

The NMC Symposium on Mashups

DISCUSSION DRAFT

The New Media Consortium's Series of Online Symposia is designed to explore emerging topics in education and technology, using emerging communication and collaboration technologies to bring people together online in ways that offer many of the same affordances as face-to-face conferences. Of particular importance are opportunities for the kinds of social interactions that make in-person conferences so valuable: hallway conversations, end-of-the-day informal gatherings, opportunities to speak with presenters in between sessions, and highly interactive breakout sessions that invite participation from the audience.

As part of a recent addition to how we design our online conferences, a topical paper will be released in advance of each symposium, and this document is a comment draft of the one for the upcoming NMC Symposium on Mashups. The hope is that this series of whitepapers will spark discussion, discourse, and especially critical thinking on the topic. The Symposium itself, to be held April 1-3, 2008, will take place in the virtual world of Second Life as well as the web.

A *mashup* is a combination of data or content from more than one source, often brought together in ways that reveal non-intuitive insights. Mashups can be creative products—indeed, the term “mashup” originates from the music industry—such as assorted film and music clips assembled into parodies of well-known productions, but the term is also being applied to juxtapositions of pure data, which for lack of a better term, we will distinguish here as *data mashups*. In a research or learning context, data mashups are powerful tools for navigating and visualizing datasets; understanding connections between different dimensions such as time, distance, and location; and bringing together data from different sources to reveal new relationships.

The premise we hope to advance here, and in the upcoming Symposium, is that mashups of all kinds are going to be both increasingly important and increasingly easy to create. They will provide a way for students to participate in research even as undergraduates; and they will lead to new insights, as we have already seen with mashups overlaying longitudinal economic, health, and family datasets with maps and geolocation.

The potential of mashups for education lies in the very serendipity they foster. Often patterns are not obvious until an overlay of additional data reveals those relationships. The field has its roots in data mining, which allows large amounts of data to be processed in a manageable way. Building on this foundation of solid work, new web-based tools for manipulating data are increasingly easy to use, widely available, and many are even free.

The Symposium on Mashups

On April 1-3, 2008, the New Media Consortium will convene an online conversation about mashups. This event is the eleventh in the ongoing series of specially focused online gatherings that explore new ideas and issues related to technology and learning.

The NMC's Symposium on Mashups will be devoted to looking across the spectrum of mashup activity, from the creative and fun applications that may end up on YouTube, to

practical applications that can be explored with students, to showcase projects that are making use of these tools, to issues of policy and concerns such as privacy.

To that end, submissions on a variety of topics are encouraged, including but not limited to these:

- Case studies involving mashups as they might be applied or used in any discipline
- Descriptions or comparisons of authoring tools and/or APIs that enable users to make custom mashups
- Presentations on relevant research, user studies, or other empirical information related to any aspect of mashups
- Examples of innovative uses of mashups for teaching, learning, or creative expression
- Interesting uses of mashups in social networking platforms (Facebook, MySpace)
- Policy considerations, the “dark side,” or cautions

Questions for Consideration

The creation and use of mashups raise questions about the integrity of the underlying content, how to choose one method of display over another, ownership of data, and the ethics of collecting and using data in different situations. We encourage sessions that include reflections on how mashups are being created and used, as well as thoughtful conjecture about possible future applications.

We invite you to consider these questions—and to pose your own—as you think about mashups:

- How can mashups help us make connections or draw conclusions that would not be obvious using other methods? What learning purposes might mashups be especially suited to?
- What kinds of data should be freely available? Who should gather and maintain it? What kinds of data should not be available, or should only be available to certain parties, and who should make those decisions?
- Many mashups use maps to plot data in geographical space. What other kinds of visualization tools might be developed? What are other ways to look at data?
- What are some of the essential tools being used to create mashups?
- Our view is that the use and applications for mashups in education, especially creative and data mashups, is clearly increasing. What does this mean for campuses and learning organizations?

Proposal Submission

Proposals may be submitted online and are due February 18, 2007. To submit a proposal, visit the symposium website at www.nmc.org/2008-spring-symposium.