

# Chapter 3: Using Social Bookmarks and Social News

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## *In This Chapter*

- ✓ Differentiating between social bookmarks and social news
- ✓ Gaining marketing benefits from bookmarks
- ✓ Submitting to social bookmarking sites
- ✓ Submitting to social news sites
- ✓ Motivating people to bookmark and rate your site or content
- ✓ Using Social Sharing buttons

**S**ocial bookmarks and social news services are essentially peer-to-peer referral networks. Each one is an expansion of the former “tell-a-friend” call to action. Rather than e-mail to one or two people a link to a site or some content, users can notify many people at a time. Advocates of these recommendation services often argue that they filter the avalanche of Web sites that appear in standard search engines. Because social bookmarks and social news services rely on popular input from “real people” rather than from algorithms, some Internet users place a greater value on these search results.

Hundreds of these services exist, which you can see on the All Services tab at <http://addthis.com/services/all>.

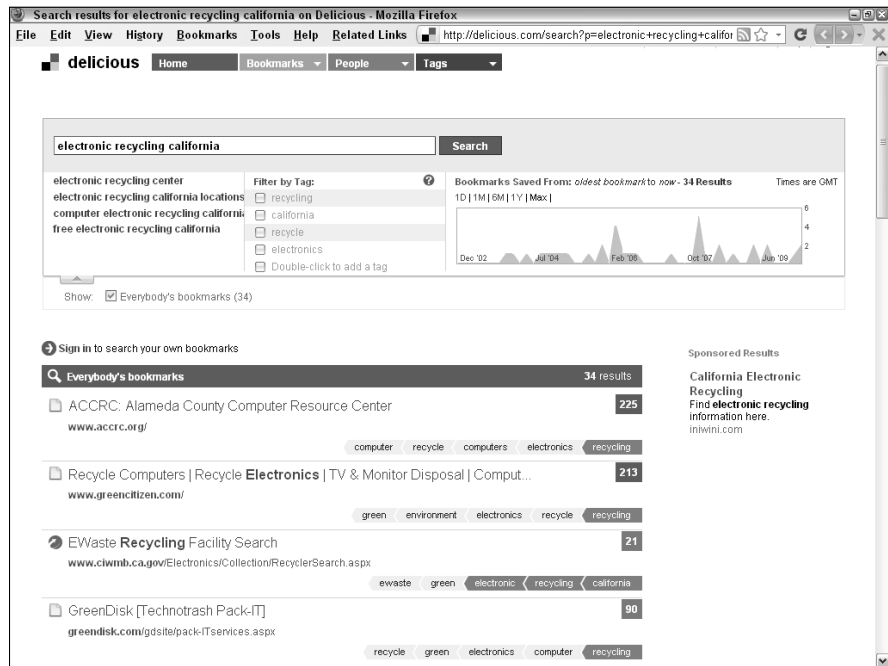


Search engines recognize inbound links from many (but not all) of these services, so appearing on them can improve your search engine ranking. (See Book II, Chapter 2 for more information on search engine optimization.)

## *Bookmarking Your Way to Traffic*

You most likely already know how to bookmark sites in a browser to make them easy to find again. Social bookmarking services work in much the same way, but you save bookmarks to a public Web site rather than to an individual computer. Users of bookmarking services can easily share links to their favorite sites or content with friends or colleagues (or with the world) while enjoying convenient access to their own bookmarks from any browser anywhere.

Social bookmarks act as testimonials from one amorphous group of Web users to many others. Bookmarking services such as StumbleUpon and Delicious (shown in Figure 3-1) recommend Web sites, blogs, videos, products, or content. At StumbleUpon, among other things, users can view bookmarks from their own list of favorites, from friends' favorites, or from everyone in the StumbleUpon database of submitters. Several subsets of bookmarking services are specific to certain applications (blogs only, for example) or activities (shopping only, for example).



**Figure 3-1:** These sites are recommended by “everyone” on Delicious for the search term *electronics recycling california*.

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Participating in social bookmarking is a no-brainer. Even if you do no other social media marketing, you should submit your site to several social bookmarking services, if they permit it, as part of your search engine optimization efforts. Some services may not permit direct submission, but allow you to include a badge on your site to encourage your viewers to submit the site (for example, <http://su.pr>).

Users generally search for listings by tag (keyword), category, most recent, most popular, or individual submitter. Bookmarking services rank items by the number of people who have cited them.

Table 3-1 lists some of the dozens of popular social bookmarking services and shows whether you're allowed to submit your own site. The Passes Link Juice column indicates whether search engines recognize a link from that service, as discussed in Book II, Chapter 2.

<i>Name</i>	<i>URL</i>	<i>Allows Self-Submission</i>	<i>Passes "Link Juice"</i>
BlinkList	<a href="http://www.blinklist.com">www.blinklist.com</a>	Yes	No
Delicious	<a href="http://delicious.com">http://delicious.com</a>	No	No
Diigo	<a href="http://www.diigo.com">www.diigo.com</a>	Yes	No
Faves	<a href="http://faves.com">http://faves.com</a>	Yes	No
Google Bookmarks	<a href="http://www.google.com/bookmarks">www.google.com/bookmarks</a>	Yes	Yes
Linkroll	<a href="http://www.linkroll.com">www.linkroll.com</a>	Yes	No
Mister Wong	<a href="http://www.mister-wong.com">www.mister-wong.com</a>	No	No
Spurl.net	<a href="http://www.spurl.net">www.spurl.net</a>	No	Yes
StumbleUpon	<a href="http://www.stumbleupon.com">www.stumbleupon.com</a>	No	Yes
Y! Bookmarks	<a href="http://bookmarks.yahoo.com">http://bookmarks.yahoo.com</a>	No	Yes



Sites that don't pass "link juice" contain a `NoFollow` attribute, which is visible by searching the source code.



You can find more on the Mashable list of social bookmarking sites at <http://mashable.com/2007/08/08/social-bookmarking-2>. The three largest search engines (Google, Yahoo!, and Bing) also have bookmarking services.

Later in this chapter, we discuss how to research bookmarking services, decide which ones to use, and submit a site.

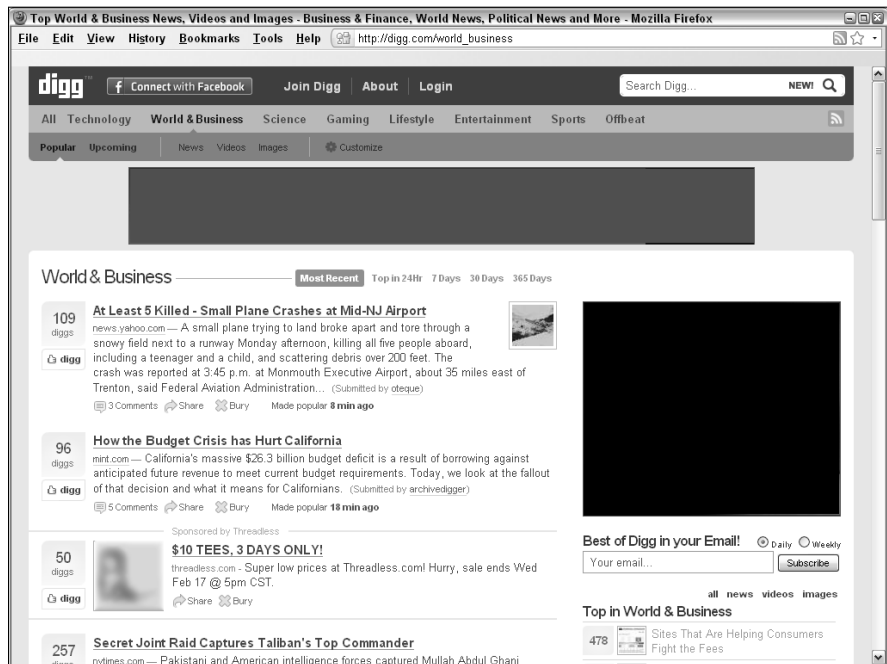
## Sharing the News

By comparison to social bookmarking services, social news services such as reddit and Digg (shown in Figure 3-2) point to time-sensitive individual postings and articles. Social news services focus on "what's news now," while bookmarking services look at sites without reference to timeliness.

Users can recommend dozens of different content pages on a particular Web site to a social news service, quickly driving significant amounts of traffic to the originating site. Many social news services rely on users to “vote” on submissions with more popular results appearing on the service’s front page. Unlike bookmarks, social news services aren’t designed to share a list of recommendations with friends.

Figure 3-2 shows recently posted popular articles in the World & Business category on Digg. Though most entries link to standard news sources, business press releases and even special offers may appear, as you can see in the third item in the list.

**Figure 3-2:** Digg shows links to individual articles submitted by hundreds of thousands of Internet readers.



*Courtesy Digg.com*



Peer-based recommendations aren’t always golden. Because they reflect whoever randomly happens to have posted, these posts may be volatile, biased, and nonrepresentative. They certainly don’t reflect scientific results.

Table 3-2 lists some most popular social news sites and shows whether you can submit your own site or press releases. The Passes Link Juice column indicates whether search engines recognize a link from that service.

**Table 3-2** Popular Social News Services

<i>Name</i>	<i>URL</i>	<i>Uses Popularity Voting</i>	<i>Allows Self-Submission</i>	<i>Allows Press Releases</i>	<i>Passes "Link Juice"</i>
Buzzup	<a href="http://buzzup.com/us">http://buzzup.com/us</a>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Digg	<a href="http://digg.com">http://digg.com</a>	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Dropjack	<a href="http://www.dropjack.com">www.dropjack.com</a>	No	Yes	Yes	No
Fark	<a href="http://www.fark.com">www.fark.com</a>	No	Yes	Yes	No
Mixx	<a href="http://www.mixx.com">www.mixx.com</a>	Yes	Yes, but not often	Yes	No
Newsvine	<a href="http://www.newsvine.com">www.newsvine.com</a>	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
reddit	<a href="http://www.reddit.com">www.reddit.com</a>	Yes	Yes, but not often	Yes	No
Sphinn	<a href="http://sphinn.com">http://sphinn.com</a>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Slashdot	<a href="http://slashdot.org">http://slashdot.org</a>	No	Yes	Yes	No
Twingly	<a href="http://www.twingly.com">www.twingly.com</a>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Y! Buzz	<a href="http://buzz.yahoo.com">http://buzz.yahoo.com</a>	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

## *Benefiting from Social Bookmarks and News Services*

Social bookmarks and news services offer multiple benefits. To start with, they're free — always a positive factor for online guerrilla marketers. In addition, you may benefit in many other ways by using these services:

- ◆ **Improved search engine ranking:** By using your primary search terms in tags and other elements of your submissions, you may improve your overall Web presence in general search engines. The appearance of your content on these services supplements your own site in general search results.

- ◆ **Inbound links:** Inbound links from social bookmarking and news services may dramatically improve your position in search engine results and your Google PageRank as well as deliver visitors directly to your site.
- ◆ **Increased brand visibility and traffic:** The more people who see your Web site or content listed on one of these services, the more people will remember your name and visit your site. Like many other social marketing techniques, bookmarks and news services help fill the conversion funnel.
- ◆ **Increased readership and membership:** If you're a writer, pundit, professional speaker, or consultant, these services can be extraordinarily valuable. After you have established a reputation on a service, you may find that you have loyal followers as well as many new readers, subscribers, clients, and speaking gigs.
- ◆ **Increased earnings:** You can consider people who visit your URL from social bookmarking and news services as prequalified prospects, pushing them farther down the funnel toward "likely buyer" status. Be sure that your site validates the ratings it has earned. Monitor comments about your site to confirm that recommended pages, content, or products continue to appear and that links still work. Visitors shouldn't see "404 File Not Found" messages.
- ◆ **Triggering the influentials:** Many online "influentials" watch social bookmarking and news services to spot trends and decide whether to mention a site or an article in their own blogs or tweets. Of course, submissions by these influential people carry additional value in the eyes of their followers.

Your task is to ensure that your business is listed in the appropriate services and shows up near the top of results. Always review a potential social news service to make sure it's not just a spam aggregator; that postings are recent; what is permitted in its Terms of Use; and how it ranks on Google. Sounds a lot like the process of finding inbound links in the prior chapter, doesn't it?

In the following sections, we talk about researching social news services, selecting the right ones for your business, and submitting to them.



Check out [http://addthis.com/services/all?c=social\\_news](http://addthis.com/services/all?c=social_news) or [www.doshdosh.com/list-of-social-media-news-websites](http://www.doshdosh.com/list-of-social-media-news-websites) for more social news sites.

## Researching a Social Bookmark and Social News Campaign

Listing your Web site, blog, or content initially is easy. You, or others, can post your site on as many services as you want. It's a more difficult task, though, to be listed high in the rankings.



Check the Terms of Use on these services; in some cases, you cannot submit your own site or content. Many news services have more constraints on the voting process than on submissions.

Here's how to do it:

### 1. Research appropriate social bookmarking and news services.

For an overview, try Quantcast or Alexa to review the user base, demographics, and traffic statistics for each prospective service. A handy chart on the Trends tab at <http://addthis.com/services> shows traffic trends on more than 200 social media services, or you can select only bookmarking or social news subsets. Generally, you're looking for services that

- Receive a lot of traffic
- Specialize in your market niche
- Attract your target market

### 2. Visit each site to confirm that it fits your needs and attracts your audience.

To understand more about the kinds of people who use a particular service, look at other top sites bookmarked in your category or at the content rated most favorably. Are the businesses and articles complementary to yours? To your competitors? Are the users of each service likely to try the products or services you offer?

You can sometimes tell whether an audience might be receptive to your offerings by looking at who's paying for ads on particular pages.



### 3. Sort by the names of those who have submitted postings to see which individuals or companies are responsible for most of the public listings.

Don't be surprised if the results follow the 80/20 rule: 80 percent of posts will come from 20 percent of users. The top ten submitters are likely to be the influentials on that service.

## *Executing your plan*

Because a distinct effort is involved in recruiting other people to submit your site, select just a few services from your research to begin. Start with the popular ones listed in Tables 3-1 or 3-2 to see whether readers will vote for your content or repost your links on smaller services without making the effort yourself.

Some groupthink takes place on these services. If you have a popular post on Digg, for instance, someone may copy it to reddit or StumbleUpon for you. Some services, such as Dropjack, display a list of icons above every story for readers to share elsewhere.

Most users select only one social bookmarking service because they want only one place for their own favorites. That behavior complicates your task because you may need to submit to multiple services to obtain broad coverage. Strive for a realistic balance between coverage and the level of effort you can commit. If you're short of time, don't worry. Start small — you can always do another campaign later.

After you've selected your list of appropriate services, write them into your Social Media Marketing plan (found in Book I, Chapter 2) with a schedule for regular postings and review. Then create an account and a profile, if appropriate, for each selected service. Finally, submit the URLs for your site (or sites) or content as appropriate. Your schedule will probably reflect

- ◆ An initial mix of multiple one-time submissions to social bookmarking services
- ◆ Regular, repeat submissions to one or two social news services, within the constraints of their Terms of Use
- ◆ Occasional additions to your social bookmarks
- ◆ Regular monitoring of links to your site and mentions in the cybersocial whirl



Watch for scam services offering hundreds of automated social bookmark submissions. You don't need hundreds, any more than you need hundreds of search engines. Besides, you could end up blacklisted for using them.



Many services offer a toolbar add-in to help users easily submit sites or content whenever they find something they like. You might find it handy to install toolbar add-ins for the specific services you expect to use regularly. Better yet, install a Social Sharing button (see the section “Using Social Media Buttons” later in this chapter) on your site and use the button to access your suite of accounts.



## *Monitoring results*

As we discuss in Book VIII, you always need to monitor the results of all your marketing techniques. Watch traffic statistics to identify which services produce the most referrals and when you see spikes in traffic. Stick with the services that become good referrers, of course, especially if they eventually lead to qualified prospects and sales. Replace the ones that don't work.

You might find it useful to try a tool specifically designed for monitoring appearances on social bookmarking and social news sites, including when others have recommended or rated you. You can use these monitoring tools to assess these elements:

- ◆ The success of your social bookmarking and social news campaign
- ◆ The efficacy of one posting compared to another
- ◆ The unauthorized use of trademarks
- ◆ The effectiveness of a specific press release or sales promotion
- ◆ The appearances of your competitors on social bookmarks and news services

Book II, Chapter 1 discussed multiple tools for monitoring mentions of your business or Web site on social networks and blogs. Many of those tools also monitor bookmarking and news services.

You might also want to try:

- ◆ **Alltop.com:** Collects current headlines and lead paragraphs from Web sites and blogs and sorts by topic.
- ◆ **Backtype.com:** Graphs tweets and comments across social media by domain name.
- ◆ **BuzzFeed.com:** Monitors “hot” stuff online to share.
- ◆ **popurls.com:** Aggregates current headlines from the most popular sites on the Internet.
- ◆ **Social Media for Firefox:** Status bar add-on that displays how many votes content has at Digg, StumbleUpon, Twitter, Delicious, reddit, Mixx, Sphinn, Tip'd, Bit.ly, and other social sites ([www.97thfloor.com/social-media-for-firefox](http://www.97thfloor.com/social-media-for-firefox)).
- ◆ **Social Meter:** Scans Delicious, Digg, Furl, Google, Linkroll, Netscape, reddit, Spurl.net, Technorati, and Yahoo!. My Web offers bookmarklet add-on for toolbars.
- ◆ **Trackur:** A fee-based topic search.
- ◆ **WhosTalkin.com:** A free topic search for multiple social media sites.

## Submitting to Bookmarking Services

You might want to submit URLs to bookmarking services from a personal, rather than business, address or have friends or employees use their personal e-mail addresses as the submission source. Use neutral, nonpromotional language in any comment or review. Figure 3-3 shows how to submit a site to Delicious.com, a popular social bookmarking service.

**Figure 3-3:** Submitting to social bookmarking services is usually very simple: Create an account and submit a URL with a brief description.

The screenshot shows the 'Save a new bookmark' form on the Delicious.com website. The form is titled 'Save a new bookmark' and includes the following fields:

- URL:**
- TITLE:**
- NOTES:**
- TAGS:**
- FOR:**

There is a checkbox for 'Make as Private' and 'Save' and 'Cancel' buttons. Below the form is a 'Tags' section with 'Recommended', 'Popular', and 'All my tags' categories. The 'Recommended' tags include 'accommodations', 'cabins', 'lodging', 'pennsylvania', 'pocono', 'resorts', and 'travel'. The 'Popular' tags include 'vacation'. The 'All my tags' section lists various tags such as 'accommodations', 'bulbs', 'bulbs', 'cabins', 'classes', 'counseling', 'cree', 'downlights', 'downlights', 'earnings', 'education', 'efficient', 'energy', 'experimental', 'floodlights', 'handmade', 'holistic', 'jewelry', 'led', 'light', 'lighting', 'lighting', 'lights', 'lights', 'lodging', 'moosoft', 'necklaces', 'online', 'pennsylvania', 'pocono', 'polar-ray', 'psychology', 'recessed', 'resorts', 'schools', 'spiritual', 'star', 'travel', and 'tubes'.

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Try to use appropriate search terms in category names, tags, text, or titles when you submit your site. Select terms that searchers are particularly likely to use. Generally, you can find those terms in traffic statistics for your Web site or in tag clouds from the target service. (There's more on tag clouds in Book II, Chapter 2.) Enter your site in as many categories as possible.

If you have separate domain names or subdomains for your blog or community site, submit a few of them as bookmarks, along with your primary Web site, as long as the number is reasonable. You can also post social bookmarks to where links are permitted on Facebook or LinkedIn or other social networking pages to further enhance your visibility. Just don't personally submit too many of your own pages to one bookmarking site or else you might be marked as a spammer.



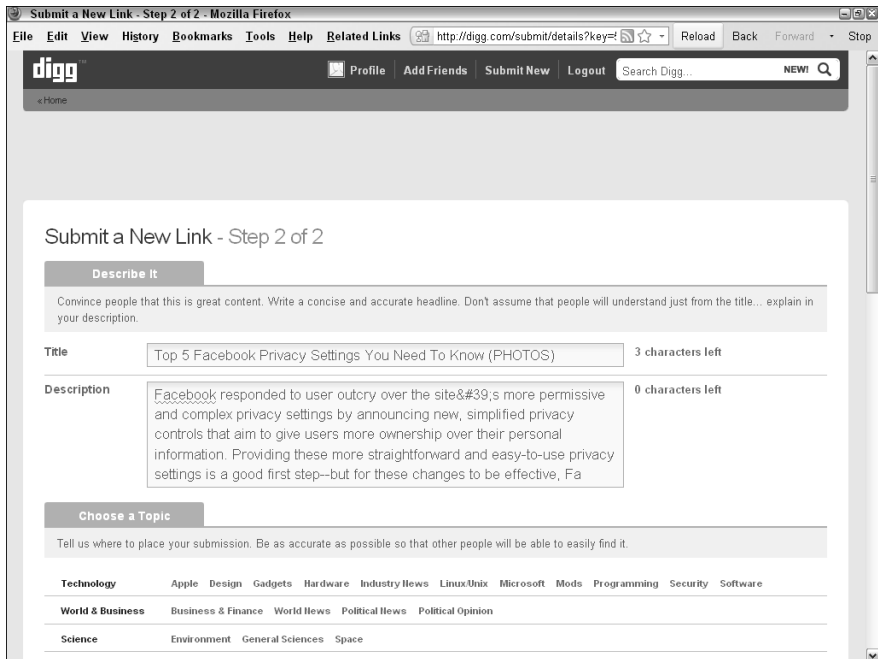
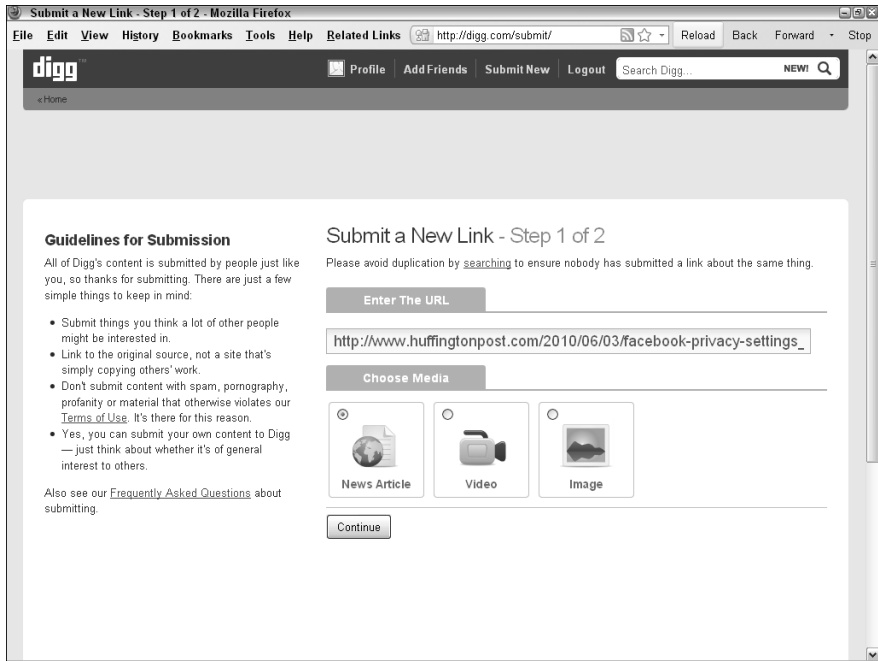
Be discrete. Do not spam social bookmarking or news services with multiple frequent submissions. Though you can organize a few submissions from others to get the ball rolling, don't set up multiple accounts per user on a social news service to vote for yourself or use automated submitters, which not only might have malware but also might be prohibited. Like regular search engines, these social services act aggressively to detect and blacklist spammers. Read the Terms of Use on every site if you have questions.

## *Submitting to Social News Services*

Think of social news services as peer-reviewed indexes to short-term, contemporary articles, whereas social bookmarks are more useful for longer-term content. Submitting frequently to social news services is not only acceptable but also practically obligatory, particularly if your site generates news within a particular industry or geographical region or if your livelihood is content dependent. Figure 3-4 shows how to submit content to Digg.com. As with most social news service, you must create an account first and then submit content.

Because users are in and out of these services often, you always need new content to catch their attention. These users prefer peer-recommended stories versus ones selected by staff editors or that appear in an unfiltered RSS feed from other sources.

People who view your content are asked to “vote” stories up or down and are often given an opportunity to comment as well. You generally need to create an account to post, vote, or comment on stories, but anyone can read the listings.



**Figure 3-4:** Most social news services have a straight-forward submission process. Digg has two simple screens.



Always select appropriate categories for your material, such as Technology, World News, Politics, Business, Entertainment, Life Style, or Environment. Avoid vague categories such as General, Other, or Miscellaneous — they're deep, dark pits from which your content may never escape!

### ***Selecting content for social news services***

The choice of content is critical. Not every item on your blog or Web site will entice readers to submit or rate an article. Generally, the ones that drive the most traffic to your site will have timely content, such as breaking news, or entertainment, humor, or quality resource information not found elsewhere.



By their nature, these services are quite culturally dependent; you may need to submit in languages other than English. Other countries and languages may have their own localized social bookmarking and news services. Visit <http://addthis.com/services/compare-countries> or international search engines to identify them.

Avoid out-of-date material. If you must submit older stories, look for items such as features, interviews, how-to's, and essays that have longer-lasting interest. Those items are good for social bookmarking sites, too.

Be sure to match your content submissions to sites where readers like the types of stories you want to recommend. Look at the tag cloud for frequency of use on tags similar to yours over the past 6 to 12 months.

Some social news services allow links to images, video, and audio; others accept only links to text. Select the services that best match the information you have to offer and the audience you're trying to reach.



Think tactically: Initiate posts for specific pages, posts, or articles that have the potential to lead to traffic, prospects, or sales, not for your everyday internal "company news" update.

If you get a reputation for posting meaningless items or using the comment space for hard-sell language, you might find it hard to gain traction on these sites; you might even be banned for posting junk.

### ***Preparing social news stories for success***

Though you might be tempted to splatter social news services with your stories, just give them a little thought. Set up tags, titles, and lead lines carefully. Follow these online journalistic steps for improved results:

- ◆ **Write a catchy headline, not an academic title.** Keep headlines short and memorable. Try to use “vivid” verbs (not just nouns) and active voice.
- ◆ **Write a good lede.** The headline and first line of a story (the lede) are often the only elements that viewers see. Set a “hook” to catch readers and make them want to link back to your original content. Tell people what’s in it for them or how they will benefit by reading the story.
- ◆ **Write a good description, comment, or summary.** Keep it short (20 to 25 words!) and focus on benefits.
- ◆ **Check your facts, your spelling, and your links.** If you make errors, someone is likely to post a negative comment. If your links don’t work, you lose potential traffic, which is a primary reason you’re using social bookmarking and news services in the first place.
- ◆ **Prepare your site for success.** Just in case, be sure you’ve structured your site to take advantage of new traffic. Links to related articles on your site or blog give interested readers more than one story to explore, thus increasing the number of page views per visit. To increase conversion rates, use calls to action and visual reminders to sign up for RSS feeds and newsletters, subscribe to a paid publication, or make a purchase.
- ◆ **Serving up your site.** Be sure that your hosting package allows for increased traffic. Traffic from social bookmarks tends to build slowly, but an appearance on the front page of a social news site can flood your server with more traffic than it’s set up to handle. A quick call to your host or IT department should confirm your preparations.



These writing tactics not only help attract the kind of viewers who are more likely to click-through but also help increase the time users spend on your blog or Web site.

### *Using Application-Specific Bookmarks*

Some bookmarking and social news services are constrained to specific types of content, such as blogs or video, and others are specific to topic, or activity, such as shopping or product reviews. Table 3-3 provides some examples.

**Table 3-3 Bookmarks for Specific Applications**

<i>Name</i>	<i>URL</i>
<i>Blogs</i>	
BlogCatalog	<a href="http://www.blogcatalog.com">www.blogcatalog.com</a>
Bloglines	<a href="http://www.bloglines.com">www.bloglines.com</a>
BlogPulse	<a href="http://www.blogpulse.com">www.blogpulse.com</a>
<i>Product, Software, and Travel Reviews</i>	
Epinions	<a href="http://www.epinions.com">www.epinions.com</a>
SnapFiles	<a href="http://www.snapfiles.com/opinions/latestopinions.html">http://www.snapfiles.com/opinions/latestopinions.html</a>
TripAdvisor	<a href="http://tripadvisor.com">http://tripadvisor.com</a>
<i>Shopping</i>	
Kaboodle	<a href="http://www.kaboodle.com">www.kaboodle.com</a>
Stylehive	<a href="http://www.stylehive.com">www.stylehive.com</a>
ThisNext	<a href="http://www.thisnext.com">www.thisnext.com</a>
<i>Sports</i>	
BallHype	<a href="http://ballhype.com">http://ballhype.com</a>
<i>Video</i>	
Kazivu	<a href="http://www.kazivu.com/index.html">www.kazivu.com/index.html</a>
myVidster	<a href="http://www.myvidster.com">www.myvidster.com</a>
Simfany	<a href="http://www.simfany.com">www.simfany.com</a>







You can find more shopping bookmark sites on the Mashable list at <http://mashable.com/2007/08/8/social-shopping-2> and more sports sites at [www.smmreport.com/top-social-bookmarking-sites-for-sport](http://www.smmreport.com/top-social-bookmarking-sites-for-sport). Search for *topic area + bookmarking site* on any search engine to find more specialty bookmarking services.

Receiving mentions in blogs and bookmarks placed by others on social shopping sites such as Kaboodle (shown in Figure 3-5) as well as on Faves, Delicious, and StumbleUpon, helped Barry's Farm laptop sleeves catch popular attention. See the nearby sidebar for more information about Barry's Farm social media story.



**Figure 3-5:** Receiving mentions in blogs and bookmarks on sites such as Kaboodle can help your site draw popular attention.

Added by 52 people

				<b>Rate it!</b>  
<b>1 FIRST ADDED</b> stellastylista added to Geek Chic	cristina added to Handbags	misskeena added to Random things	lynnies482 added to Cupcakes.....	

[See all »](#)

**Description:** Have you heard the one about the two cupcakes that fell in love? No? We haven't either, but this laptop sleeve is so sweet it will rot your teeth. Made of heavy duty vinyl and padded with 1/2

**Highlights:** \$40

**Tags:** cupcake, cute, laptop

**Comments (6)** [Flag Comments](#)

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## *Timing Your Submissions*

As with search engines, getting yourself on the first page of bookmarking and social news services can be difficult. You generally have only a 24-hour window on social news services to attract enough attention for either lasting



value or timeliness. Remember that you may need to coordinate submissions by others to get things started.

There's no point in posting in the middle of the night, when many people are asleep on one side of the country or both. Generally, posting between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. U.S. Central Time works well, with an anecdotal peak of best results around 3 p.m. Workdays are generally better for generating traffic, although less competition exists on weekends. Of course, you need to adjust submission times if "getting a scoop" is critical or if you seek visibility on an international site.

On the other hand, if you're posting to specific bookmarking services, such as a social shopping or sports bookmarking site, that isn't time-dependent, weekends may find more of your audience available. It's a lot like scheduling an e-newsletter delivery or press release, both of which are audience dependent.



Your best bet is to experiment for yourself. Try submitting the same post to different services at different times of the day, or try submitting different posts to the same service at different times. Monitor traffic to your site by the hour and day, and adjust your plans accordingly.

Generally, social bookmarks drive traffic to your site slowly as people find your URL, but you can generate a spike in traffic by pushing your site on social news services (if they permit it). You can ask several people to submit your site, but leave it to others to vote it up-or-down.

Try to get 15 to 25 people to submit your posting within the first few hours of its publication. That's usually enough to get attention from others and build momentum for votes. Receiving 25 recommendations within a few hours means a lot more than receiving 25 recommendations within a week!

As your visibility on the service rises, so too does traffic to your site. Barry's Farm, a small business that makes and sells laptop sleeves, describes its experience in the nearby sidebar, "Blogs and social bookmarks spur growth at Barry's Farm."



For all the value these services may have as "recommendation" search engines, the traffic on them is nothing compared to traffic on major search engines such as Google, Yahoo!, and Bing. Optimization for general search engines is still absolutely necessary, as discussed in Book II, Chapter 2, and forms the basis for your success.

## Blogs and social bookmarks spur growth at Barry's Farm

Known for its charming laptop and phone sleeves, Barry's Farm is a two-person business. Co-owners Katie Martin, who handles product design, and Barry Abrams, Web developer, started the company in 2004 to sell custom T-shirts. After Barry used one of Katie's monster-patterned, furry laptop sleeves on a business trip, the proverbial new star was born. In response to a flood of inquiries, they posted their first laptop sleeve on [BarrysFarm.net](http://BarrysFarm.net) that summer.

"We received a large quantity of orders that first weekend due to a mention on the popular blog [BoingBoing.net](http://BoingBoing.net)," says Martin. "Many other blogs linked to it and the social bookmarks grew. Other people placed bookmarks on Kaboodle (refer to Figure 3-5), StumbleUpon, Delicious, and Faves almost immediately. We knew then there was a demand for laptop sleeves that were both fun and functional."

The site now targets college students and young professionals because both groups "appreciate carrying a unique and humorous product.... It's a way to make a statement in a world where everyone carries the same, boring black bag and has the same laptop."

Martin tracks how the bookmarks contribute to lead generation with Google Analytics, which shows that 55 percent of their traffic comes from referring sites. Usually, when a new bookmark pops up on StumbleUpon, she finds that the site experiences a spike in traffic, but not necessarily in sales. Still, Martin values the bookmarks for increased visibility. "Internet word-of-mouth (or word-of-blog!) has been a huge driving force behind our overall popularity. Without it, we feel that our small business may not have succeeded."

Barry's Farm also uses Facebook and Twitter to post upcoming sales and announce new

products. "Facebook ([www.facebook.com/pages/Barrys-Farm/110378560770?ref=tsis](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Barrys-Farm/110378560770?ref=tsis)) is a great way to interact with people interested in your products because they can ask questions and offer product suggestions. Twitter (<http://twitter.com/barrysfarm>) works well for simple notices and secret sales," she explains. Follow Us On icons for both services appear on the home page of [BarrysFarm.net](http://BarrysFarm.net), shown in the nearby figure.

Martin, who shoulders the day-to-day business responsibility full-time, is grateful for the marketing boost. "Because a lot of our traffic comes from referring sites such as StumbleUpon and Delicious, we don't have to spend as much time on marketing as other businesses do."

The power of blogs was her biggest surprise: "Getting a mention on just one blog that has a large readership can cause a spike in visits and skyrocket sales for a short period of time. If you have a product that you think would appeal to a certain sector, find a site that blogs about that sector and send them a link to it. For example, our laptop sleeves appeal to the techie world, so we have sent notices to blogs with large daily readerships, such as Gizmodo and BoingBoing, to announce new sleeves."

She advises using social media as much as possible. "By increasing overall visibility, you will increase sales over time. Social bookmarking sites like StumbleUpon can be utilized to promote your site, or allow your customers or fans to spread the word about your products.... It is important to make your product stand out in order to succeed, so find your niche and explore how other people in your sector are marketing and networking."



## Encouraging Others to Bookmark or Rate Your Site

Like most political campaigns, the “popularity” contest on services that rely on votes or frequency of submission can be managed to your advantage. It just takes a little preplanning. Though illegal vote-rigging and outright manipulation are forms of cyberfraud, these techniques are valid ways to encourage others to submit or rate your site.

- ◆ **We all get by with a little help from our friends.** Always have other people submit your material; on some services, submission by others is required. One easy way is to e-mail a circle of employees, colleagues, and friends to help when you post a new page or content, or help them set up RSS feeds from your selected services. Ask them to submit or comment on your posting within a few hours after being notified.
- ◆ **Scratch backs.** In addition to posting your own stories, it’s good practice to recommend material on other sites that complement yours (as long as you don’t drive traffic to your competition). If you help others increase the ratings on their stories through your repostings and votes, they’re more likely to return the favor. These practices establish your reputation as a fair-minded individual who’s interested in the topic, not just in sales.

- ◆ **Be a courteous responder.** You make friends and influence people by responding to comments on your stories and commenting on others. Again, one good turn deserves another. Consider it as building your cyberkarma.
- ◆ **Become known as the “go-to” poster.** If you frequently post interesting material on one service, you may develop a reputation and a following, with readers watching for new items from you. They will happily rate or rank items you suggest.
- ◆ **Ask.** People who visit your site might be willing to let others know about it, but you need to remind them. Put a call to action or Social Sharing button at the end of a story or post, reminding them to tell a friend or share your content publicly. If you’ve decided to focus on a particular service, display its icon with a link (see the later section “Using Social Media Buttons”). You might even include a call to action to install a toolbar.



Don’t confuse *popularity* — a subjective and manipulated quantity — with the *quality* of leads that a bookmark or social news mention may generate. Popularity is a means, not an end. Ultimately, you’re better off with fewer, but higher-quality, visitors arriving at your site.

### *Swapping bookmarks*

Like exchanging reciprocal links to improve search engine ranking, exchanging bookmarks has become common practice. Like linking, bookmark swapping can be done honestly, but it has a darker side.

Follow the same principles as you do with links:

- ◆ Don’t exchange bookmarks with spam-like junk sites, only with ones that offer value.
- ◆ Be suspicious of people who offer to sell bookmarks or votes.
- ◆ Look for relevance, including shared tags or search terms, as well as traffic rankings on the exchanging site.

Because submitting too many of your own pages to a bookmarking service can tag you as a spammer, you can participate in a service in which members bookmark each other. These are similar to some of the old link exchanges, banner exchanges, and Web rings. Be cautious. Avoid anything that looks illegitimate.

If you have no friends or colleagues to help you out, you might examine the options of *piqqus* ([www.piqqus.com](http://www.piqqus.com)) for exchanges among Digg, StumbleUpon, and Propeller; [socialbookmarkexchange.com](http://socialbookmarkexchange.com) or [www.lavalinx.com/social-bookmarking.lava](http://www.lavalinx.com/social-bookmarking.lava) offer more comprehensive exchange services.



Avoid automated submission services or scripts. The safest way to participate in social bookmarking is the old-fashioned way: individually, by hand.

## Using Social Media Buttons

Social media buttons have two functions: Follow Us On buttons crosslink visitors to multiple elements of your Web presence; Social Sharing buttons enable visitors easily to share your content or Web site with others. Place buttons consistently near the top of a page or article, where the key information is.

You can repeat smaller versions of the buttons at the end of each post on your blog, so users can share a specific item instead of the entire blog. Social media buttons can also be placed on e-newsletters and on multiple social media networks. Anecdotal evidence from some companies who have tried organized campaigns shows dramatic increases in traffic on their social media sites.

### Follow Us buttons

Follow Us buttons, shown Figure 3-6, sometimes called *chiclets*, link visitors to other elements of your Web presence, such as to your Facebook profile, Twitter page, or blog. In Figure 3-6, the Follow Us On button links to Behind the Burner's social media pages, while the Socially Bookmark Us icons encourage users to share the site with their friends on their own accounts. Some services, such as Flickr and Ning, provide large, customizable graphical badges to promote a link to your alternative presence (see Book VII).

Almost all services offer free standard icons along with code to insert them. Alternatively, you can search for creative icons online at sites like [www.evohosting.co.uk/blog/web-development/design/more-free-social-media-icons](http://www.evohosting.co.uk/blog/web-development/design/more-free-social-media-icons) and create your own link or use a social bookmark links generator, such as Keotag ([www.keotag.com/sociable.php](http://www.keotag.com/sociable.php)).

### Social Sharing buttons

Social Sharing buttons (such as those shown in Figure 3-7) let visitors easily share content by linking them to the sign-in page for their own accounts on other social sharing services. On SexyBookmarks.net (top), the buttons rise up as a user hovers over them; AddThis.com (bottom) shows a small drop-down option. Several sources for other social sharing buttons are listed in Table 3-4.



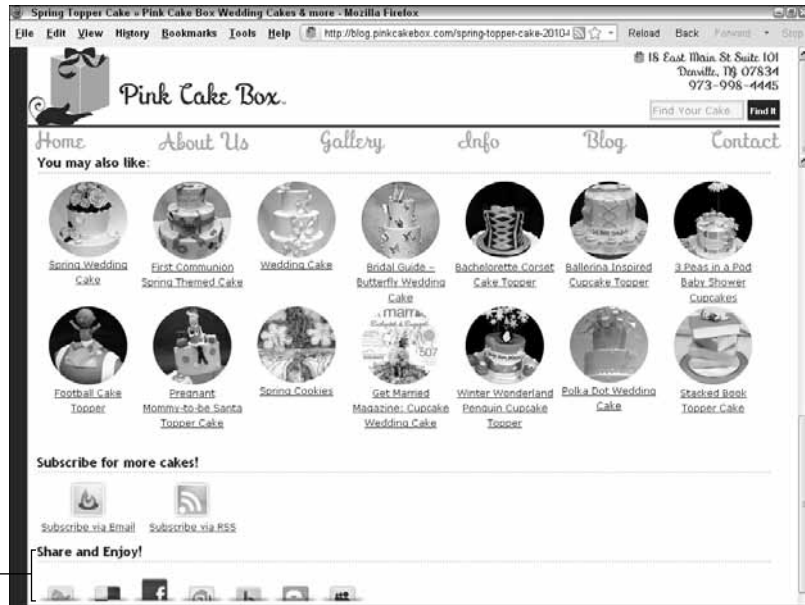
**Figure 3-6:** This blog uses a block of social media buttons for following and another row for sharing.

*Courtesy Behind the Burner*

**Table 3-4 Sources for Social Sharing Buttons**

<i>Name</i>	<i>URL</i>
AddThis	<a href="http://addthis.com">http://addthis.com</a>
AddToAny	<a href="http://www.addtoany.com">www.addtoany.com</a>
FreeTellAFriend	<a href="http://www.freetellafriend.com">www.freetellafriend.com</a>
Open Share Icon Set	<a href="http://www.openshareicons.com">www.openshareicons.com</a>
Shareaholic	<a href="http://www.shareaholic.com">www.shareaholic.com</a>
ShareThis	<a href="http://sharethis.com">http://sharethis.com</a>
Social Notes Widget for Products	<a href="http://strongmail.com/technology/socialnotes">http://strongmail.com/technology/socialnotes</a>

These free, easy-to-install buttons allow users to transfer content quickly to their own profiles, blogs, preferred social bookmarking service, instant messages, e-mail, or text messages. You can even use a special Social Notes widget from [www.strongmail.com/technology/socialnotes](http://www.strongmail.com/technology/socialnotes) that facilitates sharing of products from your e-commerce site, as shown in Figure 3-8. This is viral marketing at an epidemic level!



Social Sharing buttons

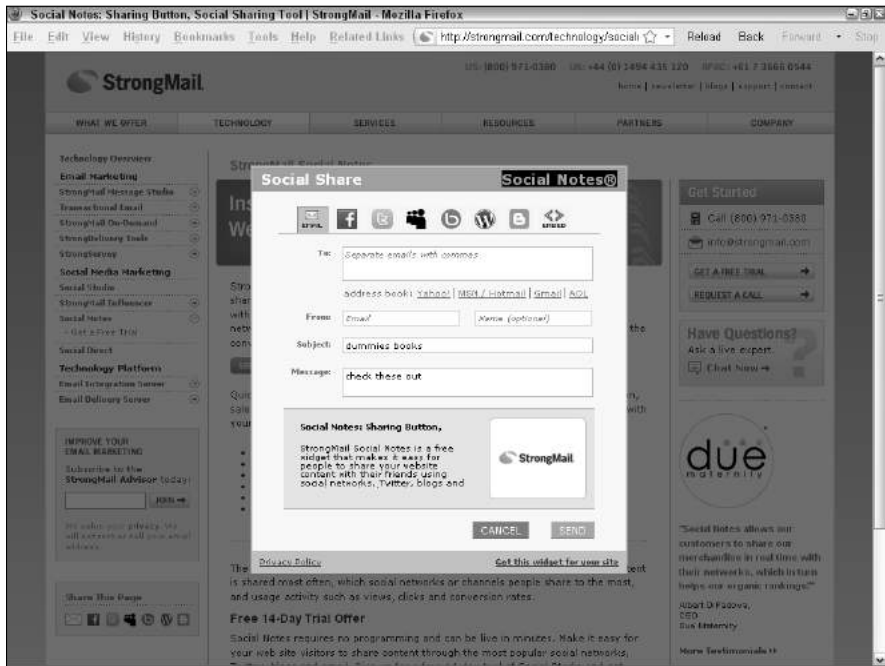
Social Sharing buttons

**Figure 3-7:** Social sharing buttons, such as the ones shown here, encourage visitors to pass along your site or content through their own accounts.



Courtesy Pink Cake Box and Courtesy New Mexico SBDC

**Figure 3-8:** Social sharing widgets enable users to recommend products direct from your online store.



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Register for free analytics on those sharing services that offer it; the analytics tell you how and where users elected to share your material or site. You can often find a toolbar add-on for each service on the site. You may want to install the ones you need in your browser and offer that option to your users in a call to action.



Always include Print, E-mail, and Favorites (for personal bookmarks) in your set of Social Sharing buttons. Some people like the convenience of the “old stuff.”



If you aren’t comfortable inserting code on your site, ask your Web developer or programmer to do it for you. Sometimes even your hosting company can help. Specify which Social Sharing or Follow Us buttons you want to have visible and ask to have the buttons appear on every page of your site.

If all these tasks seem overwhelming, plenty of providers are willing to help you for a fee. Most SEO firms, press and public relations firms, online marketing companies, specialized social marketing ad agencies, and copywriters who specialize in online content now offer assistance with social bookmarking, social news, and other forms of social media marketing. Try searching for *social media services*, *social media agencies*, or *social media marketing*.