# UContent

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## The Information Professional's Guide to User-Generated Content

Nicholas G. Tomaiuolo

*To Kristin, my daughter, and Ben, my son—*
*my greatest sources of inspiration and pride.*

# Contents

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# About the Website

web.ccsu.edu/library/tomaiuolon/UContent/toc.htm

Samuel Johnson said, "The greatest part of a writer's time is spent in reading, in order to write; a man [or woman] will turn over half a library to write one book." The quote is sure to resonate with readers of this book who are also writers. Throughout *UContent: The Information Professional's Guide to User-Generated Content*, I have blazed a trail of URLs that are representative of various types of user-generated content. I discovered these websites by reading about them in the library literature, as well as the business, communications, computer, internet, and information professional literature. I also read blog postings, industry news, and site reviews. I watched and took notes on dozens of videos and podcasts, and I executed searches and followed links. To preclude "reinvention of the wheel" and help readers return to the most helpful resources without needing to create their own bookmarks, I have produced webpages that act as a companion to this book. The best way to find the link to a resource I've mentioned in the book is to access the table of contents at web.ccsu.edu/library/tomaiuolon/UContent/toc.htm. The table of contents includes a Google Custom Search Engine that you may also use to find other relevant *UContent* webpages.

The *UContent* webpages, like the book, are organized into chapters. Click a chapter's link, and the reader lands on a page listing the most prominent webpages discussed in that chapter, and links to those webpages. A link may lead the reader to a wiki, a list, a newspaper/magazine/journal article, a map, a chat service, a search engine, a library's website, or a how-to video. Chapter 10, "Tagging, Folksonomies, and Social Bookmarking," for example, is especially rich in links to additional resources. The reader not only finds the link to Thomas Vander Wal's "Folksonomy Coinage and Definition" but also finds links to social bookmarking services, instructions for setting up a Delicious linkroll, a juicy utility called "Feed to Java Script" for building embed code, and the interactive online ESP Game (which aims to determine whether two people can describe an image with identical tags). Similarly, by accessing

Chapter 14, on photo sharing, the reader will encounter links at Flickr that will make it easy for librarians and information professionals to explore images from "Library Snapshot Day," the Flickr Commons, Flickr groups for librarians, and other interesting photostreams. On this chapter page, you'll also find a link to several examples of Flickr badges.

Remember that although web resources are in "perpetual beta," the *UContent* webpages are designed to keep readers in touch with the majority of the sites mentioned in the book. Please visit the pages frequently; I will add links to user-generated content as they emerge (the recently launched social networking site Google+ at plus.google.com is one that I've just added to the webpage, corresponding to the book's Facebook chapter). Please contact me at nick.tomaiuolo@gmail.com if you have ideas about the webpages, including suggestions for additional links, notifying me of pages that have succumbed to link rot, and other appropriate topics. I also welcome your comments at my blog (web20librarian.wordpress.com) where I offer supplementary information about new developments in user-generated content.

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# Foreword

*Phoebe Ayers*

Things have certainly changed in the last 10 years on the web. A decade ago, the first dot-com bubble had just collapsed, Google had not yet climbed to first place in web rankings, Napster (the original service) was hot, and the Neopets craze made it one of the most popular sites on the web—just above Geocities. And new sites that today define the landscape of the web were just beginning: Blogger was launched in August 1999, and Wikipedia was started in January 2001. These sites and others that followed (Facebook was launched in 2004, Twitter in 2006) would become "Web 2.0"—a participatory web for all, where every person engages in creation and discussion, and everyone interacts online with their social network of friends as a part of ordinary daily life. Web 2.0 was a differentiating term: looking forward from the dot-com bust and from a web of read-only content, to a future where everyone participates and better technology (and better bandwidth and connectivity) makes it possible to watch videos, keep up-to-date minute by minute with the happenings of the world, and create collaboratively on the fly.

But the theme of *user-generated content* is not new on the internet. Take the now-defunct Geocities: Wildly popular in its day, the site allowed users to publish their own websites. Geocities, and sites like it, helped open up the web to ordinary people with access to modems or university computer labs or libraries or, for the lucky few, home broadband. And as Nicholas Tomaiuolo notes in the introduction to *UContent*, discussion boards—from dial-in bulletin board systems to Usenet—have always been a core part of being connected online. The online experience—the magic of being connected to someone else and sharing what you know (and learning from others) or just socializing with someone down the block or around the world through your computer—has always been a part of what makes the internet extraordinary, a realm of possibility.

Sharing what you know and/or create is a theme that runs through all of the chapters in this book. Take Wikipedia. The world's largest and most-used

reference work (a staggering 18 million articles and 400 million monthly read-
ers, to date) has been created in the past decade through the work of volun-
teer "Wikipedians," folks from around the world who share the goal of writing
the most comprehensive encyclopedia (in all languages!) that they can. It is a
nonprofit project that depends not just on reader donations to stay running,
but also on the goodwill and time of the thousands of editors who make up
the community of the site and who feel responsible for it.

Wikipedians, by sharing what they know in a structured manner as well as
what others know (adding scholarly references is a core task of writing the
encyclopedia), have helped create an online culture of sharing and participa-
tion that is foundational for today's web and, indeed, today's experience of
finding information. The services and sites profiled in *UContent* all depend
on a community of participation: Without people pitching in and contribut-
ing, repository sites like Flickr and SlideShare wouldn't exist, collaborative
works like Wikipedia would quickly become unusable, and social networks
like Facebook would wither.

For librarians who want a shortcut guide to what it means to be a partici-
pant in these and many more community sites, *UContent* provides a quick
introduction to the practical ins and outs of participating, as well as how
libraries are using these services and projects. Understanding the web and
the many resources it offers our patrons (many of them created by their
peers) is certainly a core job of the information professional, and *UContent*
helps provide an orientation in a confusing, buzzword-y space. All libraries
are situated within communities of participation in real life—within schools,
research labs, or cities—and the internet is no different. The question is:
Where will you participate?

—Phoebe Ayers,
librarian, University of California,
and Davis trustee, Wikimedia Foundation

# Preface

The ubiquity of user-generated content (dubbed *UContent* in this book) on the read/write web in which we work and play is the overarching topic of this book. Wherever we travel on the internet, it seems we can set up an account, set our preferences, and personalize our experience. Barbara Quint, my editor, had a long list of sites, resources, and angles she wanted me to cover, and writing this book has been an exciting and challenging opportunity. While I gathered information, researched topics, and interacted with the websites and services I discuss throughout the book, I had the chance to run into some old friends and to make some new ones. It didn't seem to matter whether they were the altruists giving away books at Project Gutenberg, the "biblio-paparazzi" over at Flickr, the map mashup mentors at YouTube, or the dozens of librarians sorting through innumerable issues in the blogosphere. I learned something from each interchange, from each file uploaded and downloaded, and in (almost) each link I pursued.

It's quite a turn of events to perceive the web as the repository for content its users are creating. When I first used the web, the content was in place. Companies, associations, governments, professional organizations, or librarians placed it there for people to use. Now, however, much of the content is dynamically created by us web users. While we create that content, we learn more about ourselves, each other, and how we can inform one another on so many topics almost effortlessly. The resources are in place; all we have to do is swoop down and use them.

What I have attempted to do with most of these chapters—with most of these manifestations of UContent—is to experiment with them and experience them. I added links to Wikipedia and added presentations to SlideShare, SlideBoom, and authorSTREAM. I mashed up some data to create some maps, dabbled in citizen journalism, and joined groups (and started one) at Flickr; I even self-published a book at CreateSpace. At each service, whether Yahoo! Pipes, Google Custom Search, Delicious, LibraryThing, or Facebook, contributors must learn specific tasks to use the resource and, having learned those tasks, can gain a better understanding of how others have used the

resource. We can then imagine more ways to exploit the resource and try to implement them. Throughout the book you will find that I have laced the chapters with industry news and helpful links, and, ever mindful of the social networking mechanism of crowdsourcing, I've called upon experts for answers and elucidation.

If you are already familiar with UContent in its many varied forms, I hope this book will complement your knowledge. If you are expert in contributing to these forms of UContent, I hope my experiences resonate with you. If you are new to UContent, I hope this book serves as a genial welcome and a dose of encouragement. Please also use this book's companion webpages, which begin with a table of contents page at web.ccsu.edu/library/tomaiuolon/ UContent/toc.htm, to access links to the articles, websites, and examples of UContent discussed in this book.