

InfoTech Column

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EgoFeeds

By Stephen Abram

Time for a fun column to start the New Year, I thought I'd disclose a small secret this month. I have an ego. Shockers! As such I have a number of feeds set up from a bunch of free services to monitor the web for any mention of "me". And it's actually slightly more complicated than it looks since the web, sadly, doesn't yet benefit from library name authority files. Therefore I have to check out at least this many pseudonyms:

- "Stephen Abram"
- "Stephen Abrams"
- "Steven Abram"
- "Steven Abrams"
- "Steve Abram"
- "Steve Abrams"

I have avoided the big misspellings so far – Abrahm(s), Abraham(s), etc. – but I do use the phrase search since it removes a bunch of largely genealogical clutter.

It's more than just vanity. Since I give many speeches and write often it's an excellent feedback mechanism to see who's talking about things I have been involved with. I represent my company and SLA, as well as myself, in public settings and it's vitally important to be aware of some of the public feedback. I can't follow every single library blog, podcast, webcast and website, although I do have about 500 blogs in my Bloglines (<http://www.bloglines.com>) aggregator. I also find a bunch of freeform feedback this way to SLA, my employer, and the library sector in general. Indeed I have corporate ego feeds for SirsiDynix, Sirsi, Dynix and the "SirsiDynix Institute"

My Doppelgangers

Of course I do have to put up with all those other Stephen Abrams out there! There's even an esteemed Harvard librarian in the group along with a doctor (a medical pain management expert), an active high school student, and horrors, a right wing candidate in the last U.S. election who appears to stand for everything I despise. A few false drops are not a real pain to me. I'd rather not miss anything. At least I don't share a name with a celebrity or major author because then I'd have to bring out the full sack o'Boolean tricks.

Now, this approach is not without its perils. You do get the positive reviews, the simple reportage and constructive criticism. On the other hand I do get the occasional opinionated blog posting that hits my hot buttons. I was once called “Baldy McWheezy Laugh” on a blog posting after a day long workshop. At first I was offended but then I remembered what I learned early in life, anyone who makes fun of someone physically or criticizes laughter is saying more about themselves than me. I’ve found, over my life, that anyone who has issues with my large (read loud) exuberant laugh is just so, well, as Mary Richards said, “That’s just so high school, Mr Grant.” Another time, a person blogged that she had trouble hearing at the back of the room during a full day workshop and had been disappointed she had missed so much. I still regret deciding not to offer her the advice through the blog comments that she should ask herself why she didn’t feel empowered to stand up and change seats for an entire day. Was it a level of discomfort with minimal change, or a preference for being an all-day victim of a thoroughly changeable situation? Not once over 7 hours was there a request to increase the level of the microphone. Sometimes real time complaining is in order rather than living the blog life of retroactive reflection.

I am using these two real examples to show some of the ability to get feedback and potentially deal with it. I’ve had people complain about humour, slides, points of view, and politics that I wouldn’t have picked up without my ego feeds. I can then take the feedback as a gift. Like a wedding gift I can love it, use it, lose it, return it, or only bring it out when Aunt Sally visits. As a general rule I treat all feedback seriously. I have even found quite a few hits around the world in many other languages. Our reach as a profession is truly more international than ever.

Now this isn’t totally an ego column! In some respect we all work for organizations and communities that are collections of individuals. Many of us work for enterprises that have a number of famous and quotable folks involved. How many of us have ego feeds set up just as a matter of course for our users and our organizations? How many of us have built an RSS ego feed for our organization? A large number of us, I suspect. Quite a few of us manage or participate in large contracts for professional ‘watch’ services. There are many good ones through Factiva, Thomson Dialog, LexisNexis, etc. These can be supplemented by web watch services. And if your organization is not one with deep pockets you can build a poor man’s version of a Watch with a few quick, free alerts. Here are some simple suggestions on what you might want to be watching:

- Personal names of your executives, board, key public figures
- Brand names and trademarks
- Your organization name, nicknames, and stock symbols
- Your primary homepage URL
- All of the above for your organization’s major competitors
- All of the above for key clients, targets, etc.
- Key regulatory issues (e.g. DOPA, CIPA, USA PATRIOT, etc.)

In SLA's case it's in our best interests to know when SLA, Special Libraries Association (and, sadly, Special Library Association), Janice Lachance, Rebecca Vargha, etc. are in the news or blogosphere. We are information professionals and know its raw power. We can harness it in our own service. Indeed, our new member benefit, the NewsGator RSS feed (<http://www.newsgator.com/news/archive.aspx?post=110>) is an ideal example of this sort of thinking.

Here are the top four that I find the most useful. I am sure our folks in the News and the new Competitive Intelligence Division have a plethora of other choices – both free and fee. If you send me your favorites at the e-mail address below, I'll update this column with a blog posting at *Stephen's Lighthouse*.

Google Alerts (<http://www.google.com/alerts>)

“Google Alerts are email updates of the latest relevant Google results (web, news, etc.) based on your choice of query or topic. Some handy uses of Google Alerts include:

- monitoring a developing news story
- keeping current on a competitor or industry”

Digg (<http://digg.com>)

“Digg is a user driven social content website. Ok, so what the heck does that mean? Well, everything on digg is submitted by the digg user community (that would be you). After you submit content, other digg users read your submission and digg what they like best. If your story rocks and receives enough diggs, it is promoted to the front page for the millions of digg visitors to see.”

Technorati (<http://www.technorati.com>)

Create a Watchlist on any topic or event or name you like. You then have very quick access to what's being said out there.

Blogfluence (<http://www.blogfluence.net>)

Rate your firm's blogging influence. Alternatively, has some blogger just slammed or libeled you or your organization? Check out whether anyone reads or link or pays attention to them in any way. You can play a huge game of Whack-a-Mole in the blogosphere.

And don't forget to check about yourself; you never know what's lurking out there! It's OK to have a bit of an ego.

Stephen Abram, MLS is Vice President, Innovation, for SirsiDynix, Chief Strategist for the SirsiDynix Institute, and the President-elect of SLA. He is an SLA Fellow and the past president of the Ontario Library Association and the past president of the Canadian Library Association. In June 2003 he was awarded SLA's John Cotton Dana Award. This column contains Stephen's personal perspectives and does not necessarily represent the opinions or positions of SirsiDynix. His blog is Stephen's Lighthouse, <http://stephenslighthouse.sirsidynix.com>. Stephen would love to hear from you at stephen.abram@sirsidynix.com.

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p.s. John – I added the blog, etc. to the footer.