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Aggregate online User Generated Content (UGC) for your website



This document aims to provide an insight in to UGC looking at how practitioners, companies and organisations can collect/aggregate, filter and display content uploaded by anyone other than themselves to the Web without having to download, edit and re publish.

What is UGC?

UGC or User Generated content is just that, media content produced or 'generated' by an end-user. Most importantly though is that it is made publicly available on the Web. UGC can take many forms including photographs, video, audio, news articles, blog articles, comments, forum discussions, uploaded files, even tweets, anything resulting in an online asset or object possessing a unique URL. (universal resource locator) These resources created during the day to day life, buzz and activity of your organisation can be tagged, tracked, filtered and aggregated to provide content for your web site or online social space.

UGC is often created in response to an existing and often professionally generated item of media, "Professionally generated" referring to the artists creating and owning the IP (intellectual property) and possessive copyright on the originating material.

UGC can be as simple as a single photo taken at an event or a PDF document created of a seasonal brochure. More complex UGC takes existing images, audio and video, combining it with home/user captured media and collected links from around the web. This is then uploaded to a website to be freely accessible to anyone interested in looking, watching, listening and commenting.

Where is it found?

The most popular UGC sites are:

- YouTube for video sharing
<http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=YouTube&oldid=327909915>
- Flickr for picture sharing
<http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Flickr&oldid=326710624>

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- Delicious for bookmark sharing
http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Delicious_%28website%29&oldid=321760253
- Issuu for published print sharing
<http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Issuu&oldid=320617538>
- Slideshare for slideshow presentations
<http://www.slideshare.net/about>
- Scribd for document sharing
<http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Scribd&oldid=326052341>

Some websites incorporate facilities to enable users to upload or add user generated content directly to the site itself. Blog comments are a simple example of this. Sites like the BBC take advantage of UGC by asking users to upload photos of the weather to be shown with the weather reports for example.

Who is making it?

The short answer is absolutely everyone who uploads anything to the Internet. As a creative organisation, business or practitioner the question really of interest is "Who is making content about me?" and following on from that "How can I make use of it?"

Simple scenarios - UGC who makes it and who might use it?

Donna attends a workshop where she learns felt making techniques at her local arts centre. During the workshop she takes photos of her progress. That evening she uploads her pictures to Flickr and writes on her blog about the inspiring day she had.

Martin is a member of the art centre's youth theatre program. During rehearsals he and other members of the company take photos on their mobile phones and shoot bits of video. During the performances photos from backstage get snapped. Before leaving on the last night he sneaks in to the foyer and takes down a show poster as a souvenir along with promotional cards still stacked on the ticket counter. A good time was had by all. Martin likes to make videos and takes all his content and makes a short video to share with the rest of the cast to commemorate their time together. The resulting 4 min video is uploaded to YouTube.

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Tina works as the marketing officer for a mid-scale rural touring company in the Midlands. Local papers often review the company's productions, print stories and announce upcoming shows. Collecting together all these press mentions is part of her job. It can be time consuming and often only results in the stories generated by press releases issue by her. Tina relies on eager-eyed friends of the company sending links to her or cutting the articles from the papers and sending them to her. If only she could be notified every time a mention of her company appeared anywhere on the web.

Raymond owns a printing business and one of his clients is PCM stage productions. Each season a new brochure is printed to promote the company's activities. They also have posters of various sizes and A5 flyers for every production. All of the printed materials are stored in PDF format. The Arts Today regional culture magazine is also a client.

Rosie is organising the work's company outing, Pantomime at the Theatre Royal, it's become an annual affair. A few days before Rosie is updating her Twitter "I'm off to Theatre Royal panto at w/e. Sooo excited. 1 spare ticket. DM me if you want to come." Several followers tweet back, "Plz...last years was a hoot. cheers" from one "Oh no your not!" from several others! On the bus and whilst waiting to get to their seats Rosie takes some photos for the company's internal newsletter... programs in hand posed for the camera. Others take pictures on mobile phones sending them directly to Facebook or plan to upload them to flickr.

Links to articles

Is Web 2.0 Abandoning the UGC Ship?

<http://www.techcrunch.com/2009/04/06/is-web-20-abandoning-the-ugc-ship/>

Does user-generated content have a future?

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/pda/2009/mar/14/sxswi-web20>

UK: User-generated content gets sticky

http://globaltechforum.eiu.com/index.asp?layout=rich_story&doc_id=9461

User generated content becomes a hit in UK

<http://econsultancy.com/blog/238-user-generated-content-becomes-a-hit-in-uk>

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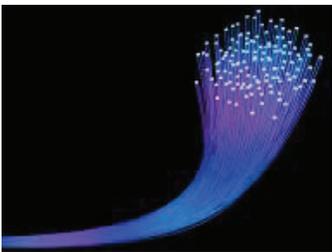
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Video Resources

The Machine is Using Us

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLIgopyXT_g

Web 2.0 is here

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RoWkkl5nA08>

The Publisher and Consumer

Data Flow - Push and Pull

Uploading, Downloading, the vocabulary we use when moving data around, on or off the web is directional. It's easy to get confused about exactly what digital data is doing on the Internet. Once upon a time the Internet was referred to as the Information Super Highway and Cyberspace. These phrases have fallen out of fashion as quickly as the "Social Media" and "Web 2.0" buzz words appeared. Seeing the Internet as a mass transit system or a vast room was a good analogy.

Data flows in 2 ways around the Internet. Content being "Pushed around" or uploaded by publishers and content being "Pulled in", downloaded, received or read by users. For the Pushers their content is kept together because it is contained on a website, a portal-like digital shop window, foyer or notice board for all the real world activity to be displayed on for online visitors.

Just as you wouldn't expect everyone to visit your office or venue every-time you publish a new brochure or newsletter. Why should you expect your online visitors to do this? With off line audiences you give them the option of subscribing to a mailing list. When a new brochure is printed one is mailed out to each member on the mailing list. Organisations who support your work may ask for

a box of brochures and distribute them, leaving piles on tables and counters where interested parties can pick one up and take it home, flick through it and hopeful attend your promoted activities.

There will be prime locations where you know having your brochure available for passers-by or patrons of a particular organisation to pick up, might boost your footfall or ticket sales. You approach these venues, organisations and outlets asking them if you can send them some brochures.

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This pushing and pulling, the creation of content made available publicly to multiple locations, the act of distributing it and the ways of receiving it. Do they sound familiar? This is Syndicating and Subscribing.

Online visitors wanting to hear about your activities can subscribe to your website updates using RSS and receive them in a reader each time a new update is published. You Push they Pull.

Creating an RSS feed is outside the scope of this "How to" document. It is the mechanism facilitated by RSS we are interested in today. Blogging platforms such as Wordpress, Typepad and Blogger are by default RSS enabled and will generate a RSS feed updating it automatically every time you publish a new post.

Subscribing - Tell me more

This is the RSS standardised icon on the left. Seeing this orange icon in the toolbar of your browser or with the body of the page indicates that the page you are looking at is RSS enabled and that you can subscribe to it.

This is an RSS URL: http://newsrss.bbc.co.uk/rss/newsonline_uk_edition/entertainment/arts_and_culture/rss.xml

This is the resulting RSS data page (below). This is the information currently (at the time of writing) being pushed and pulled around the web from this web page using the URL above. In this case the BBC's Entertainment Arts & Culture page.



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What is RSS?

RSS, which stands for Really Simple Syndication or Rich Site Summary, is based on XML, a widely used standard for textual information exchange between applications on the Internet. RSS feeds can be viewed as plain text files (see screenshot above), but they're really designed for computer-to-computer communication.

Why is RSS the secret weapon?

RSS Feeds are a way for websites large and small to distribute their content across the web. Feeds permit subscription to regular updates delivered automatically in to news readers or by email. Feeds also make it possible for site content to be packaged into "widgets" and "gadgets" so that the content of a feed can be embedded in to your own website, Blog or online social space.

Links to articles

The BBC explains News Feeds
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/help/3223484.stm>

Video Resources

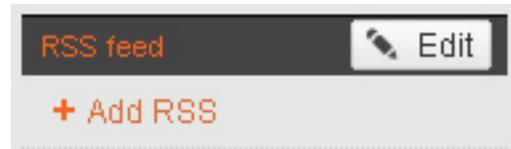
Google Reader in Plain English – Commoncraft
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VSPZ2Uu_X3Y

RSS in Plain English – Commoncraft
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0klgLSxGsU>

RSS and UGC?

Once you can locate and identify the RSS URL for your news page or blog you can copy it and paste it in to any network set up to receive RSS feeds. In the [Amb:IT:ion UK Digital Opportunities Network](#) for example every member has a personal profile. In each profile there is an RSS feed box.

Before adding the RSS URL from above the receiving elements looks like this, on the right.



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Get this widget

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Here, on the left, the RSS URL is pasted in to the receiving element dialogue.

A screenshot of a dialog box titled 'RSS feed' with an 'Edit' button. It contains several input fields: 'Title' with the text 'RSS feed', 'URL' with the text 'http://newsrss.bbc.', 'Display' with a dropdown menu set to 'Detail View', and 'Show' with a dropdown menu set to '1' and the text 'Items'. At the bottom, there are 'Save' and 'Cancel' buttons.

The resulting RSS feed displays like this:

This is a widget generated by a site called WidgetBox (shown as a screenshot here on the left). In the same way that the RSS feed was fed in to the RSS element shown above so the feed URL was pasted in to the Widget Box dialogue requesting an RSS feed URL. This widget can be added in to your own site simply by using the snippet of code Widget Box creates.

Taking an RSS URL and pasting it in to an RSS receiving element or widget, the information that feeds through will update each time the source is updated. Content from one source can be filtered or poured in to multiple locations in this way.

The application of widgets and data filtering techniques to aggregate relevant content from across the web to your own website without any complicated programming ability is what this document is about. Defining the fundamental concepts of User Generated Content (UGC) Really Simple Syndication (RSS), Tagging and understanding how these work together is important when aggregating your own online UGC effectively.

We have looked at what UGC is. There are some scenarios outlined at the top of this document where UGC is being created. We have looked at how to Push and Pull content of our choosing around the web next is filtering content from several sources. Before we look at one of the scenarios in detail we need to understand tagging and social bookmarking.

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What is Tagging? - Social Bookmarking

To mark a place in a real book as a reminder of the page you reached turning over the corner creates a recognisable point to easily return to. This is a simple tag. To pin point a specific piece of information you might place a "post-it" close by the paragraph and write a keyword on it to remind you of the content being marked. Bookmarking web pages and sorting them in to folders like books on a shelf for easy return at the click of a mouse is not new. These lists can get very long and remembering which folder you moved each bookmark to can be frustrating. A more sophisticated approach to bookmarking has emerged, Tagging.

Why are tags so special?

Most significantly is that tagging recognises that it is useful for information to be stored under a selection of different categories.

With the old method (**taxonomy**) sorted bookmarks have to go in to a file structure, Theatre, Television, Film, Art for example. For a document or web page to be in more than one category you have to create a copy.

Adopting tagging (**folksonomy**) each online asset or bookmark can be tagged with as many categories as you like. As you define the categories using keywords within or relating to the subject matter being marked the tag can be a real word or unique series of letters and numbers determined by yourself.

Throughout the **Amb:IT:ion project** all content uploaded or created online from video, photos, blog posts, audiobooks, live streamed Qiks, slideshows and even this series of How to documents the project's tag has been "getambition". **Searching for the tag getambition in Google returns 56,900 references**. A series of events run throughout 2009 called Amplified 09 discussing and reflecting on the digital landscape, legacy and future of the Internet **used the tag "amp09"**.



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Title:
Felt Sunset

Description:
Felt making workshop Nov 2009

Tags:
Felt, stripes, fmla09

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Tracking UGC

Define your own tags makes tracking UGC from specific projects possible. The difficult part is encouraging the users who generate the content to add the tag when they upload. Take the first scenario as an example.

Donna attends a workshop where she learns felt making techniques at her local arts centre. During the workshop she takes photos of her progress. That evening she uploads her pictures to Flickr and writes on her blog about the inspiring day she had.

The workshop begins with the class being welcomed to the venue and is followed by a short introductory ritual of things they need to know, fire regulations, location of the toilets and times of the cafe bar opening etc. In this digital age add to this ritual that if anyone blogs or uploads pictures from the days workshop the tag is...fmla09 (Felt Making Lakeside Arts in 2009) This you can tell them will put their work on the Art Centre's Crafts Workshop gallery page.

That evening Donna uploads her pictures and tags them fmla09. This is the upload dialogue screen on the left, it is quite common in its layout.

It has box for:

- the picture's title
- a description
- **tags**

Donna tags the picture; felt, stripes and includes the requested tag fmla09.

Searching for Felt in Flickr finds all the images tagged Felt. Searching for the tag fmla09 finds only Donna's uploads as she was the only one to upload photos and use the tag.

During the year a series of 10 felt making workshops and the artists who upload their pictures to Flickr include the recommended tag. By the time workshop

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5 runs searching for the fmla09 tag finds 31 images uploaded by 8 workshop participants.

Aggregating UGC

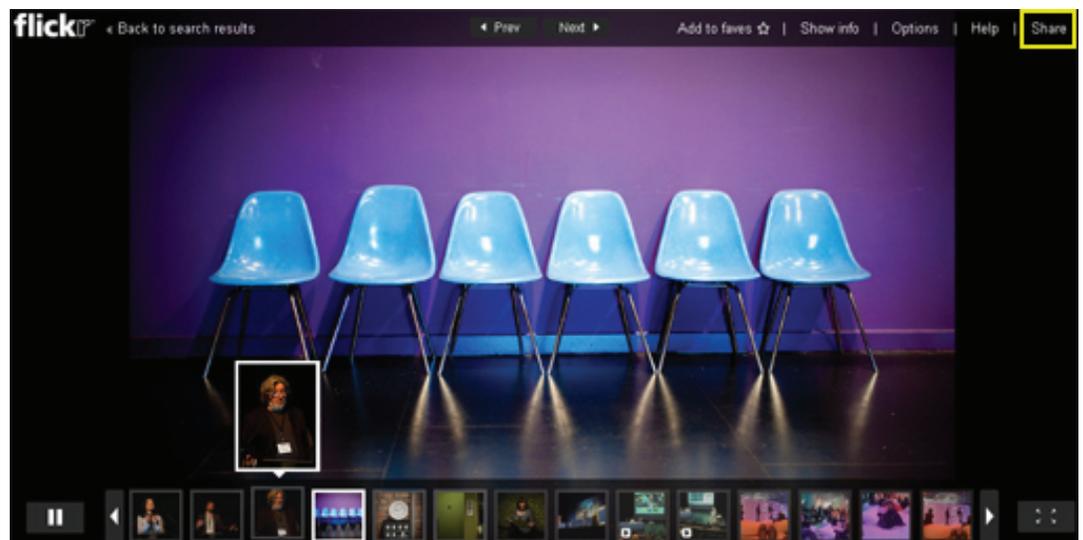
Collaboratively defining and tagging UGC in this way enables its selective aggregation in to a widget. This can then be inserted in to your website, blog or social space. Widgets generate their own RSS feed updating only when the keyword or pre defined tag is picked up.



Displaying UGC

Using a unique tag (in this case in Flickr) returns all the images attributed with the chosen tag. In the screen shot above this is every-one's uploads. Clicking the "Slideshow" button (hi-lighted in red above) creates an aggregated slideshow only containing the correctly tagged images. An example of a Flickr slideshow is shown below.

In the top right hand corner is a button called "Share" (hi-lighted in yellow). Clicking "Share" opens the dialogue box shown below.



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A screenshot of a "Share this slideshow" dialog box. The dialog has a dark background and a close button (X) in the top right corner. It contains the following options:

- "Grab the URL:" followed by a text input field containing the URL: `http://www.flickr.com/search/show/?q=getambition&m=tag`. Below this is a "Copy to clipboard" button.
- "Grab the embed HTML:" followed by a text input field containing the HTML code: `<object width="400" height="300"> <param name="flashv`. Below this is a "Copy to clipboard" button and a link that says "Customize this HTML".
- An email icon followed by the text "Email a link to the slideshow".

This gives several options. It can be emailed to contacts "Email a link to the slideshow". This slideshow has a URL, for using as a hyperlink within a document. [Like this - Click here.](#)

Most significantly for displaying UGC on a web page the option to "Grab the embed HTML"

Don't let the code scare you

It's not important to understand what the HTML says only that by clicking the "Copy to clipboard" button the embed code is yours to paste in to a website, blog or social space element that receives HTML. Once in place any new images uploaded to Flickr and tagged with the specified tag will filter through and display with the aggregated photos collected so far.

Links to articles

Web Widgets – defined

http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Web_widget&oldid=327033847

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20 Twitter Badges (widgets) to Show off Your Tweets

<http://mashable.com/2009/03/30/twitter-badges/>

Facebook Widgets: Embed Your Facebook Content Anywhere

<http://mashable.com/2009/09/04/facebook-widgets-2/>

50 Great Widgets for Your Blog

<http://mashable.com/2007/09/06/widgets-2/>

Video Resources

What are Web Widgets? (1/5)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HRAmQ_m2asg

What are Web Widgets? (2/5)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UoeHy40qjEs&NR=1>

What are Web Widgets? (3/5)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Y84cseNdGM

What are Web Widgets? (4/5)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJLqAwyMb88>

What are Web Widgets? (5/5)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=83lpdTrPnao>

Social Bookmarking in Plain English

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x66lV7GOcNU>

Platforms, Tools and Services

Flickr- Photo sharing

Cooliris - Advanced Flickr aggregation slideshows

slideshare - Powerpoint presentation sharin

Apture - Multi-media aggregation in one player

Widget Box - web widgets gallery and create your own

Create a YouTube widget

Delicious - social bookmarking

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EPK – Electronic Press Kit

With all this new digital content it is important that the local press and media are aware of its existence and that when they report about you they have the tool to ensure you get the most benefit from the articles when posted online.

Extend access to your press materials to Bloggers and content generators. A guide for presenting a consistent brand identity may already exist within your organisation. The dawn of Social Media means reviewing, adding to and reinforcing those documents. It is also important to distribute and enforce the new guidelines document. Aim to produce robust and realistic guidelines defined in short paragraphs.

[What is an EPK?](#)
[New Media Deals contracts booklet](#)

Call to action/Give permission – what do you want your UGC creators to do?

There should be no doubt when a potential content creator is in your venue or participating in an event what content it is acceptable to capture and what the appropriate tag is to enable your organisation to take advantage of the content generated.

It is also important to content creators when it is not acceptable and to direct them to the area on the web site with resources cleared for inclusion in UGC.

Links to articles

[Principles for User Generated Content Services](#)
[CIPR \(Chartered Institute of Public Relations\) Social Media Guidelines](#)
[Jumping on the UGC bandwagon is a good move for businesses](#)
[DIGITAL MARKETING: Brand guidelines, as we know them, are dead](#)

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Sample guidelines

[Intel's Social Media Guidelines](#)

[Enterprise: List of 40 Social Media Staff Guidelines](#)

Amb:IT:ion resources

[Terms & Conditions for websites that include user generated content](#)