Where the Social Web Meets the Semantic Web

Tom Gruber

tomgruber.org and RealTravel.com

Abstract. The Semantic Web is an ecosystem of interaction among computer systems. The social web is an ecosystem of conversation among people. Both are enabled by conventions for layered services and data exchange. Both are driven by human-generated content and made scalable by machine-readable data. Yet there is a popular misconception that the two worlds are alternative, opposing ideologies about how the web ought to be. Folksonomy vs. ontology. Practical vs. formalistic. Humans vs. machines. This is nonsense, and it is time to embrace a unified view. I subscribe to the vision of the Semantic Web as a substrate for collective intelligence. The best shot we have of collective intelligence in our lifetimes is large, distributed human-computer systems. The best way to get there is to harness the "people power" of the Web with the techniques of the Semantic Web. In this presentation I will show several ways that this can be, and is, happening.

1   About the speaker

Tom Gruber is a researcher, inventor, and entrepreneur with a focus on systems for knowledge sharing and collective intelligence. He did foundational work in ontology engineering and is well-known for his definition of ontologies in the context of Artificial Intelligence. The approaches and technologies from this work are precursors to the infrastructure for today's Semantic Web. At Stanford University in the early 1990's, Tom was a pioneer in the use of the Web for collaboration and knowledge sharing. He invented HyperMail, a widely-used open source application that turns email conversations into collective memories, which chronicled many of the early discussions that helped define the Web. He built ontology engineering tools and established the first web-based public exchange for ontologies, software, and knowledge bases. During the rise of the Web, Dr. Gruber founded Intraspect, an enterprise software company that pioneered the space of collaborative knowledge management. Intraspect applications help professional people collaborate in large distributed communities, continuously contributing to a collective body of knowledge. His current project is RealTravel.com, which aspires to be the best place on the web to share knowledge and experiences about travel. RealTravel provides an environment for a community of travel enthusiasts to create beautiful travel journals of their adventures, share them with friends and family, and learn from other like-minded travelers.