

A Group Is Its Own Worst Enemy

Clay Shirky's Recommendations for Social Software
A Review by Chemboli Srinivas



Agenda

- Shirky in a nutshell
- Why study groups
- The premise of the group
- Gotchas in group software
- Designing software for groups
- Case Studies
- Conclusions

Shirky In A Nutshell

- Definition of social software
- Group behavior is self defeating
 - W R Bion's therapy of neurotics
- The relevance of social software
- Guidelines and recommendations

Why Study Groups

- An isolationist approach to groupware?
 - Definitely a bad idea
 - Not much fun
 - Business incentives say otherwise

The Premise of the Group



The Group

- A collection of individuals characterized by intimate sympathetic association and cooperation
- Universal in phenomenon
- Fundamental and sharing a common ideal
- Often spawns subcultures
- Notion of “Group Rights” vs “Individual Rights”

After Charles Holton Cooley, 1937

Types of Group Formation

- The Patriarchal Sovereign
- The Leader
- The Tyrant
- The Central Person
- The Organizer
- The Hero

After Fritz Redl, 1942

Social Control

- Fruitful group endeavor requires
 - Distribution of burden
 - Delegation of responsibilities
 - Safeguards and ethical instruments

After Edward Alsworth Ross, 1910

The Need For Authority

- Internal and external authority
- Identifying the 'stranger'
- Prestige and / or status

After Georg Simmel, 1950

Gotchas In Group Software



Ubiquity

- Used in and out of context
- Disparate platform and user base
- Inventive reuse
- Non-localized presence

Meta-rules

- Intermeshing of technical and social issues
- Group effects redefine the purported goal
- The need for constitution and governance
- Limits on individual rights

Groups Within Groups

- Sub-spawning of the Primary Group
- Heterogeneity + Aggregation

After Herbert Spencer, 1897

Designing Software for Groups

- Accessible social handles
- Reputation and member accreditation
- Barriers for participation
- Managing scale and complexity
- Identifying the group as the user
- Not reinventing the wheel

Case Studies

- Orkut.com
- Metafilter.com
- Deepwoods.org

Orkut.com

The image shows a screenshot of a web browser displaying the Orkut.com login page. The browser's address bar shows the URL <https://www.orkut.com/Login.aspx>. The page features the Orkut logo in the top right corner and a navigation menu with links for Home, Join Orkut, Media, and Help. The main content area includes a descriptive paragraph about Orkut as an online community, a grid of diverse user profile pictures with the text "who do you know?" overlaid, and a login form with fields for username and password, a "sign in" button, and a "remember me" checkbox. A large, abstract graphic of blue squares is positioned on the right side of the page. The footer contains the text "in affiliation with Google" and links for "About Orkut", "Privacy", and "Terms". The browser's status bar at the bottom shows "Done" and the website URL "www.orkut.com".

File Edit View Go Bookmarks Tools Help

<https://www.orkut.com/Login.aspx>

orkut

Home | [Join Orkut](#) | [Media](#) | [Help](#)

orkut beta

orkut is an online community that connects people through a network of trusted friends.

We are committed to providing an online meeting place where people can socialize, make new acquaintances and find others who share their interests.

who do you know?

username:

password:

>> sign in

remember me
[[forgot your password?](#)]

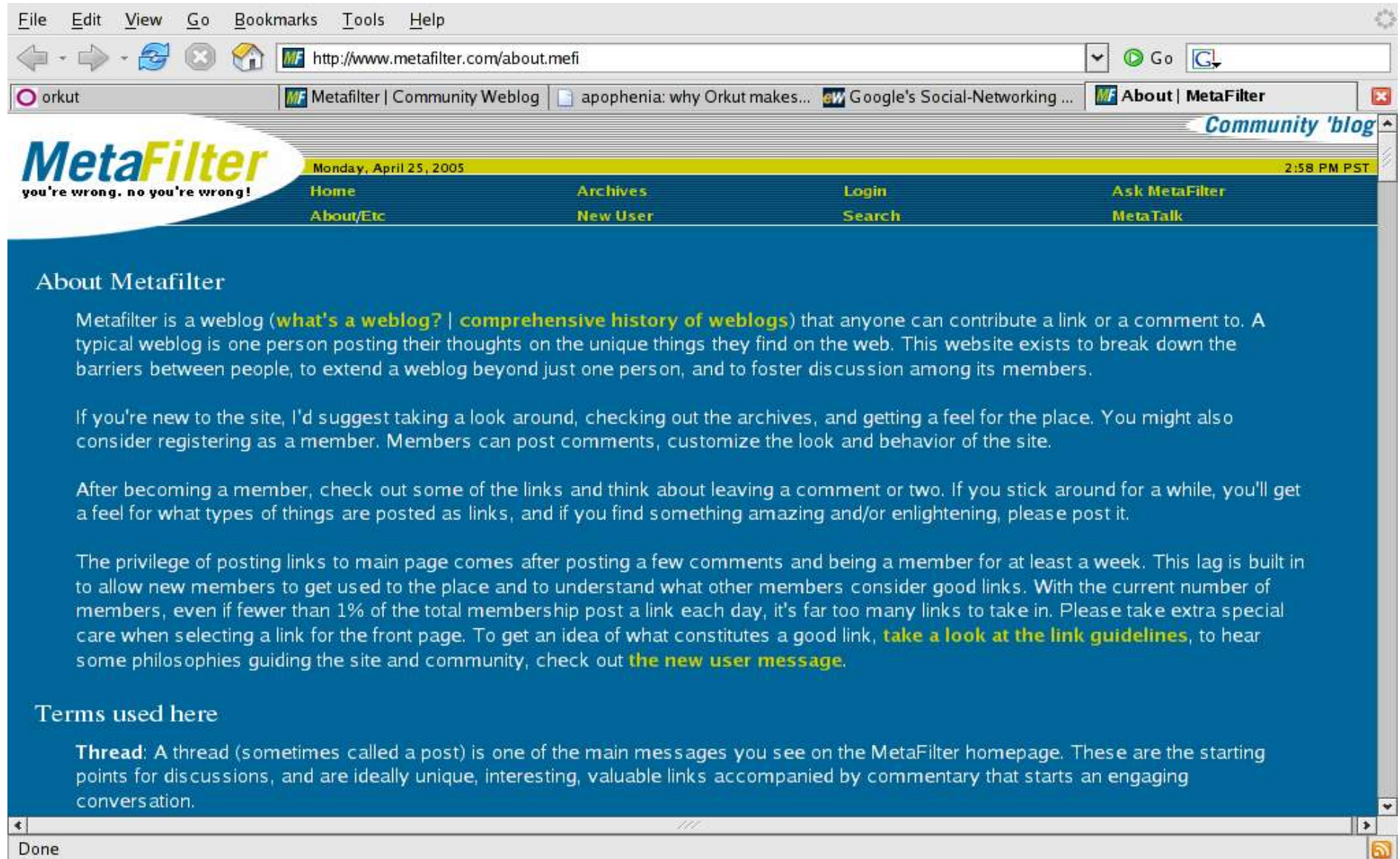
Join [orkut](#) to expand the circumference of your social circle.

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[About Orkut](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Terms](#)

Done www.orkut.com

Metafilter.com



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the address bar displaying <http://www.metafilter.com/about.mefi>. The browser's menu bar includes File, Edit, View, Go, Bookmarks, Tools, and Help. The address bar contains navigation icons and a search box with the text "Go". The browser's tab bar shows several tabs, including "orkut", "Metafilter | Community Weblog", "apophenia: why Orkut makes...", "Google's Social-Networking ...", and "About | MetaFilter". The website's header features the MetaFilter logo with the tagline "you're wrong. no you're wrong!" and a navigation menu with links for Home, Archives, Login, Ask MetaFilter, About/Etc, New User, Search, and MetaTalk. The main content area is titled "About Metafilter" and contains the following text:

Metafilter is a weblog ([what's a weblog?](#) | [comprehensive history of weblogs](#)) that anyone can contribute a link or a comment to. A typical weblog is one person posting their thoughts on the unique things they find on the web. This website exists to break down the barriers between people, to extend a weblog beyond just one person, and to foster discussion among its members.

If you're new to the site, I'd suggest taking a look around, checking out the archives, and getting a feel for the place. You might also consider registering as a member. Members can post comments, customize the look and behavior of the site.

After becoming a member, check out some of the links and think about leaving a comment or two. If you stick around for a while, you'll get a feel for what types of things are posted as links, and if you find something amazing and/or enlightening, please post it.

The privilege of posting links to main page comes after posting a few comments and being a member for at least a week. This lag is built in to allow new members to get used to the place and to understand what other members consider good links. With the current number of members, even if fewer than 1% of the total membership post a link each day, it's far too many links to take in. Please take extra special care when selecting a link for the front page. To get an idea of what constitutes a good link, [take a look at the link guidelines](#), to hear some philosophies guiding the site and community, check out [the new user message](#).

Terms used here

Thread: A thread (sometimes called a post) is one of the main messages you see on the MetaFilter homepage. These are the starting points for discussions, and are ideally unique, interesting, valuable links accompanied by commentary that starts an engaging conversation.


The browser's status bar at the bottom shows "Done" and a small icon.

Deepwoods.org

File Edit View Go Bookmarks Tools Help

http://www.deepwoods.org/phorum2/

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The Phantom Phorum

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The time now is Tue Apr 26, 2005 8:02 am
All times are GMT + 10 Hours
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Forum	Topics	Posts	Last Post
The Phantom			
 General Phantom Discussion Welcome to the Phantom Phorum, your place in the Deep Woods where you can discuss all things Phantom. Feel free to start your own topic, ask a question, or even post some news.	598	8346	Tue Apr 26, 2005 12:31 am godwulfAZ →
 New Phantom Stories Whenever a new Phantom story is published, a new thread will be started here to discuss it.	90	2635	Tue Apr 26, 2005 2:03 am Wild Bill Natanya →
Old Phantom Stories			

Done

Conclusions

- Groupware is dynamic in nature
- Caters to disparate platforms and persona
- Complex and competing balance between social and technical issues
- It's all about people

Acknowledgments

- Ida Nursoo [Research Scholar, Political Science Program, ANU]
- Dr. Bryan A Shedden [Research Engineer, BlueScope Steel Research]
- Dr. Seetha Ramanathan [Research Pyschoanalyst, Govt. Medical College, Chennai, India]

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- <http://www.socialnetworking-weblog.com>