people they meet. (Facebook.com - About - accessed 2/5/2009)

Why is it significant to teaching and learning?
Knowledge is power and sharing knowledge can be quite powerful. Facebook can be used as a tool to organize, build communities and collaborate. It can be used to build strong relationship ties to people and organizations. It has been estimated that as many as 80% of US college students have profiles on facebook.

Show me!
Demonstration: http://www.facebook.com
Seven things you should know about facebook (I)
Seven things you should know about facebook (II):
Skype

What is it?
Skype is a communication tool used for online conferencing. You can make free calls to other Skype users, you can make inexpensive calls people with regular phones, and you can video/voice conference.

Why is it significant to teaching and learning?
Users are able to interact with each other face to face without the need to travel. This opens up a whole range of opportunity to work with people all over the world and have a more personal interaction. Collaboration becomes more convenient and less costly.

Show me!
Demonstration: Using Skype to make a call and video conferencing.

Seven things you should know about Skype:

Second Life

What is it?
Second Life is a virtual world online that allows users to interact with objects and other people.

Why is it significant to teaching and learning?
Hundreds of leading universities and school systems around the world use the Second Life Grid as a vibrant part of their educational programs. Second Life technology can be used for distance learning, artificial intelligence/life projects, art galleries, museums, simulations, meeting spaces and online learning.

Show me!
Demonstration: http://www.secondlife.com
Visit: Princeton University and Art Exhibit

Seven things you should know about Second Life:
Appendix

Other web browsers
- Microsoft Internet Explorer http://www.microsoft.com/windows/products/winfamily/ie/
- Opera http://www.opera.com/
- Flock http://flock.com/

Other blogging tools
- Blogger http://www.blogger.com
- Blogsome http://blogsome.com
- Movable Type http://www.movabletype.org
- Textpattern http://textpattern.com

Other search engines
- http://www.philb.com/whichengine.htm (Search by need - Excellent)
- http://lii.org/ (Librarian’s Internet Index)
- Dogpile http://www.dogpile.com
- Ixquick http://www.us.ixquick.com/

Other RSS Readers
- Google Reader - http://reader.google.com

Seven Things You Should Know About....
- http://www.educause.edu/ELI/ELIResources/7ThingsYouShouldKnowAbout/7495