Appendix II: Purdue University Information Portal Assignment

In our information economy, and indeed information existence, keeping up on the latest news and developments is not just neat thing, it's a requirement.   Re-inventing the work of others or following false leads means lost money to a company you might be working for, or lack of competitiveness in your research group. When news is created 24/7, you can't afford to be even hours out of date. So, how can you manage information so that the information comes to you, instead of you having to go out and search for it all the time?

In terms of our scenario as think-tankers, creating an information portal will help keep your tank up to date and organized in your information gathering and management. Think of this as a place you can check every day to see what's happened in the world that you need to take into account. For example, if you're going to give testimony on Capitol Hill, you don't want someone to ask you about a new discovery announced in the news that morning, leaving you to say, "Well, Senator, I'll have to get back to you on that."

In this assignment, each group will be creating their own information portal for their specific white paper topic. The portal will utilize alerts and RSS feeds to provide dynamic content, as well as links to seminal works related to your topic, so the papers are readily accessible to your group (and the rest of the class).

So, first some background:

Alerts : in an article database like Biological Abstracts, INSPEC, or the Web of Science one can set up alerts that will re-run your search in the database whenever it is updated, and the results will be emailed to you or supplied in an RSS feed, for your convenience. Often this option is hidden under a 'Search History' tab.

RSS Feeds: These icons keep showing up all over web pages: , including Purdue's Home Page. So, what the heck are they, and what do they do? RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication, and it basically works like subscribing to a magazine or newspaper. Instead of going out to the newsstand to buy the paper to see what the news is, if you have a subscription, it gets delivered to your door—in this case your web browser. And, with the power of the internet, you don't just get it once a day or week or month, but as soon as a new story is added to a web site, it can be piped right to your browser. You can drop the RSS feed information on a web page, or, with the latest browsers, you can even access it directly on a toolbar.

Pipes: In order to customize your RSS feeds, some web sites allow you to actually save a search (for example, Technorati.com for blog postings), but most just give you major feeds, like "New York Times: Science". If you want more targeted results, you can use tools like Yahoo!Pipes to create filtered RSS feeds, feeds indexed on maps, and other exciting options. Yahoo!Pipes is an optional component to your web site. NetVibes (see below) actually allows you to filter multiple RSS feeds within their 'widgets'.

The Assignment:

We will use NetVibes as the default software/web platform for composing your portal, since it contains a pretty robust, drag-and-drop method of importing feeds, alerts, and other widgets. If you want to compose in something like iGoogle or PageFlakes, or even create your own from scratch, that is fine as well, as long as it is accessible to the instructors (☺) and your classmates.

Your information portal should include at least 8 'modules', including at least the following:

a) An alert of a well-formed search query in an article database

b) A filtered RSS feed targeted to your subject area (at least the majority of articles it retrieves should be relevant to your topic)

c) A static list of seminal readings/web sites on your topic. These should be high-quality, in-depth resources that everyone in the class should be familiar with in order to be well informed on the topic

The rest of your portal can be a collection of objects of your choice. Be creative…it might include podcasts, vodcasts, geolocated feeds, notepads, or 'walls'.

The information portal will be graded on the quality of its resources, its organization, creativity, and effectiveness in covering your discipline.

Instructions for using NetVibes.

First, create your own, free, account by going to NetVibes.com

You will be given a default web portal to work with. Delete all of those panes by clicking the 'x' button on the title bar of each pane.

Click the green button in the top left corner to 'Add Content'. Then the black menu bar will open that allows you to add a variety of widgets.

First, to simply add a feed, click the 🔊 **Add a Feed** link on the left side of the bar.

Then, just paste a URL from an RSS feed site into the box, click 'Add Feed', and a widget appears, which, after a few more clicks, inserts it onto your page, where it can be drag-and-dropped where appropriate on the page.

This simple "Add a Feed" option will allow you to bring in RSS Alerts from databases, as well as feeds from web sites.

To filter a web feed and/or merge multiple feeds.

Do a Search for 'Remixed Feed' in the search box on the left side of the screen. The Remixed Feed widget allows you to enter multiple RSS feeds into a single module.

Click the green 'Add to my Page' button, to drop it on your page.

Then, you can add filters to your feeds.

The Filter box allows you to specify terms that need to be in a news item for it to be displayed in your pane.

Click Edit on the title bar of the pane …..then, you can format the feed.

To add or remove feeds after you've placed the widget on your page, click 'Manage My Feeds'.

HTML Widget.

Another 'Essential Widget' is the HTML Widget. It allows you to enter code directly to display in the pane.

For example, to create a hyperlink, you would enter:

<ahref="http://www.link.com/mylink">My text . This would display as:

My text   -- that is, the text 'My Text', hyperlinked to the web site 'http://www.link.com/mylink'

Adding several such links in the HTML screen will create a pane filled with links. If you know HTML coding, you can add even more interesting formatting. You can annotate the link by simply adding text after the in the above example.

You can also cut and paste more complex code into this pane to display it just like it would on a regular web site. For example, the widget on my site that locates feeds on a map from where they originated or what they are referring to (www.netvibes.com/fosmire) was created in Yahoo!Pipes, and exported using their 'Embed' option. That created the following code:

<script src="http://pipes.yahoo.com/js/mapbadge.js">{"pipe_id":"WqQBeONS3BGmcqMz8jxBKg","_btype":"map"}</script>

The details aren't important. What is, is that Pipes created the code, and I just cut and pasted it into the HTML Widget, and there it is, running in a pane on my information portal.

Explore the netvibes site for more interesting widgets. For example, the Wall widget, like in Facebook, allows you to post comments (very useful for internal communication), which are stamped with the author's information.

Happy widgeting!