WaterCooler

Social Computing Lab, HP Labs Palo Alto

Presented by Mike Brzozowski, Research Scientist

WaterCooler is a web-based alpha service that allows enterprises to tap their greatest asset – the distributed knowledge base of their employees --- and it helps employees find people with specific expertise or interests.

By aggregating streams of a company's blogs, forums, knowledge briefs and other sources acquired using industry-standard RSS feeds, WaterCooler makes employees' shared knowledge findable and fosters lively discussion across an organization.

As organizations grow, the collective experience, wisdom and expertise of its people also grows. This information, by its very nature, cannot be stored in a database and, therefore, locating it becomes exponentially more difficult.

WaterCooler regularly polls RSS feeds across an enterprise, including forums, internal and external blogs and comments, news releases, press coverage, bookmarks, wiki edits, knowledge briefs and new business ideas. It matches document authors against the company directory, using the organization tree to disambiguate common names.

Hewlett-Packard Company
3000 Hanover Street
Palo Alto, CA 94304
www.hp.com

Documents are then indexed and made available to users, who can browse them by source, organization, workgroup, job junction, author, keyword or topic. Each results page can be subscribed to as an RSS feed, so employees can easily monitor for new items in a desktop newsreader or widget. In addition, WaterCooler tracks clicks on each article to identify the most popular items.

For example, WaterCooler enables different geographically dispersed business units with a common mission, such as worldwide enterprise product support teams, to form an electronic virtual community that shares useful information across organizational boundaries.

Since 2007, HP has used an alpha version of WaterCooler to harness the knowledge base of its employees. The research team is investigating ways to enable dynamic personalized RSS feeds that contain new, highly relevant content for individual users. This will allow WaterCooler subscribers to stay informed of new resources and ideas as they appear within their organizations.

WaterCooler is in use internally at HP and remains under development.

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