

UNTANGLING **THE WEB**

To my beautiful wife, Jessica. Thank you for Wasting your time with me.

Steve Dembo

*For my mom and dad who told me I could make the world a
better place and for my wonderful wife and amazing kids
who encourage me to try to do it.*

Adam Bellow

**20 Tools
to Power Up
Your Teaching**

UNTANGLING **THE WEB**

Steve Dembo ⚙️ **Adam Bellow**





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PREFACE

This book is an introduction to the best online web tools for educators. It provides teachers with twenty sites (plus a few bonus ones) that will energize learning, foster collaboration, and infuse creativity throughout the curriculum.

Every tool in this book is either free or **freemium** (i.e., free, with optional upgrades available for a fee). The sites are flexible enough that they can be used by kindergarten students as easily as by twelfth graders, regardless of subject area. In addition to introductory activities and stretch ideas, we've included explanations of why they are relevant and some creative ways to use them. Throughout the book, you'll find quotes from dozens of leaders in the education community. Not only do you get the perspective of the authors but we are connecting you to mentors and colleagues who are eager to share their expertise with you.

Join us at the online community site at www.untanglingthewebcommunity.com, where you can connect and collaborate with other teachers who are reading this book and undertaking a similar educational journey. We will be participating in conversations there, both through discussion forums as well as through live events. This book is more than a how-to guide; it's your first step to leveraging new technologies to transform classroom experiences.

WHY WE WROTE THIS BOOK

Sharing tools and resources is something that we do on a regular basis. At conferences, through our websites, and using social media, we are constantly discovering, evaluating, and promoting tools that can be used in education. Considering our affinity for web-based technologies, it may seem strange that we decided to write a book. But the reality is, we have both found that as empowering as new technologies can be, many of us still learn best by using print as a reference and launching point. We felt that a book providing educators with a concise list of the best web tools available to them was something that could impact educators at a practical level. Our goal was not only to provide a starting point for each of those tools but to also have a bit of fun with it. Let's face it: If you are in education today, you must have a sense of humor!

There are several other books about **Web 2.0** out there, but they aren't ours. They don't have the specific tools we want to discuss, nor do they approach them in a way that we feel is relevant to educators today. We believe teaching should be fun, and these tools are all about combining engagement and empowerment with an element of play. We want teachers to feel comfortable infusing these web tools into their classrooms and lessons, and we want to see the great projects and ideas that are created with them.

On a personal level, we both are the parents of young children. From a purely self-ish perspective, we want to see them grow up in a world where technology provides unique educational experiences that challenge them, inspire them, and foster a love of learning. We believe sharing our passion for new technologies with other educators is a means to facilitate that.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE WEB (ABRIDGED)

It all starts with Al Gore and the creation of the Internet (I'm kidding). What many consider *Web 1.0* was a static series of pages that users accessed and retrieved information from. Think back to the days of AOL and that lovely sound you would get while trying to connect to their interface for the Internet. Pages were informative but not interactive, and engagement was limited to reading or printing it.

But that all changed in the early 2000s. Interactivity came to the web. Instead of being passive consumers of content, we were able to craft content of our own, a trend that has exploded over the past decade.

This shift was so dramatic, and the ways we interacted with the medium so greatly altered, that people began to use the term *Web 2.0*, or the *Read/Write Web*. This era allowed the casual web user to shift from being an information consumer to a content producer.

While still sometimes referred to as *Web 2.0*, the term that was coined almost a decade ago has lost much of its relevance as we would be hard pressed to think of a site that lacked the basic functionality that the term refers to. A web tool is just that—a site on the web that is used actively to achieve a purpose for the user.

EVALUATING NEW TECHNOLOGIES

In this book, we have shared the sites that we feel are absolutely essential for every educator to know about. While they may not all be a perfect fit for you, they are representative of the genres of sites that are available—and just a few of many flavors. The specifics of each site may vary, but the broad ideas defining why they are significant are consistent from site to site.

The rate at which new sites have been released is absolutely dizzying. Every time you turn around, it seems there is a new site being heralded as the latest and greatest. While it is easy to get caught up in shiny new offerings, there are specific characteristics that determine just how appropriate they are for educators to invest their time (and money) in.

Upon visiting a new site, there are a few things to examine right off the bat. The first is to determine whether the site has an education-friendly portal, or educator accounts available. Many sites recognize that the general public may use their sites to create content that wouldn't be appropriate for a school setting. Education portals frequently address these concerns and provide additional features like student accounts or privacy settings not available through the primary version.

Once determining which version (if multiple are available) to evaluate, the next step is to assess what is being shared publicly. Sites that provide a gallery of recent content can be problematic for many educators. Since the content shared there is typically generated automatically, without moderation, there is a chance that inappropriate content will be visible to discourage educators from using the site at all. Along the same lines, educators should check to see if a global search exists, typically in the upper right corner of the page. If so, it would be prudent to search for terms that may tempt middle schoolers and see what results come up. Once again, the potential for discovering inappropriate content in this way may be a major deterrent to spending any time exploring further.

The next element to investigate is the registration process. Most sites do require users to sign in, but there are variations there. Sites that allow users to create without registering are highly desirable, as many schools forbid students from using personal e-mail accounts during school hours. Some sites, particularly those with education portals, may even allow teachers to set up registration codes for students, bypassing the need for them to go through an extensive registration process. These two scenarios are the best case, but many do require individual accounts for each student. This may not be prohibitive, but it is advisable to check their terms of service to ensure that there are no age restrictions preventing use by your students.

Another aspect of the site to consider is the option for publishing. Nearly every tool allows you to save content within the site itself; educators must check to see if students have the ability to save their work privately. Depending on the project, they may not want to publish their work to the world, and privacy options are critical. One option that has become popular of late is the ability to share globally—but only to those who are provided the link directly. The work isn't shared with others within the site, nor will it appear in search engines, but anyone who has the direct link will be able to access it. Beyond privacy, it is important to check how the content itself can be shared out. Many sites offer the ability to publish directly to popular video/image sharing sites or through social networks, but educators should always check to see if creations could be saved offline. Sharing online is valuable, but being able to save the work offline is critical, especially considering the shelf life of many websites today. Before committing to a site, consider your exit strategy. If you decide to stop using it, will you be able to take your content with you? If not, you may want to consider alternatives.

A final consideration, perhaps the most important one, is cost. One of the most appealing aspects of the online tool revolution is that so many sites are free. Then again . . . is anything truly free? These sites cost quite a bit to develop. And once they've been launched, there are maintenance costs, service costs, bandwidth costs, and much more. Lest we kid ourselves, creating and maintaining a site like the ones shared in this book is far from free. This is why so many sites have moved to a freemium model. This means that they provide a certain level of access for free and make available advanced features at a cost (flat or recurring). Other sites attempt to recoup the costs of maintaining the site by displaying ads to users, which may or may not be appropriate for students to view. While ads are hardly ideal for an

educational setting, they may be more palatable than incurring a monthly fee. Sites that provide educator accounts typically remove the ads for those users, but this is not guaranteed. The one thing to keep in mind with respect to cost is that if you don't see a way for the site to make money (subscriptions, premium features, ads, etc.), be aware that the site may not be around for the long haul. There are always exceptions, but if a site isn't making money, it is probably losing it. And sites that lose money may not be there the next time you take your students to the computer lab.

WHAT MAKES THIS BOOK SPECIAL

Traditionally, books are individual experiences. This book is not intended to be used that way.

This is not a textbook, nor is it a traditional reference volume. While we have aggregated common sites together, that does not mean they represent a specific progression from one to the next. Each tool within this book represents a launching point. We will share our thoughts about why each technology is significant and a few ideas for getting your feet wet. At that point, though, it is up to you to dive in. There are too many variations to create a comprehensive list of all the ways to use them. Even if we devoted an entire book to each site, we would still encounter people who were left unaccounted for. More than likely, the specific lesson ideas we've shared will not apply perfectly to you. What we expect is that you will use those as inspiration and consider how they can be adapted to meet your own needs.

We have been fortunate enough to be connected to a community of inspiring educators. One of our goals in this book was to share their ideas with you. Every site in the book features quotes, ideas, and testimonials from educators who are evangelists for it. We've included their Twitter name so that if you have further questions, you have a resource you can connect with. The idea isn't just to see the faces of educators that are making use of these sites but to add them to your own network and leverage them as the need arises.

We also decided to create our own community that focuses on the topics that you will be exploring as you work your way through this book. You, as a proud owner of *Untangling the Web*, are encouraged to join us online at the *Untangling the Web* community site at www.untanglingthewebcommunity.com. In addition to in-text step-by-step guides, we have created video tutorials for each of the 20 featured web tools. You can access these  **See Tool in Action** tutorials either by clicking on the video screen shot, activating  the QR code, or visiting the community site. We hope you will join us and share your ideas for using these powerful web tools in schools.

There is no substitute for experience. And your experiences will be unique to you. This is why the community elements are so critical not only to your own success but to those you will be sharing with. Start with the ideas we've documented here. Discover the variations of them that suit your own needs. Share those variations with the community, and let others benefit from your learning.

Read. Explore. Share.

NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

If you purchased the interactive eBook version of this text, you have received a brochure with an access code and special instructions about how to get started. If you did not purchase the interactive eBook, you can still gain access to all of the same online resources referenced in the text by visiting the online community at www.untanglingthewebcommunity.com.

HOW TO ACCESS THE FEATURES OF THE INTERACTIVE EBOOK

Once you have logged in to the interactive eBook, follow the directions below:

- Click on  **See Tool in Action** screen shots to view video tutorials
- Roll over bolded words to view definitions
- Click on underlined words and phrases to link out to additional information
- Click on Tweeters' Twitter handles to visit their Twitter pages

You can also access the video tutorials, key term definitions, and links by visiting the online community at www.untanglingthewebcommunity.com.

See the Authors in Action



ICON KEY



Free



Freemium



Mobile Compatible



May Contain Objectionable Content



Printable



Under 5 Minutes



No Registration Required



Educator Version

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



As a former kindergarten teacher and school Director of Technology **Steve Dembo** is a pioneer in the field of educational social networking. Currently serving as Discovery Education’s Director of Social Media Strategy and Online Community, Dembo was among the first educators to realize the power of blogging, podcasting, Twitter, and other Web 2.0 technologies in connecting educators and creating professional learning communities.

In 2010, the National School Board Association named Dembo one of “Twenty to Watch,” a list honoring individuals finding innovative ways to use technology to increase classroom learning. His work with the Discovery Educator Network has earned an Award of Excellence from Technology and Learning magazine, a Distinguished Achievement Award for Instructional Website from the Association of Educational Publishers, a BESSIE Award for Best Professional Development Website, and the Best in Tech award for Professional Development and Resource Solutions by Scholastic Administrator magazine.

Steve Dembo is a course designer and adjunct professor for Wilkes University where he serves as class instructor for the Internet Tools for Teaching course within the Instructional Media degree program. He has delivered keynote and featured presentations at conferences around the world including ISTE, TCEA, FETC, MACUL, CUE, ICE, #140Edu and TEDxCorpusChristi.

Steve lives in Skokie, IL with his wife Jessica and two children, Aiden and Ruby. He currently serves on the school board for Skokie-Morton Grove School District 69. Weekends, he dresses up as a TIE Fighter Pilot and does charity work with the 501st Legion. #TrueStory



Adam Bellow is one of today’s leading speakers on educational technology and infusing technology to aid school reformation. He is the founder of both eduTecher and eduClipper. In addition to these free resources, Adam launched the popular student-focused social charity campaign, *Change the World*.

Bellow began his career teaching High School English for students with language-based learning disabilities. While going for his first master’s degree, he was asked to teach the graduate level course for his peers on the value of Technology for the Special Education Classroom based on his clear passion for the subject. It was during this course that he created a resource for his students called eduTecher, which grew to become one of the most widely heralded and respected hubs to learn about free web tools for the K–12 landscape. eduTecher launched the first mobile applications for educational technology.

In 2007 Bellow became a technology training specialist for a school district and worked daily with hundreds of teachers across K–12 to help them better infuse technology into their classrooms. In 2010 he began working as the Director of Educational Technology for the College Board Schools and later served as the Senior Director of Educational Technology for the AP Program.

Bellow was honored by ISTE in 2010 as an emerging leader and then again in 2011 when he was named Outstanding Young Educator of the year.

Bellow has been a sought after speaker in the education and educational technology circuit over the past few years because of his particular high-speed delivery which blends humor and rapid fire visuals in a style that re-defines slide-aided presentation. Among other conferences, he has keynoted/presented at ISTE, TEDxNYED, and #140edu.

Bellow is currently serving as CEO of eduClipper, the edtech startup that he founded in 2012. eduClipper is a free web tool focused on helping students and teachers find, share, and build valid learning experiences in a K–12 safe educational social platform. He is happily married and has two wonderful boys.