

Opinion

Topic maps revisited

By Lynda Rathbone



A FEW months ago I wrote about topic maps and how online classification techniques and technologies are enjoying significant uptake by organisations. In case you missed that article, topic maps are an open standard for capturing knowledge in the form of topics (people, places, projects, companies etc), the connections between these topics (associations) and the relationship these topics have to pieces of information, such as web pages, documents etc.

Topic maps can help you organise and find information over vast information corpuses as well as capturing the details and nuances of subtle knowledge models. From building richer information websites through to aggregating and providing access to disparate information resources, topic maps are a unique and powerful phenomenon.

The creation of top-level topic pages that are based on user behaviour is just brilliant. I'll give you an example. Let's say you are a large grocery store. Your aisles and shelves are, in effect, your product classification taxonomy, which means you can now offer online shopping. As a user of such a service

myself, I know you must learn how the store organises its products so you can find them. After about six months using the site, you can finally navigate reasonably well, but tend to rely on the search engine and on "your favourites" or "your usual" lists, so you end up ordering the same products every week because you have trouble finding other things. Do you know how many weeks in a row I've made a chicken stir-fry?

Anyway, back to the topic at hand. Let's think about a world where the aisles and shelves are left in tact AND top-level topics are introduced. You could have a topic page called "Kid's Parties" or "Wedding Anniversaries", with topic tags to aggregate all the products horizontally across the site. This would give users additional navigation options without disrupting the taxonomy of the existing site, which is likely to be tied into back-end systems.

For further information on topic maps, visit www.networkedplanet.com. As always, any comments on this topic are gratefully received. Please drop me a note at lynda@foursquaremedia.net. ■

IN BRIEF

Tridion on the crest of the Forrester Wave

Forrester Research has positioned European content-management-solutions provider, Tridion as a leader in web-content management (WCM) for external sites in its report, *Forrester's Wave: Web Content Management Q1 2005*.

Nine WCM vendors assessed for the study through hands-on lab tests and the evaluation of 194 criteria in the current offering, product strategy and market presence areas. Tridion was found to be the 'leader' in WCM for external sites (internal and extranet), and a 'strong performer' in the internal (intranet) category.

The report also states that European companies now lead the pack for external WCM - a market that has previously been dominated by American technology firms. Forrester's Wave can be viewed, in full, at www.tridion.com.

Intranet consolidation

Abbey banks on intranet bookstore

By Kate Clifton

ABBEY HAS completed a restructure of its internal information systems, an initiative that has seen the consolidation of eight departmental intranets, and the migration of 100,000 pages of technical manuals to an online repository.

The company's 22,000 employees now have instant access to its 'Bookstore' - a database of product policies and procedures, via the

intranet. The system incorporates an audit trail facility that staff can use to access product specifications from up to five years ago, enabling instant checks and verification of policies or mortgages on the date they were purchased.

Previously, although certain manuals were available online, they were separate from Abbey's other systems, a problem that the project has

resolved. "The user now gets a single system to see all the information they need and they can use sales and technical data as part of the same information set. They can also search all the information in a single search," says Peter Greenfield, online channels manager at Abbey. "For those that do not search, the navigation is the same for all information and this makes access easier and quicker."

It is hoped that the system will also boost Abbey's regulatory compliance and corporate governance efforts, by making the most up-to-date product information available to its customers. All financial institutions in the UK must adhere to

standards set out in the Financial Services Act and the Credit Consumer Act - in which effective audit and archiving systems can have a positive influence.

"The new system allows us to roll back more easily to previous versions of information and also controls who can access the release of information more closely. In the long term we will have a safer and more reliable archive, which will give us greater confidence in our compliance and customer service," says Greenfield.

Abbey deployed web content technology from Opentext Text to facilitate the project. www.opentext.com.