Your Social Media Journey Begins Here

—Pamela Broviak

"There go my people. I must find out where they are going so I can lead them."

- French politician Alexandre Ledru-Rollin

(Thanks to Adriel Hampton for sharing that quote!)

"All of us are smarter than one of us."

-quote from 2008 SocDevCamp, Chicago, Ill.

INTRODUCTION

Everyday, all day long, people across the world are meeting online to share ideas and stories or just hang out. And although this has been going on for some time, new online tools are beginning to enhance the experience to the point that these online interactions are starting to rival off-line encounters.

Sometimes those of us already immersed in the social media craze can forget that the sheer number of places to meet online can be intimidating to those trying to get started. People look at it all and ask,

"Where do I start?"

"What do I do?"

"How do I get involved?"

"Why should I embrace social media?"

But, those of us spending an increasing amount of time online miss our offline friends. A good portion of our online chat is devoted to discussing ways to help encourage these friends to join us. As an engineer and a government employee working in public works, I have been particularly interested in helping to get others in these fields more involved.

After looking around on the Internet for a while, I noticed that there really were no basic guides to help guide someone who was totally new to Web 2.0 and social media. Most that I found assumed that people already understood the "jargon." So this guidebook is my humble attempt at trying to prepare something that might be helpful to people who really have not yet started down the social media path.

If those of you who are already fully immersed in Web 2.0 or have achieved expert level find it lacking, remember, it's Beta baby. Take it; try it on your friends. Offer up your advice about its format and content to help make it better.

Pam Broviak

SECOND EDITION NOTES—APRIL 2009

This edition is actually the second with the first being published online in Jan. 2009. I thought it was important to try to keep the guide updated as new sites emerge and older sites update their looks and features. But for now, I am leaving it in Beta form because I do think it could still be improved upon.

I also decided to place a link to where the book can be found online in case anyone has received this from a friend and needs to access the online document.

You can find the book in PDF format at:

http://www.publicworksgroup.com/YSMJBH09/YSMJBH09.PDF

The book is also online in digital book format at:

http://en.calameo.com/read/0000043394d0ae4b1e4af

THIRD EDITION NOTES—SEPTEMBER 2009

Ah, yet another reason why I hesitate to remove the Beta label on the cover. About mid-year 2009, Twitter changed their home screen and slightly changed their registration screens. There were a few other changes to some directories and user accounts referenced in the microblogging chapter of this book. So the third edition reflects these recent changes in a revamped Chapter 6.

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YOU ARE NOT PREPARED
—World of Warcraft, Blizzard

Social media, sometimes referred to as Web 2.0, is the new buzz word and the latest online trend. Those trying to get a handle on what it means will find as many definitions for Web 2.0 as there are Web sites writing about it. Everyone has their own idea about what it all means, and that in itself is representative of one of the basic ideas behind social media: everyone can now readily share their own opinions or ideas with the world.

Before we go any further let's take a moment to jump out to the Web and pull in some of the more scholarly definitions:

> *"The term 'Web 2.0' describes the changing trends in the use of* <u>*World Wide Web*</u> *technology and* <u>*web design*</u> *that aim to enhance* <u>*creativity*</u>*, communications, secure information sharing, collaboration and functionality of the web."* Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2.0

"Web 2.0 is the business revolution in the computer industry caused by the move to the internet as platform, and an attempt to understand the rules for success on that new platform. Chief among those rules is this: Build applications that harness network effects to get better the more people use them." Source: Tim O'Reilly at http://radar.oreilly.com/archives/2006/12/web-20-compact.html

Not sure that helped, but it seems like something that needed to be done. Examples might help shed some light, but although I can think of many examples of the use of Web 2.0 online, describing these to people who have not yet made the Web 2.0 plunge would do little to help portray the true meaning. So I am going to use an example from the non-digital world:

One day I had to kill some time waiting for a flight so I took a tour of Yale's campus. During this tour, we passed by one of the campus quads where a student had taken position on top of a large slab of granite in order to share his wisdom with the gathering crowd. In this same area, others were lounging on seats or on the grass talking in groups of various sizes. Further down the quad, a group had drawn up monopoly squares on the sidewalks forming a square around a central patch of grass. They were engaging folks walking by to play their game of monopoly. These students had even created visual aids such as a pair of oversized dice.

All of these activities personify in real life what is going on now in the digital space. People who have ideas and want to share them with others are talking on top of virtual slabs or creating online objects and tools designed to engage others and entice them to spend a little quality time with them. So to me Web 2.0 has become the digital or online representation of what typically goes on at a college's quad on a typical day.

Now, that should give us some idea about what to expect as we venture forward, and if the reference to returning to the campus quad didn't frighten you enough, remember NEW THINGS ARE SCARY!

That is why we are going to take this nice and easy. By the time you go through this guide, you will, like a level 80, Tauren Shaman in World of Warcraft, be prepared.

We start with a fun tool for engagement with which most of us are familiar—a survey!

Please choose which of the following best describes you:

1. I visit one or more Web sites each day
2. I occasionally visit a Web site if I am able to get access to a computer
3. I use a computer but never go online
4. Computers are the devil's tool, and I refuse to have one in my home.

Fun Survey

If you chose #4, close this document and walk away . . . do this very fast and don't look back.

If you chose # 2 or #3, you might want to refer to Appendix A for a quick review of Web 1.0 since we begin by assuming you are familiar with the use of e-mail and surfing standard Web pages. You may advance to the next section once you complete your review of Appendix A.

If you chose #1, you are to proceed to your preflight check.

"Let's pound those noobs" —Paul Broviak, age 8

Fortunately, none of you will encounter my son as you negotiate the jungle of social media. Well, unless you play World of Warcraft. But you might find along the way, someone referring to you as a "noob" or "newbie." If so, please do not take offense; the people using that term will most likely be doing so in a loving and supportive manner. If someone is using the term in a negative and offensive way towards you, the best advice I can give you is to move along. The person obviously has no social skills and most likely is an eight-year-old boy. Remember, we were all noobs once, and we realize with new tools being introduced every day, we will all be noobs once again.

POURING THE FOUNDATION

As with most endeavors, we need to begin by placing a good foundation. And we will start by visiting an online site familiar to almost everyone—Google. If you are one of the people who still think that Google is just a search engine, you will soon find out that the folks at Google have been busy little bees launching many other handy tools. One basic application the company has developed is e-mail, but at Google, e-mail is now Gmail.

GMAIL

If you work, chances are that you have an e-mail account. Many of us would say, "unfortunately, I have an e-mail account" because the use of e-mail has grown to the point that it can take over a good portion

FORMING THE FOUNDATION

Setting up an e-mail account is the first step in building a foundation for participation in the Web 2.0 guild. You will achieve this quest by successfully signing up for a Gmail account.

Following are the items you will need:

- Computer
- Internet connection (DSL or Broadband)
- Browser
- E-mail account

Remember to choose your account name wisely, particularly if your participation in social media will be business-oriented.

of your day with reading, sorting, deleting, worrying about deleting, and other such non-efficient nonsense. Anyway, usually e-mail is set up to be accessed through another program such as Microsoft Outlook. And usually you cannot simply access your e-mail account at work from any other location but your work place. This is an important difference from Gmail. With a Gmail account, you can access your e-mail from any computer as long as you have a browser and can get an Internet connection.

So here is your first task. Oh, and if you thought you were going to get through this without actively participating, think again because that would be so not Web 2.0. In each section, you are going to be given tasks to complete. And if you really want to have fun, you can look at each one as a type of quest—this first quest line is themed after the title of this chapter.

So the first step is to collect the items you will need. Most definitely you will need a computer and a robust Internet connection. Some of these sites are media-heavy and require a lot of bandwidth. As for the browser—choose the one with which you are most familiar. Some examples are Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, Google Chrome, and Apple Safari.

"Why do I have to sign up for a Gmail account when I already have an e-mail account at work or home?"

Ok, that is a very good question. And in fact, you will see from the quest that you already need to have an e-mail account with which to begin. The reason a Gmail account is recommended is that many of the places you will be going will end up sending you e-mails for registration confirmations, updates, notices, and any other type of

GETTING TO A SPECIFIC WEB SITE

There are several methods of launching a particular Web site:

- Type the address in the address bar at the top of the screen.

- Click a link that automatically takes you to the site.

- Set a particular site as your home page.

information that you request. All of us already seem to be inundated with e-mails so by having this separate account, you have a space dedicated solely for social media participation and information. Plus it is free and Google gives you fun themes to make your Gmail page that much more fun to visit.

Everyone ready, comfortably sitting at your computer with your browser displayed on the screen? Let's go:

Point the browser to the Google search page at http://www.google.com. If you successfully reach this site, your screen should look something like the following figure:
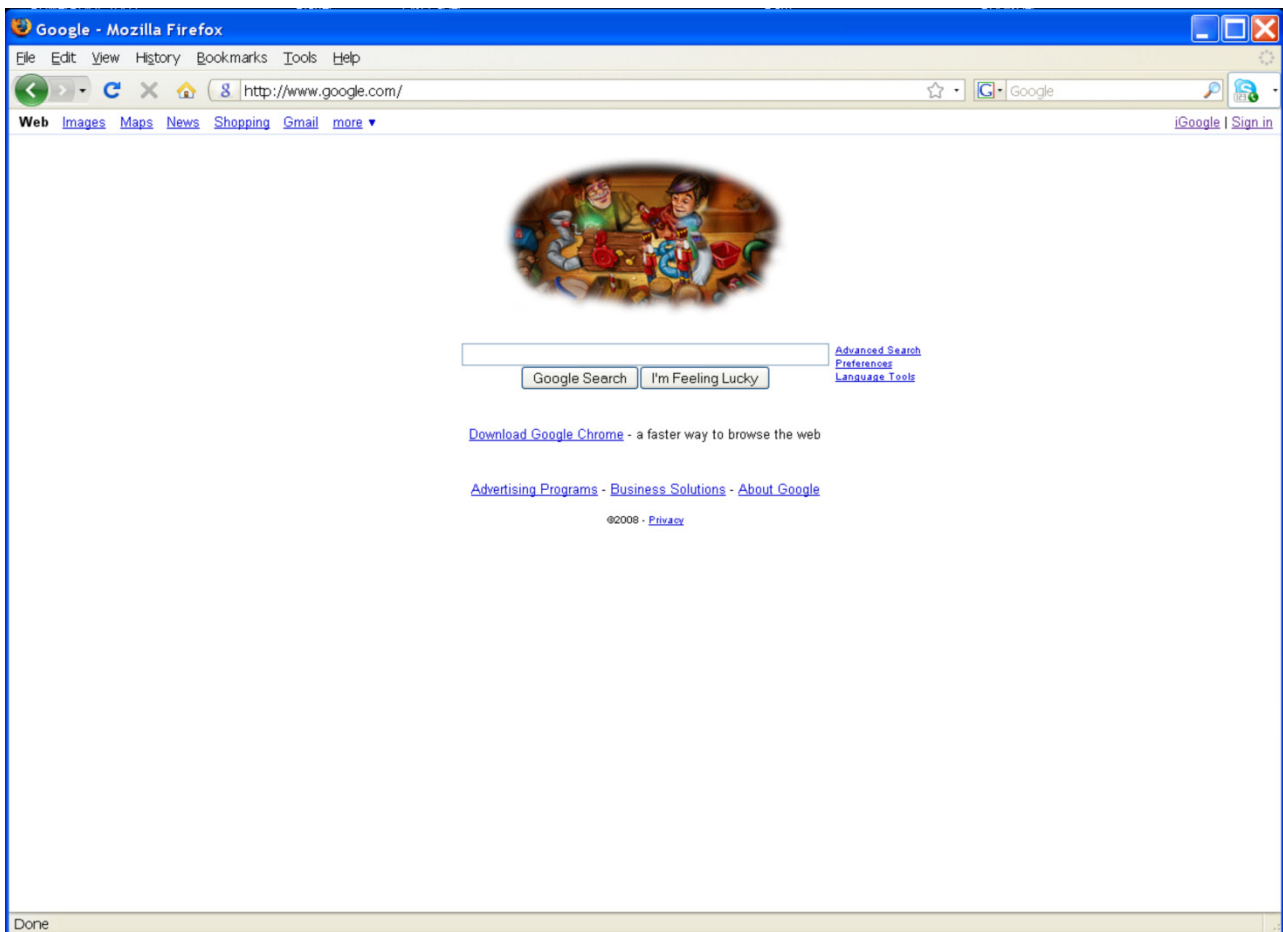

Your screen may look slightly different if you are using a different browser—the browser used in these examples is Mozilla Firefox. Also, Google tends to get a little creative with their name at different times of the year. This screenshot was taken during the Christmas season; typically Google will display their brightly colored name in place of the picture shown on this screenshot.

Now, many of us probably go to this screen often, type in our search term or phrase, and never spend much time looking around. After all, Google has made the search bar the most prominent feature. All the other tools I hinted at earlier are tucked away behind those little, tiny words. Below is another screenshot that highlights specific components on the main Google page. But before we get too far ahead of ourselves, we need to remember why we are here: to sign up for a Gmail account. Look, up at the top! One of those little words says, "Gmail."
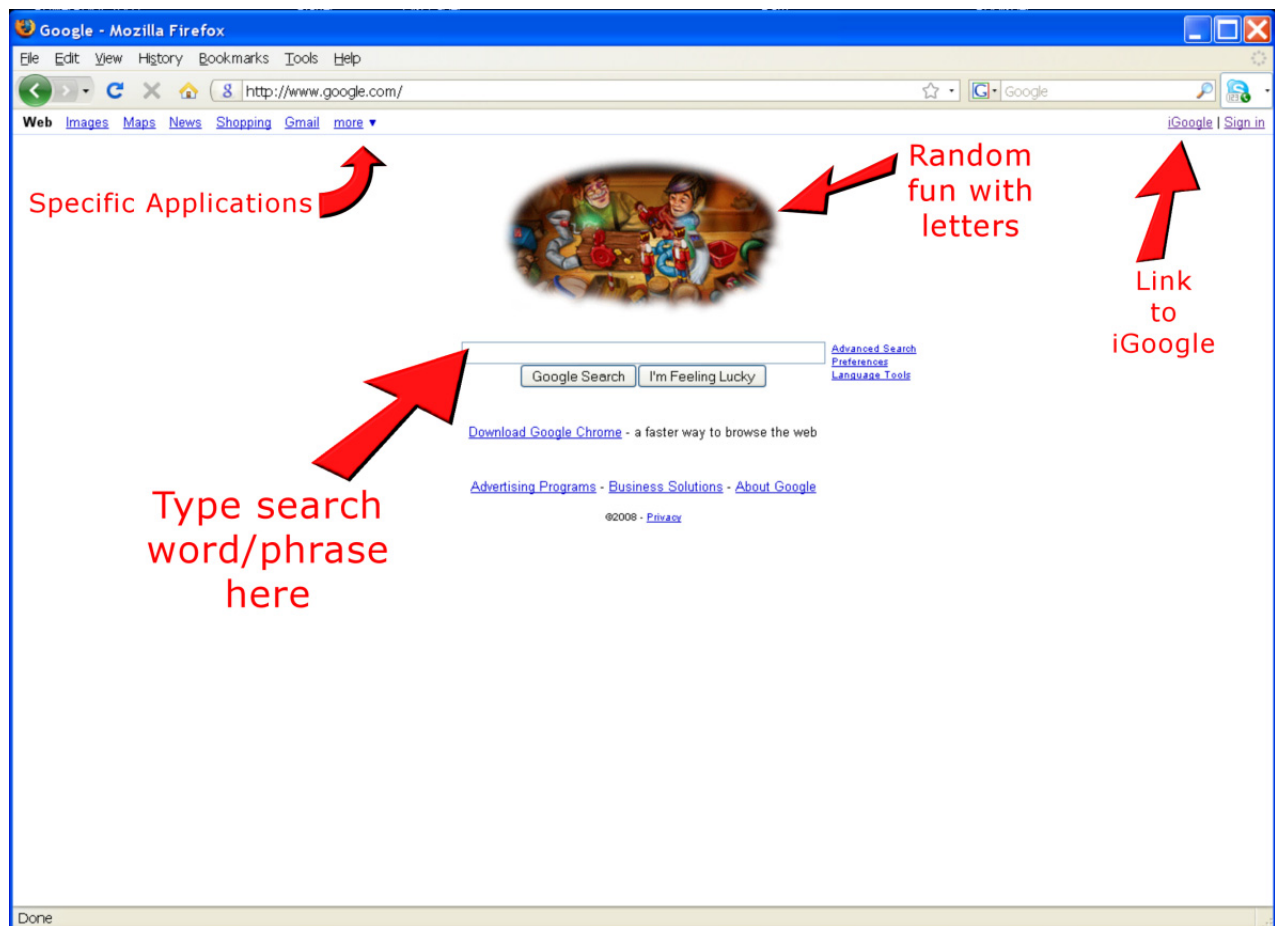
Click on the Gmail word at the top; go on, click it. This will be one of the least scary things we do. You should find yourself at the following screen.
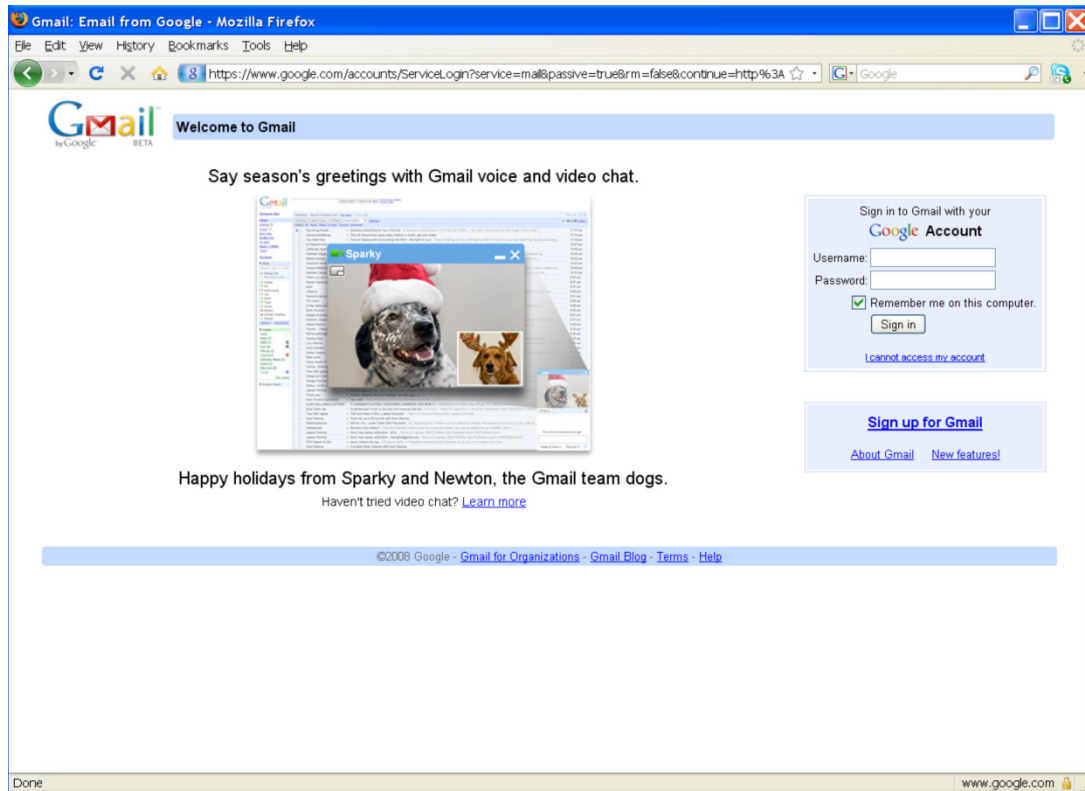
And if you were still a little hesitant about clicking over here, Google has put a happy picture of puppies on this site to help calm any apprehension you may have. They even named the puppies Sparky and Newton, the Gmail team dogs. There, now we are doing very well, and hopefully if you are visiting this screen at a different time of year, Google has made sure to place an equally happy picture here to greet you.

Now, we just need to find the link to sign up for our new Gmail account. And we find that the all knowing Google has placed this link for us in large letters on the right where it says, "Sign up for Gmail." Keeping in mind Sparky and Newton, the happy puppies, click this link. You will find yourself at the following screen:

You will see that I have started filling in the form with my first and last name and the login name I have chosen. But alas, after checking the availability of "pam.broviak" by clicking the "check availability" button, this name is not available. Now you try; put in your first and last name. Then choose your login name remembering that now is not the time to try out that crazy nickname your friends would pick out. Most likely you will be using social media for work-related purposes, and names like eggplant or darth.vader are probably not wise choices for someone working in our field. Using your real name or a derivative of your real name is acceptable. If you are simply that fun type person that needs to have a little flair, using a safe, industry-related term like ready.mix , civile.dan, or pwmanager.dan would probably be ok too. Use your best judgment.

If you have chosen a name that is available, your screen should look something like this, except with your information instead of mine:

Finish filling out the form, and if you are successful, you should be taken to a screen that looks somewhat like the next screenshot:
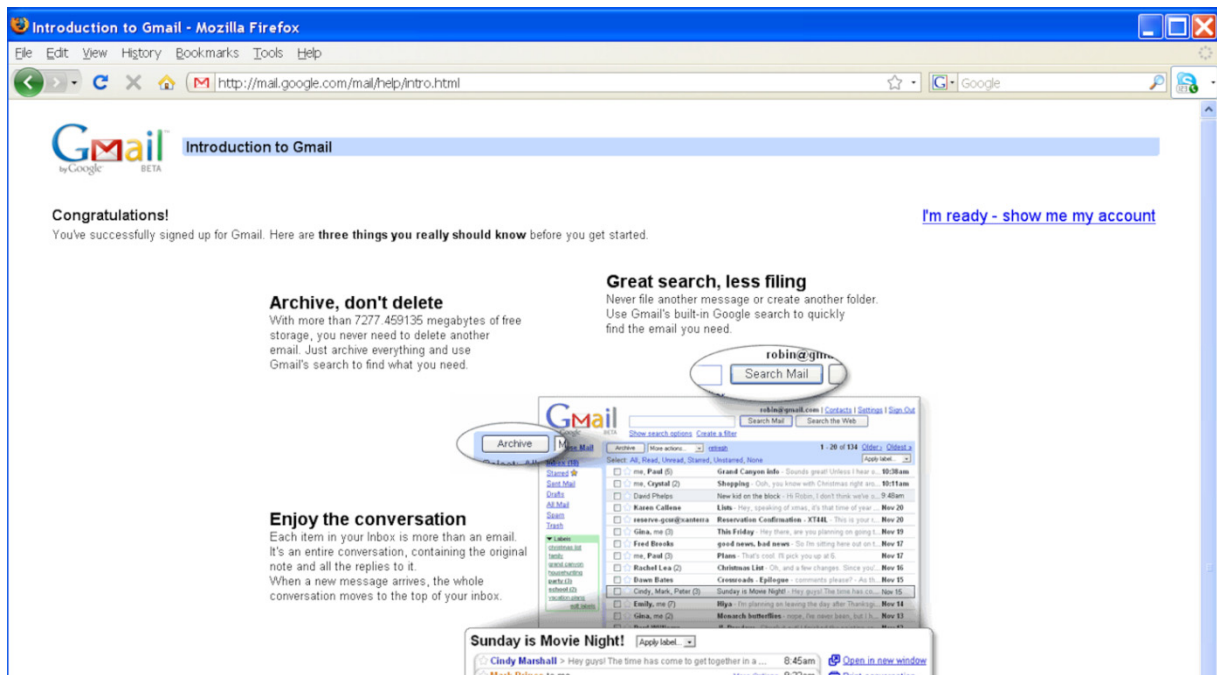
Google tries to offer you a few last tips, and posts a link taking you directly to your new account. No happy puppies here, but with renewed confidence, click the link "I'm ready – show me my account," and you will find yourself at your spanking, brand new Gmail page!
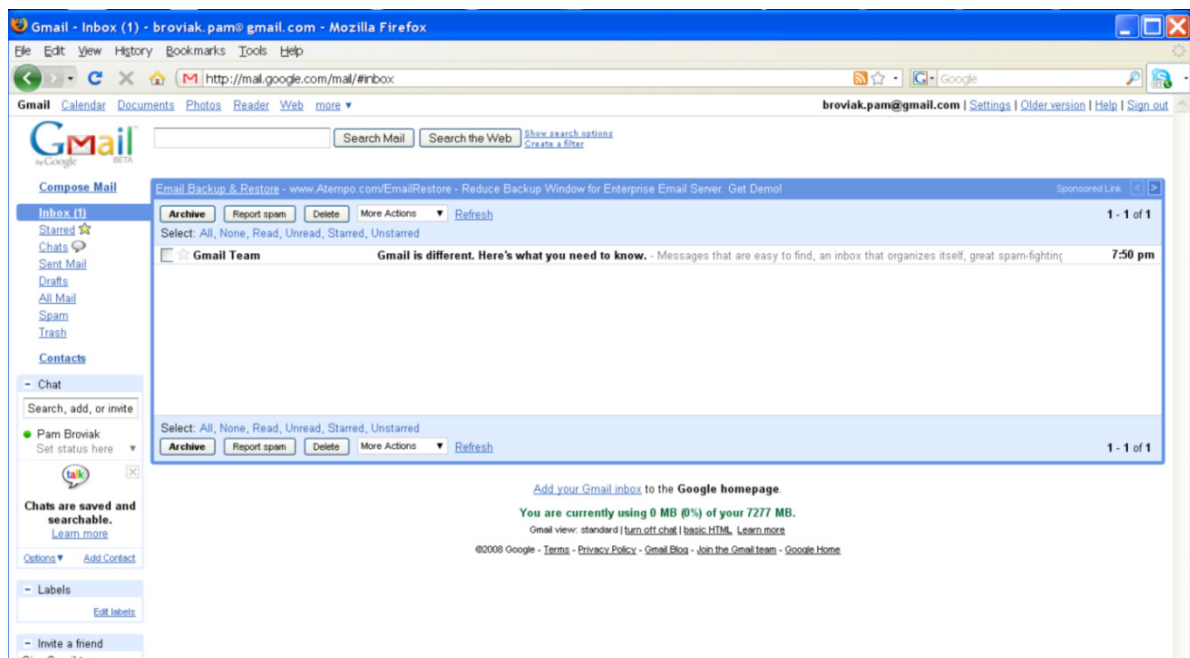
Yay! You have successfully completed the first task! Now you can either spend hours of fun and enjoyment getting to know your new Gmail page, or you can go on to our next assignment.

As we pause for a moment to bask in the glory of your first achievement, let's talk a little bit about passwords. As we continue down this path, entering new lands, you will be faced with the need to create passwords. You were asked to supply one above in order to get a Gmail account. Although using the same password for every site you ever register on might sound like a good idea because then you only have to remember one, should someone ever manage to figure out your password, they could get access to all your accounts.

BACK TO GOOGLE

Ready to go on? Your next quest is below:
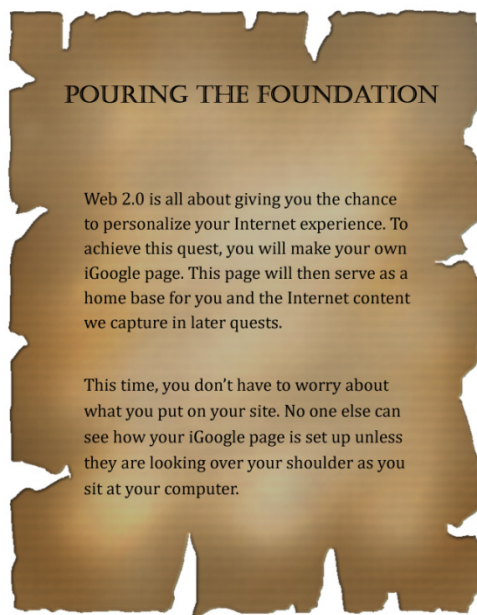
POURING THE FOUNDATION

Web 2.0 is all about giving you the chance to personalize your Internet experience. To achieve this quest, you will make your own iGoogle page. This page will then serve as a home base for you and the Internet content we capture in later quests.

This time, you don't have to worry about what you put on your site. No one else can see how your iGoogle page is set up unless they are looking over your shoulder as you sit at your computer.

For this task, we are going to travel back to the main Google page. There you will again focus on the little words; in particular, the word "iGoogle."Click this, and you will be taken to a page that looks something like the image below:
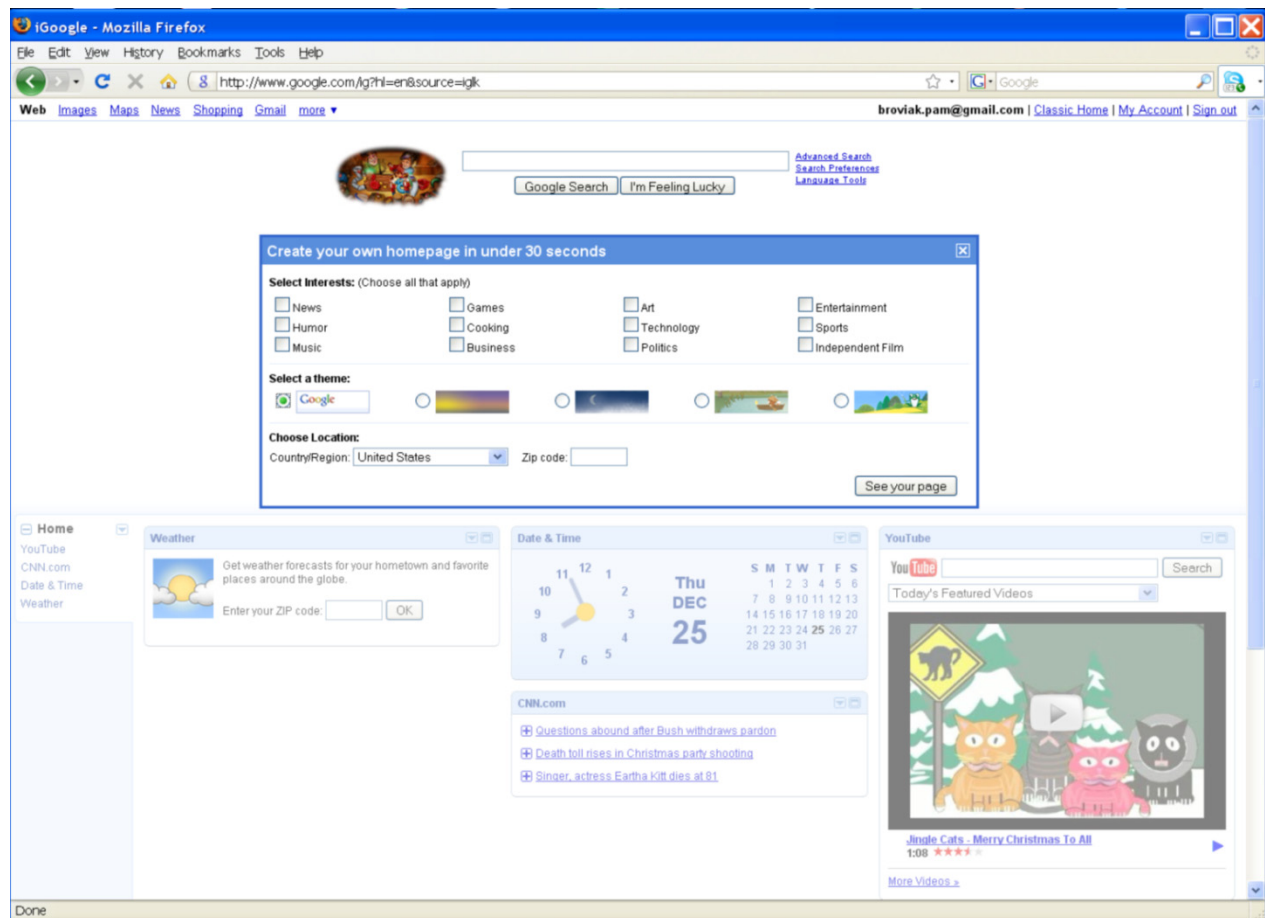
Looking around the page, you will notice that Google has placed your new Gmail address at the top indicating that this iGoogle page is associated with this account. (If at any time you miss the "old Google look," you can click the words to the right of your account name, "Classic Home," and be taken back to a non-personalized page.)

At this point, Google is waiting for you to make some choices. In the center of the screen is a box with the encouraging words: "Create your own homepage in under 30 seconds." See, everyone has at least 30 seconds to devote to making a special search page just for themselves. Go ahead and click In the boxes of topics in which you have an interest. For example, if want to keep up with the latest sports information, click the box in front of "Sports." Then go on to select your theme. Don't agonize too long over this one—later we will have the opportunity to choose from a wider selection. Indicating your location is important because Google will place a weather box on your page indicating your local weather. After you are finished, click the button with the words, "See your page." Your new iGoogle site, made just for you, will be displayed. Here is how mine looked:

As you can see, Google took your interests and created boxes, or as Google calls them—gadgets, that feed information about that topic. This information will change on a regular basis. A clock and time box along with a YouTube box is placed by default. You can further customize your page by dragging the boxes around the page by hovering over the blue bars, waiting for the cursor to change to a four-way arrow, and clicking, dragging, and dropping each box to its new location. Kind of like moving furniture but without all the hassle. The drop down arrow in the upper right corner of each box offers additional options such as deleting, minimizing, or sharing the box, or gadget, with others.

You can spend even more quality time pimping your iGoogle page. Up at the top of the gadget section, in the lower right hand corner of the banner, you will find the link to change to other themes and the words "Add stuff." Clicking the "Add stuff" link takes you to a site where you can choose from even more fun gadgets such as a Google Map search, a virtual aquarium, quotes of the day, and many more.

Now that you have your very own space on the Web made just for you, take your time to explore. Oh, and congratulations on completing the "Pouring the Foundation" quest!

ADVANCED INFORMATION FOR iGOOGLE USERS

Like many social media applications, Google allows for developers to create their own gadgets. The benefit from this is that you or someone in your IT department or an IT consultant can create a gadget for your company or agency that offers content for others to place on their iGoogle pages.

If you work for a city, perhaps you could follow the example of the city of Nanaimo and use a gadget to report Fire Incidents. Resdients of the city of Lafayette in Louisiana can install a gadget showing traffic cameras and reports of traffic alerts. Libraries are creating gadgets to allow residents to search their catalogs.

Some ideas for gadgets related to public works could be combined sewer overflow reporting, emergency alerts, building permits issued, staff directories, public works-related tips for residents, basic regulations regarding burning, garbage pickup, or water billing.

Ideas for consulting firms, construction companies, or product manufacturers could be a picture of the day, newest design or product of the week, and innovative or sustainable design ideas.

GET YOUR STORY STRAIGHT

To review, you now have your personal e-mail set up and your very own, personalized page on the Web that feeds you the content of your choosing. So far this social media stuff has been all about you, and this step is no different. We need to work on your image, your profile, the "face" you will choose to present to others on the Web. Because after this step, like a young adult going through a rite of passage, we will begin to venture out to actually start meeting others and interacting and experience the other side of Web 2.0.

PREPARING THE PLAN

Every project needs a good plan, and your venture into social media is no different. Your time is precious. Let's not waste it by beginning unprepared. To complete your plan and achieve this quest:

- Choose and prepare a digital picture or representation of yourself
- Choose a username
- Prepare a short summary of your life and/or work details.

As we venture forth, you will immediately find the need to have an acceptable photo or digital representation of you.

In addition to the photo, you need to decide on a username and prepare a short summary of details of your life that you choose to present to others.

And, I think I sense another quest coming on, but this time we will combine a few tasks into one big quest.

Ideas for profile photos:

Actual photo of yourself

Flowers

Sunrise/Sunset

Dogs/Cats

Vehicle

PREPARE A PROFILE PHOTO

First, you will need to decide if you want to use an actual photo of yourself or some other image that you would like to represent you. Remember, this is for work-related purposes so using a photo showing you asleep or worse, passed out, is not wise. If an actual photo is what you want, find one that shows you in a safe, neutral setting. If you decide to use some other image, pick one that will not offend anyone else. Something related to your work is probably a good idea.

Once you have your image in mind, you must prepare it for the sites on which it will be displayed. Typically, these images are shown as a small thumbnail image on a Web site so they do not have to be high resolution or of a large size. If you are familiar with image editing software, open your image (otherwise you can get some help from the sidebar on the next page). If there are portions of the image you wish to eliminate, crop those out using the editing tools. Resize the image to 120x120 pixels with a resolution of 72 or 100. Give this file a name like myprofilephoto and save it as a jpg or png file.

Real vs. Avatar

There seems to be an ongoing debate about what is more proper to use as a profile photo—a real photo or an avatar, or digital representation. Some say you have no credibility if there is no photo of your face—as if you do not exist. Others feel putting their real photo online compromises their security and privacy.

There are plenty of examples of both approaches online. So at this point, the jury is still out on which is more acceptable. You will need to make this decision for yourself based on your own values, concerns, and beliefs.

DETAILED PHOTO EDITING TIPS

If you don't have a favorite photo editing program or have never before edited a photo, don't despair. Just click on over to http://fotoflexer.com. This site provides a free, online photo editing service.

Once there you will see a button that says "Upload Photo." Click this and navigate to where you have your photo stored on your computer. The photo will upload to the site, and an editor will open. If you only want to use a certain area of your photo, use the "crop" tool to highlight this portion. Once you are happy with your choice, click "crop selected area."

Next resize your photo by clicking the "Resize" button. Change the size to 120 x 120 making sure the "keep proportions" button is checked.

To save, click the "Save" button, and for now, choose "Save to My Computer," renaming the photo to myprofilephoto.jpg

CHOOSING A USERNAME

Well after all that photo editing, choosing a username might seem to be a much easier task, but you will soon discover this could take much more time and consideration. If you have not yet been exposed to social media, you cannot begin to imagine the number of sites at which you can become a member and upload your profile. If you are using these sites for business and networking with others in your field, you probably will want to

The Name of the Game is Personal Branding
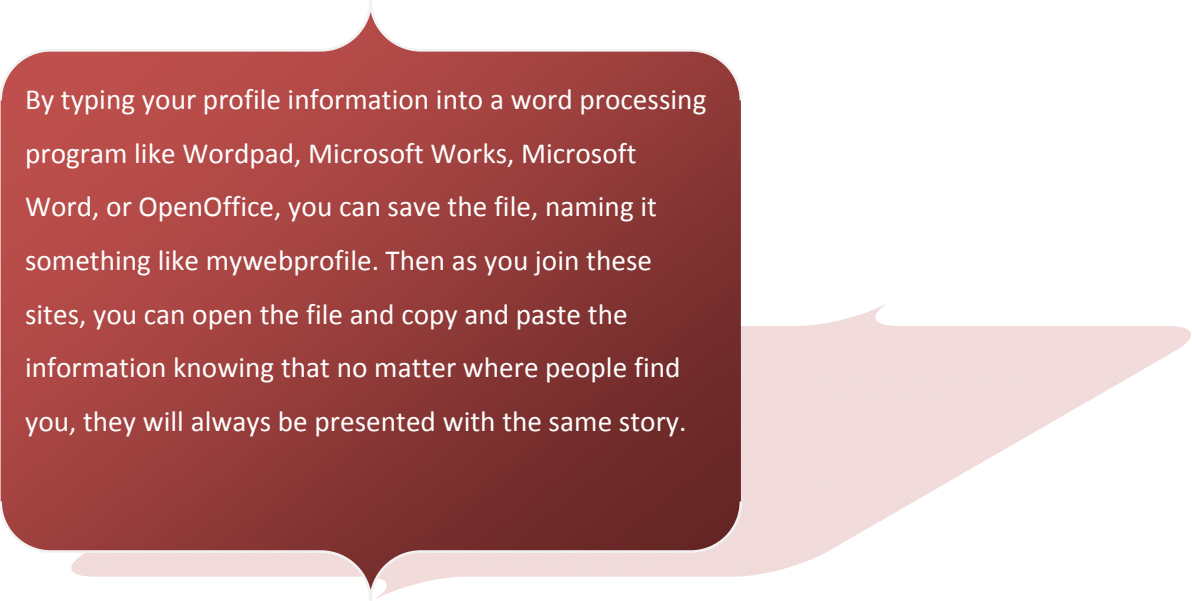
If nothing else convinces you to start joining sites now, think about the consequences of waiting. Any username you might want could be taken. Join now, and get that name while the getting is good! Some people go to sites and reserve their names even if they know they will not use the site for some time.

maintain a cohesive and similar profile on each. Many will require you to be identified by a username so to make sure everyone can find you on each site you join, try to think of a username and stick with it on each site.

YOUR LIFE'S STORY IN 100 WORDS OR LESS

Next you must decide what you want others to know about you. Most likely, this summary of you will focus on work-related information. While some people choose to include the name of their employer and exact location, others choose to remain more vague. This decision is also yours to make. Perhaps if you have any reservations about sharing your life's

details, you might want to start by using vague references such as "engineer for a mid-sized community on the east coast," or "salesman for a small distributor in the water treatment industry," or "operator of a 4 MGD wastewater facility in the western U.S." As you become more comfortable on a specific site, you can always go back and edit this information, adding more detail.

Some sites do ask your age and encourage you to indicate if you are a man or woman. Usually you can turn on or off or make private or public this information so you only reveal what you choose.

That's it! With your photo, username, and story, you are ready to venture out. On to the next section!

By typing your profile information into a word processing program like Wordpad, Microsoft Works, Microsoft Word, or OpenOffice, you can save the file, naming it something like mywebprofile. Then as you join these sites, you can open the file and copy and paste the information knowing that no matter where people find you, they will always be presented with the same story.

PHOTOSHARING:

NOT JUST FOR VACATIONS ANYMORE

The first social media stop we will make is at a photo sharing site called Flickr. You might have already heard about Flickr. This site has been around for some time—long enough that some would doubt if it is authentic Web 2.0. As for me, I have decided for myself that the site's sharing, discussion, and networking tools are enough to allow Flickr to be included at the social media banquet. And as we will eventually see later in this guide, Flickr has come up with some Web 2.0 interaction of its own that you might find useful. But for now, we are beginning here because again, it is safe. After all, everyone has photos they want to show to other people.

Before we get too far along, there is one minor detail we need to take care of. Remember back a couple sections when we set up our Gmail account and special iGoogle page? Well, at the time some of you might have felt we neglected that other search popular search engine—what's it again? Oh yeah, Yahoo. (Just kidding—I love Yahoo too.) Here is where we balance out our search-engine related affections because in order to get a Flickr account, you must sign up for a Yahoo ID. Now since all of you are old pros at signing up for accounts at search engine sites, I am going to let you go off to the Yahoo site on your own at http://www.yahoo.com. It is ok, the experience should be very similar to the one you just had with Google, except I have to admit there will be no happy puppies to greet you on the Yahoo account setup. Now, off with you, and don't forget to come back after getting the Yahoo ID and password.

A PICTURE'S WORTH 1000 WORDS

People love to take photos and show them to other people making photo sharing a good fit with Web 2.0. So, why are you missing out on all this photo-sharing fun? Quick, onto the next quest and complete the following tasks:

- Join Flickr—a photo sharing site
- Create a profile for yourself
- Upload 3 photos
- Join a Flickr group
- Add a contact

See, I knew you would get through that. Your next quest, "A Picture's Worth 1000 Words," is here waiting for you. This task is much more involved. By the end, you will have created a Flickr account, filled out your profile, uploaded some photos, joined a Flickr group, and added a contact. You might want to start thinking about which photos you have sitting in your computer collecting data-byte dust. Focus on about three to start with, and make sure you know how to get to them on your hard drive.

Due to the numerous steps, you will be guided in this quest through the use of a series of screenshots.

1. Visit the Flickr Website at http://www.flickr.com. Create your account by clicking the button that says: "Create Your Account"
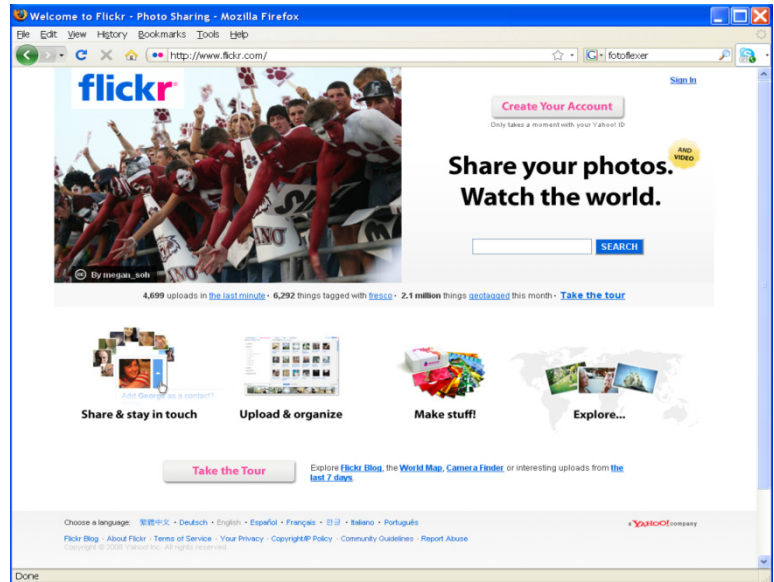
2. Ok, this takes you to the Sign in screen where it should be asking you for your Yahoo password that is associated with your Yahoo ID. And just in case you are wondering why they are asking for your password, Flickr has the answer!
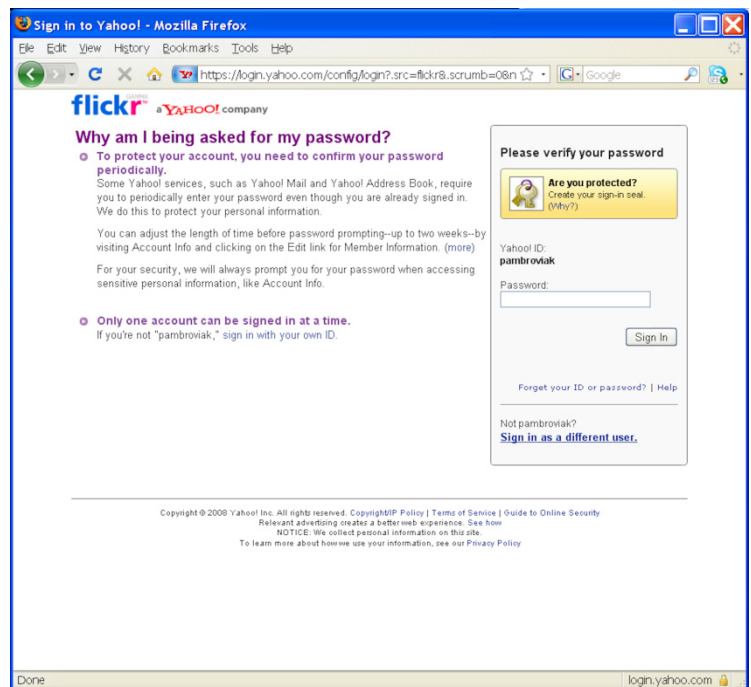
3. If you successfully put in your password and hit the "Sign In" button in the last step, you should find yourself at this screen. Now you can choose your special, very own Flickr screen name. Then click the blue button that says: "Create A New Account"
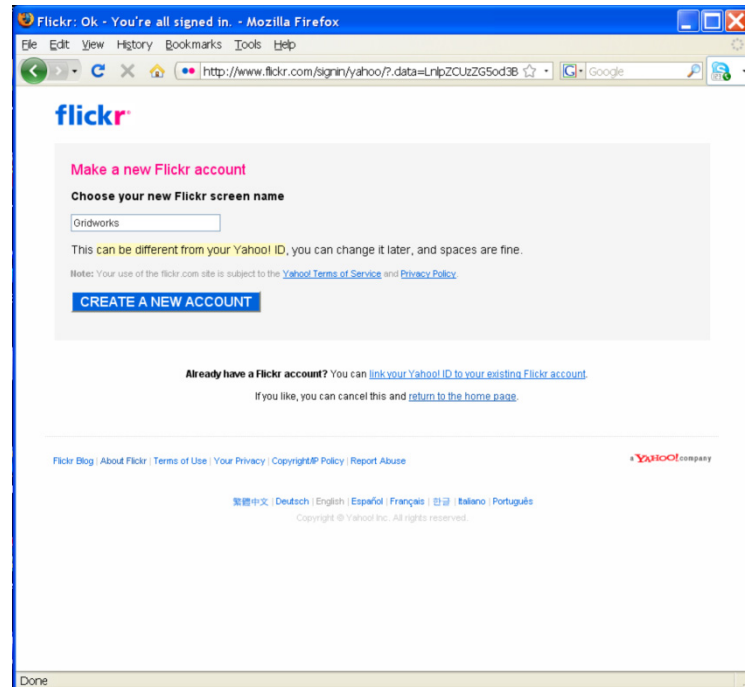
4. You are now at the configurator, or profile page. Flickr is telling you it's time to set up the basics. And with a positive and assertive, "Let's Do It!" they send you on your way.
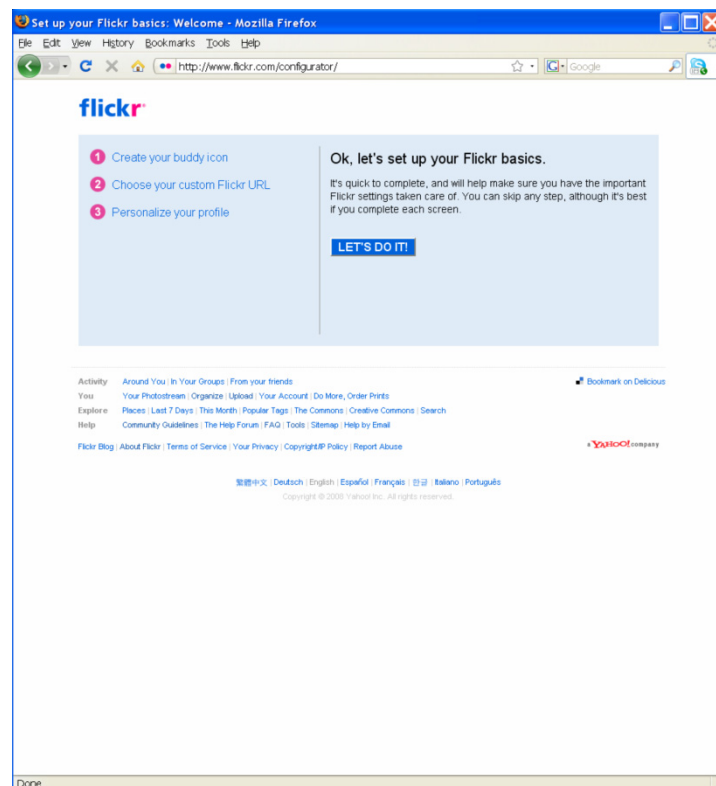
5. The first step to setting up your Flickr profile is creating a buddy icon. This is the thumbnail photo Flickr proudly displays by your user name on your pages. See the words "Find an image on my computer?" Click them because that is exactly what we want to do.
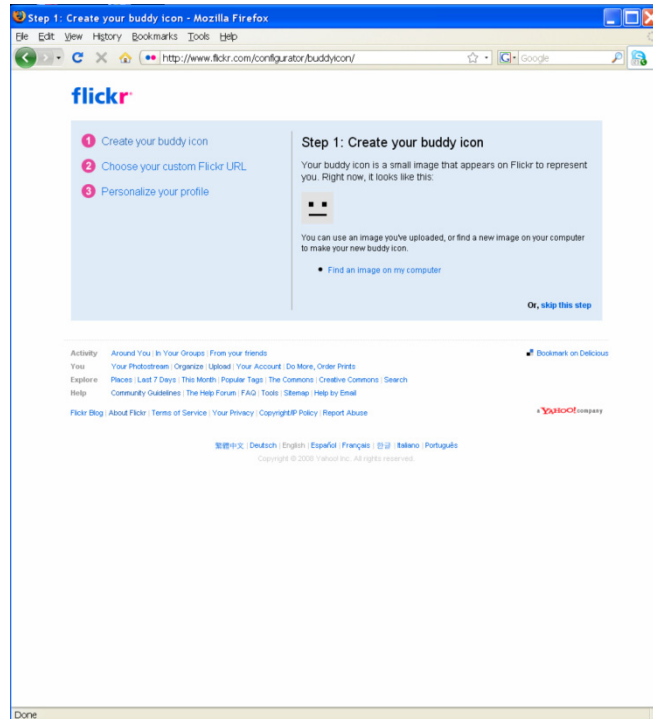
6. Now you should be faced with this screen, and the task of clicking the "Browse" button so that you can navigate to your special profile photo. When you have found it, and the computer loads the file location into the little window, you are ready to click "Upload."
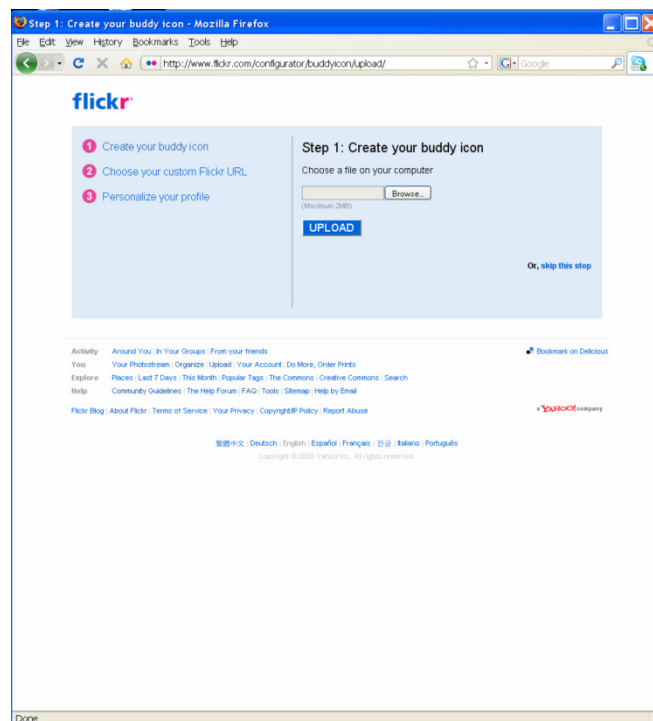
7. Flickr will now display your photo in a window like this, and offer you the opportunity to crop your image. Drag the crop box around until it highlights the area of your photo that you want displayed. Here I only wanted the gears since they look the coolest so I have that section of the image highlighted. Click "Make Icon" when you are done.
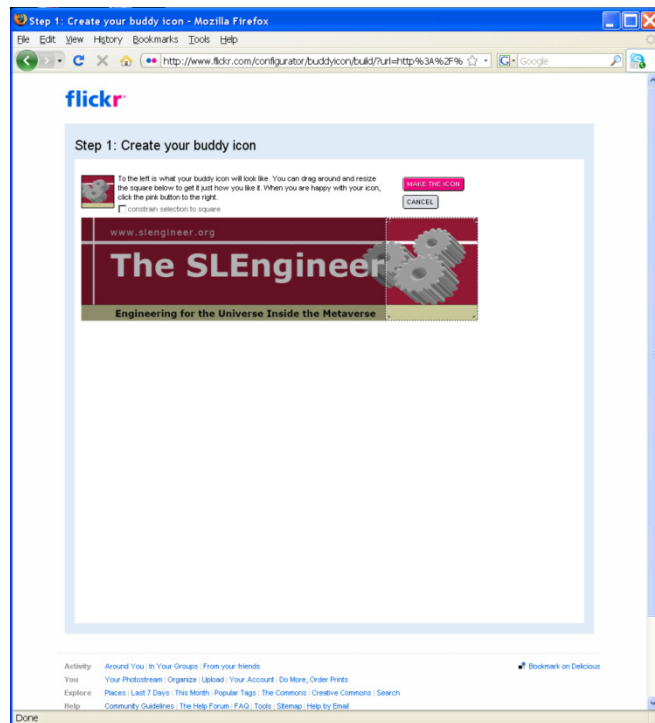
8. The next step is to set your custom URL for your profile page. You can try to use your username or some other clever designation. Hit the blue "preview" button when you are done.
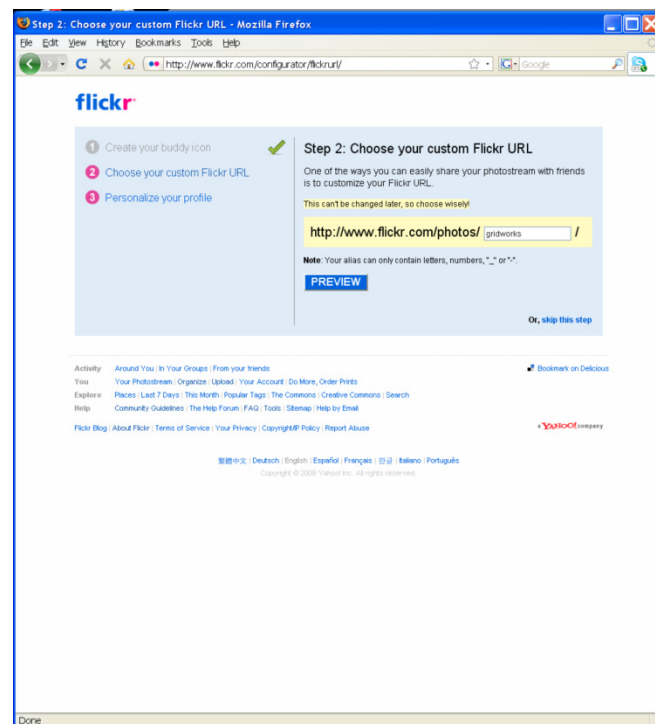
9. If you have chosen wisely (actually if you have chosen something no one else has) then you will see this screen. If you are happy with your choice, then click the blue button to "Lock it in and continue." If instead, you realize you made a poor choice, Flickr gives you the chance to go back and try again.
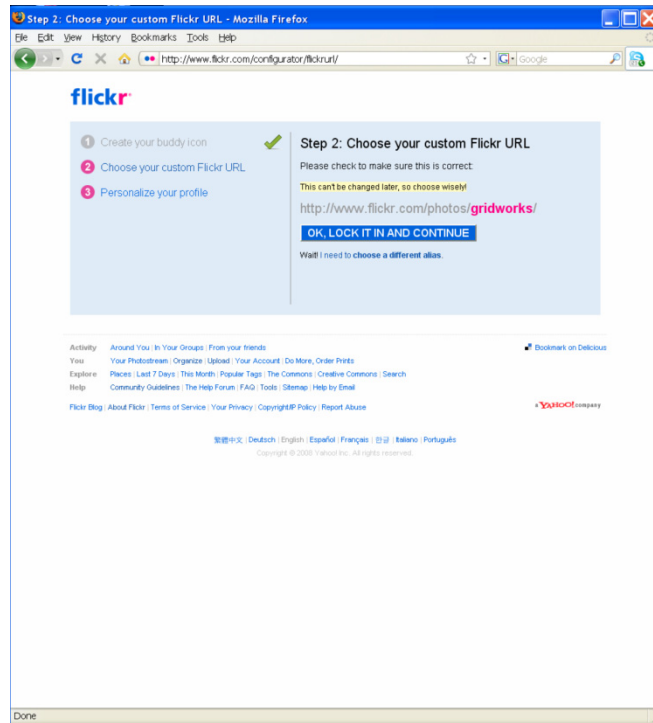
10. The third and final step in setting up your profile is to tell people about you. But don't worry if you aren't ready to share personal information. Even Flickr realizes not everyone wants others to know what time zone they are in.
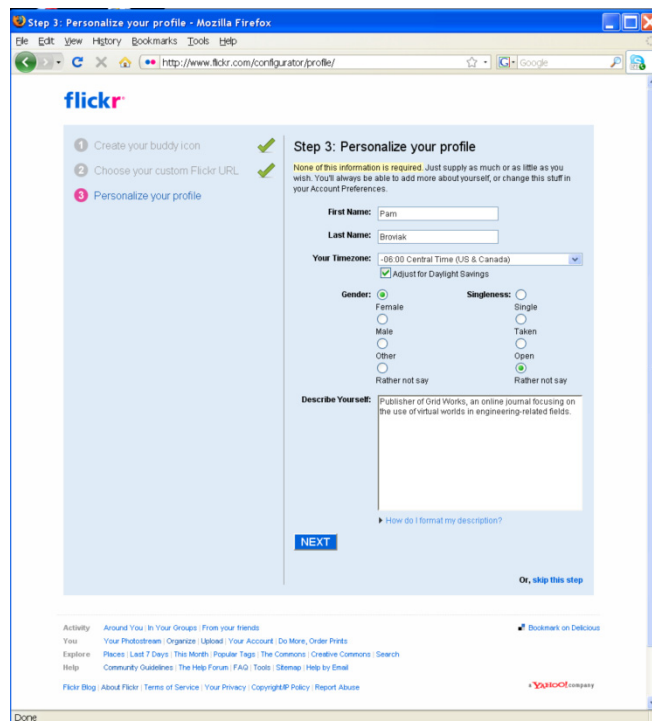
11. Whew! I was starting to wonder if we would ever get through all that! Finally, Flickr takes us to our very own profile page. Flickr also lets us know how we are doing. So far, we have personalized our profile. Next they prompt us to upload our first photos. Let's go by clicking the words, "Upload your first photos."
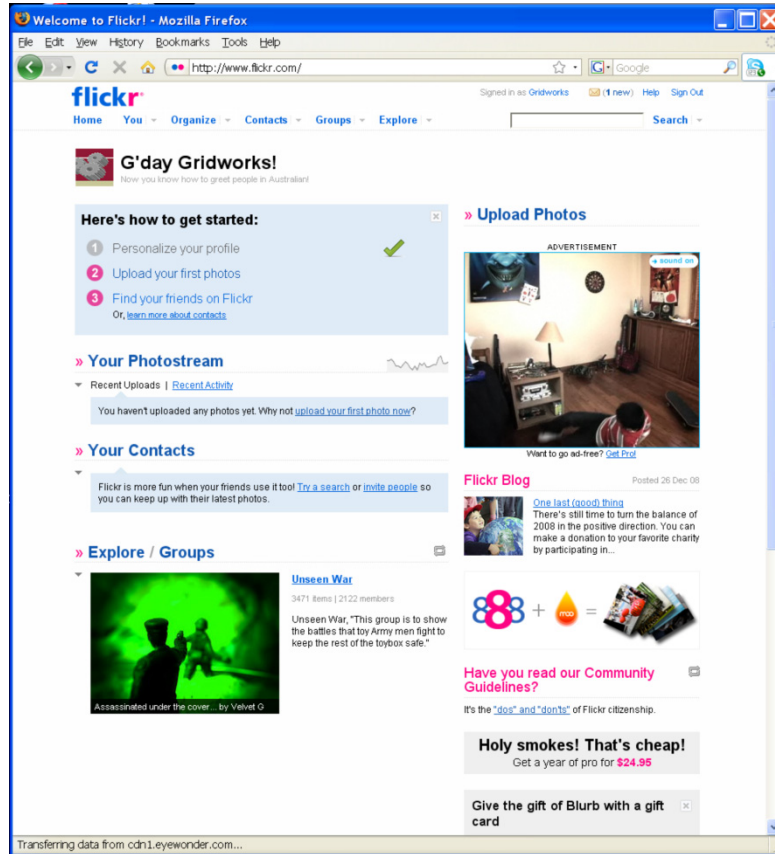
12. It should be no surprise that a photo sharing site is encouraging you to upload photos. Pick out at least three you would like to share. Once you have the three in mind, click the words, "Choose photos."
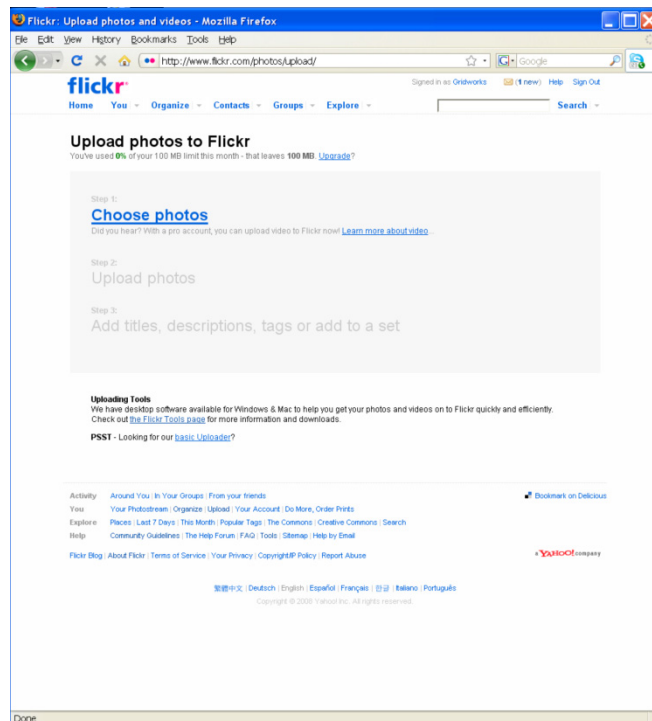
13. This screenshot shows three photos I have chosen sitting in a queue waiting to be uploaded to Flickr. Once you have all your photos displayed, click the button that says, "Upload Photos."
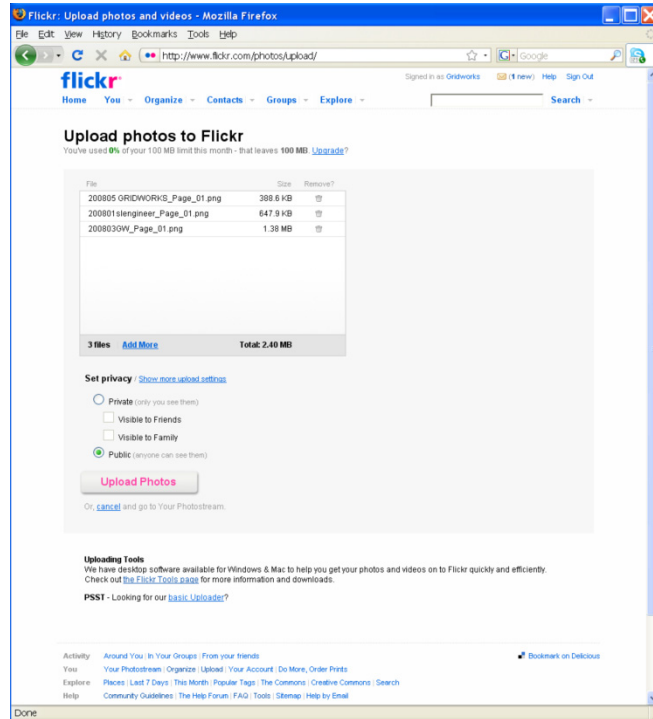
14. If your photos successfully uploaded, you should see a screen similar to this one. And with these new digital photo tools, there is no more forgetting to write on the back of photos. With Flickr, you can just add a description. Go ahead and click "add a description" now to tell others about your photos.
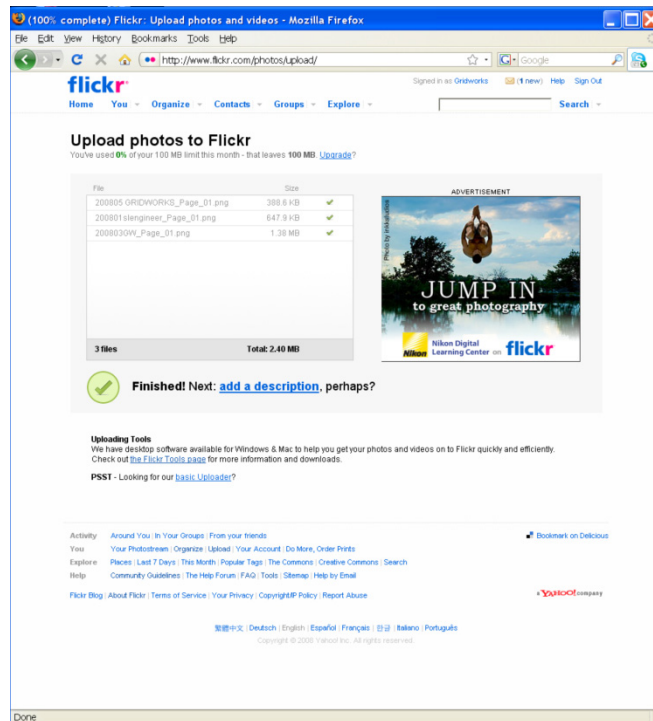
15. This is the screen where you type out the information for each of your photos. It is also a good idea to put in some descriptive tags so others can find your photos more easily.
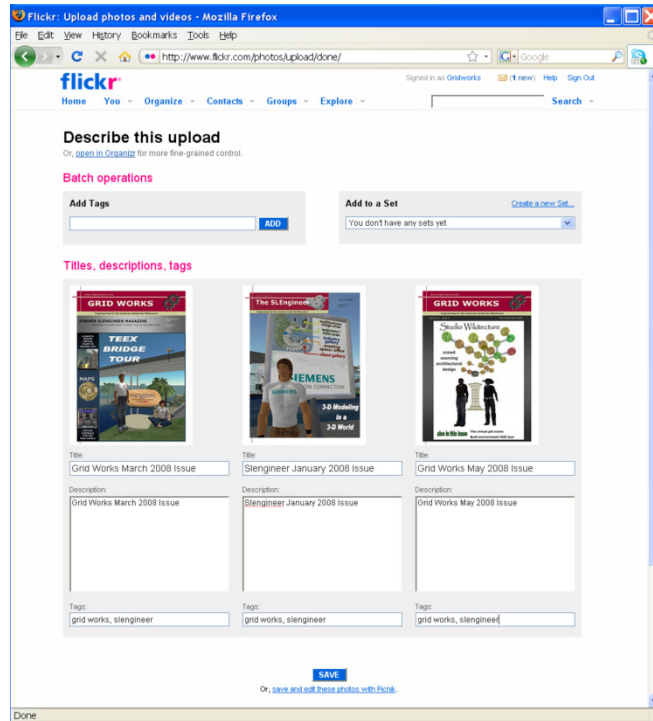
16. And there you have it; your photo stream is now complete with photo titles and descriptions for the world to see.
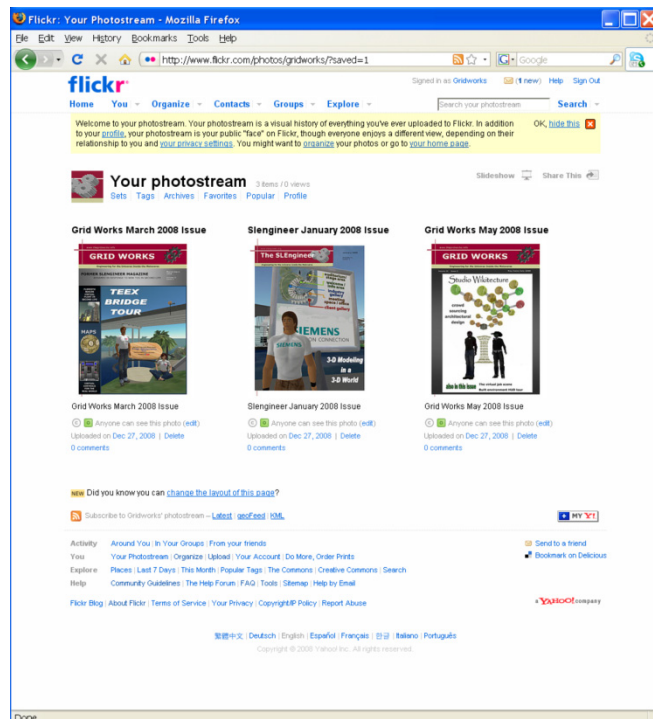
17. As you upload more photos, you might want to consider creating sets to help organize your images into categories. Flickr only allows us to create three sets since we have the free account. So let's try creating a set—click the word "Sets" under the title "Your Photostream," and you will see a screen similar to this. Then as the screen says, "click the create new set button to get started."
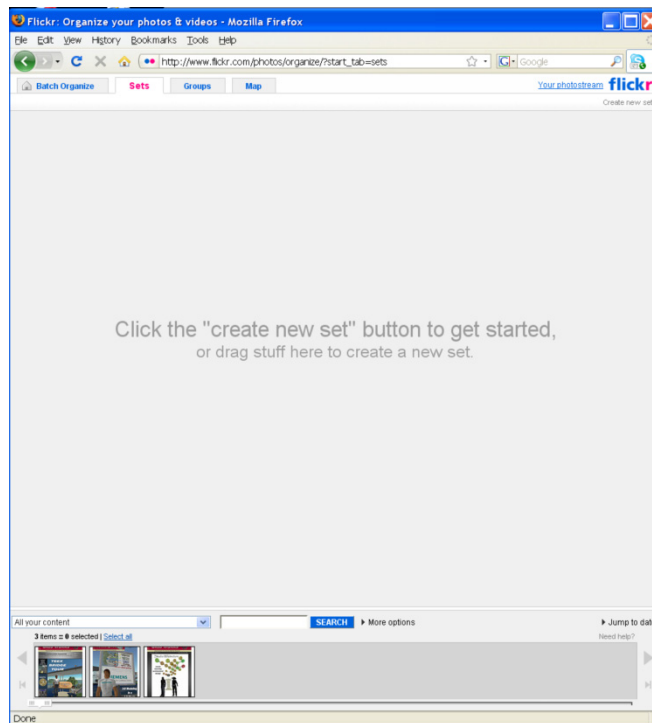
18. Now you should be at a screen similar to this one. Drag your photos from the window at the bottom of the screen to the larger window in the middle. When finished, hit the blue "Save" button. That's it—you made your first photo set!
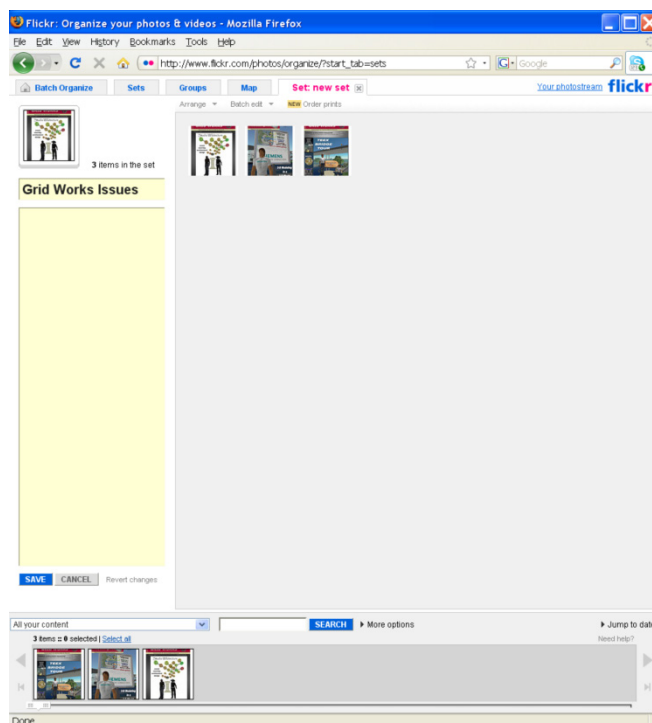
19. Now, to really take advantage of the Web 2.0 capabilities of Flickr, let's join a group! Click the Group menu tab at the top of your photostream page. This will take you to a screen that should look something like this. Type the words "civil engineering" in the window under the words, "Find a group."
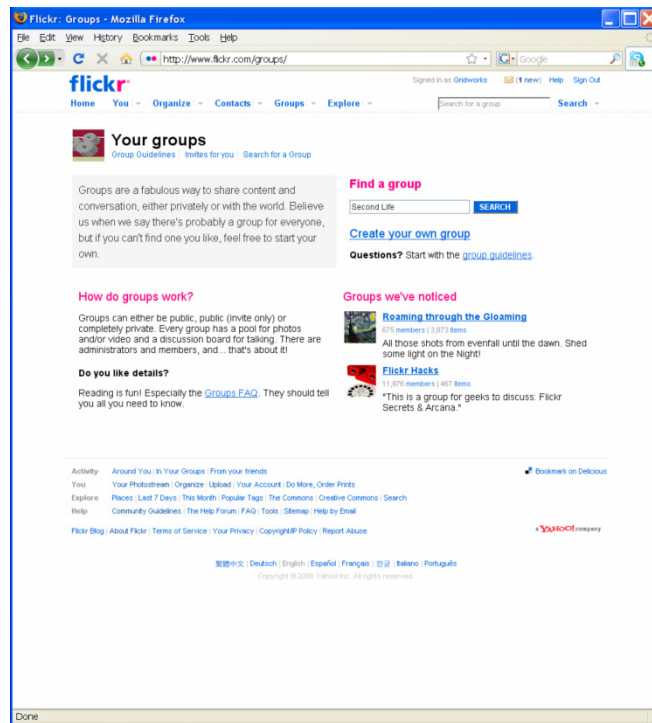
20. The group search for civil engineering will bring up a list of several Flickr groups related to civil engineering. You can click the group names to visit their Flickr pages. Here is the page for the Civil Engineering Flickr group. If you want to join, you just click the words "Join this group."
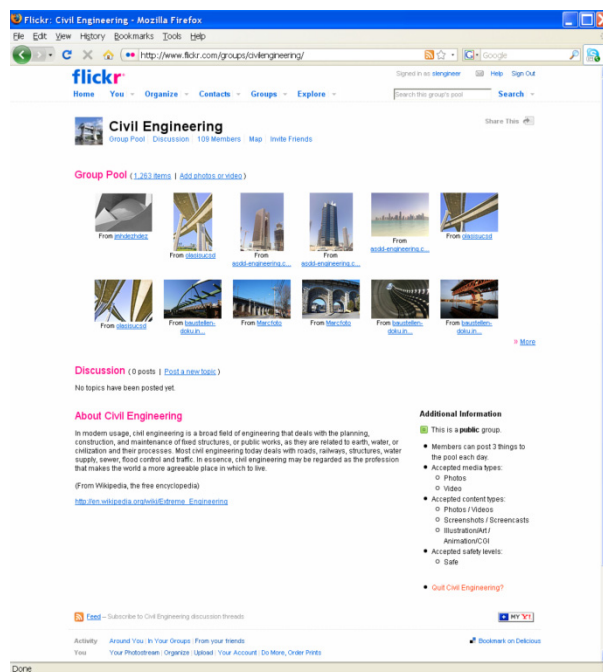
21. If you are looking for other groups to join, here is a listing of groups I have joined with my account.
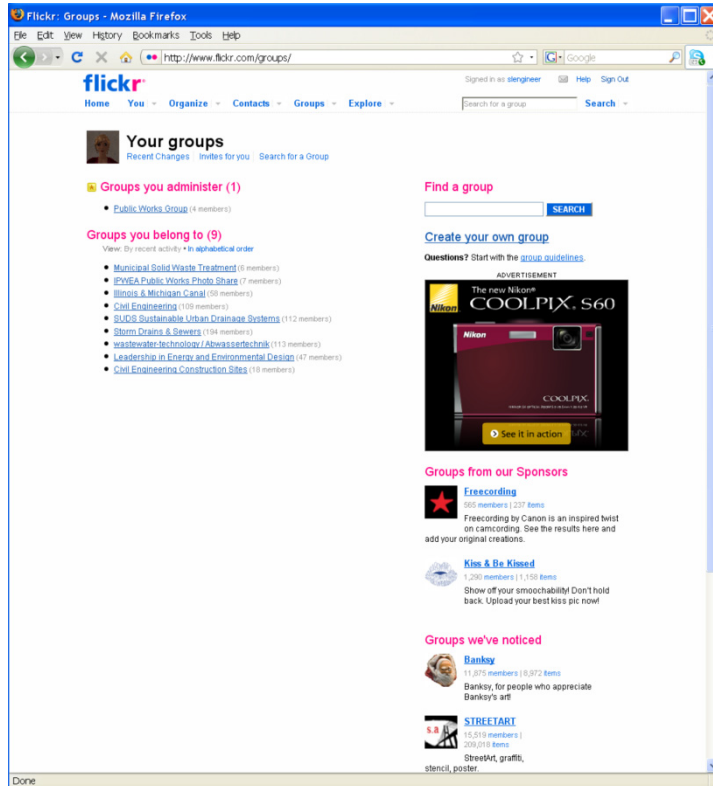
That's it! You now have your very own photosharing space on Flickr. And you have created a set for your photos and joined a group. The final activity was to add a contact. If you know someone already on Flickr, send over a contact request. If your friends and colleagues have not yet made it over to Flickr, feel free to search for me by clicking the little arrow next to the word "Contacts." Then go to "People Search," and type in the word "slengineer" in the window. (This is the username I have set up on Flickr.) Click the blue "Search" button, and one person should be displayed, me!

To add me as a contact, hover your cursor over my profile image, and a little arrow appears. Click this and choose from the menu that opens, "Add Slengineer as a contact?" A new window pops up prompting you to click an "OK" button if you really want to do this.

There, all finished? If you have successfully completed all four tasks, you now have established yourself on Google, Yahoo, and Flickr.

Feed Me Blogs

Blog—the merging of the two words Web and log. Although a blog may sound like a creature rising out of a swamp, blogs are nothing like a green, dripping wet, slimy hulk of slippery goo. Instead they are the bright, shining light of an online journalism craze. Everyone seems to be reading one, commenting on one, or writing one. But you shouldn't jump onto the blog bandwagon just because everyone else is doing it—the reason you jump on is because there is cool stuff for you on that wagon. Stuff you will want to have access to. So let's get started by getting introduced to a few blogs set up for people like us—you know, cool, government and techno type folks.

The quest on this page asks you to look at four blogs related to your work. Although there are many blogs out there written by government agencies and people working in public works and engineering, finding them can be a challenge. We will help by offering you some suggestions. Pick four blogs from the list below, visit the sites by either clicking on the links or copying and pasting the links into your browser; then read at least the first post (this is the most recent post) that you find at each site.

Ok, you have chosen four blogs and looked over the first posting on each site. You probably noticed a few distinctions right away:

CONFRONT THE BLOG

No one likes to be out of the loop, so let's make sure you are in the know like the rest of the online crowd. To achieve this quest complete the following:

- Access four blogs related to your work
- Read at least the most recent post for each of those blogs
- Analyze the delivery methods and lay-out used by each
- Bookmark the sites for later reference

LAFD News & Information (Los Angeles Fire Department):   http://lafd.blogspot.com/

The Fast Lane—The Official Blog of the U.S. Secretary of Transportation: http://fastlane.dot.gov/

Greenversations—The Official Blog of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: http://blog.epa.gov/blog/

Kerry McCarthy—Labour Member of Parliament for Bristol East: http://kerry-mccarthy.blogspot.com/

MayorMark's Blog (Mayor Mark D. Boughton, Danbury, Conn.): http://mayormarksblog.blogspot.com/

The WSDOT Blog—From the Washington State Department of Transportation:
http://wsdotblog.blogspot.com/

The Water Blog (Portland Water Bureau): http://www.portlandonline.com/water/index.cfm?c=39678

Invent Civil: Civil Engineering news, technology, and opinions: http://inventcivil.com/

- Typically the post on a blog will be written in first person, making the blog a more personal method of delivery
- There is usually an opportunity for others to comment on the article
- There is usually a "word cloud" indicating topics discussed on that site
- There is usually an archive of past posts
- There are also other "gadgets" and "widgets" located on the page
- Many sites list links to other blogs that discuss related topics; sometimes this is called a **blogroll**

Not all blogs will have all of these, but most will. You probably also noticed a lot of other attention-grabbing items scattered all over each page. We will talk about some of these in the next section and throughout the rest of this document. For now, go back to each of your four sites that you chose, and really look for each of the following for each site. Check off if your chosen site had these items or not in the table below.

Site	Written in First Person	Comments Allowed	Word Cloud	Archives of Past Posts	Gadgets or Widgets	Blogroll or Links
LAFD						
FAST LANE						
GREENVERSATIONS						
MCCARTHY						
MAYOR MARK						
WSDOT						
THE WATER BLOG						
INVENT CIVIL						

Probably most people discovering blogs for the first time don't go to the trouble of dissecting them in this manner. However, after only looking at four blogs and filling in the table, you are prepared to discuss blogs with even the fully initiated. You have the overall idea, and more importantly, you know the lingo. Your final part of this section is to bookmark the sites you found by adding them as favorites in your browser. What? Your bookmark list is too long? Well, don't despair, the next section will help show you another way to access your favorite blog sites. Meanwhile, congratulations on confronting the Blog!

Word cloud created at:http://www.wordle.net

FEED ME A BLOG

Based on your lovely experience in the last section, you can read the title of this section and continue with the knowledge that being fed a blog will be nothing like eating something slimy and green. In fact grabbing a blog feed can end up being a quite pleasurable experience and keep you from having to sit on the couch wondering if your favorite blogger has yet released another witty or thought-provoking post. And here is where we tie in even more of our beginning preparations. Yes, this activity will involve yet another quest! And here it is:

As you visit sites created with social media principles, you will begin to notice little, cool boxes scattered all over a page, all vying for your attention. Some you will recognize as little photos fed from a Flickr site, some are maps showing where readers are located, and many link you over to other social media sites.

GRAB THE FEED

Grabbing a blog feed is like gathering a banquet for your mind. Ok, enough of the sappy analogies, let's get to it:

- Return to one of the blogs you book-marked in the last section and find the "RSS Symbol" or the word "RSS"
- Click the RSS feed symbol or word and follow the directions to add the feed to your iGoogle page
- Check out your iGoogle page to access the feed

Ok, we start by going back to one of the blogs you looked at in the last section—one you particularly liked the most. Look for either the word **RSS** or something that looks like this:

 or

You need to click the symbol you find on your site that most resembles one of these examples. Either a small box will pop up with some choices, or you will be taken to a screen that looks like the screenshot below. At the top you will notice the words "Subscribe to this feed using" and then a drop down box that has defaulted to Google.

The default just happens to be the choice we want to make. Remember your handy dandy iGoogle page? Well now is when we really start to put it to work. With "Google" displayed in the box, click the button that says "Subscribe Now." Another screen will appear asking you to add the feed to either your Google homepage (which is your iGoogle page) or to Google Reader. For now, click "Add to Google homepage." You will be sent directly to your iGoogle page where you will find your newly subscribed feed proudly displayed in the top line of boxes; it should look something like the little box below. Don't forget, you can always drag it around on the page—after all, Web 2.0 is all about choices.
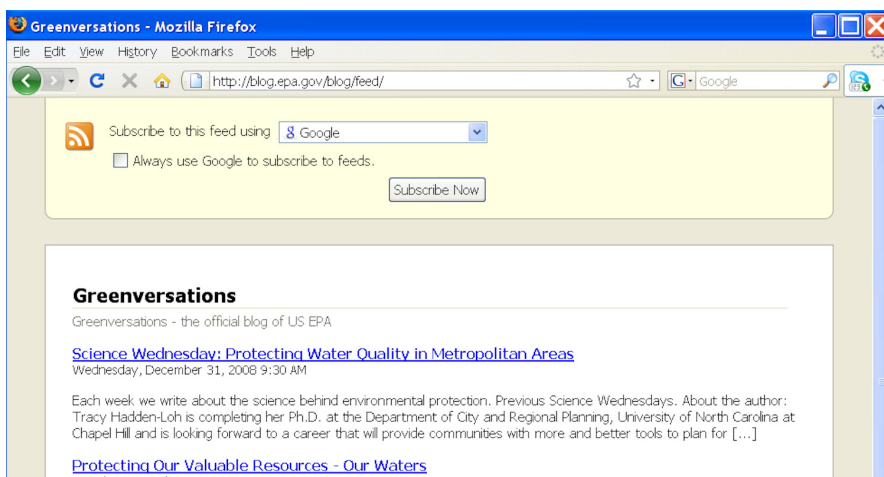
All right, that was awesome. You now have successfully grabbed a feed and proudly installed it on your iGoogle page. What does this mean? It means that if you set up Google as your homepage, each time you get on the 'net, you will be greeted with the latest news from all your favorite places. You can't get more personalized than that! This increases your news-collecting efficiency by allowing you to just skim headlines, choosing only to click on over if you think it is worth it.

Now, you might be saying, but all those little boxes look the same. Can't I get a little more pizzazz out of this feed business? Well, yes you can. On to the next section…

WIDGETS & GADGETS

I know what you are thinking: Widget sounds so cool; let's quick read our quest so we can go find one. All right, here it is:

And what better place to find a widget than at http://www.widgetbox.com. Visit this site by either clicking the link or pasting it into your browser. Once you get there, the site should look like the screenshot below. I know you are excited about jumping right in, but first we should join the site. Look for the words "Join Now." Click them and a sign-in box will pop up on the screen. Look, it even reassures you that "All the cool kids are doing it." With luck you will be able to sign in with the username you chose in thee earlier section. If not, you will have to come up with a backup plan for a username. Once you are successful, the site shows a quick confirmation of your registration then takes you back to the main page, but now you are officially logged in.

GET THAT WIDGET

Feeds might be handy, but let's face it, they really are still just a bunch of text. So let's go find a better way to display our favorite feeds.

- Visit a widget-making site
- Search for a widget that displays your type of info
- Get that widget! Then add it to your iGoogle page

Now let's get to business; type the following words into the search window (located in the upper right portion of the screen): government transportation. You should end up with search results that include four widgets created by the Missouri Department of Transportation, MoDOT. While a widget from the MoDOT blog might not be our first choice, unless we live in Missouri, installing their widget and following their feed for a little while might be worth it. After all, you can see they are the only DOT that has gotten this far.

So, onto the installation. Click the name: "MoDOT Blog" and you will be taken to another screen that shows the widget. At this point you can fancy it up a little by choosing different color borders. Go ahead, you can't break anything, try clicking a different color over on the right. You can see in the screenshot on the left, I chose safety orange. The widget changes to reflect your choice. This tool also allows you to pick a size. Other options include adding summaries instead of just having titles and including any available photos.
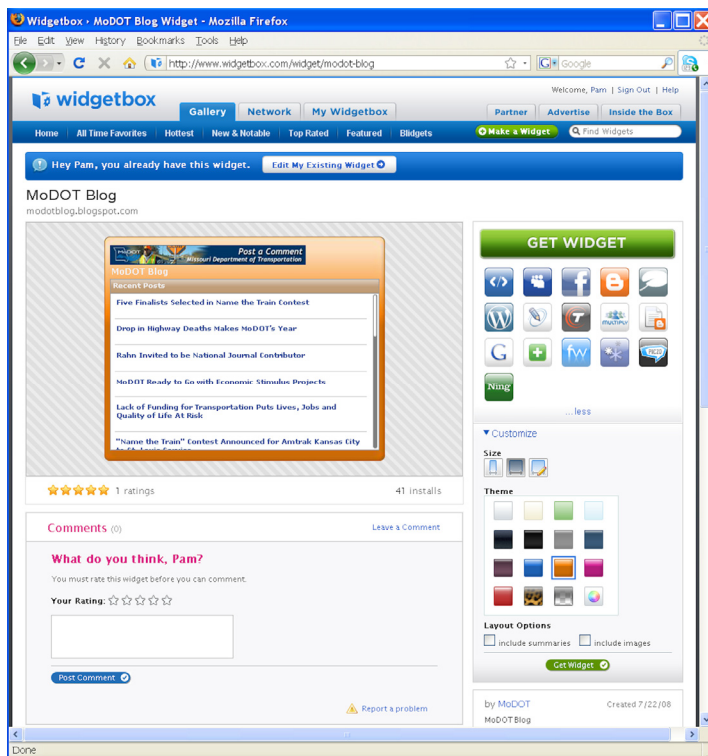
Now to add the widget to, guess where? Yes, your iGoogle page. To do this look for the little word, "more," located below the row of buttons under the title of "GET WIDGET." When you click "more," you will be give additional buttons from which to choose, and yes, there is the button with a capital "G" signifying "Google." Click it! This brings up a box that asks you, just to make sure, that you really want to add this widget to your iGoogle page. Well, yes, we do want to do that which is why we clicked the "G" button. So click "Add Widget."
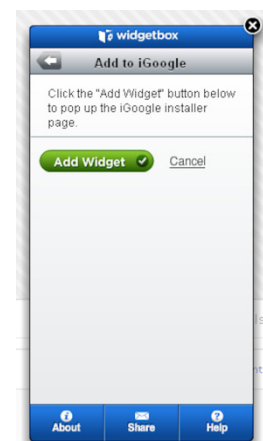
This takes you to yet another screen where you again get to tell them of your intense desire to add this widget to your iGoogle page. Let them know of your intent by clicking the button that says: "Add to Google." That's it! Finally you will be sent back to your iGoogle page where you will see your new widget proudly displayed up at the top. Remember, you can drag it around, or if this one just is too big or the color clashes with your iGoogle page décor, delete it and go get a different size or color.

If you look back at the top of your browser, you should still have the Widgetbox site still open under a different tab. Go back there. You will find the helpful folks at Widgetbox are informing you of your installation and suggesting other widgets you might like. Who knows, maybe there will be a few more you can grab. There are widgets for just about everything!

All right, we are moving right along, and you are doing great! Already you have conquered the Blog and found out this new tool is not really that scary and actually can be quite helpful. And now you have your very own widget displaying one of your favorite feeds, or at least a feed from Missouri telling you all about their highways.

TIME TO MEET THE BIRD

Everyone seems to enjoy gathering and sharing over a plate of appetizers, and yes, even social media has an appetizer course to offer. Enter stage right, microblogging. This term designates a tool that acts as a mini-feed, or an appetizer of sorts, that functions by pulling short messages from multiple sources and delivering them to you. A time-saving smorgasbord of appetizers. But don't forget, this feast is potluck. Your friends will let you stop by empty-handed for awhile, but eventually you will want to join in and share your own creations. Come on, this is going to be fun (and maybe just a little addictive).

So there's the quest, "Gorge Yourself on Appetizers" (who is making up these names anyway?). We begin by meeting a little bird and emulating his ability to captivate with only a short, tiny, sound called a "twitter." You can go to the Twitter site by either clicking the link below or typing it into your browser's address window: http://www.twitter.com.

GORGE YOURSELF ON APPETIZERS
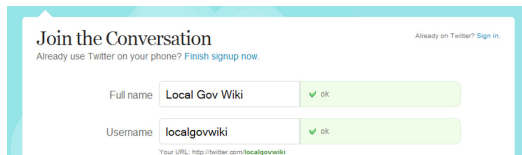
Say goodbye to "always being the last one to know." Not only is microblogging informative and efficient, it is fast. Follow the right people, and you will know everything going on in the world within minutes. Let's go:

- Visit the Twitter Website and register for an account.
- Follow 10 people (Tweeple) for a week
- Post your own "Tweets" for a week
- Respond to any messages directed at you

The Twitter site will offer a page that brightly tells you to "Sign up now." What luck because you do want to get started and sign up now. Before you make that final leap, you might want to watch a quick video, *Twitter in Plain English*. Watching this video is a good idea. Not only is it amusing, the video helps to explain the new paradigm of microblogging.

If you go ahead and click the strangely colored green button that encourages you to sign up now, you will be taken to a sign-up screen. Using your chosen username, type it in the box and hope that no one else has already signed up using this name. If you are the first,
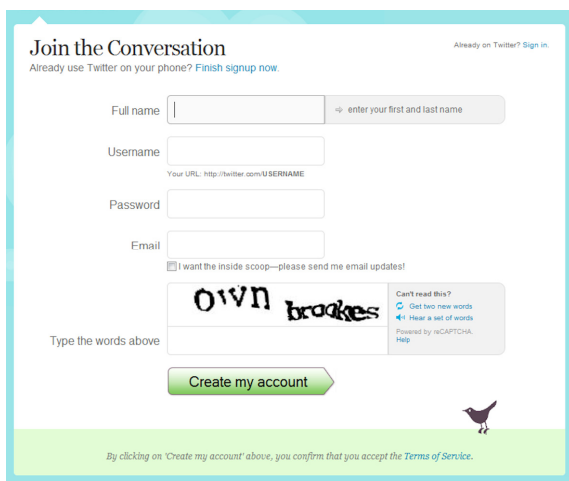
you will get a happy, "ok" message. Great! (If not, you will have to keep trying different variations or other names until one gives you the happy,

and much anticipated "ok" message.) Make sure you type in the captcha words that are difficult to read, but even harder for a robot who might be trying to create a Twitter account (and yes, this is a clear case of robot discrimination). From there, you will be asked to search your e-mail contacts to see if they already have a Twitter account. Please skip past this, unless it is something that you are just dying to do and will keep you up at night should you not accept this option. (If you cannot find the "Skip" option, look near the middle of your screen; Twitter has strategically placed the "Skip this step" link here in very small letters while the search Web Email option is centered and much larger.) Next Twitter will offer you the incredible chance to automatically follow people they have hand-picked. If you want to accept their suggestions, then do nothing more than click the big,
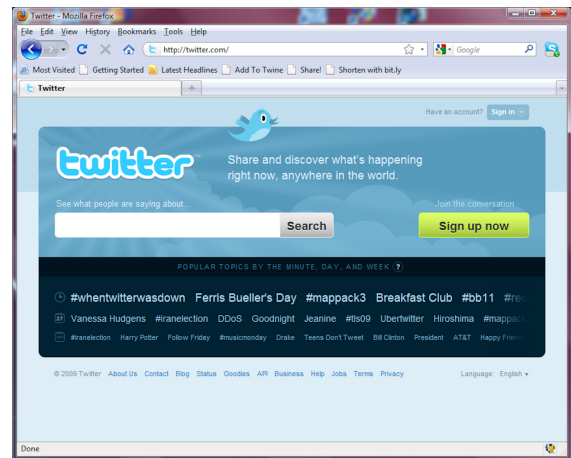
green "Finish" button on the screen. However, if you don't like having your friends chosen for you, just uncheck the box near the top of the list where it says "Select All." This will take the check marks out of all the people listed, allowing you to begin with a clean slate. Then you can click the big, green "Finish" button. Ok, you are done and you should now find yourself at your Twitter home.

Before we go any further, let's get a little more acquainted with the Twitter home page layout. First, you
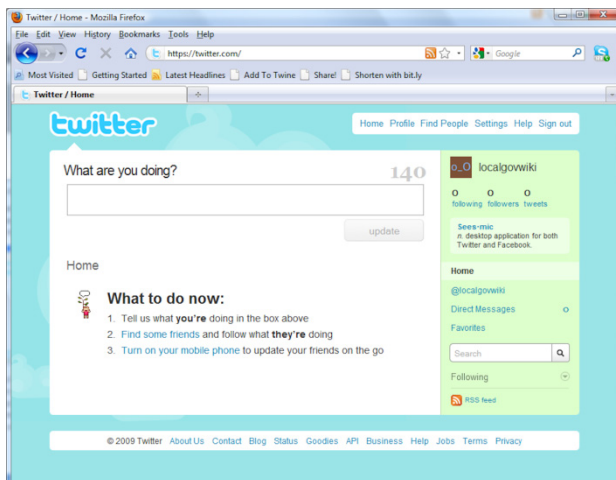
will notice Twitter asking you, "What are you doing?" followed by an open box with the number "140" just above the box. Below this box, Twitter is offering you a friendly suggestion: "What to do now." Most likely because that is the very thing you are wondering yourself. So if gently asking you didn't work, they now tell you to let them know what you are doing in the box. Below that is the suggestion to find some friends, and they mean on the Twitter site—let's be clear here, they do not mean find someone on the street and start following them. That will surely lead to trouble. Next they tell you to turn on your mobile phone, not the one plugged into the wall, to tell your "friends" what you are doing.

That is a lot to do for someone who is just starting. What do they want from us? Well, we will at least tell them what we are doing by typing into the box since they seem pretty keen on getting us to at least do that. So go up to the box, and type one of the messages below depending on your personality. Remember these posts stay associated with your account so use one with which you are comfortable, or feel free to make up one of your own. (A special thanks to Adriel Hampton, an awesome social media guru from San Francisco, for calling my attention to the first quote in the list):

> "There go my people. I must find out where they are going so I can lead them." - French politician Alexandre Ledru-Rollin

> New to Twitter. Looking forward to following others in engineering, government, or public works.

> Just started using Twitter because this crazy online guide told me to. #YSMJBH09

As you type these words into the box, you will notice the number that started out at 140 decreasing to reflect the number of characters you have left. This is a very important concept behind microblogging—you must get your message across in only 140 characters. Don't you wish we had this rule in other aspects of our lives?

The last message ended with some funny letters that really didn't make sense so it doesn't surprise me if few people chose to use that message, besides the fact, it is the more "off-the-wall" comment. I included it to demonstrate one way of tagging your messages and finding those of others. As you increase your use of Twitter, there will come the day you say to yourself, "Gee, I wonder what is going on over at that cool conference my boss wouldn't let me attend?" Well, if those attending the conference include this "hashtag" in all their messages or "Tweets" that relate to the conference, then all you have to do is search for that hashtag. Perhaps there will come a day when conference organizers publish the "official" hashtag to be used in microblog messages that reference a particular event, but for now, people who are on Twitter are making this decision amongst themselves.

Back to the other parts of the home site: in the right sidebar of the site, you will see your username displayed with a little square icon. Oh my gosh! You look like a silly brown square with googly eyes. We must work on that image. So before exploring any further, let's go upload that profile photo you have sitting in your computer waiting for just this moment. To edit your profile, you might think you should click "Profile" up at the very top of the Twitter screen, but oh no, you should be clicking "Settings" instead. Go there and you will see a page showing your account information. Twitter offers some helpful tips over in the sidebar. But you don't need to read these now, you've got this guidebook! You can change your Name designation to indicate your real name, not your username, but only if you want others to know who you really are. Your username will remain the same.

The other entries allow you to change your e-mail, time zone, and add a URL for a Web site or blog, but only if you want that site associated with you. There is also room for a bio but this is limited to 160 characters—refer to the profile information you prepared in the earlier chapter. Now you can put in your location and the language with which you will want to read Twitter. The last choice on this page is a box with the words "Protect my updates." Checking this ensures your posts will be private so that no one else can read what you write. This might seem somewhat counterproductive so only check this if you want to have to first invite people before they can read your posts. Otherwise, remember that everything you post is out there for the world to see. (Note that this is also where you would delete your account. But Twitter is one of those things that take time to develop a taste for. So I would advise holding off doing any deleting until you have used Twitter for at least a week or so.) Click the save button at the bottom before we go any further.
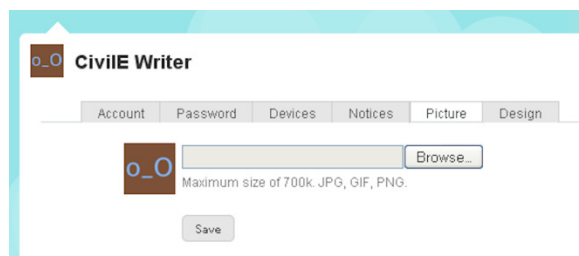
Ok, on to that picture. You could just click the tab on this page that says "Picture," but like most Websites, you can get there faster by just clicking an image so click the googly-eyed brown square at the top next to your name. This brings you to a screen that looks something like the image on this page. Click the "Browse" button and a screen will pop up that allows you to browse (hence the "Browse" designation on the button) to where you have your ready-to-go profile photo stored. Navigate to that location, and click the file so that it places the file location in the box. As you can see Twitter tells you the file must be below 700k and be in either JPG, GIF, or PNG format, but if you prepared the photo as described earlier, you should be ok. If successful, Twitter will tell you it is a nice picture and return you to this screen.

Although there are more tabs up there, we will only review the Design tab. Click this and you will be given a choice of designs that can be used as your Twitter background on your page. There are theme choices along with the opportunity for you to upload your own background image. You can even pick the colors used for exciting items such as the text, links, and the sidebar. What more could you want from a microblogging site? When done, click the "save changes" button at the bottom.

୬୦୯୪

Twitter—the only place where it is ok to follow others without being labeled a "creep" or a "sheep"

୬୦୯୪

Twitter Messages

By first following a few Twitter veterans you get a good feel for what types of messages are usually posted.

Here are some tips to consider when posting:

- Posts that would elicit a typical "TMI or too much information" are probably best kept to oneself.
- Check your company's policy about posting company-related information so you don't get yourself into trouble at work.
- Remember, if your posts are public, they are there for anyone to see, even your mother or your boss.

Now, go back to your home by clicking "Home" at the top. At this point we need to work on our next step which is to find 10 people to follow. In the world of Twitter, following simply means that you have chosen to collect a particular person's Tweets and have them fed to your Twitter home page. For now, I am going to suggest some people for you to follow based on having watched them post over the last several months. While there are many great and interesting folks to follow, it is best to only start out with a few while you get the hang of it. By watching their posts over the week, you will have a good idea about how people are using Twitter.

Now, to choose your ten, you can either take my suggestions below or you can visit the GovTwit Directory at http://govtwit.com/ and pick your own.

Here is a list of a mixture of folks who are involved in all levels of government, construction, engineering, and public works.

Adriel Hampton	http://twitter.com/adrielhampton
City of Naperville	http://twitter.com/NapervilleIL
FEMA In Focus	http://twitter.com/femainfocus
Mark Drapeau	http://twitter.com/cheeky_geeky
Staci Ford	http://twitter.com/ConstructionPM
EPA	http://twitter.com/greenversations
Patti Flesher	http://twitter.com/ConcreteThinker
10 Downing Street	http://twitter.com/DowningStreet
NPR News	http://twitter.com/nprnews
Pam Broviak	http://twitter.com/pbroviak

Many of the people listed above will follow you back once you are following them. As for me, if you choose to follow me, I will definitely follow you back. (Well, unless you are a only interested in teaching me how to get rich quick.) I am not as prolific of a Tweeter as some of the others, and most of my posts are related to public works and engineering.

AREN'T WE DONE YET?

I realize that you are probably excited about your new Twitter account and about waiting to see what words of wisdom will arrive on your very own Twitter home page. But before you are cut loose totally, we need to go over a couple last items. Trust me, you will want to know these last few tips. If you look through Tweets on other sites, you might notice some that look like this:

I am using one of Mark's tweets because he is so prolific of a Twitterer to the point that most would consider him a Twitter expert. This particular post is filled with a few great examples of how folks get information across in Twitter. You will notice that when Mark refers to someone who he knows is also a user of Twitter, he does so using their Twitter name and places an "@" symbol in front. Here is another example where Mark is directing one of his posts to one specific follower with the username MichaelHardy. Again, Mark places the "@" symbol in front of the username:

The other noticeable items from Mark's first post are the links that he includes for his readers. Each link provides more information related to his message. This is called sharing, and it is a good thing to do. The bad thing about links is that they are often long. Mark used a couple different methods of shortening those URLs in order to save characters. You can shorten the links you want to post by going to a site like TinyURL at http://www.tinyurl.co.uk/. This site will shorten any URL, and then allow you to copy and paste the Tiny URL that is generated.

Ok, the last few things you need to know are that you can check when someone directs a public message to you by clicking the "@username" word in your sidebar on your Twitter home page. This takes you to a screen listing all of the times someone has put your username in a post with the "@" symbol. Below this are the words "Direct Messages." This is where you can send short messages back

and forth between you and a specific follower and keep the communication private. These are sometimes cleverly referred to as a DM, or Direct Message.

There, I think we are almost done. You have successfully created a microblogging account at Twitter.com, you have started with your first post, and you are now following at least 10 people. The last item at hand is for you to directly respond to someone. You can achieve this either by responding to a post you particularly like, or post a message using the tag for this book: #SMNY09, or you can send me a message using the @pbroviak designation.

Great, that's it! Done. You are now a part of the Tweeple population.

TWITTER RESOURCES

Twitter is now such a hit that people are writing many guides and resources for using the service. Here are a few you might want to look at. Some are for beginners and some for more advanced users:

- *Twitter Search: http://search.twitter.com/*

- *Twitter 101, A Special Guide http://business.twitter.com/twitter101*

- *Best 100 Twitter Tools: http://commetrics.com/?p=740*

- *Twitter's 10 Commandments: http://darmano.typepad.com/logic_emotion/2008/12/twitters-10-commandments.html*

- *HootSuite: http://hootsuite.com/*

- *Twitter Fan Wiki/US Government: http://twitter.pbwiki.com/USGovernment*

- *TweetDeck: http://www.tweetdeck.com*

HEY, WHERE'S THAT WATER COOLER?

Imagine there is a favorite hangout in your community or workplace where everyone gathers to talk—like at a "water cooler," coffee shop, or break room. Each day issues, work-related or not, are brought up and discussed, plans proposed, solutions offered, all within the context of a small social gathering. Now imagine that you take part in this on a regular basis. Maybe you are the one who updates everyone on the latest sporting event, or the one everyone turns to for information about what the government is up to, or the one that comes up with the best ideas, or maybe you are the one who lightens up the crowd by offering funny stories and jokes. Whatever your contribution, people place value on it and look for you to be there.

Now, what if, during your next week off, everyone decides to meet at a different location, and no one thinks to let you know. You come back, and everyone is gone. Each day, you sit in the old location waiting for your old group to return. But they never do. Meanwhile, they are at their new location going on as usual, but they realize something is missing: you! But they aren't sure why you aren't there. Do you no longer want to hang out with them? You wonder why they moved. Were they trying to avoid you? Usually, in a situation like this, you see the other group members enough that they make a point to let you know where they have moved to. So eventually you are back with the group in the new location.

But what if they moved to a place that makes you very uncomfortable. Perhaps they now meet in another town or in a coffee shop you never much liked. Or maybe the new break room is inconvenient for you to visit during work. Is your participation in that group important enough for you to get over your negativity towards the meeting location? The group is certainly hoping so.

This is very similar to what is happening on the Internet. Whether you realize it or not, more and more people are moving their "water cooler" meetings online. And even though the people in your group want you there, they too might be treading new waters and not ready to lead someone else there. Right now, you need to get yourself to the new meeting place. Trust me, they are hoping you will show up.

So, this chapter will help you out with that. Not only will you be reunited with those you already know, you will meet everyone else who has shown up at this new meeting place. And we will begin with the safest network out there: LinkedIn. Gaze on over at the quest to set your next course of action.

FINDING THE VIRTUAL WATER COOLER

Networking is vital to success in business. So in the spirit of the old saying, "It's not what you know, but who you know," let's get going and make some connections:

- Visit the LinkedIn Web site and sign up for an account
- Fill out your profile
- Join a group
- Add a connection
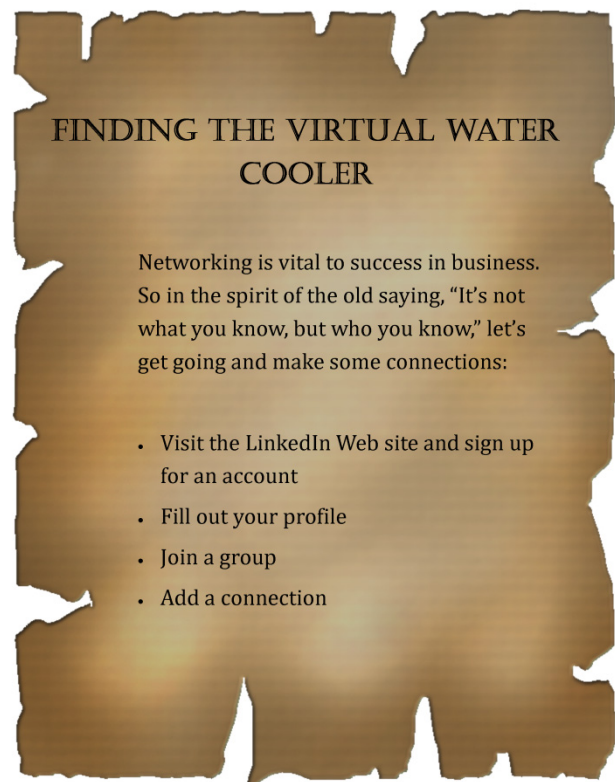
First we need to go to a networking site called LinkedIn at http://www.linkedin.com. There you will be greeted with a screen like the one that follows, reassuring you that "over 30 million professionals use LinkedIn to exchange information, ideas, and opportunities." Look, over on the right is where you join! It
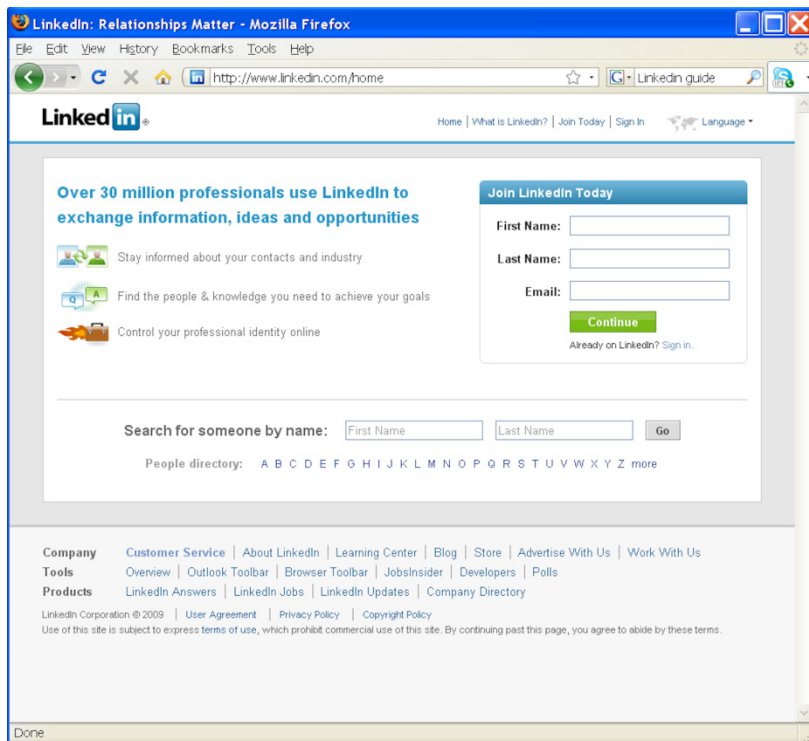
says: "Join LinkedIn Today." Not tomorrow when you get around to it, but TODAY! So, thinking that over 30 million people can't be wrong, you will input your first name, last name, and your e-mail. No user names here because LinkedIn is all about serious business. Folks need to know who you really are in this online community.

Unfortunately, this is one site where I am already registered and cannot add another account since there really is only one me. (Although if you search for "Pam Broviak" in the "Search for someone by name:" area of this page, you will see there actually are two people named Pam Broviak on LinkedIn—one is me, and the other is a woman who lives in Minnesota and works in the computer industry. Which just goes to show you, LinkedIn will allow two people to share the same name.) So because of my pre-existing account, LinkedIn gently reminds me at the sign-up screen that they think I already have an account. But in any event, you should have been taken to a sign-up screen that looks something like this:

Yours will most likely also have the First and Last Name boxes filled in. Finish filling in the rest of the information, and click the blue "Join LinkedIn" box at the bottom. There, that wasn't so bad, was it? Now off to fill in that profile.

The next screen should have a sidebar on the left offering a type of map to your areas in LinkedIn. Click on the "Profile" word in this sidebar. This takes you to your profile screen where you can input all the information
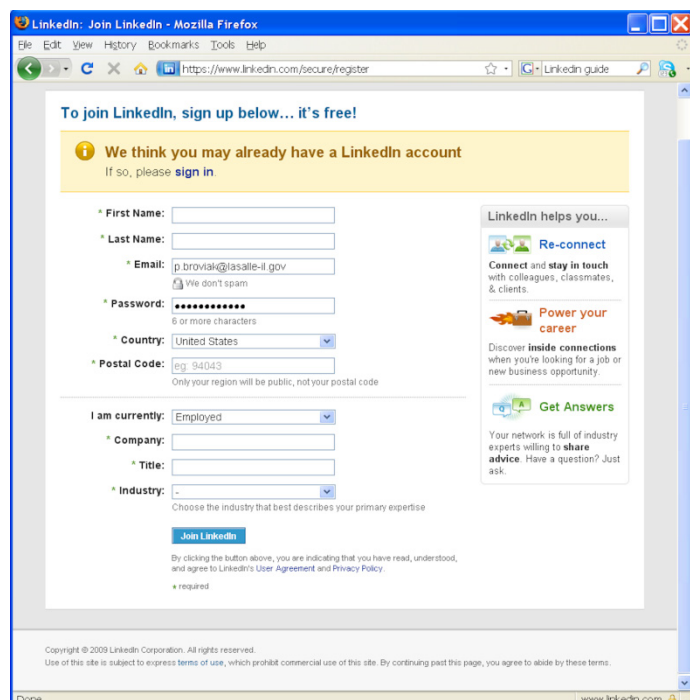
about you that should be shared with your business colleagues. The layout is similar to that of a resume offering you places to input your work experience and education.

After you are done with the profile, and before we go any further, I want to point out that LinkedIn operates under somewhat of a little different philosophy from other networking sites. Here, you are encouraged to only connect with others you already know or are known through your existing network. I have seen comments by LinkedIn members indicating if you solicit a connection with someone who you don't know at all in any way, things won't go well for you. I tried to find, on the LinkedIn site, if this is a LinkedIn policy or urban legend, but really came up with very little. I did find that in responding to an invitation for a connection, your response could prevent that person from ever contacting you again. So concerning invitations to connect, read the two pages below before responding to or sending out invitations for connections. (Note that these are found in the help section of the LinkedIn Website):

Responding to an invitation

Sending Invitations

All right, I put a screenshot of my profile here so you can get an idea of what yours would look like once your profile is all filled out:

You can always come back and add or change your profile so for now, we are going to go on. One of the great tools in LinkedIn is the group section. New groups are being added all the time, and they are a great place to meet new people in your industry. Let's go there now and find a group to join! Click the "Groups" word at the top of your
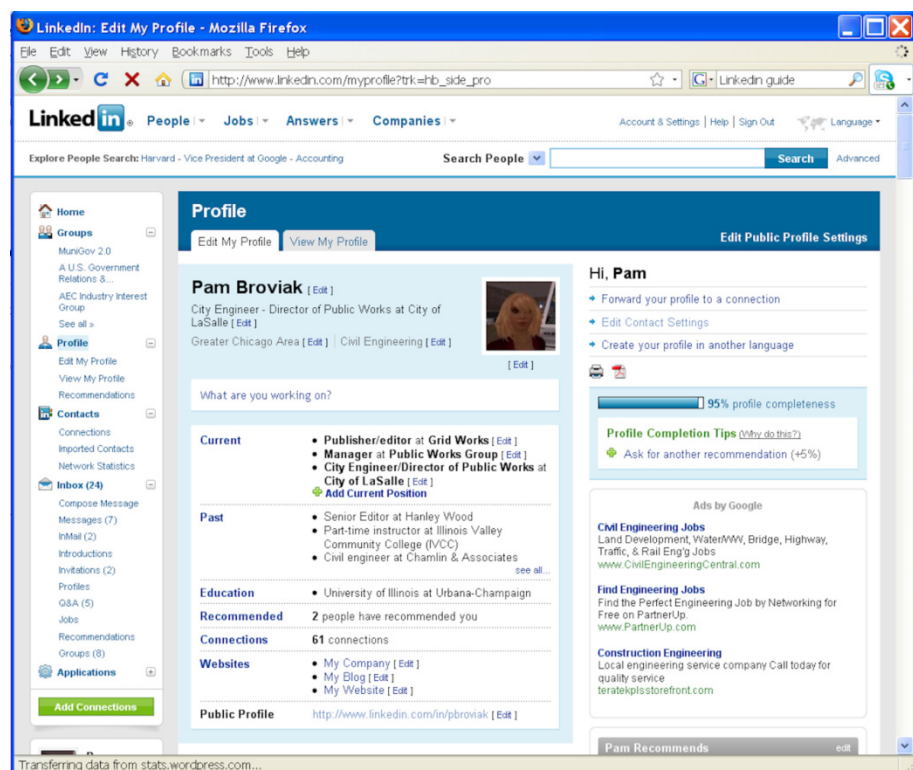
screen. This takes you to your group screen, but you don't have any groups yet. But look, over there on the right. LinkedIn has placed a bright yellow button there just for you with the words, "Find a Group." That's what we want to do! How did they know? When you click it, you will be taken to a screen where you can search for groups. This page also has some featured groups displayed. But for today, we are going to search for ones related to what we do: civil engineering, public works, or government.

Let's start with one of my personal favorites: wastewater. Type this into the top box under the section titled: "Search Groups." Something similar to the following screen should come up.
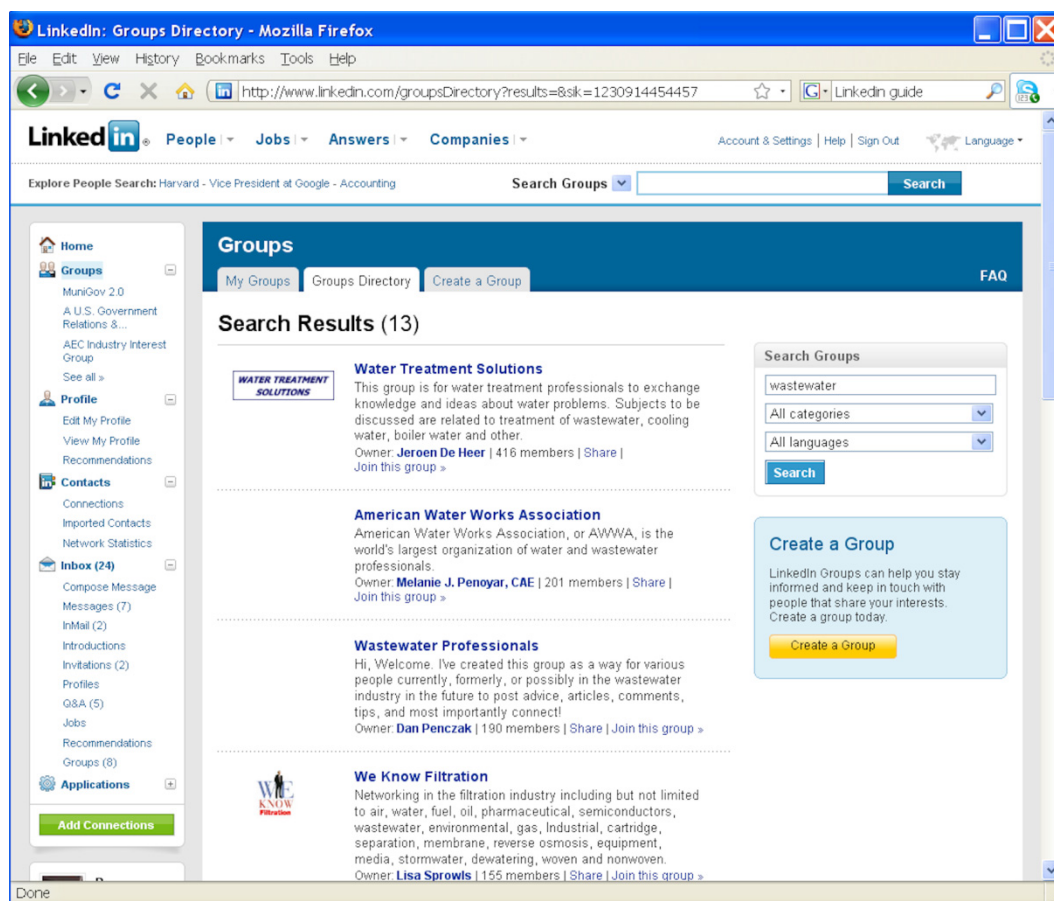
Looks like one of our old favorites, the American Water Works Association, has found its way here and already has 201 members. If water is your thing, I would suggest joining this group. There is also a group titled, Wastewater Professionals, started by Dan Penczak with 190 members. You can continue to search for a group that interests you, typing in different relevant terms in the search box, or you can search for one of the following specifically.

MuniGov 2.0 is a coalition of local/municipal governments focused on exploring the use and principles of Web 2.0 in an effort to improve citizen services and communication via technology.

The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) was founded in 1852 to represent members of the civil engineering profession worldwide. It is the oldest national engineering society in the US. This is a meeting place for members of the ASCE around the world to network, interact, and exchange ideas.

GOVERNING is a group for leaders in state and local government, including elected and appointed officials, as well as those in the private and non-profit sectors who work closely with those officials. The group was created by the editors of GOVERNING magazine and GOVERNING.com, the resource for states and localities.

The group for professionals involved in GIS, mapping, Geo technologies. Perhaps you're a project manager, programer, mashup developer, analyst, or consultant. Feel free to join this group if GIS, maps, GPS, LBS, or mashups is your thing! Please also visit GISuser.com, LBSzone.com and Amerisurv.com

There are many more groups to be found and joined; this is just a small sample to get you started. For example, so far, I have found and joined 42 groups related to civil engineering, public works, or local government. You might find when you click the "Join Group" button on a group's site, that you are informed your request to join must be approved. If so, you will be sent an e-mail once the administrator of that group logs in and approves your request. In the end, you should have at least one group displayed on your "My Groups" tab.

Ok, the last part is connecting to someone. Again, keeping in mind the issues with contacting someone you don't know, it would be best for you to search for someone you do know who you think might be on LinkedIn already. You can search for people by typing in a name in the upper right hand corner of the screen in the box next to the blue "Search" button. There is also an advanced search available that allows you to search for people using key words and location. If you simply cannot find anyone at all, you can certainly connect to me. Just make sure you choose the option to add a message to your invitation, and mention that you are on the "looking for the virtual water cooler" quest, and would like to connect. Make sure you don't send this to the other Pam Broviak in Minnesota; she might not be amused.

Ok, you have survived this step—by no means the biggest one you will take, but still significant. You are now part of the over 30 million people connected through LinkedIn.

Joining a Tribe

You might, at this point, be thinking: "When I agreed to follow you down this wagon-rutted path to social media, you never said anything about joining a tribe. That is just not me. No way. You already have me linked up and now this? The Kiwanis Club is as close as I am going to get to joining any sort of tribe."

Rest easy, young traveler, with the release of Seth Godin's book: *Tribes: We Need You to Lead Us*, talk about tribes has become all the rage. But the tribes of today bear little resemblance to those of our

ancestors. Many of today's tribes are online and are referred to as networks. Within these digital networks, you keep in touch with colleagues, you mingle at office parties, and you attend industry conferences.

What you might not realize is that networks have been forming online for some time. They have grown to a size and sophistication that now warrants notice by anyone doing business. However, I realize that this step is quite often the one that scares people the most. All that came before was just exploration and testing the waters. This is getting more serious. Many want to turn back at this point. I encourage you to go forward. Why? Because we need you.

JOINING A TRIBE

Sharing our goals and visions with others and taking the time to work towards common goals are noble choices. The time has come for you to share your experience and knowledge with the tribe :
Visit the Ning Web site and find a network of your choice
- Investigate your chosen network
- Join the network and fill out your profile
- Read a blog post
- Join a group

Most of you have probably heard of MySpace and Facebook –two of the more popular social networks out there at the moment. But we are here for primarily work-related reasons, so for now, we will pass
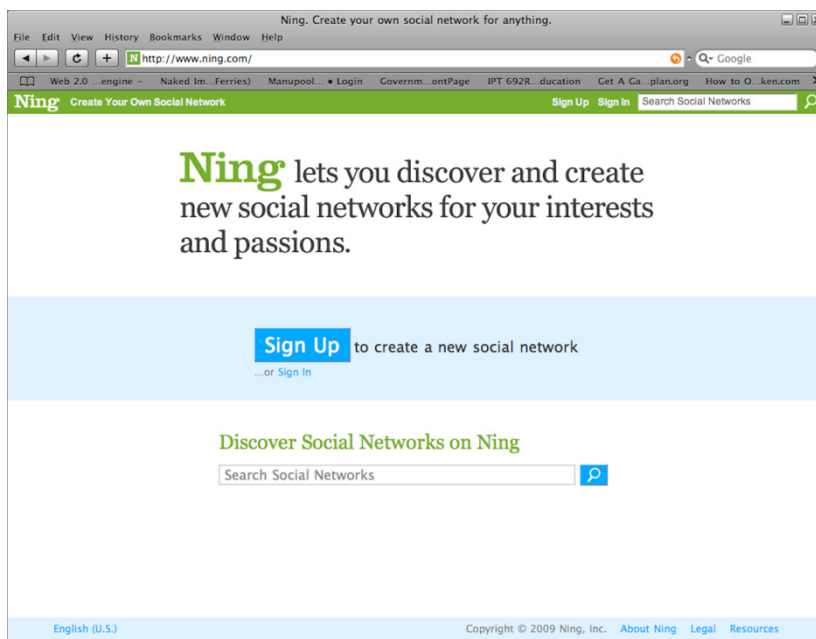
these by like a person intent on a steak dinner passes by McDonalds. And on the way, we pick up our quest:

Not all people join online networks just to hang out and send hugs, some people really do want to further their careers. And one of the primary services providing this networking interface for working folks is a company called Ning, Inc. As you can see from the screenshot on this page, Ning allows anyone to set up a network. Don't let their main page of their Web site fool you. Yes, people are using the Ning service to set up their own social networks, but people are here for business too. For now, we are going to use the search feature to find a business-related network we can join.

Explore Type the word "wastewater" into the search window, in the upper right-hand side of the page, where it says "Search networks." A few sites will come up: in particular one for **Waterspheres** and one for **We Are Public Works** (a network set up by APWA for those working in the public works field). For now, we are just going to explore so go ahead and click on the name of one of these networks, and you will find yourself taken to the home page for that network. Most Ning-based networks have a similar look and feel. The screenshot on this page shows the main site of the We Are Public Works network. (And yes, I did change my browser to Safari—for some reason Firefox starting overwhelming all my CPU.) The inner portion usually has announcements, photos, or blog posts from members. Usually the page shows thumbnail photos of members and of groups that members have set up on within that network. If someone does not upload a photo, a default image is shown.

Videos, calendars, and even Google ads might also be located on this main page. At the top, you should see a menu bar with links to other areas of the network.

Next we are going to get signed up as a member of the Ning network of your choice. Sadly I have to admit that not all of us might want to be members of a wastewater or public works network. So for those of you who are saying, "there ain't no way I am joining a group where people discuss sewage," let's look for a different network that you might like.

Go back to the Ning Web site (http://www.ning.com), and type the word "government" in the search box in the upper, right corner of the screen. Hit enter or the little blue, magnifying glass, and you will be presented with a list of sites related to government. The first network listed should be **GovLoop—Social Network for Government 2.0**. Go ahead and click on over to the site. You will see that the site, as of today, has almost 10,000 members. So if you didn't want to talk about sewage with the rest of us, here is a network for you.

Join Now, whether you are at the Watershperes, We Are Public Works, or GovLoop, let's sign up for a membership! The sign-up area is usually located in the upper right-hand area of the page. Click the words: "Sign up." This takes you to a page with a form. Much like the many, many other forms we have been filling out. E-mail address, password, but in this case, no username is

asked. You will add that later as most likely you will be using your real name. For some reason, Ning sites default to asking your birthday. Not sure why, as the note below this reassures you, "We won't display your age without asking." Then there is another robot-discriminating feature where you have to prove you are human by typing in the letters in a box. Click the "Sign up" button and you are in!

The next screen is where you can input your name, and upload your favorite photo that you have ready to go just for this purpose (see how handy that was getting it ready up front—everyone asks for it!). Some sites have other questions such as which Web site you want affiliated with your name. You don't have to answer any of the other questions unless the site indicates they are required. Upon successful

registration, you are taken to your very own page on that network. Here is a screenshot of the profile page for Steve Ressler, GovLoop's founder.

From here on out, you can post your own blogs, upload your photos and videos, or contact other members. How much you choose to be involved is up to you.

Read

Don't be surprised if someone sends you a welcome message right away. This is a typical practice among all Ning networks. Everyone is happy you joined and wants to make sure you feel welcome. Many will also add you as a contact so that if you have any questions, there will always be someone you can ask. And don't hesitate to ask questions. All of this is still so very new to all of us. You can ask questions by posting them directly on someone's page in the "Add a comment" section on their profile page, or you can "Send a message" that will go to that person's inbox on this network. Mail in your inbox is designated by a number displayed next to the little envelope at the top.

Group

The next item of business is to simply find an article, blog, or discussion that interests you and read it. You can find these by again, clicking in the menu at the top. Go on, I will be here when you get back.

Now, the final step will be to find and join a group on the network you joined. Groups are helpful because they concentrate the discussion and members into specific areas of interest. Look for a group by clicking the word, "Group," in the menu bar at the top. This will take you to the group page that lists all the groups set up by the members of this network. Anyone can join any group. Go on and search for one you like. The GovLoop site has over 300 groups—the most of

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the networks we have discussed. There should be something there that piques your interest. When you find that special group, click the underlined name taking you to the page for the group. Here I clicked on over to the Homeland Security group page on GovLoop's network. This group was set up by a member, Lynn Ann Casey. There are 171 members as of today. On the group page, all the members are listed along with any group-specific discussions. To join, just click where it says "Join Homeland Security," or whatever group you have chosen. So you are done! That wasn't too bad, and now you have a place to go to network with others in your industry. Together you will share stories, ideas, resources, photos, videos, and anything else the network decides to pursue.

Hey, over here!

if you start getting e-mails from the network each time someone sends a message to you or posts a blog or discussion, and you want to turn that off, this can be done in the "Settings" area.

You also should know that once you join a Ning network, it is helpful to continue using the same e-mail and password on each one. That way, a connection on one network will show up right away on another if they are also members of that network.

NING NETWORKS RELATED TO GOVERNMENT, ENGINEERING, PUBLIC WORKS

We Are Public Works: http://wearepublicworks.org

GovLoop: http://www.govloop.com

Be2Camp: http://be2camp.ning.com

American Planning Association: http://apaplanning.ning.com

Economic Development: http://economicdevelopment.ning.com

e-Government: http://egovernment.ning.com

SpaceClaiming: http://spaceclaiming.ning.com

Konstructr: http://designbuild.ning.com

Engineering Exchange: http://engineeringexchange.ning.com

Michigan Department of Transportation: http://transportation-states.ning.com

Architects, Engineers and Constructors Network: http://aecnetwork.ning.com

PowerPoint
+
Social Media
=
slideshare

{metalab}
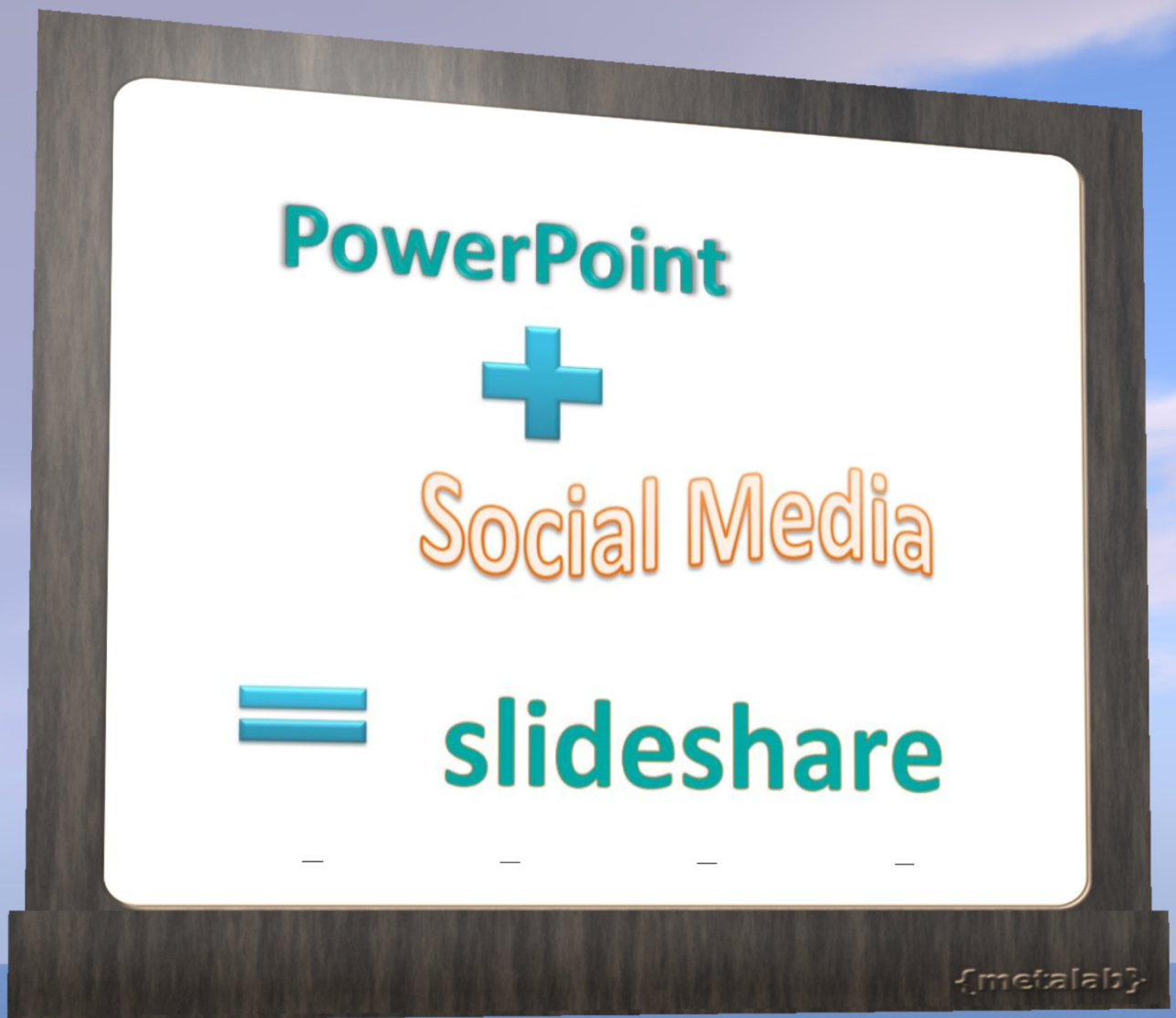
Think back over the years about how many Powerpoint slides presentations you have either prepared yourself or sat through for training purposes. Wow—Powerpoint has become ubiquitous (I had to use that word somewhere as it is one of our city attorney's favorites) in our industry. Now with all this Powerpoint mania, you might have started to wonder, "are we all just making the same slides for the same type presentations?" and if so, "how could I get my hands on some good slides?" Or perhaps, you have wished you could add some more pizzazz to your slides but just haven't come up with any good ideas. Or maybe you created the most awesome presentation of all time and are lamenting that only one small group of folks got to see it. Well wonder and languish no more. Enter stage right—

Not all Powerpoint presentations are filled with slide after slide of black text on white backgrounds. Let's go browsing Powerpoint shows—It will be fun, really :

- Visit the Slideshare Web site
- Create an account
- View a slide presentation

Slideshare! The site where all of us can explore, post, and share slides for Powerpoint presentations. Yes, even Powerpoint has entered the realm of social media. And this little venture will not only be quick and enjoyable, but will offer a multitude of resources on which you can draw. Yay! That sounds great. Let's grab the quest and go.

First, we visit the Slideshare Web site at http://www.slideshare.net. Below is a screenshot of this site, and you can see right away that someone has posted a slideshow called "The Tao of Twitter." Just scrolling down the page will give you an idea about the many, diverse topics covered by the slides posted on this site. Many cover social media, after all, that is a current buzz word. But there are slideshows about cities, ideas, New Year resolutions, and even slideshows about how to make better slideshows. Some people are also turning their resumes into Powerpoint presentations and posting them on Slideshare.

Looking even further down, there is an area highlighting "Latest Features" for the site. Here you will see that not only does the site offer a download that installs as a plug-in for the PowerPoint 2007 program, but you can also post the slides you have shared here on your LinkedIn profile page. See, you begin to notice how all these sites are starting to tie together.

I know you are anxious to get started, you know the drill, scan the
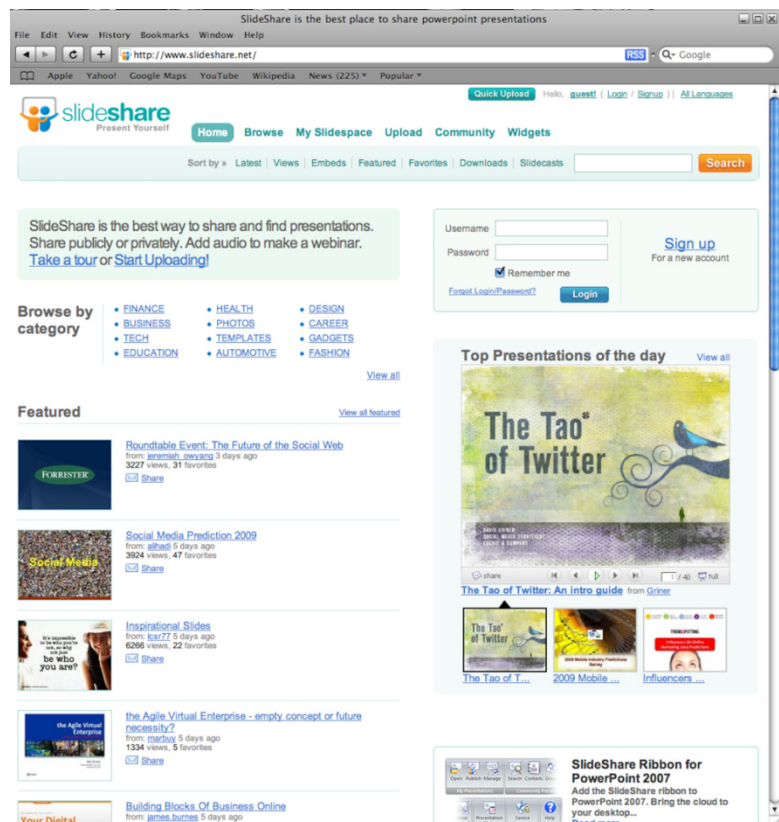
page for the word "Signup," located at the very top in very tiny letters, or better yet, over on the right near the top where it says: "Sign up for a new account." Clicking one of these takes you to, of all things, a signup page that should look something like the screenshot below:
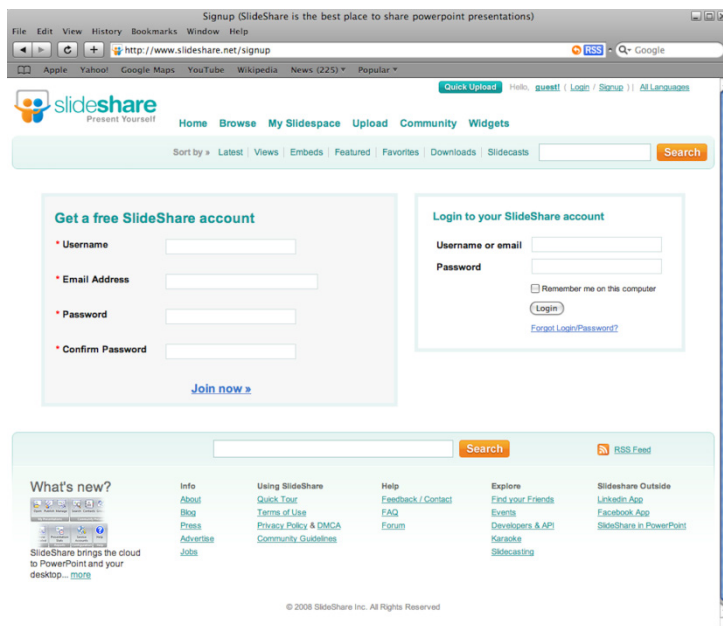
As with most sites, you can sign up for free by just putting in your username, e-mail address, and choosing a password. Then hurry, and click "Join now."

Since I already have an account of my own, plus an account for work, I did not choose to make another one for this demonstration. I am guessing that after you clicked "Join now," you were taken to your profile page. I logged into the profile I set up for the Public Works Group so you can see an example of my page below:

On here, I have uploaded the slides I made for a few Powerpoint presentations I have given. Others can view these and even download them since I have set them to public. You can keep your presentations private, allowing only those people who you choose to view them or you can make yours public too.
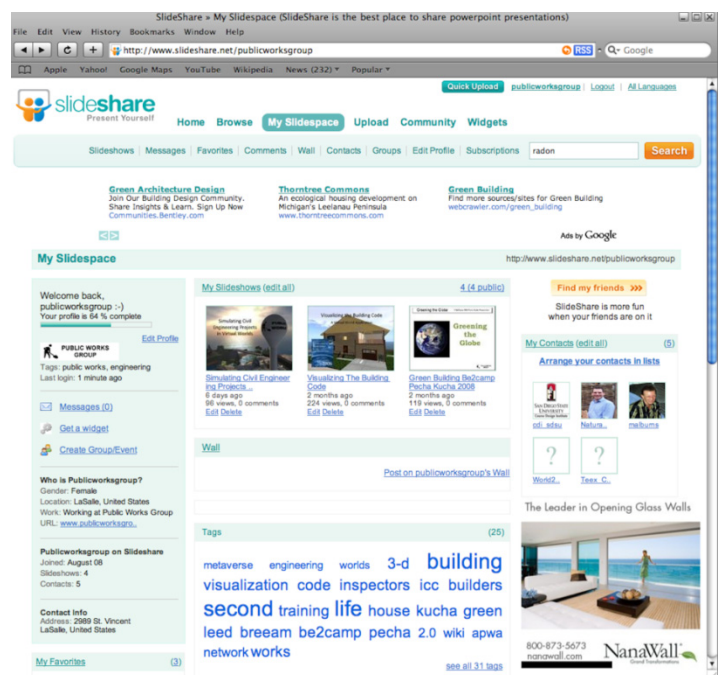
You will see from the screenshot, that even Slideshare reminds you it "is more fun when your friends are on it." And if you have colleagues with whom you like to share your work, this is how you do so. Add them as contacts and keep track of the slideshows they are creating.

If you present at a conference, you can post your slideshows here and let your audiences know they can access them on Slideshare . What has been happening at some conferences is

that presenters upload them prior to their presentation. If Wi-Fi is available at the conference, presenters can let the audience know where the slideshow is posted. Then anyone with a laptop connected to the Internet can follow the presentation on their own computer.

Our final step here is to click on a presentation and view it. Find one you like on the main page, or use the search to find one on a topic you are passionate about. If you click on the title, you will find yourself at the main page for that slideshow. View the presentation by clicking the little arrows under the picture
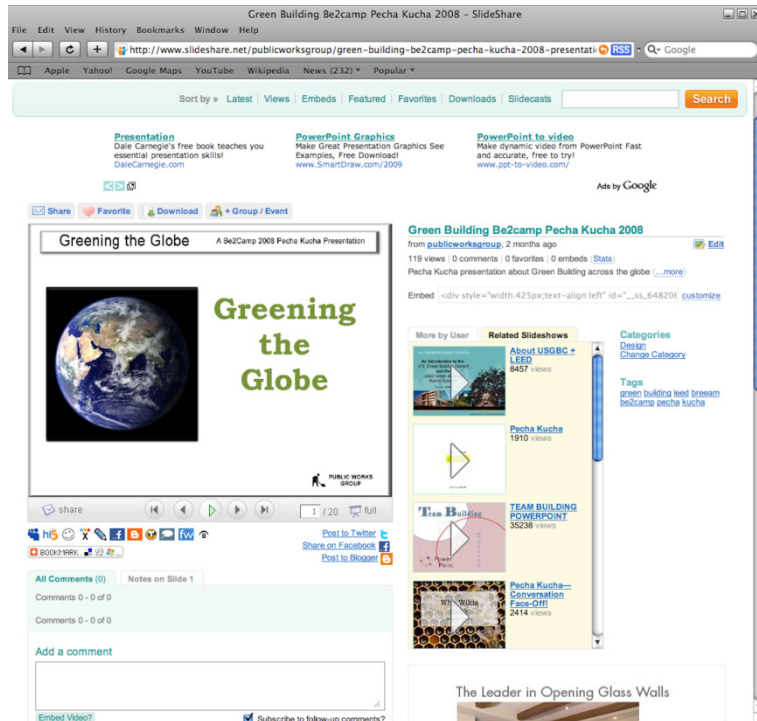
of the first slide. Off to the side, you will see the kind folks at Slideshare have even suggested a few more presentations that might interest you based on your search terms. That's it. You're done!

There are many other areas to the Slideshare site. I leave this for you to explore. And feel free to connect with me through the Public Works Group Slideshare account!

THIS HAD BETTER BE GOOD

And trust me, it is. What would you think if I told you that you can make an international call of high quality sound, and it would cost you nothing? I know, it sounds like one of those online scams, and what in the world has that got to do with social media? So let's back up, and I will share another story with you. Then afterwards, we will explore how this ties into the social media thing.

Last year, our family finally canceled our land-line phone service for good. After all, the annual bill had grown to about $1,000, and we made maybe, what? Ten calls all year. Ok, I am exaggerating a little, but the point is that most of our calls were being made with our cell phones. And that bill was, well, I don't even want to think what that bill was. I think the reason we hung on so long to the land line was because our kids needed some way to call if they were home and no cell phone had been left for them. We already had three cell phones and numbers and did not want to invest in another cell phone just to sit at home.

So one day, I noticed someone online talking about communicating with their friends by using an online phone service called Skype. I checked out this Skype thing and decided to try it out. The service is based on VOIP (voice over Internet protocol) which basically means it works over the Internet. What I found out was that simply by creating a Skype account and installing the software on my computer, I could text chat or talk, using a microphone, for free to anyone else who had also signed up for Skype and installed the software. If you have a Webcam, there is also video available. Since that first signup, I have talked with people all over the world for free, and the quality of the connection has been the same or better than using a landline. That all sounds too good to be true, doesn't it. But wait, it just gets better.

Not only can you talk to someone else, but you can easily add other Skype users to your call. For example, last year, I worked with a group located in Australia and England to help organize a conference. We "met" on Skype each week at a specific time using the Skype conference calling feature, all for free—well, unless you count the cost of the Internet service that we were all paying anyway. The sound quality and ease of connecting for these conference calls seemed incredible. In contrast, in our office, where we still use landlines, only one secretary knows how to set up a conference call.

But wait, like a late night infomercial, there's more. For only $2.95 per month, about $36 a year, you can call from your computer to any landline and cell phone in the U.S. and Canada (for someone based in the U.S.). And for $9.95 per month, you get unlimited calls to landlines in 36 countries around the world. The service also includes call forwarding and voice mail.

And yes, there is one last benefit. If you sign up for a subscription, you can secure your own personal phone number for only $30 more a year. And if you hate the idea of using microphones on a computer, you can always buy a Skype phone for anywhere between $30 and $300. So let's review this incredible offer:

- Free calling, text chat, video, conferencing (limited to 25 people) anywhere in the world between Skype users

EXPERIENCING SKYPE

So many times we hear about products that sound too good to be true. Well eventually you would think that at least one of those things had to actually be true. And Skype is that thing. So let's get Skyping:

• Visit the Skype Web site and create a free account

• Approximately $36 a year for calling to landlines or cell phones in the U.S. and Canada or approximately $120 per year for calling to any landline in 36 countries.

• And for an additional $30 a year, you get your own phone number anyone can call.

• And you can buy a device that uses this service but looks like a regular handheld phone.

Wow, do I ever have the infomercial lingo down—gotta stop watching so much late night television. Anyway, perhaps you can begin to see why I have been hooked on Skype. It almost sounds too good to be true. But yet, it is true. And now, we will begin to see how it all fits under the social media umbrella.

But first, the quest line which is one of the more simple ones you shall accept. And don't worry, we are only signing up for the free stuff.

So the quest is fairly simple. Visit the Skype Web site at http://www.skype.com. Your screen will look somewhat like the screenshot to the right. We need to find the place where we can make a new and free account. Where is it!? Since there is no obvious signup link, I guess we will have to start with downloading the software.
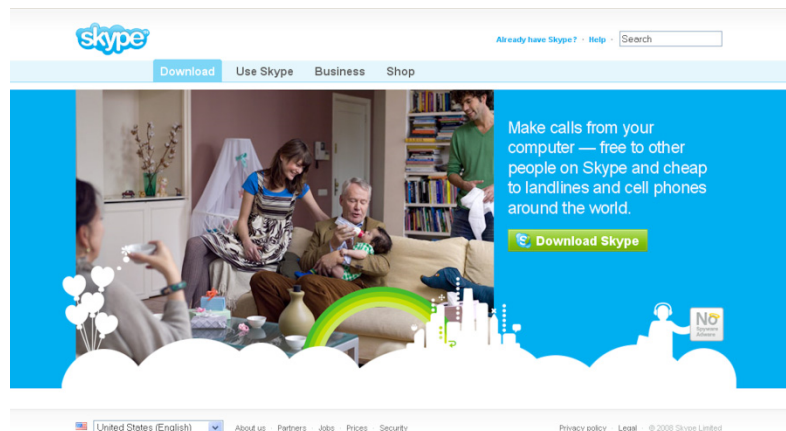
Click the bright, green button that cleverly says, "Download Skype." That is it! Click that green button. This will begin the download process onto your computer. The Web page that pops up at this point will give you further direction on how to install the software.

Once you click "run," another screen will pop up that looks somewhat like the image on this page.

Choose the language you prefer to use and then click that you agree to the terms of service, if in fact you do. When Skype launches, you will be shown a screen that looks like the one to the right (at least I hope it does—I have to warn you here that I already have a Skype account and could not be sure that Skype would react in the same way if I never had an account). Because you don't yet have an account, click where it says, "Don't have a Skype Name?"

Now you are presented with the actual signup screen for your very own Skype account. Finally!
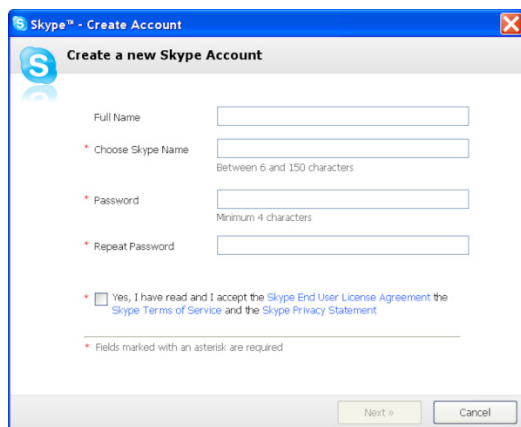
You will see that there is a prompt for your full name, but this is not required. You do, however, have to choose a Skype name. At this point, you might want to consider using some derivative of your real name if you want to make it obvious to people that this account is yours. Otherwise, you can also use the username that you have been throwing out all over the Internet. Pick your password, and check the user agreement—again, if you are so inclined. And off we go. You are in!

When you first sign in using the little Skype screen you see above that says "Welcome to Skype," a "Getting Started" screen appears to, well, help you get started. Skype even puts a happy rainbow in white, fluffy clouds and offers a friendly, "Hello."
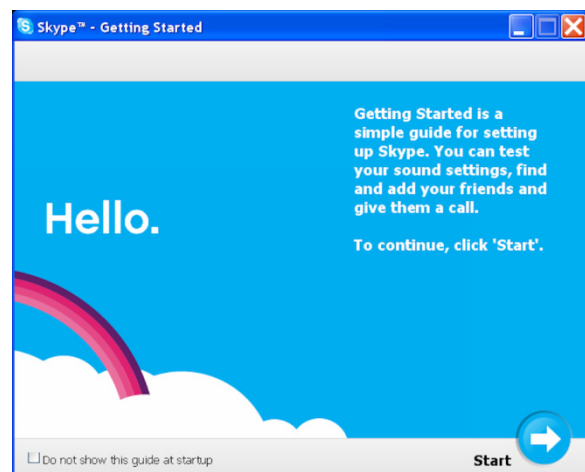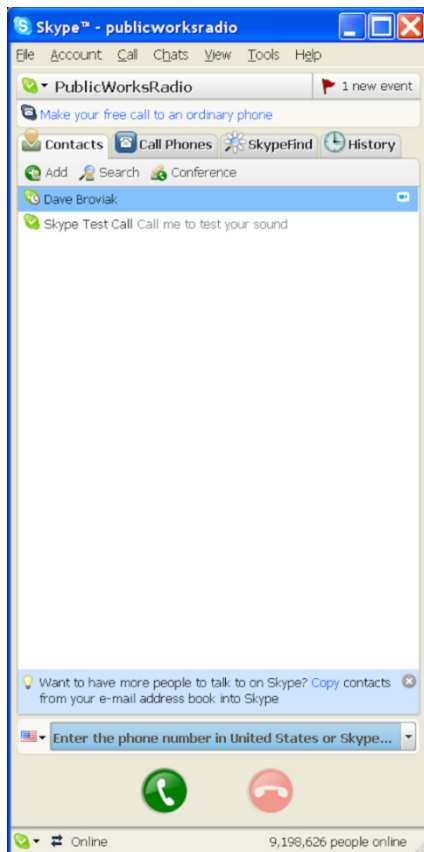
But, after viewing the screens, you will find that, like most communication devices, you can't do much with them alone. To really experience the true benefits of Skype, you will need to find a friend who also has Skype. You can do this by clicking on the "Search" button on the main Skype console. But if no one you know uses Skype, keep in mind that some people don't like to receive anonymous calls so you might not want to start randomly calling people. A better idea might be to encourage a good friend to jump on the Skype bandwagon so the two of you can experiment together.

FINALLY, THE SOCIAL MEDIA THING

Now, finally, we will touch on the social media tie-in. Once you get more connected with people around the world who work in your industry, you might eventually want to talk to them or join in a conference call. Most people using social media sites have Skype accounts.

Another use I have found for Skype is right inside my workplace. Where I work, speednotes used to be the method of choice when it came to conveying phone messages. But, all those slips of paper can get annoying fast. Plus they get shoved into pockets while I am running out into the field, and maybe a few fall into the sewer manhole I end up checking out. Well, it could happen. Anyway, I installed Skype on our computers at work, and now everyone can send everyone else a message using Skype. Plus, you can set up Skype to save a history of your chats. If a message is sent while I am out of the office, Skype keeps track of it, and I can access it when I return.

TAKE IT FROM ME…

Skype is great, but I am going to give you one vital piece of advice concerning your account. Before going any further, go visit your settings by clicking the "Tools" menu and then "Options."

Here is where you can set up how you want Skype to operate keeping in mind that millions of people all over the world have Skype accounts—after all, it is free.

Go to the tab that says, "Privacy." Make very sure that the part that says "Allow calls from…" is checked to be "only people in my Contact list." Going down the line, keep making sure that the options are all checked for "only people in my contact list."

Trust me on this, you don't want unsolicited calls.

Another benefit of using Skype in this manner is that you are able to watch messages come in while you are working, and you only have to respond to the ones that need immediate attention—like, "Mrs. Jones called from Fifth street and wants to know why water is shooting up out of the pavement."

GOING VIRTUAL

Now, if you've stuck it out this far, good for you. You have reached the last and ultimate social media tool—virtual worlds. For now, this is the final destination of our journey. You can go forward with the conviction that everything you have accomplished so far will have helped prepare you for this step. Many of you will wonder if it really is worth it. And my answer to that is, yes, it can be more worth it than you can ever imagine. But, as in everything Web 2.0, and well, even in life, that will be up to you.
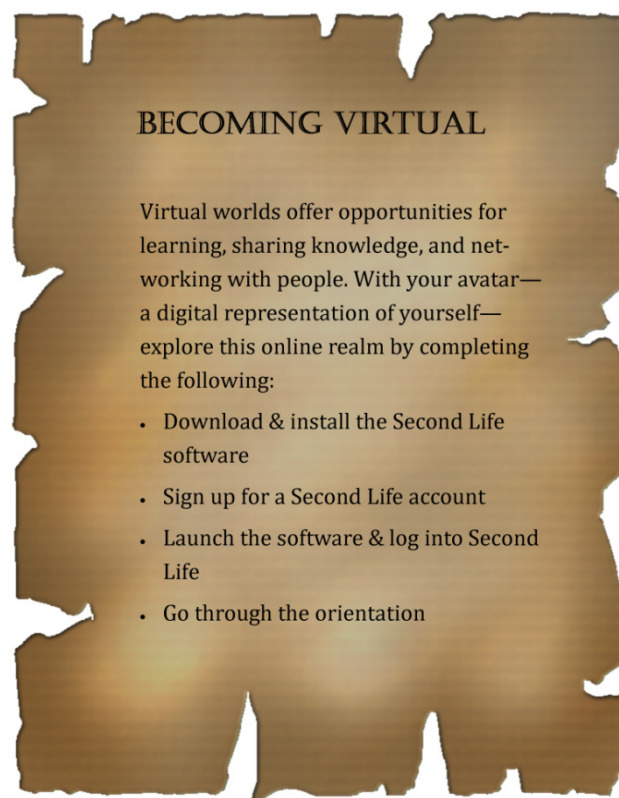
Some of you will be familiar with the movie, *The Matrix*, or with the book, *Snow Crash*. Others might never have even heard of terms like "virtual worlds" or the "metaverse. " But whether you think you

have an idea about virtual worlds or not, trying to prepare you for what you will eventually experience is just about impossible. This is one of those things you have to experience yourself to really understand. I can tell you the virtual world we will visit for this quest is Second Life because at the moment, this world is the most populated, stable, and diverse metaverse for adults.

Now, even though I don't like to have to pause here to address this, I will. There have been some stories about Second Life in the news that might have given some of you a negative impression—negative enough that you are now hesitating to go forward. While I cannot deny that there are probably places in Second Life that are not for the faint of heart, I will offer this analogy. (I know, not another story!)

Imagine that someone lives in a country other than the United States. You meet them in their own country and they say to you, "I would never go to the U.S.; there are people there who walk around with guns and shoot people. Kids are running loose in the streets stealing from everyone. Prostitutes walk along all the sidewalks, and drug dealers are constantly driving through neighborhoods. Buildings are run down, and there is garbage in the street. Why in the world would I ever want to go there!?"

BECOMING VIRTUAL

Virtual worlds offer opportunities for learning, sharing knowledge, and networking with people. With your avatar—a digital representation of yourself—explore this online realm by completing the following:

- Download & install the Second Life software
- Sign up for a Second Life account
- Launch the software & log into Second Life
- Go through the orientation

Now, if you live in the U.S., I really doubt you live or spend time in a place like that described above. But do they exist? Yes, I can imagine somewhere in the U.S. there is a place that might come cause someone to have that impression. Particularly for someone who might come upon it for the first time. But is this an accurate description of the entire U.S.? Of course not. Not even close. So why are we so ready to believe such horror stories about other places. Real or virtual? Think of the two sides to every story thing, and then read on.

Ok, so, we are going to use the Second Life experience to explore what it means to visit and interact in a virtual world. Let's grab the quest and get started.

The first step is to download and install the Second Life software. In order for you to enter this world, you will need to have the software installed on your computer. While this might at first appear to be a
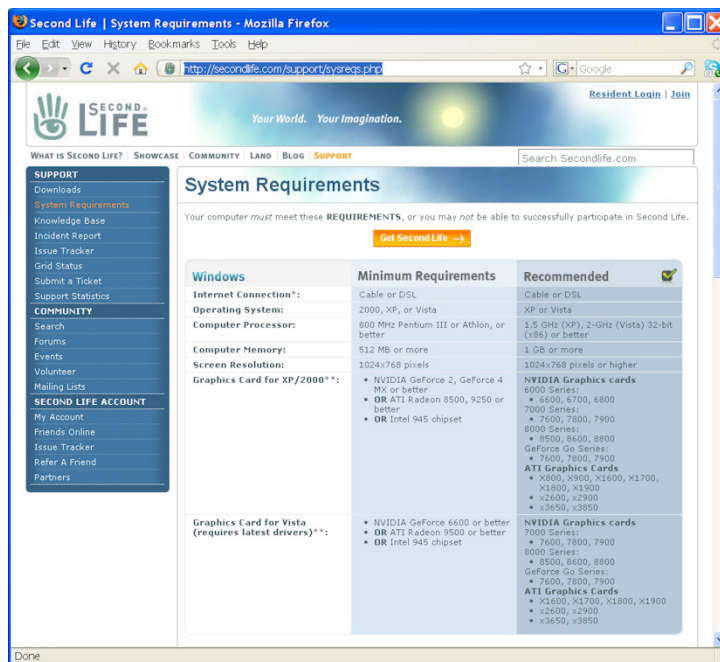
simple and uncomplicated task, there is one minor issue to discuss: the Second Life software is a computer resource hog.

Therefore you will need to make sure your system is capable of running the software. Everyone now go to the System Requirements page of the Second Life Web site (http://secondlife.com/support/sysreqs.php) to make sure your system meets the test. On this page, which is shown below, are minimum

requirements and recommended setups. The bottom line is if you are accessing the Internet using dial-up, you might have to find another computer and Internet connection in order to follow through on this.

If you pass the dial-up test, then the next item to check is your graphics card. Even if yours is not on this list, I would still recommend at least trying.

So if you feel you are ready to proceed, let's go get that software! Look at the top of the page we were just on for an orange button with the words: "Get Second Life."

This takes you to a new screen with a much larger orange button that says, "Download Now." Click that and follow the directions to download and install the Second Life software, or as it is sometimes called, the Second Life viewer or client. After it installs, the software will try to launch. You can go ahead and allow it to launch if you choose, but we will have to wait before signing in since we need to make our account.
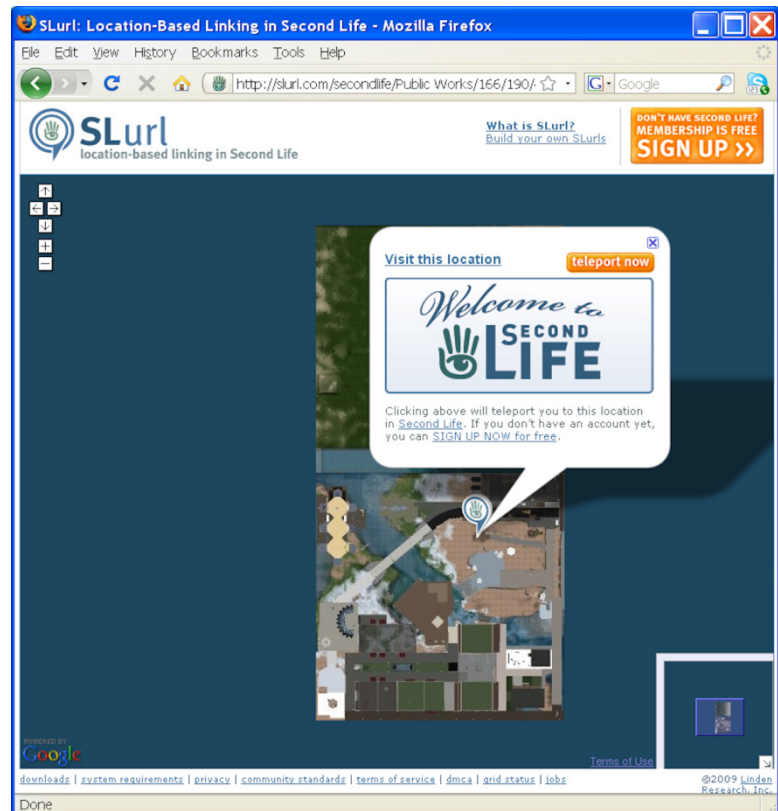
FIREWALL ISSUES

If you are trying to access Second Life from behind a firewall and are unable to login, you might need to change some port configurations. The following Web site offers more information about the ports needed to successfully access Second Life :

http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Firewall_Configuration

Now, to make the account, we could stay here at this screen and click the little, tiny, "Join" link in the upper, right-hand corner of the page. But if we do that, I can't do as good of a job guiding you through this since I will not really know where you are deposited once you enter Second Life. So, if you are the type that likes to go out on your own and are more open to the unknown, go ahead and follow that link. For the others, I am going to bring you into the world through Public Works island. That way, I know you are entering in a safe, business-related place.

So to get our account, we will begin by visiting the Public Works Group Website at http://www.publicworksgroup.com. Once there scroll down until you see a red-colored button on the left with the words: "Click here to visit us in Second Life." That would be the button we are supposed to click. If you click the button, you are taken to a page titled SLurl with an overhead view of Public Works island. Look they are welcoming you and offering to take you there now! But since we don't have an account, we need to take care of this order of business first. See, again, in the upper, right-hand corner is another orange button that says, "Don't Have Second Life? Membership is Free, Sign Up>>"—this is the button you need to click since you don't yet have that Second Life.

Clicking this takes you to the signup page. This part is easy; we have been filling these out all along so you should be able to whip through this one. But there is one little item to note: first, you will be entering as a 3-D person so you need to choose how you want yourself to look to begin. Don't worry; you can always change this look once you are in.

Next, you are asked to input a first name and then select a last name from a list. Not sure why Second Life is set up so that you cannot use your own username, but it is. So try to choose a name with which you are comfortable. Some people use their real first names while others make up names. Just

remember, if you are going to use your Second Life account for anything related to business, you might want to make sure the name is somewhat respectable. Here is a screenshot of a signup I created.

Once you input the secret code that proves you are not a robot, and click the "Create account" button, you will be taken to a screen that reassures you that you are "Almost Done!" Then it advises you to check your e-mail to activate your account.

I suppose we have to take a break to do this now. Go to your e-mail account that you used to sign up for your Second Life account and look for an e-mail from Second Life. Click the link in that

e-mail to activate your account. This will launch your browser and the Second Life site will offer their congratulations to you for creating a new account. Then they remind you that you need to download

and install the software. They even open a download window for you, but since we already did this, go ahead and hit cancel. That is it for the account.

Now this is where it gets interesting. Look for the Second Life icon on your desktop, or look for the Second Life program in your program listing on your computer. Launch the software by clicking the icon or program name. When the software starts, you should have a screen that looks like this. Well, I can't be sure you will be subjected to the singing snowman. But you can be sure
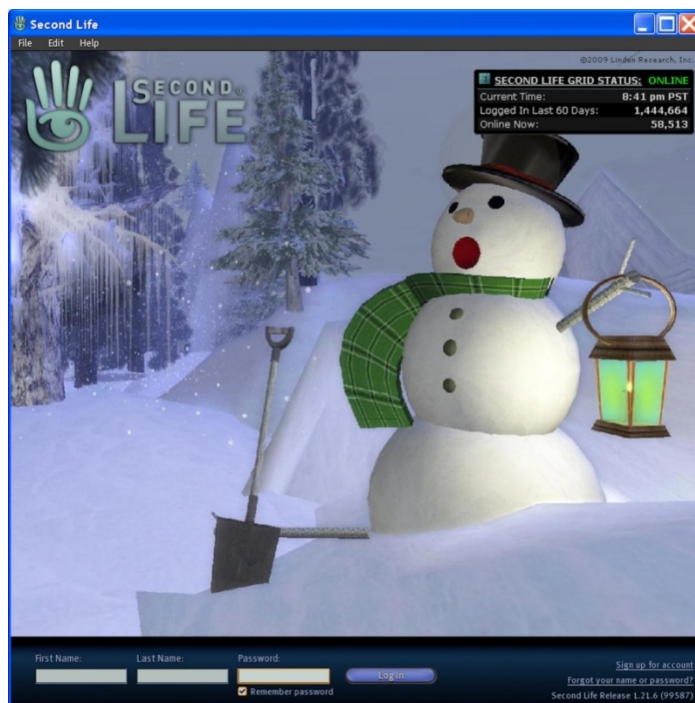
there will be some photo that represents something in Second Life. The windows at the bottom are where you input your new name and password. Before you do that, you might want to look in the upper, right-hand corner where the helpful Second Life people have placed some statistics. Up here you can always see how many people are online and in Second Life at that moment. This area also indicates if the world is online, the current time, and how many people have logged in over the last 60 days.

So we are now ready; go ahead and put in your new name with your password and hit the button that says "Login." Oh, wow, just when you thought you were there, a new screen pops up. Linden Lab, the folks behind Second Life, want to make sure you understand the terms under which you are allowed to use their software and enter their world. I encourage you to read these terms of service since being bad and not following these terms can result in you losing your privilege to enter Second Life. Kind of like losing recess privileges in grade school. If you are entering Second Life without any ill intention, and you

agree to these terms, click the button indicating this and hit the continue button.

Yay! You should be in. there you are standing in all your digital glory in the avatar form you chose with your unique name hovering above your head. Remember, everyone can see your name, and you will be able to see everyone else's (although there is a way in the preference menu to turn these off so you cannot see them).

Please notice right away that there is a little screen, now in the upper, left-hand corner that has a helpful arrow labeled, "Begin." This is probably a good place to start so let's click that. The screen will change to one labeled "Moving." These screens have been placed here by Linden Lab so that they come up each time someone makes a new account. That way, each new person has the chance to go through a mini tutorial before getting too far.
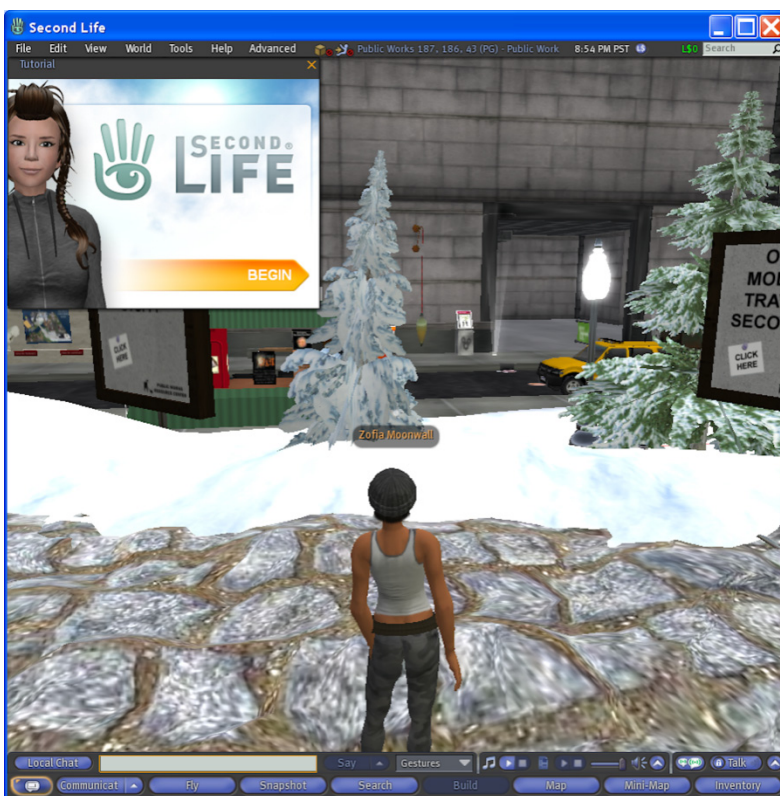
Go ahead and take some time now to run through these screens. They should help orient you about the following topics. And if at any time, you want to refer back to these, the tutorial rests under the Help menu:

Moving	Flying (yes, we fly in Second Life)	Changing the view	Chatting with others
Adding friends	Viewing inventory (yay, we have stuff!)	Changing appearance	What's out there (or how to find places to go)

Once you are done, you can start to look around this 3-D world, using your arrow keys. If you signed up by first clicking that button on the Public Works Group Web site, well, then you are on Public Works island. If you had chosen to be daring and signed up directly from the Second Life Web site, that is ok too, but I just don't know where you are right now. And you will have to follow along as best you can.

So now, we are on the island standing along a stone path. There are orientation stations here too if you want to go through them to help you better remember the basics like flying, moving, chatting, dealing with all your stuff! At the end, click the "Onward and Upward" board, and you will be given a few notecards with information and things that looks like links in them— when you click those links or landmarks, a window will come up.

There will be a button on there that says, "Teleport." Click that and your avatar will be taken to the site for that landmark.

There are sites where you can get free things, and there are sites with cool places to explore. And that is that. You are now an official resident of a virtual world. But while exploring is fun and interesting, the best part of Second Life is meeting others from around the world. While you are exploring, remember that people want to talk. If you don't feel comfortable talking yet, just say hello and let them know you are new and still learning how to get around. You can always leave a conversation by telling the person you have to go, saying bye, and going up to the World menu at the top of the screen, and hitting "Teleport Home." This will always bring you back to Public Works Island until you choose to set your home to another location.
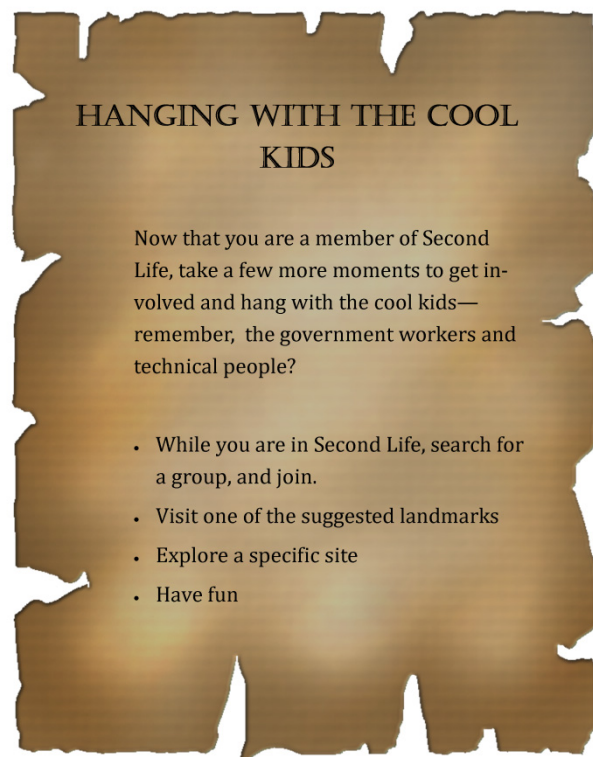
To leave Second Life, all you have to do is go to the File menu and choose, Quit.

There are many, many videos that have been made to help you understand and learn how to best use Second Life. Here are some links to a few you might want to watch:

Video Tutorial Quick Tips from Linden Lab: http://tinyurl.com/62serj

Hey Avatar Series by Mo Hax: http://imohax.com/heyavatar/

Second Life Tutorials by Chris Smith http://secondlifetutorials.blogspot.com/

HANGING WITH THE COOL KIDS

Now that you are a member of Second Life, take a few more moments to get involved and hang with the cool kids—remember, the government workers and technical people?

- While you are in Second Life, search for a group, and join.
- Visit one of the suggested landmarks
- Explore a specific site
- Have fun

JUST A LITTLE FURTHER

Now, we could stop here, but I am going to leave you with one last quest just to make sure you get a little more experience than the average person who signs up for a Second Life account.

One of the best ways to get involved in Second Life is to join a group. Joining is so very easy, and many groups have meetings or send out regular notices to their members to keep them up to date on what is going on in Second Life. So let's go group: while you are logged into Second Life, click the blue "Search" button on the bottom of your screen. Next, choose the "Groups" tab on the window that popped up. In the open box at the top, type in the
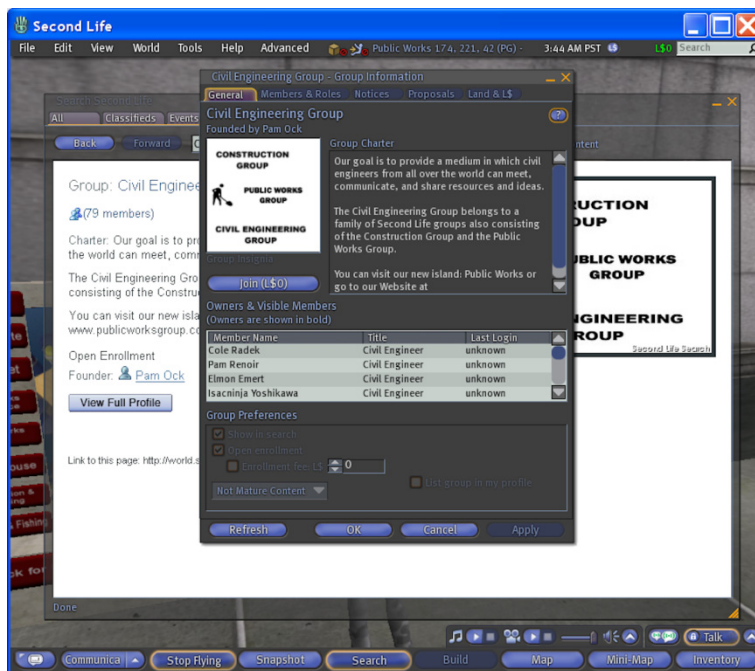
name of the group in which you have the most

interest:

- Real Life Government in Second Life
- MuniGov 2.0
- Civil Engineering Group
- Public Works Group
- Construction Group
- Geotechnical Engineering Group
- Engineers
- Second Spatial <M-GIS IA>
- GIS Users Group
- Society of Women Engineers
- RL Engineers
- All About Water
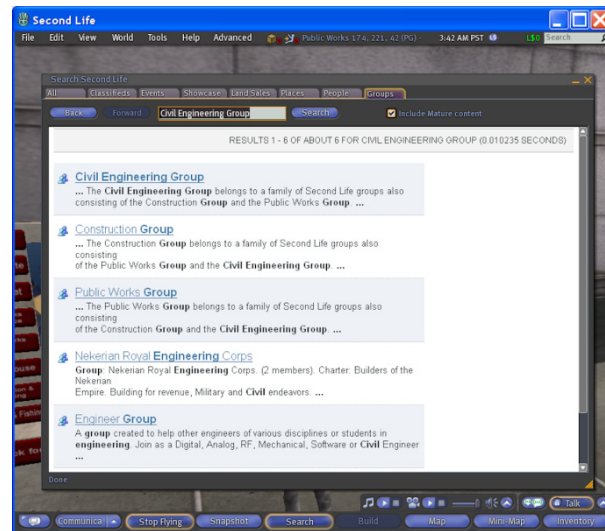
After you type in the name, hit the blue "Search" button, and a listing will pop up into the window. Look for the name of the group. You can see in the image above, the results I got when I typed in "Civil Engineering Group." This listing shows all the groups that meet your search criteria. At this point, click the name of the particular group you are looking for. This brings you to a summary of the group information and displays the name of the person who created the group. Click the button that says: "View Full Profile" to get the full group profile information. There should be a blue button on this window that says: "Join (L$0)." This is the button you press to join that group.

If ever you go to join a group, and there is no blue, join button, this means enrollment in the group is closed to the public, and if you really, really, want to join, you must send the group creator a message requesting membership. Except for the MuniGov group above, all of the others should have open enrollment.

Once you have joined, you can click through the tabs on the group window to

view other members and to access notices posted by the group. You will also notice that joining the group caused a title to be displayed above your name that floats on top of your avatar. This is often referred to as "wearing your group tag." Sometimes groups will have alternate titles available from which to choose, and if so, these will be displayed on this main group window. You can always remove the tag by right-clicking on your floating name, and clicking "Groups" in the pie menu that pops up. This brings up a listing of all of your groups. Click where it says "none" and then click the "Activate" button.

So we did the group thing, now off to explore! Here is a list of some sites in Second Life that are related to government and/or engineering. I also threw in a few that are focused more on the arts and culture just in case science isn't your thing. To visit a specific location, just make sure you are logged into Second Life, and then click the link. A window will pop up offering to teleport you to that location:

Etopia Eco Village: http://slurl.com/secondlife/Etopia%20Island/193/54/22

Spaceport Bravo: http://slurl.com/secondlife/Spaceport%20Bravo/49/80/23

NOAA Virtual Island: http://slurl.com/secondlife/Meteora/177/161/27

Swedish Institute: http://slurl.com/secondlife/Swedish%20Institute/71/213/30

Dresden Art Gallery: http://slurl.com/secondlife/Dresden%20Gallery/123/128/26

When you arrive at the site of your choosing, take some time to walk around and explore. Many of the sites offer information that can be accessed by interacting with the items and objects in Second Life. You might hear music, an audio tape, watch a video, receive a link to a Web site, or receive a notecard with more information. Some places offer the change to buy Second Life objects for free. If you are not interested in spending real money, make sure anytime you "buy" something, the price is listed as $0L.

And most importantly, remember to have fun while you explore!

Well, this is it, the end of our journey into social media. Congratulations on all your accomplishments—embracing new technology is no easy task, but with your new experiences, I am sure you can confidently log into anything they throw at you.

And thanks so much for spending time with me as we journeyed through the twisting and sometimes obscure path leading through the Web 2.0 or social media maze. I hope that you found some interesting resources and information, but more importantly that you found some friends along the way. So, this is not the end of the journey, but only the beginning. And if you see me hanging out online or flying around in some virtual world, stop by, and we can always trade some good wastewater stories.

APPENDIX A

While there are few social media or Web 2.0 resources for people completely unfamiliar with these tools, there are many, many helpful guides, books, tutorials, and Websites to help those who are not yet comfortable moving around the World Wide Web. With all these helpful guides, I could not even begin to do justice to writing something new. So I am going to encourage you to follow some of the links below if you feel that you need a little more help on just getting around the World Wide Web.

After you complete enough of the tutorials that you feel more comfortable attacking the social media aspect of the Web, head back to Section One: **You are Not Prepared**.

Web Basics Tutorial: http://www.lib.unc.edu/instruct/community_tutorials/web/index.html

Basic Web Lessons: http://www.aarp.org/learntech/computers/basic_web/

Quest Internet 101: http://www.questnet101.com/

Chat Abbreviations: http://www.missingkids.com/adcouncil/pdf/lingo/onlinelingo.pdf