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John Martin
Developer Connection

[Building the Microsoft Social Platform](#)

The path from online reference libraries to large and vibrant online communities

Back in May 2008, Microsoft made [the first step](#) towards opening up its online reference libraries, namely the TechNet, MSDN and Expression portals, providing the "fertile soil" necessary for communities of IT professionals and developers to form around the websites. The social bookmarking tools for MSDN, TechNet and Expression [evolved](#) past the preview stage in September, and [John Martin](#), from the Server & Tools Online (STO) group, was kind enough to answer a few questions related to the social platform Microsoft is building via its web-based reference libraries.

Softpedia: To get started... Please tell our readers who you are and what is your role with Microsoft.

I'm John Martin, Director and Lead Evangelist for Microsoft's global MSDN, TechNet, Expression, and CodePlex web sites. I have been at Microsoft for almost 6 years and have spent the last 3 years in the Microsoft.com group.

Softpedia: In May, you delivered the preview of Social Bookmarking 1.0 on MSDN, TechNet and Expression. How has version 1.0 evolved since then, and especially in the September RTW version? Could you please comment on some of the most relevant features in this release?

John Martin: Sure, there are a couple of really important new features to be aware of:

- We made it easy to get started by importing your bookmarks from IE and Firefox and other bookmarking services like Delicious. This makes it really easy to get your bookmarks into the system and start networking.
- People can now use RSS to subscribe to tag-filtered bookmark feeds (like a feed of new bookmarks for Visual Basic or Hyper-V) and can also subscribe to an individual's bookmark feed (like an expert or really good bookmarker). Both these features make it easy to stay up to-date on the latest technical content.
- The application was localized and released in 12 languages, including English, French, German, Spanish, Brazilian-Portuguese, Russian, Japanese, Korean, Traditional and Simplified Chinese, Italian, and Czech.

Softpedia: Microsoft is obviously building more than just a social bookmarking application. What is the company's social vision for one of the largest technical communities worldwide? What is the next step for the Microsoft Social Platform? MSDN and TechNet attract together approximately 30 million visitors per month. What is Microsoft doing in order to engage them in a conversation, in sharing, in collaborating, etc.?

John Martin: Our core vision is to transform our sites from big online reference libraries into large and vibrant online communities. We refer to this as "opening the sites up" to the technical community, and we're doing it so that people can better use our sites to connect with each other and with people at Microsoft, share resources and knowledge, and ultimately be more successful with our products and as professionals.

It's really important for us to align our social innovations with the things people come to us for help on. We refer to these things as "tasks." Troubleshooting is a top task for IT professionals and getting code samples is a top task for developers. Examples of us aligning our innovations to these core tasks include our investment in the new Forums application (for asking questions and getting answers), and MSDN Code Gallery (where everyone can share code samples). Discoverability (finding things) is a universal task and we hope that things like Social Bookmarking and Voting will help people find and evaluate content better.

Another important part of our strategy is to increase the ROI for becoming a member of MSDN and TechNet. By that, I mean we need to lower the barriers to participation, and increase the value that someone gets. For example, we need to unfragment the profiles that are used on different apps and make it possible to sign in once and be authenticated into all our apps. Additionally, we are working to make sure we have a single recognition system that recognizes your contributions to the community across all of our apps. For example, your profile should reflect that you have answered questions in Forums, uploaded some code samples, and been an active bookmarker. With a unified recognition system in place, you can establish a meaningful identity within the community and grow your visibility, impact, and influence as you contribute.

Softpedia: What should [MSDN](#), [TechNet](#) and [Expression](#) users expect from, let's say, Social Bookmarking 2.0?

John Martin: It's early days for this release yet, so we will be monitoring the behavior and feedback around the world for further improvements. We are focusing on improving the global user social experience by integrating our social platform services and syndication across all of our applications with respect to creating feeds from a standardized tagging infrastructure, being recognized for your engagement, and building a reputation. Our plan is to also continue to drive social bookmarking feeds to other sites within MSDN, TechNet and Expression as well like the Visual Studio Team System 2008 Team Suite [development center](#) on MSDN.

Rather than look at bookmarking specially, let's look at the whole set of social experiences we are working on. Bookmarking was a start, and fills a fundamental need to enable people to contribute resources to the community. We are also working on adding the idea of "groups" to the sites, so people can organize and share knowledge around specific things / products, or a business or team. One thing I think will happen is that a lot of local user groups will create online groups on MSDN and TechNet to collaborate and share info. We are also planning to allow people to formalize their associate to other members with a "friends" type of feature. I think you will see this displayed on the profile page. As in, here's me and my colleagues, or friends.

We are also committed to a public API for our social platform, and will be publishing that on an ongoing basis. I think there are some really great ways to leverage our data and services that we might never get to, but the community can. Watch my blog for announcements on that.

Softpedia: How successful was the introduction of Social Bookmarking 1.0? Can you provide our readers with some statistics related to the ongoing "dialog" catalyzed by MSDN Social and TechNet Social? Are MSDN and TechNet visitors embracing the new social bookmarking application? What kind of feedback has Microsoft received?

John Martin: We have been tracking the buzz and receiving very positive feedback about

this release from around the world, but we are still at the beginning - launched less than 30 days ago. The last report I saw showed about 2,000 active social bookmarkers, more than 30,000 bookmarks (70% from non-Microsoft sites). We also saw a big spike in bookmarks when we released the import tools in early September. We have many regional launch events coming up and even some contests, so we expect the adoption and the bookmarking action to continue growing.

Softpedia: What kind of impact do you expect the social platform to have on Microsoft's software products beyond MSDN and TechNet? Do you think that consumers and users that are not among the MSDN and TechNet audiences will see any benefits from stronger developer and IT professional communities?

John Martin: Right now, our focus is on opening the MSDN, TechNet, and Expression sites up to the global developer, IT professional, and designer communities. But I believe the approach we are taking creates new value for any audience.