Report on TagTeam
December 2012 - November 2013

Project summary

TagTeam is an open-source, social-tagging platform and feed aggregator. It goes beyond existing tools in the same categories in two large ways.

First, it supports what we call *interoperable tagging*. It accepts tags from any tagging platform that generates RSS feeds for its tags, for example, CiteULike and Delicious. It accepts those tags by subscribing to their feeds, and publishing its own integrated or unified feeds for TagTeam readers. Social-tagging projects no longer need to restrict their participants to just one tagging platform.

Second, it allows manual and automated modification of tags. This is true both for tags from TagTeam users and tags from users of other platforms whose feeds are imported into TagTeam. This feature allows user-defined tags to evolve into convergent, consensus tags under the direction of project managers. We call this *folksonomy in, ontology out*. Crowd-sourced tagging projects no longer need to choose between the freedom of user-defined tags and the utility of a standard vocabulary. They can have the best of both worlds.

TagTeam has two natural real-world applications. First, it allows a group working on a common topic to tag new developments on their topic, and use the resulting feeds as an alert service for others interested in the topic. The alerts are feeds in RSS, Atom, or JSONP, but these can easily be converted to email feeds, Twitter feeds, or other formats, through freely available mash-up tools. Second, TagTeam allows a group working on a common topic to organize knowledge on that topic by tagging new and old web resources with tags representing subtopics. A project could provide both of these real-world benefits at the same time. The topic could be any single topic at all or any cluster of topics. And the group could be a hand-picked team or a open-ended crowd of cooperating participants.

I developed TagTeam primarily to support the Open Access Tracking Project (OATP) for both the purposes just mentioned, as a real-time alert service and as a database to organize knowledge of the field. TagTeam works so well that I moved OATP from Connotea to TagTeam in September 2012, and have used TagTeam as the OATP platform ever since. Most of the program's features and enhancements have been suggested by this real-world use of the program. However, I was very conscious that any program serving the needs of OATP would serve the needs of social-tagging projects on any topic, and deliberately developed it as a tool of general utility for tag-based and crowd-sourced projects of any kind. This view has been confirmed by the fact that today more than 50 independent projects are running on TagTeam.

Accomplishments

TagTeam 1.0 launched in June 2012, and had the basic functionality to support a social-tagging project on any topic. It incorporated both "interoperable tagging" and "folksonomy in, ontology out". It proved that these concepts could work and could operate at scale. TagTeam 1.2 launched

in February 2013, adding new stability, a cleaner user interface, and a much more powerful search engine.

The latest version TagTeam will launch this month, November 2013. (We haven't yet decided on the version number.) Its major new features include the following:

* Project managers can now view project tags in alphabetical order and order of popularity, helping them decide on tag modifications to support their evolving project ontology.

* Projects can now publish user-based feeds as well tag-based feeds.

* Projects can now also publish "remix" feeds based on an arbitrary boolean combination of tags, keywords, and input feeds.

* Every search now has a unique URL, and can be saved as an element in a remix feed.

* Feed URLs now indicate the projects to which they belong with intelligible nicknames rather than unintelligible numbers.

* The program now has a cleaner way to display all the projects running at the same time, enabling it to scale up and support more projects without confusing users.

* The program will soon have terms of service, written with the input of the Legal Clinic at the Law School and Berkman Center. The program already links to an external file where I can place the terms of service when the clinic and I finish them.

Next steps

TagTeam is now at a major plateau, allowing robust real-world use. Other projects began adopting it when we released version 1.2 last year, with minimal promotion on our part. With the new version we'll be ready to recruit many more adoptors and support a larger variety of projects.

TagTeam still needs good documentation. The program is powerful, and so far we've written little to help new and potential users appreciate that power or understand how to use it. During the showcase year, we'd like support to create an online manual and improve the built-in help system.

TagTeam still needs some minor bug fixes and fine-tuning. In this showcase year we don't expect to add major features, but we would like support for minor enhancements.

Finally, we'd like support for promoting TagTeam to potential users.

Publicity for TagTeam

Here are my blog posts on TagTeam since last year (November 2012):

* On a technical detail in the Open Access Tracking Project transition from Connotea to TagTeam, November 2012
https://plus.google.com/b/106186030764599769426/106186030764599769426/posts/3cQ5EKaSWEZ

* On the milestone 20,000 items in the Open Access Tracking Project, December 14, 2012
https://plus.google.com/+PeterSuber/posts/3EEsu4rRUEL

* On the imminent launch of TagTeam 1.2, February 26, 2013
https://plus.google.com/b/106186030764599769426/109377556796183035206/posts/9g6LNpPsQxX

* On the launch of TagTeam 1.2, February 27, 2013
https://plus.google.com/+PeterSuber/posts/UyiWmieR2ZE

* On TagTeam as an alternative to Connotea and Reader (a few days after Connotea closed and Google announced the July closure of Reader), March 15, 2013
https://plus.google.com/+PeterSuber/posts/126D9qw6jHW

* Repost of the previous post recommending TagTeam as an alternative to Google Reader (two days before Google Reader was scheduled to shut down), June 29, 2013
https://plus.google.com/+PeterSuber/posts/EvjBccY5aUX

* On the milestone of 25,000 items in the Open Access Tracking Project, August 6, 2013
https://plus.google.com/+PeterSuber/posts/RuJt8LUiPky

* On the limitations of the Twitter version of the OATP feed and the advantages of using other versions of the feed directly from TagTeam, October 6, 2013
https://plus.google.com/b/106186030764599769426/+PeterSuber/posts/VvX6ojnUSTK

Here are some other ways in which TagTeam has been publicized in the last year.

In the December 2012 issue of my newsletter, I summarized many of my then-recent announcements about the transition of the Open Access Tracking Project from Connotea to TagTeam.
http://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/10055732/12-02-12.html?sequence=2#housekeeping

Andrea Bernard, my research assistant and a major TagTeam user, presented TagTeam at the Annotations @ Harvard workshop on March 28, 2013.
http://www.darthcrimson.org/annotations/

Justin Clark, one of the TagTeam developers, presented TagTeam at the Library Lab Lightning Round on July 11, 2013, and Andrea Bernard presented it the Library Lab Showcase on November 5, 2013. I could not be in Cambridge on either day.

Dan Jones filmed an interview with me about TagTeam on August 27, 2013.

I've also continued to revise my online handout introducing TagTeam to new users.
http://bit.ly/tagteam-intro

When we release the new version of TagTeam later this month, I'll blog the event, describe the new features, invite new users, and update my online handout.

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