

Webmarks: Revisiting the notion of bookmarks toward contextualized reference on the Web

Nicolas Delaforge

In the early days of the web, we were many to think that we were witnessing the advent of the giant global library. This librarian vision led to a modeling of web content (pages) which was propitious to the development of web tools, concepts and terms directly inherited from the paradigm of documentation. With web applications, web 2.0 and the rise of social web applications, the nature of the web evolved considerably and eventually the documentary vision of it became obsolete or at best very much confined. However, some remnants of this ancient metaphor remain and one of their best representatives certainly is the bookmark.

On the web, every resource is accessed by an URL. By analyzing both the technical and editorial web specificities we show that the web is not, from our definition, a documentary space. Due to their documentation legacy, bookmarks are built on top of the old archivist principle "access to support give access to content" and they should be reconsidered as well. For instance, as web pages are dynamically generated, the transposition of this principle to the web gives a drastically different result: "access to support potentially generates a new content at every access". In fact, on the web, a bookmark does not give access to a content. It is more like a road sign that points to a web place where something is happening.

We believe we can improve the traditional bookmark system by a deeper understanding of the true nature of the web. Starting again from the documents of the W3C Technical Architecture Group (TAG), we propose a model of the web as a superposition of three spaces: the web pages, web of data and web of services. Then we focus on the inherent intentionality behind the act of marking a URL and we show that in most cases, the original intention has nothing to do with the initial documentary practice of book-marking. We finally propose a definition of what we called "webmarks" which allows us to envision innovative and contemporary applications.

We suggest to define several Webmark types: a reference mark, a location mark, an application mark. Each of these marks should be managed in a specific way, with dedicated tools offering adequate functionalities. A "Reference Mark" can be scrapped from the web and stored on a server. Then a stable access and a referenceable URL could be guaranteed. A "Location Mark" is used when a user wants to mark a social place, like a pin on a map. We could propose a personal web map of the user's social web and provide notifications when social activities are detected. An "Application Mark" works more like a shortcut on a Web desktop. It could be placed on a personal dashboard for instance and other specific services can be proposed according to their public API (Google Maps, Facebook...).