Social Bookmarks

Before Web 2.0, when you discovered a really good website, you bookmarked it in your browser so that you could quickly visit it again in the future. This worked well for the most part. However, a couple of problems arose with this method of bookmarking. When you bookmarked a site on one computer, it was only available on that specific computer. Change computers, and you lose your bookmarks. Another problem with this method of bookmarking is that you couldn't easily share your bookmarks with other people. And other people couldn't share their bookmarks with you.

A delicious concept
The times have changed for the better. Now you're able to organize all of your favorite websites in one convenient online location, and you can easily share them with others. Social bookmarking has arrived. With social bookmarking, you simply set up an account with a web-based bookmarking site, such as del.icio.us, and then add new websites to this account as needed. Your bookmarks are stored online, so they are accessible and editable on any computer.

Share and share alike
Better yet, you can make your bookmarks public and share them with others. Send your friends and colleagues the link to your social bookmarks, and they instantly have access to all of your favorite websites. You can also easily create a network of other people who have similar interests as you. Every time you add a website to your bookmarks, you can view the rest of the people on the internet who also bookmarked that site. Then you can view their bookmarks. You can begin creating a network of people who bookmark similar websites, and you can monitor their latest additions. This is a great way of discovering great, new websites. It's all about collaborating and sharing bookmarks amongst people of similar interests, whether or not you know these people in real life.

Tagging
You have complete control over how you organize your bookmarks. Gone are the days of putting bookmarks into folders. Doing this restricts a website to one location and one topic, when it really might fall under numerous topics. When you add a website to your social bookmarks, you assign it tags. These tags are single keywords that you create to help you categorize a website. You can assign as many tags to a website as you like. As you add more websites to your social bookmarks, you will use many of the same tags, and at times you will continue to create new tags. You can then quickly find specific websites by searching through your tag list and seeing which sites fall under the categories you assigned them.

Privacy
One quick note about privacy: You do not have to make all of your bookmarks public. You always have the option of creating private bookmarks that can only be seen by yourself.

Popular social bookmarking sites:

Del.icio.us [http://del.icio.us]
Mister Wong [http://www.mister-wong.com]
Furl [www.furl.net]
Blogmarks [http://blogmarks.net]
Diigo [http://www.diigo.com/]
StumbleUpon [http://www.stumbleupon.com]

Educational benefits / classroom applications:

- Network with other educators around the globe who share your interests.
- Create social bookmark accounts for your school's academic departments. Teachers within the department all contribute to the growing database of web resources.
- Contact other people for professional networking, based on their social bookmarks.
- Allow yourself and your students to share bookmarks on research topics.
- Subscribe to someone's bookmarks via RSS and receive updates whenever they add new websites.
- Collaborate on projects with other schools, sharing bookmarks between all participating communities.
- Search sites that have already been recommended by others. To make it even easier, you can use the Social Media Search.

Concerns and solutions:

- There are no standards for tagging. You create your own tags, which may be different to what someone else would come up with for the same website. Teachers are encouraged to come up with a class list of standard tags whenever students are working on a collaborative project. This will prevent good websites from slipping through the cracks when students are searching by tags.
- Some students might sit back and wait for others to provide good websites for a research project, rather than making their own significant contribution. Teachers can monitor who has been adding bookmarks and who has not.
- Students who add inappropriate websites to their bookmarks are essentially sharing them with their classmates. Teachers should discuss with their students the school's Acceptable Use Policy, as well as issues of cyberethics and self management.

Real-world examples from teachers:

- Andrew Robitaille (eLearning integration teacher) del.icio.us bookmarks
- Jody Hayes (primary teacher from NZ) del.icio.us bookmarks
- Mollybug (social studies teacher) furl bookmarks
- Tami Brass (teacher in Minnesota) del.icio.us bookmarks
- Bill Tozier (educator from Michigan) del.icio.us bookmarks
Further reading:

- Tracking down educators that use social bookmarking (del.icio.us) by Quentin D'Souza
- Sites to See: Social Bookmarking - an Education World article by Lorrie Jackson
- All Together Now: Social Bookmarking offers a new way to store and share web sites by Donna DesRoches (School Library Journal)

Tutorials:

- What are tags, and how do I use them? - from the del.icio.us help page
- Furl Guide by Jim Wenzloff
- Social bookmarking - a how-to article featured in Teaching Today
- Tagging to help teachers