

A Social Aggregator for SMEs

Fabio Calefato, Filippo Lanubile, Nicole Novielli

Dipartimento di Informatica
Università degli Studi di Bari Aldo Moro
Bari, Italy
[calefato|lanubile|novielli]@di.uniba.it

Motivation

In recent years, the use of the web has widely affected interpersonal communication, thanks to the diffusion of social software that facilitates interaction and enhances our everyday life. Most people and companies have their digital identity spread on multiple social networks, such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Foursquare, TripAdvisor, and so on. As an evidence of this, for example, the current number of monthly active users of Facebook is around 901 million of which 526 million are active on a daily basis [1].

Social software is now playing a fundamental role also at work. It can be used both as an instrument for knowledge sharing in a company intranet and as a powerful marketing channel for establishing a direct communication with the customers. As a consequence, several companies are now investing in social media for building their social digital brand and establishing trust-based relationship with their customers.

Assessing the adoption of social media into an enterprise requires that commercial goals are well defined. On the one hand, it becomes crucial to provide tools that make it possible to easily manage company profiles on the various existing social media platforms. On the other hand, it is fundamental to constantly monitor the activity on the company profile in terms of return of the investment [2]. This holds not only for large enterprises but also for small-medium enterprises (SME) that can benefit a lot by the buzz of social networks as a modern version of traditional word of mouth.

We propose the usage of a Social Aggregator that aims to put together all the information about a SME, including both information that a SME is directly posting and what customers say about the SME on social networks. Here, we briefly introduce the architecture and present some usage scenarios for SME.

Architecture

The Social Aggregator follows a client-server architecture. The server component, called Social Proxy Server, is an aggregator service that accesses the API of social networking services (SNS), using the HTTP/REST protocol. Being a proxy, its main duty is retrieving information from SNSs about registered users. We plan to support the most popular SNS, namely Facebook, Twitter, and FourSquare. For each service, a user will be able to customize

what information the proxy is allowed to retrieve from the account (e.g., posts shared and profile picture, but not friends or followers).

The client component will communicate with the Social Proxy Server through the HTTP/REST protocol. Clients will be implemented for a number of platforms, in a device-independent fashion, wherever an HTML5 browser is available. In addition, to exploit the large diffusion of smartphones and tablets, platform-specific apps will be developed for Android, iOS, and Windows Phone. Clients will also be available as extensions of other applications, including content management systems (CMS), such as WordPress and Drupal, and desktop application, such as Visual Studio. In the latter case, we already have implemented a prototype of an extension of Visual Studio, called SocialTFS [3].

Usage scenarios

In the following, some possible scenarios are presented related to the Foo company, an imaginary Italian SME in the food category.

Twitter as a source. The company wants to monitor the trend of tweets that mention Foo. In order to do so, a filter is set to monitor the tweets that use the #Foo hashtag or directly mention the official twitter account @FooSME. The Social Aggregator service generates a widget that can be integrated within a Wordpress extension, the content management systems adopted by Foo. The widget displays a rotating list of the latest filtered tweets, draws a graph to visually monitor the "mention" tendency over Twitter, and ranks the most "addicted" commenters.

Facebook as a source. The Foo SME uses the Social Aggregator to generate polls for the Foo's Facebook page. A poll lists those meals that have been most cited by fans in their posts. Most voted meals will end up in composing the special weekend menu. Voters of the winning menu combination might get a special discount.

Social Network Analysis. As a combination of the two previous scenarios, Foo uses the Social Aggregator to monitor customer activities on social media. In particular, Foo may access to statistics on the most popular posts, topics and contents as a support for understanding the trend of the user behavior with respect to the Foo SME business.

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