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HOME

## **Furl.net: Say farewell to Blogs and Bookmarks and get your Furl on.**

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*"I still haven't found what I'm looking for." – Bono of U2*

Here's a riddle: What begins with one, expands to over fifty and then continues to grow by hundreds and then thousands within a matter of weeks? A fertilized human egg? Howard Dean's recrudescant supporters in his final weeks? No. The answer is Furl.

My primary frustration with Blogs and Bookmarks is the inability to structure findings clearly beyond date-stamped archives or clumsy Internet link listings. Coupled with ad hominem commentary (on Blogs) and dead link pollution within both Blogs and Bookmark folders, there is motivation to explore alternatives.

Recently, I was turned on to a neoteric research tool for information management from Furl, located online at [www.furl.net](http://www.furl.net). I'd like to say thank you to Jim Stroud of Siemens for introducing me to this resource within one month of official public launch (January 2004). Furl was created by Mike Giles, a man with a problem. Mike bookmarks sites zealously. As time passed, his ability to reason through cryptic links stored across countless folders was being hampered by his short term memory. According to Doctors, this memory thing worsens with age...though I forget exactly what changes.

The basic idea behind Furl: focus entirely on organizing endless links uncovered during the course of inquiry connected to any project (personal or professional) such that one might return later to easily search and retrieve findings. Does this sound similar to a 'favorites' folder within your browser – but one of Brobdingnagian proportions? It is not, and this column explains how any why within the following six detailed sections:

### **Archive everything and build your own "WayBack Machine"**

Visit a web site today and you must always determine your fleeting interest in capturing the screen before you. When you Furl a site, what you are actually doing is creating a cached version of the entire page on Furl's server. If you've ever clicked on a 'cached' link from within a search engine such as Google, then you understand the value of web fossils.

If you've ever had to use the 'WayBack Machine' ([www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)) to find pages from the Dark Ages of the Internet because Google's 'cached' link is dead - or if you've ever clicked on bookmarks only to be welcomed back with a 404 error, then you understand the value of historical information within any research project (for example, comparing old and new product and service descriptions, management teams, etc.). You also understand the tedium involved in tracking down that same page at some future point.

However, as a twist, Furl extends this capability to include all of your permission level access sites. This means everything that you are paying for from databases to subscription news sites to online receipts of purchase. Think about this for a minute. If you are bookmarking sites and terminating subscriptions, you are losing content. Furl removes this information access obstacle. You are filing away your own permanent copy when you Furl that screen, granting you digital access forever.

### **Control privacy and permissions**

One of the most interesting features of Furl is the ability to lock down entire folders and/or individual web pages. For a serious research professional, privacy is paramount. This is particularly important where Furl allows for archiving of password access resources, online receipts or other sensitive information (think, 'copyright violations').

You might choose to leave some of your folders in public view, as many users do. Every single time that you Furl a site, you are reminded to designate not only the folder for storage, but also the privacy of the resource (you may set the default to 'private'). If you forget to mark a site as private, simply log in at Furl.net and edit permissions for that site. Currently, the folder structure supports only 'top level' organization, meaning that one may not yet create subfolders and deeply structured archives - which doesn't really matter given the incredible search capabilities. However, deeper folder structure is coming, and the ability to assign a default folder is already here. But again, better searches on your own coded and sorted content will obviate the need for such old school archiving exercises.

### **Search everything, create your own keywords and add comments**

Just as email has become the killer app of communication, so too has search become the killer app for information management. New email applications like Bloomba (<http://www.statalabs.com>) have been built entirely around search-versus-stratify logic, just as Furl has built search logic into the entire archival and storage retrieval process.

Once sites have been Furl'd, search your archive at any time from the shortcut bar (described below) or log in to Furl.net. When you Furl a site, you not only designate permissions and folder preferences, you also add your own keywords to focus any search. Additionally, you may add comments or notes, or cut out and past salient clippings. . You may also add such comments and notes in any language, from Czech to Chinese. For example, while researching a client project, Furl a site into a private client folder, tag the site with keywords related to the client, the area of inquiry or other, add comments in French to describe the purpose of the site, paste in a salient clipping, and revisit any of this in the future to edit and modify.

To back up a bit, the entire purpose of Furl (per the Founder, Mike Giles) is to allow users to turn around many months or years from now and say, "where is that site that I visited ages ago that had all of the information related to Subject X?" With Furl's recommendations engine, a very new feature enhancement, users might also stumble across related resources tagged by *other* users with similar or related information archives. Finding the research work performed by

others online is commonly called, "combing" – and Furl makes it easy.

Stop and think very hard about this search capability for a long minute. Such a search is not possible within any local bookmark tool. Furl is not only searching on your keywords and folder structure, Furl is also searching the entire text of archived pages – your entire historical database of web sites. Furl supports elements of advanced search syntax; search is arguably one of the greatest features of the entire tool.

### **Simple set up and utility**

To get going, head to Furl.net, create a free account, review user options, and install a toolbar or a shortcut link on the browser. Alternatively, put the Furl command right into your daily activity by installing the 'right click' option to launch from your mouse. During setup, you have the option to create multiple folders with assorted permissions. By clicking on the shortcut from wherever you are located on the Internet, you will be able to instantly Furl the site, designate the folder for storage and continue surfing. If you have installed a program to prevent pop-ups (the standard Furl shortcut command is a pop-up), there is now a non-pop-up utility. You may also visit your own Furl archive at any time through the shortcuts, or by returning to Furl.net and logging in. It's that simple.

You may share accounts or Furl'd sites with others, allowing – for example – a colleague to share a view of a subscription based article link without taking one through the tedium of site registration, credit card entry, etc. (ouch, those copyright issues again! Review your 'click wrap' agreements before sending around such information). Currently, Academicians are testing Furl to archive class resources for students, moving them beyond the mundane task of periodic bookmark validation. You may also add notes and comments related to *other* Furl user bookmarks and resources and review such commentary within any public member archive.

Currently, Furl allows for sharing by basic URL access (your own furl site at furl.net), email, web site integration and also RSS. RSS stands for "Really Simple Syndication" or "RDF Site Summary" depending on who you ask. It's a way for news sites to share lists of their current articles and headlines. If you've been to any of a number of "portal" sites that provide news and headline summaries from other sources, you've seen RSS in action (last three sentences courtesy of [www.Craigslist.com](http://www.Craigslist.com) ).

### **Storage, retrieval and universal access**

So what happens if Furl goes out of business? What happens if you wish to work with existing bookmarks from your local browser, or take all of your Furl'd sites on the road with you? This is all possible. Currently, Furl allows for both import and export of archives. Import is simple, and effectively pulls in your entire "favorites" folder. However, Furl does not 'archive' the imported links for full text search unless one manually processes such a request.

For export, Furl allows for a user to generate a zipped file of all Furl'd content for retrieval. If you begin to use the site and develop concerns about the storage of your content, or wish to include the archive in your routine backups, simply put the requested zip file into your backup process.

Another wonderful feature of Furl: access your Furl archive anywhere. If you are off site, at a friend's house, across the globe, simply visit Furl's homepage, log in and work with your entire public and private archive. You might consider clearing the history and related footprint information whenever accessing any password protected site from any remote terminal, though this is common sense to researchers.

## About the creator of Furl and the future of Furling

I caught up with Mike Giles, the creative energy behind Furl. He's a bright and motivated guy, got his degree in Physics from Oberlin College with a research focus in visual cognition (that's in the Psych department). He's earned his stripes in both engineering and entrepreneurship, most recently having led software design and development teams at Vitria Technology, from start-up through IPO. Before Vitria, Mike co-founded an enterprise marketing company and was also in the development group at Illustra/Informix working on web-based document management systems. Under Mike, Furl has assembled a solid team, and is headquartered in Western Massachusetts.

"In many ways, Furl is an 80/20 play, in that it meets the needs of 80% of Internet users (might fall short for really hard core researchers at this point)," Mike told me, "and it meets those needs with a very easy to use tool. In the long run, we will chip away at that other 20%, but there will always be a space for high-end tools (from others)."

When asked to speak to the needs of all professional and individual users, Mike commented, "When we look at this product space, we break the user needs into four categories. We continually focus on excelling in each of the four, and think we are unique in our ability to deliver on all four). They are:

- Archive (save a copy, save meta data, etc.)
- Recall (find something again - full text search, browsing, etc)
- Share (email, RSS, web site integration)
- Discover (find new articles/people of interest)."

Regarding top Furl goals for 2004, Mike added, "Our top goal at any point in time is to meet the needs and exceed the expectations of our users. But two strategic items that we are driving beyond the more tactical requests are: Recommendations - based on what you save, recommend new articles/sites/members of interest, and Archive expansion - adding more ways to save information...and more types of items to save - i.e. notes, email, documents." Coming soon: each time you Furl a site, you will have the ability to email the site simultaneously to others, including non-members (currently, people may 'subscribe' to your public archive if you're really doing some interesting Furling).

Overall, I am delighted by this new resource and have already begun Furling away into an entirely private site for professional purposes. However, for readers of this column, I've also created a few sample public folders so that you can get a feel for what a working Furl account looks like from the outside, should you wish to build your own. Visit: <http://furl.net/members/davidcarpe> to take a look. Also, Mike greatly appreciates any and all user feedback, so please feel free to send your own ideas, thoughts and comments directly to [Furl@furl.net](mailto:Furl@furl.net) ...oh, and he's currently self-funded, so please feel free to make donations (instructions are on the site)!

As mentioned in earlier columns, please feel free to send an email if you have questions or comments: [contact@clew.us](mailto:contact@clew.us)

### Background:

David Carpe received his BFA from the George Washington University and his MBA, with a concentration in Finance and Entrepreneurship, from Babson College. He has authored a case on Valuation for the Division Chair and has also served as a Volunteer Teacher with the National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship. Professionally, he has worked in research with Fidelity Capital, served as a Management Consultant, acted as the founder and CEO of a venture backed software startup, and most recently has been working with Clew, LLC serving some of the world's most formidable organizations through Clew's CI for Strategic Human Resources practice (HRCI) and ClewRaRE™ services. David, his two sons, and their dog reside in Lexington. He is a member of SCIP, MIT Enterprise Forum, IRE and a Founding Member of the Human Capital Institute. He also serves on the Board of Conditor, LLC. David has spent the majority of his career involved, somehow, with research, analysis, consulting and planning. Direct: 781.674.CLEW (2539) [www.clew.us](http://www.clew.us)

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