

# Gadgets

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*"The fact with which I deal is that, in the field of Interpretation, the gadget has come to stay, and will be used to a much greater extent than is now the case. There will never be a device of telecommunication as satisfactory as the direct contact not merely with the voice, but with the hand, the eye, the casual and meaningful ad lib, and with that something which flows out of the very constitution of the individual in his physical self.*

*"While I think nobody disagrees upon this, we all know that there will not be enough of those individuals to make the direct contact... So whether one likes it or not, we are going to have more—and I should hope, better—mechanical devices aimed at multiplying the interpretive effort."*

*—Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage**

I don't think Freeman Tilden had in mind widgets and wikis when he wrote these words 43 years ago. Yet his words sound like they could have been written yesterday. Social media tools are among the newest gadgets available to interpreters. I believe they are here to stay. Why?

Because of one important reason—social media gadgets give people a voice. These tools are not just a new way for interpreters to talk to the public. Social media is a new way to listen. Interpreters try to influence the way visitors think and behave. Social media is the visitor's chance to influence the way we think and behave.

Social media is also more than just Facebook and Flickr; it's an entire suite of gadgets that can be used to multiply the interpretive effort.

This article introduces

**National Association for Interpretation, NAI maintains five blogs, including the NAI blog.** <http://interpnet.com/naiblog>

## **Blogs**

Blog is short for "Web log." People use blogs to write comments about subjects that interest them. Others read these posts and add their own comments. The versatility of blogs has made them wildly popular. Professionals, businesses, and even politicians have entered the "blogosphere."

Another version of a blog is a microblog, which allows users to communicate through super-short blog posts. The most popular microblog site is Twitter. Many users add posts to microblogs using the text message feature on their cell phone.

Blogs are probably the best social media tools you can use to listen to your audience. Blogs are searchable like any other Web page. You can search for key words related to your work and find out what topics interest the public and what issues concern them. Try [blogsearch.google.com](http://blogsearch.google.com)

Microblog sites like Twitter also offer an avenue for conducting market research using online focus groups. Businesses can solicit consumer opinion through product surveys. Twitter is also becoming a tool for monitoring real-time events, such as natural disasters. In both of these cases, listening to what people say can influence management and decision-making processes.

### **Google Trends**

If you want to know what is on people's minds at any given moment, you can track search engine trends. Google keeps a tally of every search on its site. You can find out what the most popular search term or phrase is for a particular city. This data might give you an idea for a new exhibit or program. Visit [www.google.com/trends](http://www.google.com/trends)

### **Wikis**

A wiki is software that allows multiple authors to build a Web page or online document. The most popular application is Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia that is created and edited by users. Anyone can add text, illustrations, maps, tables, and links to other sites.

Wikis are great collaboration tools. Designing a new exhibit? Invite professionals, special-interest groups, and members of the public to help using a wiki. Think of the viewpoints you can incorporate, the mistakes you can avoid, and the ineffective material you can revamp before the exhibit goes to press. Try [www.wikispaces.com](http://www.wikispaces.com)

### **Metaverse**

This term refers to the digital universe that exists in virtual worlds like Second Life. Users create online alter egos known as avatars that allow them to interact over the Internet. Some universities have purchased virtual land inside Second Life to use for teaching, study sessions, and group projects. Visit [www.sl-educationblog.org](http://www.sl-educationblog.org)

### **Video Sharing**

Anyone can be a film producer these days. Sites like YouTube provide a venue for premiering amateur movies. Many agencies create videos, hoping to gain publicity on YouTube. The key to success is creating something that grabs people's attention so fully that they can't help but tell other people about it. People want to watch fun films, not advertisements or educational videos.

Some organizations have succeeded in this arena by hosting competitions to see who can create the most entertaining and engaging video about a subject. This is generally more effective than posting agency-produced videos on sites like YouTube.

### **Social Bookmarking**

Chances are, you have a list of bookmarks or favorites on your work computer. You probably have another list on your home computer. Sites like Delicious.com allow you to

create your list of favorites online. You can access it from any computer and share it with other people.

The interpretive themes at your site are likely related to topics that people research every day for papers and presentations. Set up a social bookmarking site to guide people on their quest for knowledge. Create a list of favorites that links to websites related to your interpretive story.

Social bookmarking sites also offer a way for people to promote interesting articles. Members of sites like Digg vote on articles as a way of filtering online content. Try posting an article online and submitting it to Digg. Members of this site will then have an opportunity to vote on your article. If enough people promote it, your article could find its way to the "front page."

Find creative ways to make your story rise to the top: Share an off-beat or little-known fact, relate your site to a current event, or write a story with humor or shock value. Digg says, "We're committed to giving every piece of content on the web an equal shot at being the next big thing."

### **Widgets and Apps**

Take a look around your desk. Perhaps you have a calendar from a store or a pen from a bank. The object is useful and it reminds you that you need to stop by the store or bank on the way home. A widget is a computerized version of a freebie that a company gives away as advertising. Widgets can be downloaded to your computer desktop, Web page, or blog.

An app (application) is a little program that offers a fun and interactive way to share your interests with others. An app might be a quiz that identifies your favorite movies or a tool that allows you to calculate your carbon footprint.

Can you think of a widget or app that could be created for your interpretive site? Perhaps a widget that continuously updates your visitors on the weather at your site or an app that allows users to identify their favorite outdoor recreation activities.

### **RSS Reader**

RSS is an acronym for Really Simple Syndication. Most blogs put out notices or "feeds" that alert you when a message is posted about a topic that interests you. This is an efficient way to stay current on blogs that you want to follow.

When you find a blog or website you like, see if it gives you an option to subscribe to a feed. You can use a tool like Google Reader to monitor multiple feeds. Certain sites, such as Technorati, are search engines that monitor blogs. These sites allow you to subscribe to a RSS feed of a specific search term.

### **Social Media Toolbar**

Viral marketing occurs when people spread a message for you. Any content you offer online must be so interesting and easy to share that people can't help but tell their friends about it. Be sure that people can spread your online content by embedding it in their websites, emailing it instantaneously, or posting it on their blog.

You can do this by creating a social media toolbar that allows users to click and share. Most social media sites offer a button or badge for this purpose.

### **Social Media Newsroom**

Some interpretive sites offer an online newsroom or press page that allows reporters and other interested people to download press releases and photos. A social media newsroom expands this idea to include other types of media. You can offer podcasts, blogs, RSS feeds, widgets, links, embeddable files, photos, and other media. Be sure to display a Creative Commons license that allows users to use, adapt, and share your content

<http://creativecommons.org>

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