PRESSFORWARD

Stephanie Westcott is Project Director and Eric Olson is Outreach Coordinator for PressForward, a free, open-source software program designed to help researchers aggregate and disseminate relevant content online. Here, they talk to International Innovation about the tool’s humble beginnings and exciting future.

PRESSFORWARD WAS DEVELOPED in response to a single question: how can researchers keep up with the growing robust scholarly output on the open web and still have time to participate in the latest conversations in their field? The PressForward team responded to its founding question by building an instrument that not only created the space and opportunity to develop publications that could pull content from all corners of the open web, but also challenged outdated ideas of ‘published literature’.

RELEVANT READING
Since its launch in 2011, PressForward has been developing a tool that provides content aggregation, reading, curation and publishing all in one place. Thus far, this has all been accomplished using the WordPress platform via a dedicated plugin. This digital tool brings all scholarly output into the WordPress dashboard, allowing users to spend less time looking for relevant material on the open web and more time reading, sharing and discussing the material. The plugin is also ideal for community collaboration, with built-in tools for discussion and content selection, as well as flexible and customisable tiered access roles.

A PERSONAL TOUCH
The plugin retrieves content in two ways: through rich site summary (RSS) feeds that you have subscribed to via individual feeds or an outline processor markup language (OPML) file, and through the use of a bookmarklet designed to send individual pieces of content directly to the PressForward dashboard. Once there, users and their community of editors can read and discuss the content among themselves. Individual users can use the discussion function to make notes to refer to later. Each user reviews content and makes a decision about what they think the publication should share with readers, nominating chosen pieces with one click of the PressForward toolbar. Recommended pieces are visible to the top-level users, who will consider content, discussion and number of recommendations, and make final decisions about what to republish. Once that decision has been made, the content is sent to the WordPress posts panel for final edits and editor commentary, along with all of the original metadata.

READ, BOOKMARK, SHARE
The primary difference between PressForward and similar tools is in the way in which it incorporates editorial methods into the tool itself. Just as someone might read, bookmark and share aggregated items manually, the plugin has mechanisms for review, nomination, further consideration and selection. Unlike other tools, it incorporates discussion among collaborators (users can discuss an item with others on their team) and lets individuals control what’s republished and how it’s formatted. It also preserves original metadata, to ensure fair use and appropriate attribution.

FLOURISHING COMMUNITY
PressForward is growing all the time. There are currently more than 900 active installations and over 6,500 downloads. As the plugin is particularly – though not exclusively – useful for community publications, many of those installations represent groups of researchers, scholarly societies, labs and libraries. In November, we’ll be announcing the second group of PressForward pilot partners – research institutions and non-profits who will work with us over the next year to create quality, high-profile science publications. There are exciting communities in that list of partners, including the American Association for the Advancement of Science’s new collaboration and communications platform, Trellis. They will join other upcoming publications, including the Public Library of Science’s PLOS Collections and Citizen Science Today from Zooniverse.

All of these platforms are beneficial to researchers, but PressForward’s greatest benefit is also its simplest: with PressForward, open access scholarship is accessible without having to check in with dozens of websites on a regular basis. It essentially brings the literature review to you.

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