Collaboration Tools, 2.0 Style

This chapter describes a number of tools that facilitate collaboration. Though many of these tools were not designed specifically for collaborative work in a library setting, users have creatively adapted them for that and a wide variety of other uses. This is not an exhaustive list—there are dozens of platforms with varying popularity available online, and new tools continue to emerge every day.

Calendars

Shared social calendars are single-purpose tools that can be used by groups to do many different things. They differ from regular calendars in that they are designed to be used by more than one person to keep a schedule. This makes them ideal for group use on a project. Many of the calendars that people already use to keep their schedules under control are social, though in many cases users might not even realize it. This situation solves, at least in part, the platform problem mentioned earlier. If people are already using a common calendar provider, then choosing what service to use to mark due dates, project milestones, or team meetings is pretty easy.

There are many social calendars out there to choose from, and many of them support importing data from another calendar service to help with the platform issue. Deciding on the particular calendar a given group wants to use will generally be a matter of deciding on which calendar service is used by the most people or is familiar to the most people. The eConsultant Web 2.0 directory contains a list of the top social calendar sites on its site.[1] This is a good resource for any group that is trying to determine which platform to use in order to share scheduling information.

A good calendar solution for a group will have a number of specific features that make it easy to share and reuse the data. One important feature for collaborative use is a data feed. RSS (or XML) data feeds allow you to put your calendar data into your feed reader and get notifications of upcoming dates and events. Because RSS is an XML standard, it is a prime candidate for data reuse—you can embed an RSS feed into a webpage or repurpose the data in a number of different ways. Another feature that is handy is support for the iCalendar (or iCal) standard (see figure 6). This standard, according to Wikipedia, enables the sending or receiving of calendar data through e-mail. You can send an e-mail request for people to attend a meeting at a particular time and, when the prospective attendees respond, the data goes directly into the calendar.[2] It also allows for publishing free/busy information about a person's schedule, which helps make scheduling meetings easier; collaborators can easily identify mutual periods of availability. This, of course, requires that the calendar be kept up-to-date. A social calendar should also give users ability to share a calendar easily with a group, the ability to export data easily, and some sort of easy reminder function, such as SMS or text message reminders.

One of the top sites on eConsultant's list is 30 Boxes. It has RSS and iCal feeds, the ability to share a calendar with a group, easy exporting, and SMS reminders. It also does quite a bit more, like keep track of data entered in other calendars that support the iCal standard. If a group is using a number of different social calendars, all of which put out data in iCal, users can combine all of those calendars into a single calendar at 30 Boxes. All of these features give project teams the ability to create calendars that work for them—team members can maintain their own personal calendars and just provide data, or everyone can use a 30 Boxes calendar and share their

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Figure 6
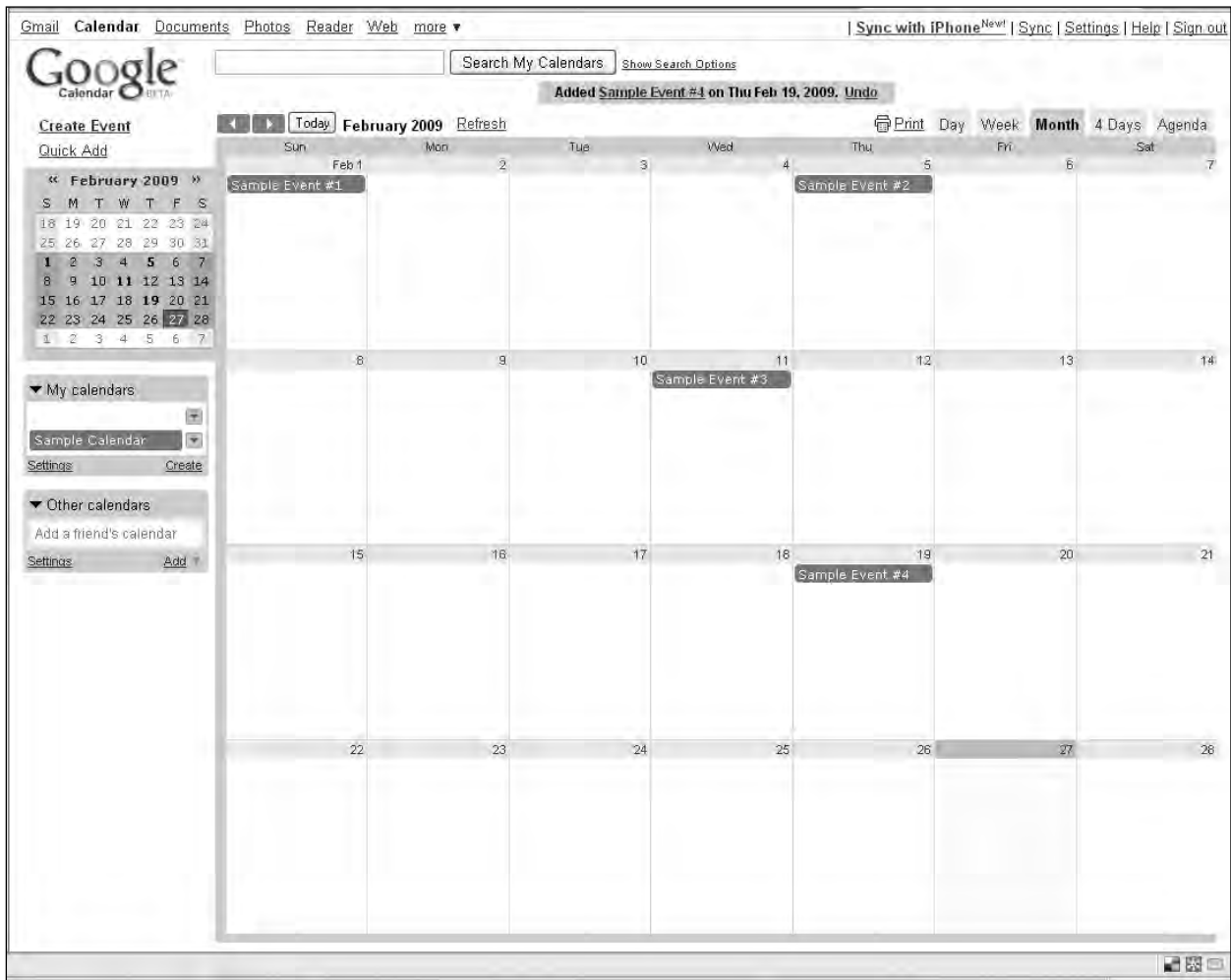Google provides support for both XML and iCal.

Figure 7
A Google calendar.

calendars with each other. Either way, this is a platform that can give a team easy access to due dates, milestones, common free times for meetings, and more.

The terms of service statement (ToS) for 30 Boxes can be found on the site. The short version of that long document is that the 30 Boxes service requires that users be responsible for their usernames and passwords and, accordingly, responsible for any content posted under their accounts. The ToS includes a list of prohibited activities (hacking into other accounts, violating spam laws, etc.), and it makes clear that each user is solely responsible for the content he or she posts. The service does, however, reserve the right to reuse content, but only for the purpose for which it was submitted in the first place. Finally, 30 Boxes declares that it is not to be held responsible for any loss of data that may happen while using the service. This is a pretty standard agreement for a free service that is hosted on the Web.

Like 30 Boxes, Google's online calendar service (see figure 7) includes all of the features listed above. Because of the popularity of the Google application suite, many people already have a Google Calendar available to them, even if they are not yet using it. Google offers users the ability to have multiple calendars on a single account and to share those calendars independently. The team leader can create a calendar in his or her personal account, share it with teammates, and not risk giving out the "keys" to a personal calendar that might also be on that account. Like 30 Boxes, Google Calendar supports embeddable calendars—displays that can be put, with just a line or two of code, into a team webpage and used to keep team members aware of upcoming dates.

Google Calendar's ToS is very similar to the one at 30 Boxes and is standard for all Google applications, including Google Docs and Google Groups. It also requires users to keep their passwords safe—users are solely responsible for any content uploaded. Google acknowledges that it has no rights to the content that individuals post, but it also states it is not charged with enforcing protection of its users' rights. If a user's content is stolen, the user, not Google, is responsible for rectifying the situation. Google does reserve the right to utilize its users' content for promotional purposes. In order to prevent this type of use, you must notify Google explicitly, in writing, that you do not wish your content to be used. Because Google claims no responsibility for lost data, it is imperative that users back up data that has been uploaded for use with Google's services.

Either of these calendars—or just about any of the other seventeen on the eConsultant list—will work very well with a team that is using 2.0 tools to collaborate. They can be embedded in Facebook profile pages or on wiki pages and used with any number of communication methods to keep a team updated and aware of what is going on.

Social Networking Sites

As we already know, social networks have become so popular that in a given library, it is likely that there are already some experienced users of some of these networks among the staff. Through their websites, these networks offer a lot of different tools that collaborative teams can use in organizing and working on projects. Most social networking sites now offer some sort of application that lets third party developers create custom applications for people with accounts on that site to use. Others are highly customizable and let groups pick and choose which features they want to make active and which ones they might not use at all. All of them help to facilitate communication among team members by giving a team a single place to post information and updates.

Facebook is one of the most popular of the social networking sites, and the one to choose if some of the team already have Facebook accounts. To use Facebook as a collaborative platform, users must take advantage of some of the platform's custom features. Facebook contains message boards and IM tools, so the communication part is taken care of natively. In order to share documents, schedules, and time lines, it may be necessary to use a secondary application.

The Get Stuff Done application is one of the best and most popular tools for collaborative work on Facebook. Once you install this application, you can invite the rest of your teammates to use it. It provides document storage capabilities, photo-sharing capabilities, its own "wall" area (an area on the page where people can post comments for everyone to see and comment upon themselves) for group notices, and a nice to-do list that will help keep team members on track. This application is based on the Getting Things Done (GTD) philosophy outlined in David Allen's book *Getting Things Done* and uses the GTD method to keep track of project tasks.[3] This philosophy works well for collaborative teams as well as for individuals.

The Facebook ToS requires that all users be 13 years old or older and strongly suggests that 13- to 17-year-olds seek parental consent before creating a page. This is unique because of the vast age range of people who are interested in social networking sites. Facebook also requires that each user be responsible for the security of his or her own account information and that all personal data (information in a personal profile) be up-to-date and accurate at all times. The ToS includes a list of both prohibited conduct and prohibited content.

Facebook's ToS is also unique in the way that it deals with third-party software. Facebook takes no responsibility for any non-Facebook application that may damage data or a computer. Like all of the other services described thus far, Facebook reserves the right to use your content. Unlike the other services, however, it reserves the right to use that data for any purpose, including promotional materials. This could be a sticking point for some legal departments.

Facebook
www.facebook.com

Get Stuff Done application for Facebook
http://apps.new.facebook.com/getstuffdone/project
.php?id=86820

www.facebook.com/apps/application.
php?id=8449172630

Facebook ToS
www.facebook.com/terms.php?ref=pf

Social networking sites like Ning and LinkedIn are part of a growing trend among newer networks. These sites are built with collaborative and professional use in mind. They are highly customizable and can act as private networks for groups. They allow group members a private

Figure 8
A sample social networking site on Ning.

communication channel where they can share documents; share multimedia content like photos, audio, and video; send messages; and chat via instant message.

Ning includes the ability to create a completely public social network site, a completely private site, or anything in between (see figure 8). Users can make some of their data and interactions private while making others public. The amount of data to be made public or private is highly customizable. Ning is a fantastic tool for teams that want to make certain elements of their work public while having a private channel for team business.

Ning has one of the longer ToSs of the collaborative platforms discussed in this report. The Content section of the document starts with a statement that Ning in no way claims ownership of user content. It does, however, reserve the right to use member content for the purpose of operating the system (displaying a user's content to them and to those they choose to make it available to), internal business purposes, and gathering metrics for use in advertising. Ning also reserves the right to make and keep archival copies of content even after users stop using the service. Ning's ToS has the standard Acceptable Use clause that lays out the conduct that is acceptable for use of the service, and Ning denies any responsibility for damage or loss of user data on its servers or network.

Ning
www.ning.com

Ning ToS
http://about.ning.com/tos.php

Bookmarking

Social bookmarking services provide teams with a handy place to store references to online resources and tools that they might need. Delicious is easily the most popular of these services. Bookmarking platforms like Delicious give users a way to bookmark and organize websites that they like, access them from any computer, and share them with other users. Bookmarks are organized with one-word tags that users apply to each site that they save.

Almost all social bookmarking tools give teams a place to store references, handy links, and other important information. This information can be tagged for easy retrieval later, and at Delicious those tags can be bundled into groups for even easier organization. All social bookmarking services offer RSS feeds, and some offer application programming interfaces (APIs) that allow users to manipulate in many different ways the information that they put into the service.
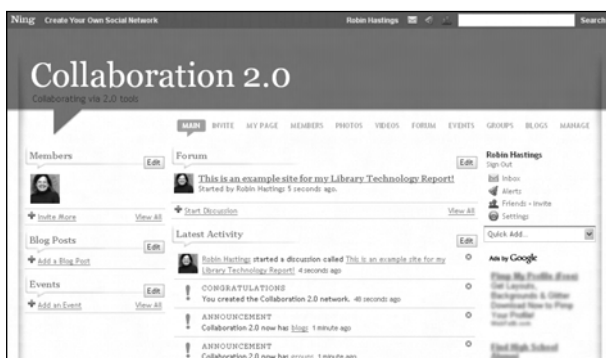
Social bookmarking offers the ability to create a network within the service that team members can use to share links and information with one another easily. These sites allow team members a way to quickly accumulate, store, and organize resources relevant to their work. The ability to tag each link makes organization of your resources pretty easy, as long as everyone agrees on a tagging scheme. While social bookmarking sites might not be able to provide all of the tools that a team needs, they can add value to the other tools that are chosen for the project.

The ToS at Delicious is fairly short. It contains the standard user responsibility clause that states that users are responsible for anything posted to their account, as well as the standard disclaimer of ownership of content that users post. The document also grants Delicious permission to use the data in connection with its affiliates—whether links and data have been marked as private or not. Finally, Delicious also will not take responsibility for lost data put into the service, so backing up bookmarks stored in Delicious is still a good policy. The website contains applications that allow users to transfer bookmarks between their Delicious account and their Web browsers.

Delicious
http://delicious.com

Delicious ToS
http://delicious.com/help/terms

While Delicious is the most popular social bookmarking tool, there are other, more specialized bookmarking sites available to those doing collaborative work. One site called Connotea is more of an online reference management service for researchers. For librarians working with researchers, clinicians, or scientists, familiarity with Connotea may be more important than with Delicious—and it may be a better choice for a project if it is what patrons are using as well. Another service very similar to Connotea is CiteULike, which is also aimed at the scientific community. If a project involves working with scientists or researchers, either Connotea or CiteULike might be a better choice than Delicious to manage your references, links, and other information.

Connotea
www.connotea.org

CiteULike
www.citeulike.org

Wikis

Wikis are software applications that are installed on a server and provide tools for groups to collaboratively author, edit, revise, and publish documents. A wiki, then, appears as a webpage that users who are granted appropriate access can easily expand and modify by logging into their account (see figure 9). The most popular wiki, of course, is Wikipedia. Some organizations that create wikis have the capability to host them internally. The software on which Wikipedia runs, MediaWiki, is a commonly used platform for wikis that are internally hosted. There are also services available for remote wiki hosting. These services allow groups to quickly create an account and have the features of a wiki immediately available.

Wikipedia
www.wikipedia.org

MediaWiki
www.mediawiki.org

Wetpaint and PBwiki are two popular hosted solutions for group wikis. For organizations that need to keep their data internal, a internally hosted solution like MediaWiki can give them the tools they need inside their firewall. For groups that need to have a more central and accessible wiki, Wetpaint and PBwiki offer levels of access to each account that give groups some control over who can read, edit, and administer each wiki that is created.

Wetpaint
www.wetpaint.com

PBwiki
www.pbwiki.com

Wikis facilitate the process of document creation when used in collaborative group work. They not only offer a collaborative space in which to create documents, but almost always provide ways to roll back documents to previous versions, compare versions of a document to see who made what changes, and offer discussion tools attached to each document that give groups the ability to discuss a document outside of the document itself. Remotely hosted wikis often include extra features such as the ability to comment on a page without needing an account (if the permissions for that page allow it) and file storage areas for documents that can be created outside the wiki or for supporting assets like graphics or other files.
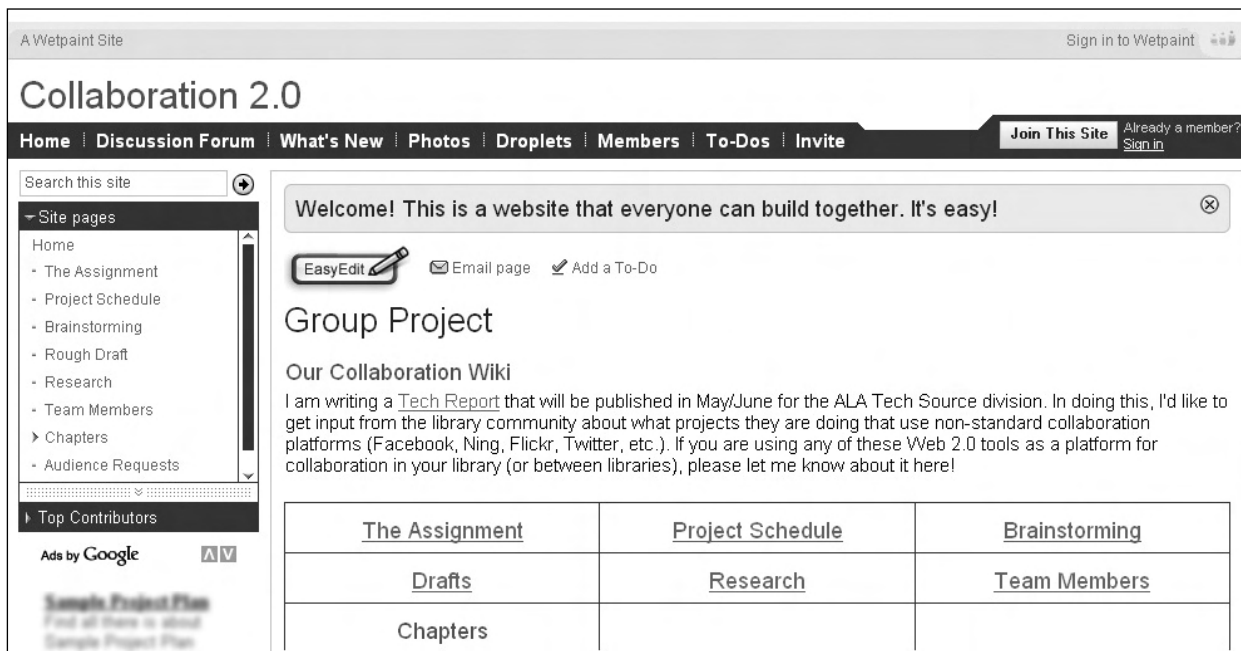
Figure 9
A Wetpaint wiki.

Wetpaint's ToS is mostly a standard agreement. It begins with a claim of no responsibility for anything users might post–they take all responsibility for that. The document also says that while Wetpaint provides a "private" option to its users, it cannot be responsible for hackers who might access the data, so users will have to use those privacy options at their own risk. This is true of most of the services that are in this report, with the exception of the internally hosted groupware discussed in the next chapter. If users need assurances that their data will be private, they may decide to host the data themselves so that they can be sure that they take steps that meet their needs to protect it.

Wetpaint's take on the use of your data is a bit different, though. It specifically claims an Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike Creative Commons (CC) license for everything it displays on its site. This means that if users are not comfortable with a CC license for their documents and the information they put on their wiki, they may decide not to use Wetpaint. The ToS also contains the standard claim of nonresponsibility for any loss of data through the use of the service.

PBwiki has a very interesting English summary of its ToS on its terms page. The summary of the summary is that PBwiki doesn't own user content, that it will defend user secrets as best it can, and that it doesn't do any policing of content, but if the police ask the service to remove data (for copyright infringement, for example), it will. The terms continue with a notice that while the network may have some down time, the service will try to avoid that situation. They end with two requests: that users not sue the service because they prefer to code software instead of defending lawsuits, and that companies using PBwiki regularly pay for the premium version. This, despite the cute phrasing, is pretty much standard fare. The service still reserves the right to display, alter, modify, and so on, user content so that it can be displayed to visitors–just like every other ToS that we have looked at so far. The document also claims no responsibility for loss of data.

Documents

The social documents category includes services like Google Docs (see figure 10) and Zoho Office. These applications give you the ability to create documents with many of the same features (revision tracking, commenting, etc.) that wikis offer, but they also provide more in the way of formatting options and in file format compatibility. Both Google and Zoho can read and write in the major office suite file formats (Microsoft Word, Open Office, etc.), and both let you save documents in the PDF file format, as well as others. They also make sharing documents with others very easy, which is why they are included in the list of social applications. Google and Zoho both offer word processing, spreadsheets, and presentation software options, and Zoho also offers many other business applications as well. Google's big advantage is that if you have a Google account, you already have access to the Docs application and can use it with your existing account credentials.

> *Google Docs*
> http://docs.google.com
>
> *Zoho Office*
> www.zoho.com

See the section on the Google Calendar for information about the Google Docs and Spreadsheet Terms of Service—all of Google's properties have the same terms, so if you look at one, you have looked at them all.

Social document-sharing sites like these give teams the opportunity to share not only text-based documents like RTF or TXT files, but also spreadsheet documents with financial information or presentation documents for a meeting. These sites allow users to create documents that are similar to what can be created with Microsoft Office, but the documents are stored on the site's server where they can be modified by anyone who is given permission by the original creator. Zoho also offers other office suite functions, such as a shared database and a project-management feature. Some of the extras in the Zoho suite cost money for multiple users, but the basics are free, just as they are in the Google application suite.

The Zoho ToS is different from those of most of the applications we have seen so far—it includes a clause about beta services that Zoho might offer. Users are cautioned that these features may not work as well or as regularly as the normal, tested portions of the site. Zoho claims absolutely no ownership of user data, but unlike many other services, it also claims no rights to use user data in marketing. Zoho disclaims any responsibilities toward data loss, though, and requires that all user-generated content be legal. Otherwise, the Zoho ToS may be more hands-off than the Google Docs ToS, and as such, may be a better choice for certain organizations.

> *Zoho ToS*
> www.zoho.com/terms.html

Blogs

Blogs give teams an easy communication tool with commenting and discussion components built in (see figure 11). As with wikis, there are both internal and remotely hosted options. WordPress actually offers both types of services. Software for internal hosting is available, as is remote hosting through WordPress's server. Either way an administrator decides to go, the WordPress blogging platform is a standard and something that most people who are familiar with blogs will be able to use easily. As with wikis, if users want to keep their data inside their firewall, installing the internally hosted version of WordPress will
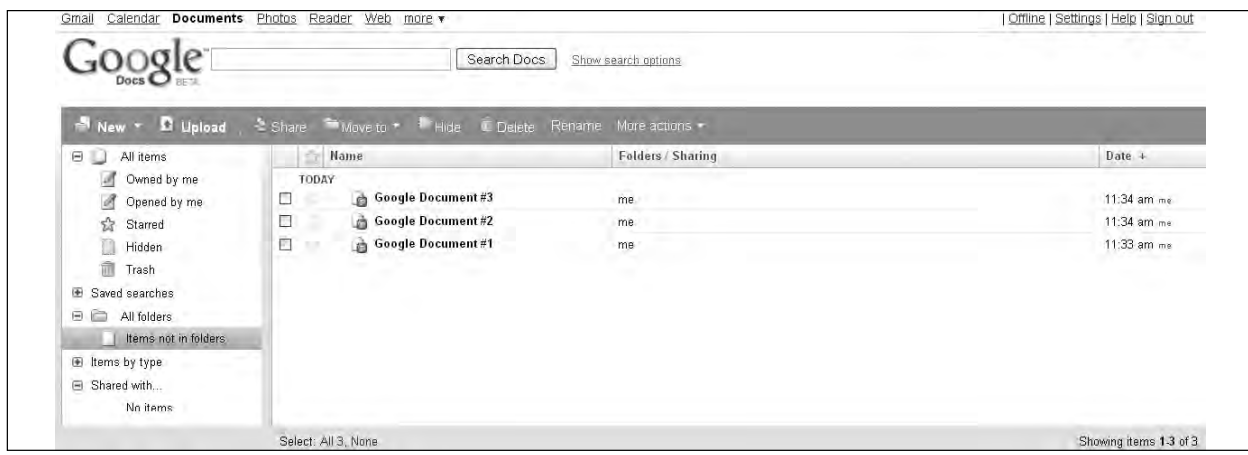

Figure 10
The user interface for Google Docs.

allow them to do that. If users want to collaborate with people outside of their organization, getting a group blog at the WordPress site will be easy and convenient.

Blogs are useful tools for a group to use for internal communications or to publish status reports for external audiences. They automatically organize themselves into chronological order, so they provide a great way to keep track of what is going on in the project by a time line. WordPress, because it is one of the most popular platforms for blogs, also offers a vast number of plugins (small applications users can install into their WordPress blog to perform specific functions—see the sidebar for more information) for users who are using the internally hosted version. The remotely hosted version includes some plugins, but users do not have the number of choices that they can get with an internally hosted blog.

The WordPress.com ToS also has a little summary at the top, similar to PBwiki's ToS. The gist of the agreement is that WordPress wants users to use the platform, so it has been designed to provide as much control and ownership of data as possible. Of course, WordPress still asks that users post responsibly and includes a list of prohibited items (other people's copyrighted work, spam, libelous content, etc.) that is not allowed. WordPress also claims the right to redisplay user work, but only for that user's blog or the promotion of that blog—not for general marketing purposes. Finally, there are the usual disclaimers that every service has of taking no responsibility for loss of data. WordPress.org—the internally hosted solution—can be used as users see fit and, because it is open source software, has only a very liberal usage license, as opposed to a true ToS like the remotely hosted options mentioned previously.

Figure 11
The GIL collaborative blog.

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WordPress Plugins

WordPress is designed with "hooks" in the program that allow third-party developers to create functionality for the blogging platform and share it easily. Plugins require only that you download the files, upload them to your server (in the plugins directory that has already been created for you), and then go into the admin backend of your blog and click a link to activate the plugin. You can find a huge number of plugins on the WordPress site at the Plugin Directory: http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins. Some of those may fit your needs perfectly, depending on what your group wants to do.

Miscellaneous Sites

There are a number of different kinds of social media sites that can be useful for group projects of any type. From microblogging tools like Twitter to lifestreaming tools like FriendFeed to picture- and image-sharing tools such as Flickr, there are a number of different ways that social tools can be used by collaborative groups.

Microblogging

Twitter is the standard microblogging application. Microblogging consists of very short messages (short enough to support the 140–160 character limit for SMS or text messaging applications on cell phones) sent to people who "follow" your account. Its popularity has skyrocketed in recent years and appears to be continuing.[4] Followers also have an account and can send their own microblog messages. Two people who follow each other can engage in short-form communication via the microblogging application. Twitter is useful for status updates within a group or for sending out quick questions to poll the "hive mind" of all of the people who follow a given user.

Twitter's ToS is pretty basic. You must be at least 13 years old to get an account; users are responsible for anything that is posted under their screen name; you must not harass other Twitter users; you must not use Twitter for illegal purposes; you are responsible for your conduct and your data; you must not try to hack, spam, or introduce a virus into Twitter; and you must not violate the laws in your area through the use of Twitter. Any violation of these terms will result in Twitter closing down the account.

Lifestreaming

Lifestreaming is the process of pulling together multiple Web 2.0 applications and displaying all of the activity on those applications in one spot. FriendFeed is one of the more popular lifestreaming application in use today and is very popular in the library community. FriendFeed not only aggregates all of the content from the various services your team may be using, but it can do it in a room, either public or private, so that there is a specific URL on the FriendFeed site that contains all of the updates from all of the services that are in use by all of a group's members in one place.

FriendFeed's ToS is short—just a license to use the service, a note on user responsibility, a quick discussion of FriendFeed's rights to its own intellectual property and its intent to comply with notices of copyright infringement, and finally, a claim of no responsibility for any data lost on the service.

Flickr

Flickr is a photo-sharing service with social aspects (see figure 12). Flickr enables users to join groups and make other individuals their contacts, or friends. This is a great way to store both pictures for a group and graphics that might be useful—any JPG, GIF, or PNG file can be stored on Flickr. Because of Flickr's use of Creative Commons licensing, many of the images uploaded by other people may be available for free use. Often the attribution license is the only one applied to images that are uploaded so that any use of the image is allowed as long as credit is given to the original photographer. This means that Flickr could be a good source of images for a project, even if the group isn't using it to store their own images.
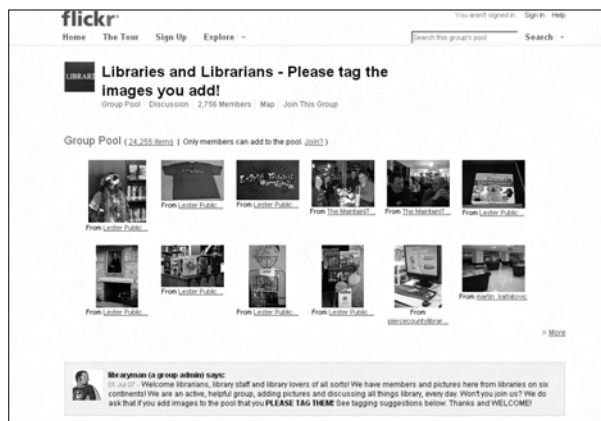
Figure 12
Flickr is a popular online photo-sharing site with collaborative capability.

Flickr is owned by Yahoo!, so Flickr's ToS is the Yahoo! ToS. The general structure of the Flickr ToS is the same as many of the others mentioned so far: the service requires certain behavior from its users, and it provides no guarantees that your data will be available at a given time. One area of difference is the fact that Flickr does not prescreen any of the images put up on the site, but reserves the right to remove any image that violates the ToS. For photos and graphics uploaded to the Yahoo! network (Flickr, for example), Yahoo! retains the right to display user images, but only for the purpose for which they were put up in the first place—to share with contacts and friends.

Notes

1. "Top 19 Full List of Social Event Calendar Sites," Technical Lists:eConsultant,July5,2007,http://lists.econsultant.com/top-full-list-of-social-event-calendar-websites.html (accessed March 17, 2009).
2. "iCalendar," Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ICalendar (accessed March 17, 2009).
3. David Allen, *Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity* (New York: Penguin, 2002).
4. "Twitter Grows Fastest, MySpace Still the Social King," Nielsen Wire, Oct. 23, 2008, http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/online_mobile/leading-social-networking-sites-still-growing (accessed Feb. 24, 2009).