

A short description of Pearltrees

Pearltrees is a collaborative project enabling Internet users to become editors of the Web, i.e. to visualize, organize and share their navigations. By building their own Web, they collectively build the living map of the entire Web.

Context

The development of content creation, sharing and discussion sites has radically transformed the practice of Internet users. Originally only spectators of content produced by a few professionals and enthusiasts, they have today become the main content creators of the Web. As a result, the quantity, the diversity and the quality of content have grown tremendously.

However, the democratization of creation has not led to the democratization of access to this content. Search engines and major portals still guide and direct users – rather than Web users themselves. Social bookmarking sites and other voting systems do not resolve this issue. By aggregating individual views rather than extracting specificities, they produce the same kind of results as the search engines.

This imbalance between democratic content creation and centralized access to content poses one of the main barriers to the development of the Web. It has two parallel effects:

- As spectators, Web users cannot find their way through the mass of content that is of interest to them
- As creators, Web users are obliged to engage in disseminating and referencing activities, far removed from their real interests, if they want to attract the audience their content deserves.

In practice, therefore, the Web's potential for democratic creation, sharing and access to content remains unfulfilled.

The objective of Pearltrees

Pearltrees' objective is to bring about democratization of the Web by enabling users to become individually and collectively editors of their own Web.

Pearltrees' founding principles

I - The Web is the collective creation of its users. Hence, it only can be, legitimately and effectively edited by the users themselves

- Any organization of documents has a meaning. It is the result of personal, subjective and creative choices that cannot be confined in an algorithm¹. It is necessarily an edition
- No sub-group of editors or experts, whatever its capabilities, is able to capture and edit all the diversity of Web content.

II – Every user has the raw material to hand allowing him to edit his Web, namely his own Web navigations. During each navigation, the user makes choices, creates pathways and discovers new content. In order to make this raw material useable, it just needs to be collected, visualized, and re-arranged by the users.

III - The map is the natural representation of a pathway and is therefore the natural format of the edition of the Web. The tree form devised by Pearltrees simultaneously embodies the meaning of an edition and its organizational logic. Unlike a list or a feed, a map reflects the choices, junctions and side-turns. Unlike the tag, its meaning is not complicated by the different contexts in which one single word can be used.

Pearltrees' platform

Pearltrees' platform permits each member to build his own Web edition, to explore other members' editions and to use them in his own:

- Collect Web navigations
- Represent navigations as a map in the form of a tree – the "Pearlree"
- Modify navigations so as to create unique editions
- Share, combine and discuss his own navigations and those of other's

¹ An algorithm taking into account acts and point of views does not solve the issue. Even in a pure model, such as Pagerank, the weighting of acts has more impact on the search results than the acts themselves. The creator of an algorithm is limited by the voting paradox: he remains the main editor of his algorithm data. Cf. <http://infolab.stanford.edu/pub/papers/google.pdf> and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voting_paradox

- Navigate the Web from edition to edition, following the maps of interests and creations of the community.

The Pearltrees community

Besides the personal benefit derived from organizing his own Web, each user enriches the Pearltrees community and the community of Internet users as a whole

- Readers of editions discover new content and explore known content from a new perspective
- Content producers gain a new readership
- Other editors benefit from additional raw material that they can use to expand their own editions.

The community collectively constructs a living map of the Web, without aggregating or reducing the individuality of their choice or their interests

- Individual maps with identical content overlap so as to create ever-broader maps that link editions and editors
- Maps that have a collective interest are in turn mapped or co-edited by other members.

Project status

The concept of Pearltrees was invented by Patrice Lamothe in November 2007. François Rocaboy, Nicolas Cynober, Samuel Tissier, Alain Cohen and Julien Wallen joined him between November 2007 and April 2008 to found Broceliand, the company responsible for designing, implementing and operating Pearltrees.

In July 2008, Broceliand raised nearly one million Euros from private investors. Shortly after, Ariel Sommeria-Klein and Sébastien Ballesté-Antich, the first two employees, were recruited and the team moved into its office at 86 rue de Charonne in Paris.

By November 2008, a community of nearly 50 contributors is engaged in building the map of the Web using a prototype which includes almost half of the key features. The completion of Pearltrees' first version and its opening to the public are scheduled for February 2009.