Social Networking Terms

Aggregation is the process of gathering and remixing content from blogs and other websites that provide RSS feeds. The results may be displayed in an aggregator website like Bloglines or Google Reader, or directly on your desktop using a newsreader.

Alerts: search engines allow you to specify words, phrases or tags that you want checked periodically, with results of those searches returned to you by email. You may also be able to read the searches by RSS feed.

Authenticity is the sense that something or someone is "real". Blogs enable people to publish content, and engage in conversations, that show their interests and values, and so help them develop an authentic voice online.

Avatars are graphical images representing people. They are what you are in virtual worlds. You can build a visual character with the body, clothes, behaviors, gender and name of your choice. This may or may not be an authentic representation of you.

Blogs are websites with dated items of content in reverse chronological order, self-published by bloggers. Items – sometimes called posts - may have keyword tags associated with them, are usually available as feeds, and often allow commenting.

Bookmarking is saving the address of a website, either in your browser, or on a social bookmarking site like del.icio.us.

Bulletin boards were the early vehicles for online collaboration, where users connected with a central computer to post and read email-like messages. They were the electronic equivalent of public notice boards. The term is still used for forums.

Chat is interaction on a web site, with a number of people adding text items one after the other into the same space at (almost) the same time. A place for chat – chat room – differs from a forum because conversations happen in "real time."

Comments: blogs may allow readers to add comments under items, and may also provide a feed for comments as well as for main items. That means you can keep up with conversations without having to revisit the site to check if anything has been added.

Commitment: the "social" aspect of social media means that tools are most useful when other people commit to using them too. Commitment will depend on people's degree of interest in a subject, capability online, preparedness to share with others, degree of comfort in a new place, as well as the usability of the site or tool.

Feeds are the means by which you can read, view or listen to items from blogs and other RSS-enabled sites without visiting the site, by subscribing and using an aggregator or newsreader.

Forums are discussion areas on websites, where people can post messages or comment on existing messages asynchronously – that is, independently of time or place. Chat is the synchronous equivalent.

Friends, on social networking sites, are contacts whose profile you link to in your profile. On some sites people have to accept the link, in others, not.

Groups are collections of individuals with some sense of unity through their activities, interests or values. They are bounded: you are in a group, or not. They differ in this from networks, which are dispersed, and defined by nodes and connections. Email lists and forums sit easily with bounded groups, blogs with networks - although the match with tools is not entirely clear-cut. A group may use a blog, and an email list may serve a network.

Instant messaging: (IM) is chat with one other person. using an IM tool like AOL Instant Messenger, Microsoft Live Messenger or Yahoo Messenger. The tools allow you to indicate whether or not you are available for a chat, and if so can be a good alternative to emails for a rapid exchange.

Lurkers are people who read but don't contribute or add comments to forums. The one per cent rule-of-thumb suggests about one per cent of people contribute new content to an online community, another nine percent comment, and the rest lurk. However, this may not be a passive role because content read on forums may spark interaction elsewhere.

Mashups are the smart mixes that techies do to combine several tools to create a new web services.

Permalink is the address (URL) of an item of content, for example a blog post, rather than the address of a web page with lots of different items. You will often find it at the end of a blog post.

Profiles are the information that you provide about yourself when signing up for a social networking site. This includes a picture, basic info, your personal and business interests, a "blurb" about yourself, and tags to help people search for like-minded people.

Registration is the process of providing a username, password and other details when seeking to access a website that has restricted access. See logging in.

RSS is short for Really Simple Syndication. This allows you to subscribe to content on blogs and other social media and have it delivered to you through a feed.

Searching for information on the Net is done using a search engine, of which Google is the best known. Specialist search engines like Technorati concentrate on blogs.

Sharing is offering other people the use of your text, images, video, bookmarks or other content by adding tags, and applying copyright licenses that encourage use of content.

Subscribing is the process of adding an RSS feed to your aggregator or newsreader. It's the online equivalent of signing up for a magazine, but usually free.

Tags are keywords attached to a blog post, bookmark, photo or other item of content so you and others can find them easily through searches and aggregation. Tags can usually be freely chosen - and so form part of a folksonomy - while categories are predetermined and are part of taxonomy.

Threads are strands of conversation. On an email list or web forum they will be defined by messages that use the use the same subject. On blogs they are less clearly defined, but emerge through comments and trackbacks.

Widgets* are a stand-alone applications you can embed in other applications, like a website or a desktop, or view on its own on a PDA. These may help you to do things like subscribe to a feed, do a specialist search, or even make a donation.