

The Identity Share Project

Daniel Upton - Design Document Spring 2009

Project Committee: Carl DiSalvo, Fox Harrell, Nihad Farooq

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The Identity Share Project: Abstract

While many social communities exist on the web, they generally consist solely of networks of friends, family, and co-workers. Those that do offer the ability to learn about or meet other people are either dating sites or forums based around a single interest. The Identity Share Project approaches the social network from a new angle, facilitating the sharing of identities with others outside of standard networks while not limiting the connections between strangers to a matched subset.

The project is a web-based system that allows users to create and share a profile, to browse others' profiles, and to follow their online experiences. The Identity Share Project is an online social site that connects individuals based upon their entered attributes, browsing history, and RSS feeds. Through complex queries and the formation of dynamic communities, it allows exploration of the user-base. Identity Share can record users browsing on the internet and share the experience with others on the site in real-time.

The project will display meaningful depictions of people, allow individuals to see a small section of the world through the eyes of another, and encourage connections based upon the similarities and differences between users.

The Identity Share Project: Introduction

In thinking about how to utilize the web and web applications to facilitate communication between strangers, I began to come up with ways to connect people from different backgrounds with one another. I was initially interested in the idea of a digital pen-pal system—one that could allow people to find each other and offer some sort of insight into the life of a stranger. A website of this nature would typically involve a small profile, consisting of the geographic location and a brief background of each user. The interaction between users would likely involve the writing of letters or messages between members. While an online pen-pal system could be interesting to create, I eventually concluded that the concept was weak, as the implementation would merely be a simple translation of an existing process to the digital medium.

While doing background research, I came across an article in the Christian Science Monitor which detailed the project of Ronni Abergel, entitled “Living Library.” His idea was to bring stereotyped

categories of people to the local library (i.e. witch, Muslim, gay male) who could be “checked-out” for one hour conversations. This combination of social categorization and social interaction can lead to some interesting insights for individuals unfamiliar with people who self-identify with these stereotyped categories. The most exciting aspect of the Living Library project is the juxtaposition of a stereotypical categorization with an actual individual who fits the category. The project attempts to create an activity that allows people “to focus and reflect on their own prejudices and stereotypes, and to establish a peaceful, positive and fun meeting with one's own worst prejudice” (Abergel et al. 8). To reproduce the “Living Library” in an online environment would certainly fall short, because of the limited communication offered via web applications. Face-to-face communication, rather than just writing or chatting, is an important feature of the Living Library Project, and in order to create a meaningful experience for users, something of value would have to be shared between users. The Living

The Identity Share Project: Introduction, cont.

Library project also has a very limited focus—dispelling stereotypes, which would not necessarily translate well to an online environment where a user’s interest must also be maintained.

With these two methods of connecting strangers in mind, I set out to create a social network of “non-friends.” Such a network would require the absence of permanent “friendship” connections between users, and would allow enough information to be shared about an individual that other users could gain some idea of that person’s character and online experience. I toyed with the idea of mimicking the Living Library project by forcing users to identify themselves with fixed categories, such as race, gender, etc., while offering an additional set of more robust and open-ended categories to create contrast. Later, I realized that a system offering only open-ended categories would allow the same insights to occur and a more performative display of individuality to arise. As Ann Branaman states in “Goffman’s Social Theory,” “[the self] is a product of the

performances that individuals put on in social situations” (Branaman, et al. xlvi). By allowing users to represent themselves in an open-ended manner, Identity Share not only serves as an expressive digital space, but also allows users to share as much or as little as they want about themselves.

The first step in designing the Identity Share site was to determine different ways in which users could describe themselves, and to think of alternative means of sharing one’s online identity. Identity Share is different from the majority of online profiling systems because a user’s profile consists entirely of user-generated categories and details. The standard profile model of name, age, gender, location, and race is replaced with a customizable list that exists as a database, growing as more categories are added. Database consistency is maintained by giving users type-ahead functionality when adding custom categories and by presenting existing categories in order from most common to least common. In

The Identity Share Project: Introduction, cont.

a future implementation, this method could be subtly changed by randomly placing lesser used categories at the top of the list to promote diversity. Currently, the custom category system allows users to choose whether they will identify themselves with standard categories, more creative ones, or a completely absurd or nonsensical list. While the latter may not be ideal, it could offer some interesting and subversive ways in which the system might be used. Even now, very early in the site's existence, users have entered categories ranging from the standard "occupation," to lists such as "favorite movie," and even more bizarre entries such as "Billy Joel or Elton John."

While creating the framework of the Identity Share Project, I decided that it was important to use more than just profiles to represent users. Allowing users to augment the way in which they define themselves creates opportunities for additional interaction, giving the profiling system something to scaffold. Identity Share's main

reflection of a user's online presence can be seen in their browsing history, which is visible to all users. Users can install a browser extension that records the websites that they visit, allowing others to follow in real time. The extension offers a menu item and toolbar that can turn sharing on and off, thereby increasing the performativity of the sharing process. A user can choose to share a few sites per day, or they can share constantly. The selectivity of the sharing process allows users to craft an online persona to present to others.

A second method that allows users to employ external web sites to represent themselves is a personalized list of RSS and ATOM feeds associated with their profile. This list serves a similar purpose to the browser sharing, but in many ways it is more intentional and therefore more contrived. The feed list can represent artifacts from other sites that define a user, such as wish lists (Amazon, BoxedUp, etc.), Google Reader shared stories, personal blogs, favorite blogs, and many more. The open-endedness of sharing feeds allows for

The Identity Share Project: Introduction, cont.

more creative expression as well. Users can creatively choose blogs about their interests or even blogs that are absurd just to present their online persona in different ways.

Identity Share also offers a commenting system which is attached to each user's profile, each user's shared URLs, and communities of users. These comments offer a means for discussion but also a way for users to present themselves within the context of the site. They are located in these areas to promote dialog around users, their attributes, and their browsing histories. As Paolo Freire discusses in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, "The methodology of [a person's thematic universe] must likewise be dialogical, affording the opportunity both to discover generative themes and to stimulate people's awareness in regard to those themes" (Freire, et al. 96-97). While Freire may have been referring to performance as a means to promote positive change and action amongst oppressed individuals, the idea applies just as well when referring to dialog formed

around self-representation in an online environment.

There are many activities available to users on the site, some of which have been mentioned previously. These include exploring another's online browsing, reading comments, looking at profiles, viewing feeds, but also exploring the user-base and creating dynamic communities through this exploration. Two sections on the site allow for different methods of exploration. The "Find a User" section is designed to drill down through the user-base and locate an individual or set of individuals based upon certain characteristics. The Identity Share Project offers three different methods to search by. One can search based upon selected categories and attributes in the user base. A person can also search based upon these same attributes but in comparison to the searching user's profile. A third method is a search based upon visited websites. These searches can be performed using complex queries. For instance, one possible search would

be for users with a “location: Atlanta, Ga” and “gender: male” or “location: Atlanta, Ga” and “gender: female.” This would return anyone with “location: Atlanta, Ga” who has specified their gender to be either male or female. The complex queries also offer negatives. For instance, one could find users that have visited “www.yahoo.com” but not “www.google.com”. In this manner a user can search for differences, similarities, and interests that they are curious about and explore the returned individuals’ profiles in an attempt to gain some insight about what type of person they present themselves as.

The “Communities” page offers similar querying capabilities, but with a different intention. The page allows users to perform a query and create a community out of the returned users. When created, these communities are given titles determined by the creator, and users are either in or out of the community based upon its query definition. If a user wished to leave a community they must change their profile to no longer meet

the community’s query definition. This method of dynamically defining communities can create interesting ways to explicitly display similarities and differences between users, and the community comments can create dialog around these groupings. When a community is selected, a visualization of the group appears in a node format, which is different than the display on the “Find a User” page. This visualization displays a main node as the community, users as sub nodes, and categories beneath users. Offering this view of the communities can reinforce the fact that Identity Share is a network based not on friendship and acquaintance, but on shared attributes.

As stated earlier, in order to create a network of “non-friends,” not only would the network have to offer a robust profile and sharing system, but it would also require that the site not promote “friends.” Along these lines, I have employed a couple of different methods to promote connections without promoting existing friendship networks. If a user finds an individual

The Identity Share Project: Introduction, cont.

that they want to continue to watch, or a profile that they find interesting, they can add the profile as a “favorite” which will keep it on a favorite list on the user’s personal profile page. This list is currently only accessible to its owner, and therefore will not display as a friends-list in the style of Facebook or MySpace.

A second tactic that I have implemented defines users not by their real name or their user name (the site does not require this information), but by the five categories that they find are the most primary to describing themselves. This name therefore is dynamic as the user’s profile changes. By allowing for primary selection of categories, I am implementing centrality, “the idea that some members of a category may be ‘better examples’ of that category than others,” (Lakoff 12) to a users profile. In category theory, this means that a user’s profile, as a category which defines the user, is no longer just a set of static characteristics that are true about this user, but is a complex set of characteristics where some may be truer or more

defining to the user. To take this even further, in a future implementation, Identity Share could offer a ranking system for each category, thereby not only providing centrality, but a centrality gradience, “the idea that members (or sub-categories) which are clearly within the category boundaries may still be more or less central.” [Lakoff, 12] This offers a dynamic to social network profiling that doesn’t currently exist on the popular social networking sites. If a descriptor is filled out it generally means that it is a defining element for that individual, but with centrality and centrality gradience, the descriptor can have varying levels of importance. The idea for integrating cognitive categorization into a user’s profile comes from working with the Advanced Identity and Representation project, headed by Fox Harrell.

The Identity Share Project is not intended to be merely a social network, but rather a means by which to learn about other people. It is designed to promote exploration of other users’ shared information and to allow users to form dialog

The Identity Share Project: Introduction, cont.

around these explorations and subsequent discoveries. While the Identity Share Project could be seen as voyeuristic, it promotes a shared, group activity which requires sign-up to participate, forcing any casual observers to share as well. Users control the amount of information that they provide, and therefore have control over the amount of anonymity that they have on the site. Overall, the Identity Share Project should be seen as a application that offers a space for broad self-representation and the ability to see the internet from another person's perspective.

The Identity Share Project: Related Work

<http://living-library.org/>

This is the official site for the Living Library project. The overall concept is to allow library visitors to "check out" real people for one hour face to face discussions. The available people are categorized in a very stereotypical manner (i.e. gay male, Muslim, witch). Abergel's intent is to decrease prejudice through face-to-face contact with an individual who is more than the sum of their stereotypes.

The Identity Share Project is similar to the Living Library project in that it connects strangers via boundary objects (Bowker & Star 293). The Living Library project is in itself a boundary object, but beyond the presentation of stereotyped categories, the individuals have control over the value of the experience. In a similar manner, the Identity Share Project will provide a connecting point for individuals from different communities. This connecting point will consist of profiles, websites, and associated internet information.

<http://www.browzmi.com/>

Browzmi allows users to share their browsing publicly, in real-time. The site uses the html iframe in combination with a proxy, to share browsing with an optional browser extension to work around security issues. Browzmi works similar to a social networking site, allowing favorites, comments, and ratings for visited web sites. The site is designed to look like a web browser within your web browser.

The Identity Share Project borrowed some of the technical aspects of the Follow a User application (see page 11) from www.browzmi.com. This is one of the few sites on the internet that is able to share browsing information in real-time. After discussing many technical aspects with one of the creators of the site, I was able to determine that using a Firefox extension would be the best way to record browsing history.

<http://flock.com/>

Flock is a web browser designed to facilitate sharing. The site uses existing social networks (i.e. gmail, facebook, digg) and integrates them into a “people” sidebar. Users can drag and drop links, photos, and more to share with friends in their networks. The site is essentially a normal browser with plug-ins that integrates many different social networking sites’ functionality together.

While Flock seems to have garnered more publicity than browzmi.com, the site is not as helpful in describing methods of sharing information online. By using existing technologies (Facebook, Gmail, MySpace, FireFox), Flock is merely recombining sharing tools and reorganizing the interface for their usage. Flock and browzmi.com share many visual and layout aspects within their interfaces, and these have helped to define the layout of identityshare.net.

<http://delicious.com/>

Delicious is the very popular site for sharing bookmarks. Delicious began as a public space for storing bookmarks but caught on because of its ability to share links based on popularity (similar to digg). Delicious focuses on sharing of one aspect of an individual’s browsing history, their favorite sites. The site creates a new way to search the web, via tags on popular bookmarks.

Delicious’ ability to explore sites based on a tagging system has proven valuable when implementing aspects of the Identity Share Project, such as “Find a User” and “Communities”. Rather than associating tags with websites, Profile information and browsing history serves as Identity Share’s tag system.

<http://www.we-swipe.us/>

This is a site dedicated to the Swipe project, a performance art/real-life bar that travels around North America swiping drivers' licenses to raise awareness about the information that the government and other agencies keep on you as an individual. The site includes a "Request Your Data" tool which allows you to see what information companies are collecting about you. This project's focus on privacy issues and institutional identities are an important resource for online identity sharing.

The Identity Share Project, while not taking an activist stance, will eventually have to deal with privacy issues as the site grows. The current methods to deal with privacy issues, include giving users control of their data, allowing users to limit the amount that they share, and allowing only members of the site to view user information.

<http://www.everyblock.com/>

Everyblock is a site that offers news feeds for a specified location within a city. The site brings together real estate, business reviews, news articles, and public records for your location/block. The public records included are: building permits, business licenses, and restaurant inspections.

While everyblock.com may be too specific to integrate into the Identity Share Project, using location information and associated news stories is an interesting way to describe a person's identity. The metadata associated with particular categories of a user's profile offers many opportunities for varying descriptions to arise in future versions of the Identity Share site. The current RSS feed listing, allows users to enter some local data if they choose to.

<http://www.modernista.com/>

Modernista is an advertising firm that uses the HTML iframe overlay to display their site on top of other websites. Modernista hosts all of their content on other sites, i.e. Wikipedia, YouTube, etc.

Modernista's iframe presentation laid the foundation for my conception of the Follow a User Application.

The screenshot shows the Delicious website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'delicious' logo and links for 'Home', 'Bookmarks', 'People', and 'Tags'. A search bar is located on the right. The main content area is titled 'Popular design Bookmarks' and lists several bookmark entries. Each entry includes the title, the user who saved it, and a list of tags. The number of bookmarks for each tag is displayed in a blue box. A sidebar on the right shows a list of tags, with 'Related Tags' and a count of 11. Two callout boxes are present: one pointing to the 'design' tag in the first bookmark entry, and another pointing to the 'design' tag in the 'Related Tags' sidebar.

delicious Home Bookmarks People Tags Search Delicious Search

Popular design Bookmarks Recent | Popular See all design bookmarks.

Popular design x

Stefano's Linotype " Blog Archive " Why Programmers Suck at CSS Design SAVE 1084
First saved by: happygiraffe layout programming css design

ESTHETIC CORE | Everything A Designer Needs SAVE 318
First saved by: positivespaceblog Tutorial Graphics Design

25 Impressive Blog Footers | Vandelay Website Design SAVE 230
First saved by: alvaroz webdesign design

Pie In The Sky " Not The User's Fault SAVE 130
First saved by: lazymalevolence ui interfaces design

8 & 709 Design

Multicolr Search Lab - Idée Inc. SAVE 3143
First saved by: hansmex mashups flickr colors tools design

Online image / photo editor pixlr free SAVE 2735
First saved by: agaton software photo image editor design

Battle of the CSS Frameworks | Capsize Designs SAVE 221
First saved by: natekoechley web css design

100+ Resources & Inspiration for Hand Drawn Design SAVE 150
First saved by: jimmiejo Design

Tags
▼ Related Tags 11
inspiration
webdesign
art
portfolio
web
blog
typography
illustration
graphic
css
resources

Delicious utilizes popularity to explore bookmarks

By searching for a single tag users can see non-matching tags

My Stuff shows where you and your friends have been and currently are browsing

The screenshot displays a web browser window with the address bar showing `http://www.browzmi.com/`. The main content area is an iframe displaying a Google search page with the address bar showing `http://www.google.com/`. The Google page includes the search bar, "Google Search" and "I'm Feeling Lucky" buttons, and links for "Advertising Programs", "Business Solutions", "About Google", and "Privacy".

Annotations on the screenshot:

- A callout box at the top left points to the "My Stuff" sidebar, stating: "My Stuff shows where you and your friends have been and currently are browsing".
- A callout box in the center points to the Google search page, stating: "The Iframe acts like a browser within a browser, offering full controls".
- A callout box at the bottom right points to the "Chat Room" and "Explore More" buttons, stating: "Chat and browzmi favorites are located at the upper right".

The Identity Share Project: Screenshots - Flock Browser

Friend Bar Imports from other social networking sites

Allows dragging links and images to share with friends

The screenshot shows the 'My World' social networking page in the Flock browser. The interface is organized into several main sections:

- People (Left Sidebar):** Features a 'Friend Bar' with a 'Facebook' login button and a list of friends including Eric W. Gage, Anya Kogan, Ellen Yi-Luen Do, Riley McDermid, Jen Tatasciore, and Adam Rice. Each friend's profile includes a small photo and a 'Media' button.
- Favorite Feeds (Center):** A collection of news and content widgets from various sources:
 - Yahoo! News: Top Stories:** Lists news items like 'Ike whips up waves as it steams toward Texas' and 'Palin's statements on climate change murky'.
 - Digg - Technology:** Lists items like 'Google Trounces Web Video Competitors With 5 Billion V...' and 'Apple's iPhone 2.1 update is finally out!'.
 - CNET News.com:** Lists items like 'Yet-to-launch Blummi blows it with mass e-mail snafu' and 'Green news harvest: White 'green' roofs, cutting data ...'.
 - CNN.com:** Lists items like '37,000 may need to be saved from Ike' and 'Tracking Ike: Location, path, pics, traffic'.
 - ESPN.com:** Lists items like 'ESPN.com has launched many new widgets that offer s...' and 'Physicist's math: Minus showboating, 9.55 for Bolt'.
- Friend Activity (Center-Right):** A section titled 'What is the Friend Activity Widget?' with a description: 'This is where updates from your friends appear. To get friend updates here, log into one of the social networks that Flock supports:'. It includes links for Digg, Facebook, Flickr, Pownce, Twitter, and YouTube.
- Favorite Media (Right):** A section titled 'All the media you love.' with two widgets:
 - Flocking on Flickr:** Shows a grid of image thumbnails.
 - HowToFlock on YouTube:** Shows a grid of video thumbnails.

At the top of the page, there is a search bar and navigation icons. The browser's address bar shows 'Most Visited', 'Getting Started', 'Latest Headlines', 'New to Flock?', and 'Share Flock'.

The Identity Share Project: Research Approach

The Identity Share Project was informed by researching both identity representation and cognitive categorization theories. This approach allowed for a new perspective in the development of a social network. By including a data structure that offers dynamic categories, it has allowed a profiling system to arise that promotes social performance and group control over the site's content.

Following are some of the resources for this project:

Advanced Identity Representation: Computing for Social Identity and Imagination, by Fox Harrell

The AIR project, headed by Fox Harrell, has been the basis for many of the ideas that helped form the Identity Share Project. In combining cognitive categorization (Lakoff, Rosch, Fauconnier, Turner), sociological classification (Bowker & Star), and formal computational approaches to meaning (Goguen, Harrell), the AIR project is creating an

interdisciplinary approach to identity representation (Harrell 1). I originally created the database for the Identity Share Project as a generic database API used in an application built for the AIR project.

Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things, by George Lakoff

This is a book about the ways in which humans tend to categorize things and the implications that arise from this. Lakoff dispels classical folk theories of categorization and brings together research from a cognitive and social perspective. Lakoff's theories have helped serve as a way in which to structure the framework of the Identity Share database and its implementation as a profiling system. The different relationships between categories and objects can be described by the structure of the system that holds this information. For instance, Lakoff's discussion of centrality, or the idea that certain members of a group can be better examples of that group is represented by attaching prototype or primary tags to certain

The Identity Share Project: Research Approach cont.

members, describing them as perfectly representing the group or user (Lakoff 12). The Identity Share Project has used this theory to give users a better method by which to describe themselves.

Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet, by Lisa Nakamura

This book focuses on changing the way in which identity is seen online. Rather than a utopia of disembodied individuals without race, the internet is a reflection of its creators. This book, by dealing with online identity, is a great example of the abstractions that occur when moving to the online realm. In her reproduction of the list, "101 Ways to Tell if You're Japanese American," she outlines how race exists online in nuanced ways. Her analysis shows that the exchange of these lists in the community is a way to propagate stereotypes, redefine racial identity, and acknowledge political issues (Nakamura 123-128). The Identity Share Project hopes to promote some

of the occurrences that Nakamura has described by providing an environment that won't force a propagandistic view of identity relations, but rather will allow users to explore what it means to be an individual online. This may involve many users choosing to define themselves by preexisting stereotypes, but the system also allows for variation from these limiting categories.

Living Library Organisers Guide, by Ronni Abergel, Antje Rothemund, Gavan Titley, and Péter Wootsch

This is a publication that describes the history, intent, and details of the Living Library project. The project's underlying concept is to "Meet your own prejudice! Instead of talking about it, simply meet it" (Abergel et al. 5). By creating an open ended forum in which people can educate and make their own decisions, the Living Library project creates a positive experience for participants. The Identity Share Project aims to approach the problem of online identity in a somewhat similar manner. While not using fixed categories, where

The Identity Share Project: Research Approach cont.

users are forced to classify themselves, Identity Share promotes discussion around users' choices of classification and description.

Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences, by Geoferey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star

This book focuses on the social aspects of categorization and the implications that can arise from these groupings. The Identity Share Project, by reflecting and reworking the ways in which people are categorized and represented online, will be a tool that links social aspects to categorization. Bowker and Star's description of boundary objects can be applied to many of the applications within the Identity Share Project (Bowker & Star 293). By connecting people via descriptors and websites, elements from the internet serve as boundary objects between people that previously would have no connection. The site also allows for communities to be formed around these boundary objects.

The Identity Share Project is a set of web applications that resides at www.identityshare.net. The database for the site resides at the Google Apps site: <http://identityshare.appspot.com>. The database was constructed as an API written in Python for the Google Apps engine. This API is accessed via AJAX calls from browsers using identityshare.net. The API responds to these calls using JSON objects, allowing database insertion and queries to be made.

Much of the functionality of the site occurs in JavaScript using the JQuery plug-in. Other JavaScript plug-ins that are being used include the JQuery autocomplete plug-in, an md5 hash plug-in by Kevin van Zonneveld (<http://kevin.vanzonneveld.net>), and array intersect and difference functions by the JavaScript Lab (<http://www.jslab.dk/>). The browser sharing functionality was written as a Firefox extension, again using JQuery in the JavaScript calls. The Python database uses the texttime library by Björn Lindqvist, and the simplejson

encoder available at <http://code.google.com/p/simplejson/>.

Registration:

Users begin at the registration process (see wireframes pg. 23). Categories that other users have entered are available for new users to choose during registration. These categories are sorted from most commonly used to least commonly used. Users are required to choose at least five. After choosing these categories, users must fill out specific values for each. In order to maintain database consistency, existing values in the database are presented as a type-ahead drop down when users enter their details. After this, users are given the opportunity to add custom categories with which to define themselves. Finally, users must choose five categories that they believe best represent them out of all of their entered categories. These categories are marked as primary and will serve as the user's identifier.

Profile:

After registration or login users are taken to their profile page. This page lists all of their existing categories and allows for addition of new categories, deletion of categories, and editing of details and primaries. This page also allows a user to change their email address or password. Several other tabs aggregate the user's actions on the site. The "browsing" tab allows the user to view and delete shared browsing history. The "comments" tab allows the user to view and delete comments made by the user or made about the user. The "favorites" tab allows users to see their favorite users list, and delete or view a user. The "RSS feeds" tab lists all RSS feeds for the user and allows addition and deletion of feeds. The "communities" tab shows all of the communities that a user belongs to. The profile page is private and serves as the control panel for each user.

The main site hosts several sub-applications that use an individual's profile information, browsing history, and RSS feeds to create methods of

interaction. Currently, the following four sub-applications exist: Find a User, Communities, Follow a User, and RSS Feeds.

Find a User:

The Find a User application is a way to find users based on the information that they provide. The user-base can be searched in three ways: by category, by similarity to themselves, and by websites visited. Each search can include more than one filter and filters can include AND, OR, or NOT indicators.

Communities:

The Communities application is a way to find groups of users, based on the information that they provide, and form communities from these groups. The user-base can be queried in a similar manner to the Find a User application. Existing communities can be selected, and comments can be added to each community.

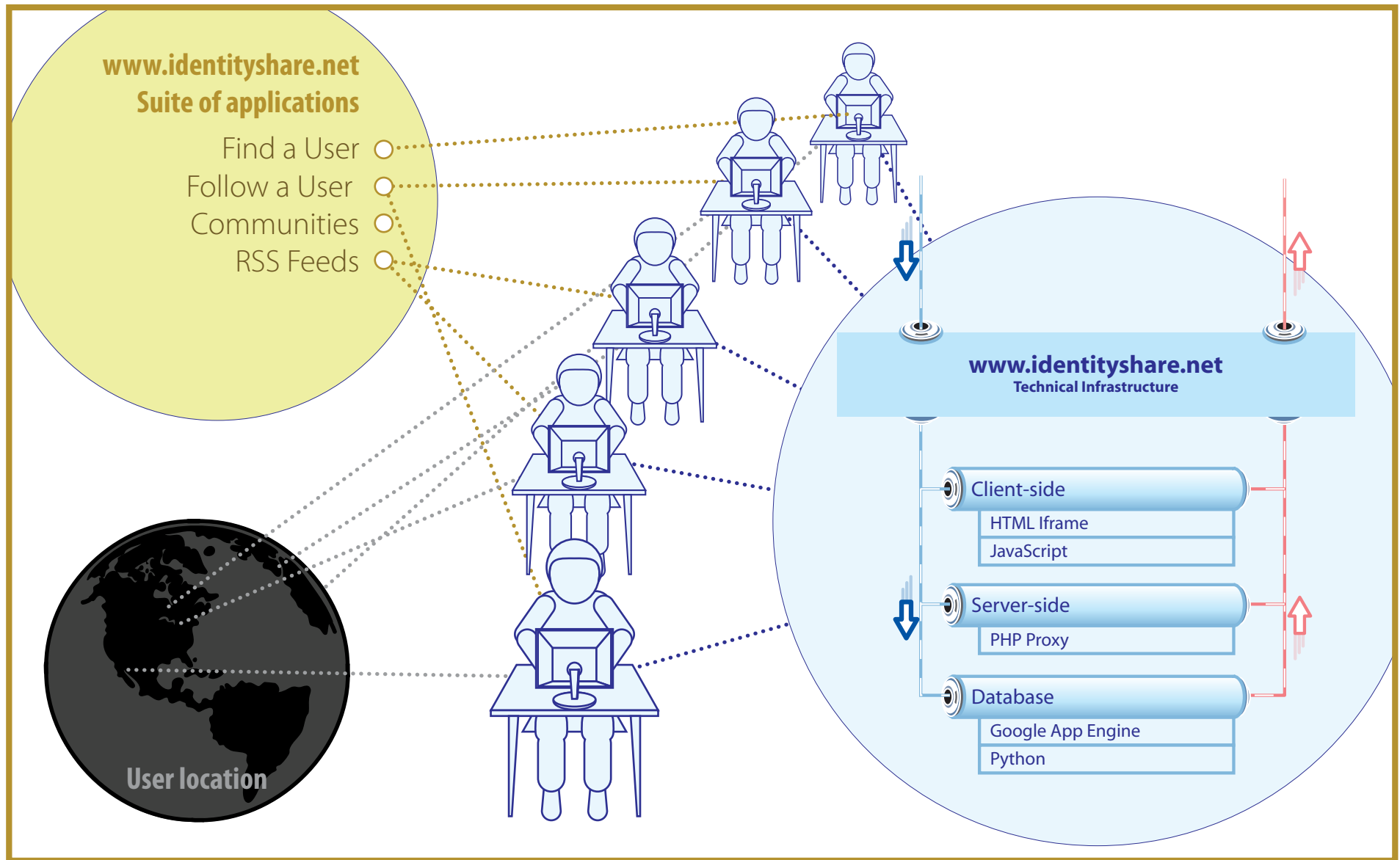
Follow a User:

The Follow a User application works in conjunction with a Firefox extension. It will allow users to follow another user while they browse, showing the websites that they are visiting in real-time (using the extension). This application was implemented using the HTML iframe tag. Users that share their browsing are listed in order from most recent sharing to least recent. Comments can be added to URLs attached to a users browsing history.

RSS Feeds:

The RSS Feeds application displays users who have entered RSS or ATOM feeds on their profile. After selecting a user, their feed list is displayed and feeds can open in a Google Gadget reader, which is embedded in the site. The feeds are attached to a users profile block, and therefore comments on the user's profile apply to feeds as well.

The Identity Share Project: System Diagram



The Identity Share Project: Technical Resources

Client Side

- HTML
- CSS
- JavaScript
- ⦿ Firefox Extension
- ⦿ JQuery
- ⦿ JQuery autocomplete
- ⦿ JS Lab Array functions

- Main Technology
- ⦿ Accessory

Server Side

- Google App Engine
- Python
- ⦿ texttime library
- ⦿ simplejson encoder

The Identity Share Project: Scenarios for Use



After leaving work Simon, a waiter, takes a shower and goes online. He checks out his news reader, looking at the new Mars pictures posted on the NASA feed, and then decides to log in to www.IdentityShare.net. He chooses to follow a self-labeled "Successful Real Estate Broker" to try and get a hint about what makes him tick. Real Estate has always been a passion of Simon's, although he hasn't yet received his license.

The frame on the website shows the man searching for Flash Games and then NASCAR. That's something Simon didn't expect. He thought that he could glean some sense of what successful people did or looked at, but he realizes a bit more that everybody is different and one aspect of their personality doesn't completely define them.

The Identity Share Project: Scenarios for Use, cont.

In his home in Los Angeles, Robert is surfing the Internet on a Friday morning. As a production assistant for Paramount, he has worked long hours during the week and finally has a chance to relax and browse the web for fun.

He stumbles across a blog posting about a website that allows users to learn about how other people experience the web and he decides to check it out. Upon arriving at www.IdentityShare.net, Robert selects "new user" and is intrigued by the profile he has to fill out.

Most online profiles will ask for a name, but he is provided with a set of interesting categories and many options for each. Under "Profession" he lists "Film Production Assistant." He is interested to see a "country of origin" box and can enter "Mexico," and the "Ethnicity" box will let him type in anything he wants, offering suggestions based upon what other users have entered. He selects "done" and is taken to the main site.



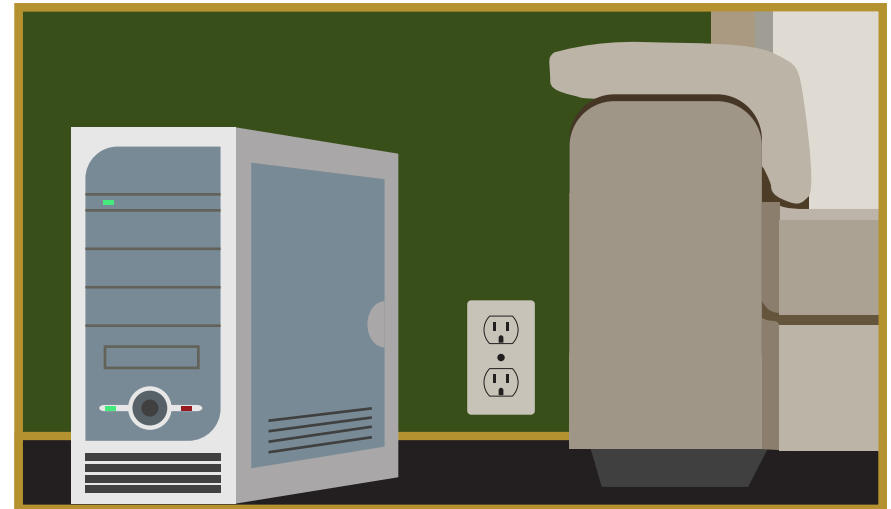
The Identity Share Project: Scenarios for Use, cont.

At her home in Montreal, Jasmine, an airline pilot, logs in to www.IdentityShare.net, a site she signed up for a couple days before. She is presented with a suite of applications that will let her explore the experiences of other people who use the site. Listed there are: "Find a User," "Follow a User," "Communities," and "RSS Feeds." She had downloaded a browser plug-in to share her web-browsing when she signed up.

Choosing "Find a User," she arrives at a page that gives some filtering options. As she selects "American," the number of people shown decreases and the "Top Defining Links" change to reflect the new demographic. Selecting "Southern," further narrows the top defining links. She selects "People with links in common with me" to see who shows up. Finally she clicks on a random user from the list of people displayed.

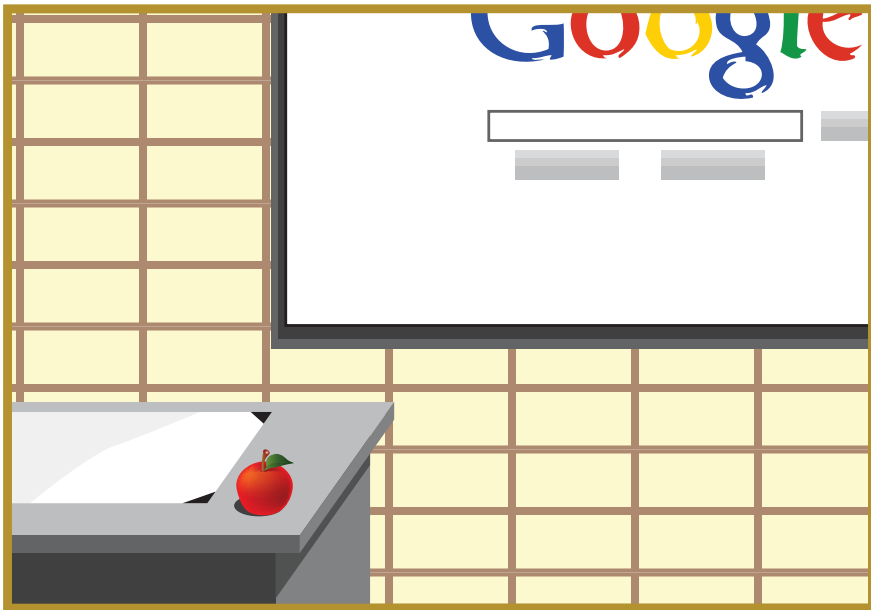
The selected user is a male, age 21, Chinese American, in Birmingham, Alabama, working as a waiter. The links that define him are a Crunch

Fitness site, the New York Times Website, and the same image feed from NASA that Jasmine has. It intrigues her to think that this 21 year old Chinese Southern American looks at the same images as her every day. She thinks about how it is different than watching the same television show, since they both sought out this one website among millions. She clicks "back" on her browser to search some more.



The Identity Share Project: Scenarios for Use, cont.

Matt, a teacher in Arizona, is showing his high school class a website, called www.IdentityShare.com. He explains that the website is about sharing your personal attributes with strangers and seeing how they use the Internet on an individual scale. He fills out the profile projected in front of the class, making them all laugh when he enters "25" for his age. Changing it back to the appropriate "52", Matt shows how a new description can be added to the hair category; in his case "none". Again the class laughs.



He explains how the site is a good way to show diversity and even similarity between strangers in the world. He clicks on "Follow a User" and is brought to a filtering page. He filters by region to show only people who are choosing to share their browsing experience in the Southwestern United States. Seven users are listed, so he tells the class that he'd like to select someone in the movie industry. He clicks on a "Film Production Assistant" in Los Angeles.

A frame opens up below the header and they can see the person in Los Angeles type in "www.google.com" and then type, "gifts ideas for anniversary," in the search box. The class watches as he reads through a Yahoo answers forum giving suggestions for gifts. Matt explains to the class that it seems funny because he was just searching for gifts online yesterday. The window changes to a Los Angeles Humane Society website and the user that they are following clicks on "Adopt a puppy." The class goes "awwww."

IdentityShare home | logout | activities | favorites | profile

Find a User Follow a User Identity Game Wish Lists Institutional ID

Selected User: Montreal, Canada | Female | Airline Pilot hide

Location: Montreal, Canada Gender: Female Occupation: Airline Pilot Favorite Color: Green Pets: Cat	Ethnicity: English Descent Relationship: Married Education: Bachelors Degree Hobby: Stamp Collecting Favorite Book: Oryx & Crake	Site: www.stamps.org Site: hubblesite.org Site: www.nitroplanes.com Site: www.lacrosse.ca
--	--	--

By category Similar to me **By Website**

Find people base on their profiles:

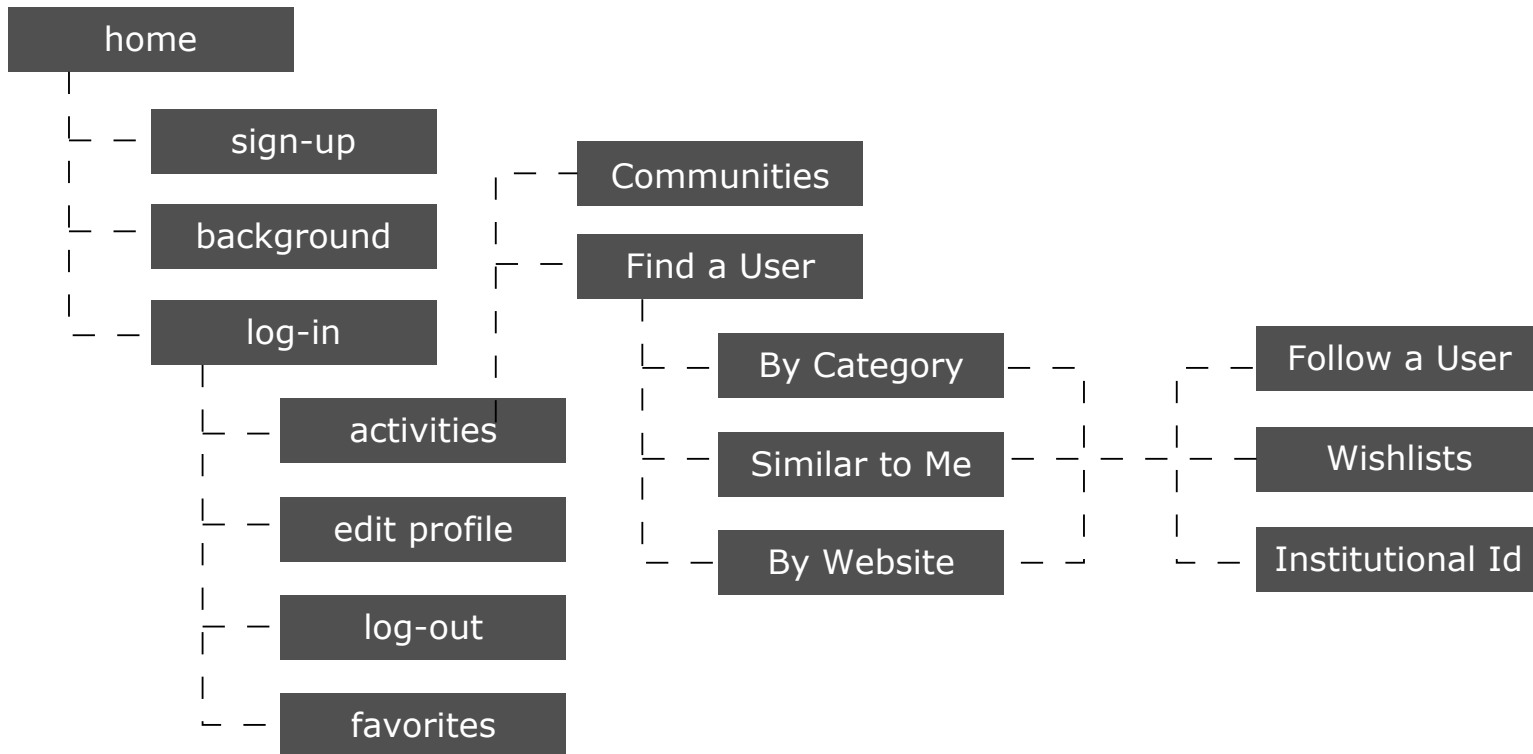
Select categories: location age oc occasional activities occupation oceans visited	Choose details: North America 39
---	---

Query: 4 Users

- Born in Kenya African American New York NY North America
- Waiter Chinese American Birmingham AL North America
- Airline Pilot Female Montreal QC North America**
- Limo Driver Middle-Aged Indianapolis IN North America

IdentityShare

Site Map:



IdentityShare

[home](#) | [login](#) | [sign-up](#) | [background](#)

New User:

Step 1

Step 2

Identity Share only collects information that defines you generally. We don't want your specific address or name. Your email address is for log-in only and will not be shown to others ([learn more](#))



Email:

Your email address is private and will serve as your log-in.

Email Address Blank

Please enter a valid email address.

Country:

Country of current residence.

Region:

Location of current residence.

Add categories to define me:

All Categories
Height
Weight
Favorite Color
Occupation



My Categories
Age
Gender
Birth Location
Ethnicity

Create a custom category

- Add -

Cancel

Continue

New User:

Step 1

Step 2

Identity Share only collects information that defines you generally.
We don't want your specific address or name. Your email address is for
log-in only and will not be shown to others ([learn more](#))

Fill in your categories:

<input type="text" value="Enter Location"/>
<input type="text" value="Enter Age"/>
<input type="text" value="Enter Height"/>
<input type="text" value="Enter Occupation"/>
<input type="text" value="Enter Gender"/>
<input type="text" value="Enter Favorite Color"/>
<input type="text" value="Enter Hair Color"/>
<input type="text" value="Enter Education"/>

Make Primary:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

My Favorite Websites:



Edit Profile:

Identity Share only collects information that defines you generally. We don't want your specific address or name. Your email address is for log-in only and will not be shown to others ([learn more](#))

	Edit your categories:	Primary:	Edit your favorite websites:
Location:	<input type="text" value="Tallahassee, Fl"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text" value="www.facebook.com"/> <input type="button" value="X"/>
Age:	<input type="text" value="27"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text" value="www.cnn.com"/> <input type="button" value="X"/>
Height:	<input "="" type="text" value="5'9\"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text" value="www.piratesinfo.com"/> <input type="button" value="X"/>
Occupation:	<input type="text" value="Used Car Salesman"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text" value="Add favorite websites"/> <input type="button" value="- Add -"/>
Gender	<input type="text" value="Male"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Favorite Color:	<input type="text" value="Blue"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Hair:	<input type="text" value="Brown"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Education:	<input type="text" value="Bachelors"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

IdentityShare

home | logout | activities | favorites | profile

Find a user

Find a user | Follow user | Identity Game | Wish Lists | Institutional ID

Selected User: Montreal, Canada | Female | Airline Pilot hide

Location: Montreal, Canada Gender: Female Occupation: Airline Pilot Favorite Color: Green Pets: Cat	Ethnicity: English Descent Relationship: Married Education: Bachelors Degree Hobby: Stamp Collecting Favorite Book: Oryx & Crake	Site: www.stamps.org Site: hubblesite.org Site: www.nitroplanes.com Site: www.lacrosse.ca
--	---	---

By category | Similar to me | By Website

Find people base upon their profiles:

Select categories: location | age | oc | occasional activities | occupation | oceans visited

Choose details: North America | 39

The system will automatically lookup charateristics that users have entered.

4 People With similar Sites:

- Birmingham | AL | Chinese American | Waiter
- Indianapolis | Indiana | 39 years old | Limo Driver
- Montreal | Canada | Female | Airline Pilot
- New York | New York | African American | Born in Kenya

Cancel | Continue

User's previously selected "defining characteristics", are used to identify them to others.

The wireframe shows the 'IdentityShare' logo at the top left. Navigation links include 'home | logout | activities | favorites | profile'. The main heading is 'Find a user', with buttons for 'Find a user', 'Follow user', 'Identity Game', 'Wish Lists', and 'Institutional ID'. A dark bar displays 'Selected User: Lyon, France | 39 Years Old | Karate Instructor' with a 'show' button. Below are tabs for 'By Category', 'Similar to me', and 'By Website'. The 'Similar to me' tab is active, showing a section 'Find people who are similar to you:'. Underneath, it says 'Select items from your profile:' and lists two categories: 'My Categories:' (Age, Gender, Birth Location, Ethnicity) and 'Sites that define me:' (www.craigslist.com, www.nytimes.com, hubblesite.org, www.stamps.org, www.stuffonmycat.com, www.ucla.edu, www.nitroplanes.com). To the right, a list titled '4 People With similar Sites:' shows four entries: 'Birmingham | AL | Chinese American | Waiter', 'Lyon | France | 39 years old | Karate Instructor' (highlighted), 'Montreal | Canada | Female | Airline Pilot', and 'New York | New York | African American | Born in Kenya'. A yellow callout box points to the highlighted entry with the text: 'User's previously selected "defining characteristics", are used to identify them to others.' At the bottom right are 'Cancel' and 'Continue' buttons.

Method

The Identity Share Project is an open-ended project that allows users to explore identity in meaningful ways. While the final outcome of the project may not be completely predictable, the success of the Identity Share Project will be evaluated by its usability and functionality to serve the purposes of allowing users to see others' identities and share their own identities online. Identity will be constrained to refer to a meaningful portion of information that allows users to express, in some manner, the type of person that they see themselves to be.

I have run a series of informal tests, in which users have signed up for the system, filled out profiles, and shared their browsing online. The feedback that I received from these informal tests helped to inform the design layouts and application flow of the sub-applications and site in its entirety. Because of the complexity and time involved in creating a working social network application, the site is currently considered to be in a functional

beta state with requirement for additional bug testing and iteration in the future.

Assessment

The project in order to be successful should easily register new users, allow for a clear method by which to discover strangers, and provide a suite of applications that will allow these strangers' identities to be revealed in a meaningful manner. This suite of applications will serve as a toolkit for discovery, rather than a direct intervention in the social perceptions of individuals.

Deliverables

I have created the following elements for the Identity Share Project:

- Database API: Residing on Google's App Engine system.
- User System: This includes a user profile, registration, and data control.
- Four Sub-Applications: Including Find a User, Communities, Follow a User, and RSS Feeds

Possibilities for Future Functionality

Following is a list of future capabilities that could further enhance the Identity Share Project:

- Creating summary reports based on all user information (for example, a listing of top visited URLs or most common categories).
- Searching users based on the type of websites that they visit (i.e. clothes, news, or games).
- Creating an RSS feed for each user's updates and comments.
- Displaying a chronological list of user actions (similar to Facebook's wall).
- Adding capability to contact others privately, via email (similar to Craigslist's contact functionality).

The Identity Share Project: References

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