

Subject-Centric Content Syndication with Topic Maps

Presentation at Topic Maps 2008, Oslo

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Who am I?

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Formal background: Cand. philol. at the University of Oslo.

Even though I love fishing, I have spent most of the last 12 years developing IA and interactive concepts. I have had a love/hate relationship with Topic Maps ever since I discovered their existence back in 1999/2000..





The UX unit at Logica

 UX are 8 passionate people whose great ambition in life is to create viable and innovative interactive concepts and designs...

or

 UX is one of Norway's most awarded and experienced design teams existing for more than 10 years.







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Presentation outline

- I will discuss the benefits of applying a subject-centric approach to content syndication by presenting two different cases studies
- The first case will focus primarily on the integration of structured and unstructured content
- The second case will focus on the integration of content across two different, but related solutions – where the segmentation and view on content is quite different
- These cases illustrate how a combination of Topic Maps and common web technologies provide a flexible yet powerful framework for userfocused content integration



Disclaimer: My view on topic maps (two views)

- · Simple, yet extremely powerful!
- As an IA I really love it (well who doesn't?)!

BUT

- Still far away from reaching its potential many topic maps applications we see today are quite simple and the use of topic maps in some cases even feels unmotivated...
- In some cases there tends to be a (for me) strange focus on topic maps in itself, not on the real value they can provide to a solution...
- I would like to see a more balanced view on the use of Topic Maps, it is not (or at least shouldn't be) a religion...
- ...and I would like to see more focus on the real strengths of Topic Maps (which are quite many – and I will discuss only a few of them in this presentation...)

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Subject-centric syndication

- Focusing on how different types of content can be connected to subjects
- Trying to streamline the content, not the users
- Building a flexible solution which is both user-centric and subjectcentric



On integration of content from different sources

- The need for integration of content is self-evident...
- But it's not easy to do, because you (almost) never have control of the different sources you want to integrate:
 - Structured vs. unstructured content
 - Different degrees of segmentation/detailing
 - "Unstable"/highly dynamic structures
 - Different terminology, different ownership (the classic IA problems)
- Topic Maps (in combination with common web technologies) gives us the possibility to "flatten" the information and pull together content from different systems, and thus give the users a seamless view on the content





Legeforeningen – Project background

- The Norwegian Doctors Association (Legeforeningen) wanted to use Topic Maps for their new extranet-solution for members (more than 21 000 doctors and about 3 500 medical students).
- The new solution gives all members access to information about their membership, as well as updating personal data and possibilities to follow their own areas of interests

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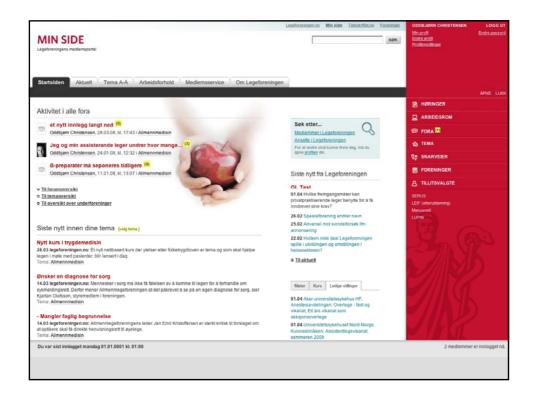
Legeforeningen – Challenges

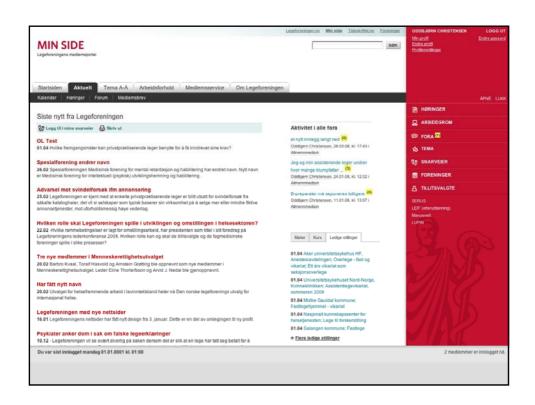
- The solution needed to structure and syndicate content from as many as 89 unstructured content providers/sources (mainly websites for the different sub-organization's within Legeforeningen)
- All these sources have different content structure (and they are also based on several different platforms) - to try to integrate content from all these in the new solution was quite a challenge

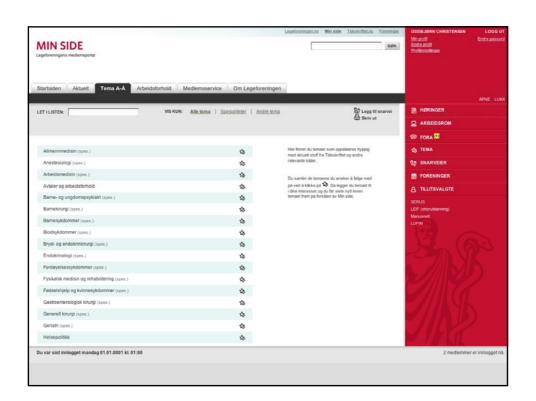


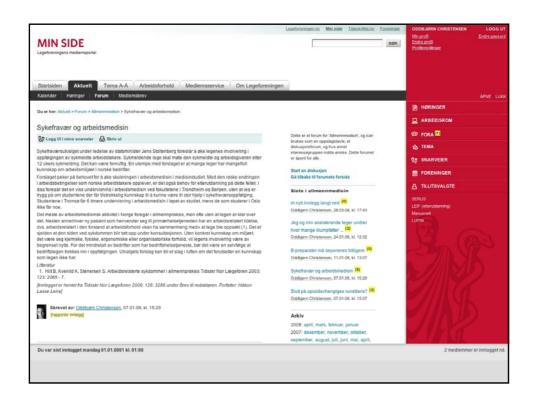
Legeforeningen – The solution

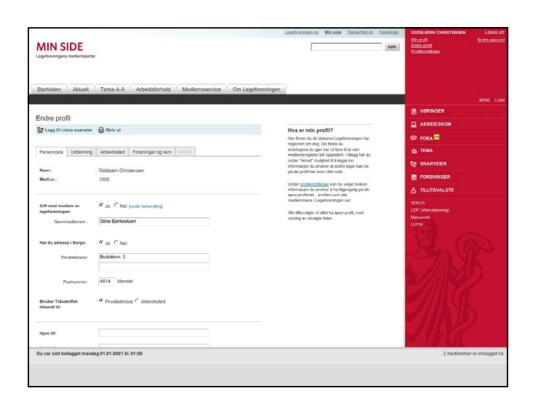
- We ended up with a solution where all the different unstructured websites delivers one or more RSS-streams to the extranet solution, where the RSS feeds are picked up, treated as a content type and connected to the Topic Map in the same way as published content
- This is a extremely flexible yet quite powerful way to integrate content form different unstructured sources
- Gives the possibility to quite easily add new sources -> the only prerequisite is that the source can deliver a RSS-feed













Legeforeningen – Conclusion

- This case study shows how the use of modern web technologies can get us from unstructured content to structured content, and how Topic Maps in combination with common web technologies can build a simple and flexible framework for content syndication and presentation
- One challenge with such a solution is that you will be very dependent on the quality of the RSS-feed
- Tighter integration with the Topic Map and better segmentation of the content will be future focus areas, in addition to keep adding more and more valuable content-sources to the solution





Private barnehagers landsforbund – Project background

- The National Association of Private Nurseries (PBL Private Barnehagers Landsforbund) wanted to establish two different websites:
 - One website for the members of PBL, where useful information for the members (documents, information, templates, etc.) were collected, structured and presented to them in a user focused way
 - One website for the public about nurseries, barnehage.no, where all information relevant to general public should be addressed
- These two different websites would have related content, but on different level of details and with different focus

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Private barnehagers landsforbund – Challenges

- Our idea of a common topic map for the two different websites proved to be difficult
 - Terms and scope were more different between the websites than first expected
 - The members of PBL and the general public does discuss the same subjects to a certain degree, but at quite different level of details, and the terms are extremely different
 - While PBL.no have a quite stable topic structure, barnehage.no is highly dynamic
 - Topics covered in detail on PBL.no might be generalized on barnehage.no (and vice versa)
- It might have been possible to solve this challenges by using Topic Maps mechanisms such scope etc., but I would have been quite tricky to build and maintain...
- However we wanted to give the users clear paths between the two different websites



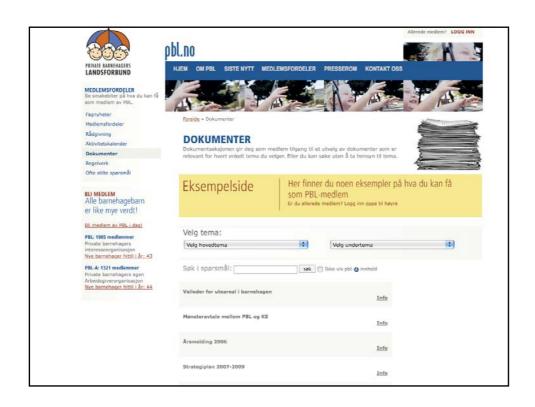
Private barnehagers landsforbund - The solution

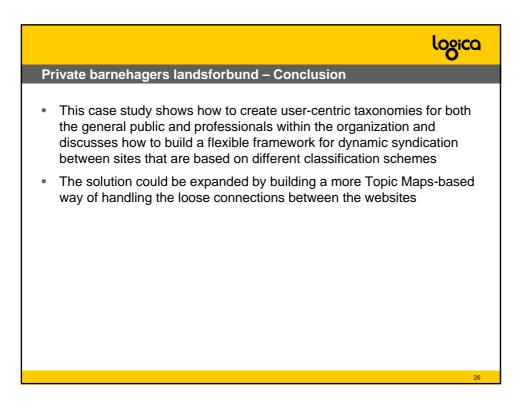
- The solution uses two different Topic Maps to enable a user-centric and coherent approach for each website
- The need for syndication content between the different websites is done by using topical RSS-feeds, and connecting related topics from the two different websites
- Most of the relations are dynamic and "loose" and are stored and maintained independent of the Topic Maps themselves (e.g. the connection between "barnehagepolitikk" og "Øystein Djupedal" or "Kristin Halvorsen")













Summary

- Both these solutions use a common framework of modern web technologies and RSS combined with Topic Maps to create a subjectoriented content structure
- They illustrate different approaches to content syndication between structured and unstructured websites

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Conclusions

- The combination of Topic Maps and common web technologies (such as RSS) provide us with a extremely simple yet powerful way to syndicate and structure content across different solution
- Topic Maps can be used to collect RSS-feeds from different sources, connect them to topics and present them in a coherent way
- Published content can be used to enrich syndicated content



Thank you!

Questions, comments?



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