Agent: “Expert” Discovery Service

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At its core, we can largely summarize the purpose of web browsing as information retrieval, whether it is encyclopedic entries on academic subjects, visual information through photos, or public feedback on questions. One trend we have seen is the rise of specialized Internet forums and the more recent proliferation of free, question-and-answer sites like Quora. Sites like Quora are often very good at helping users get answers to specific, individual questions, assuming that the questions are well-communicated. However, current question-and-answer sites have their limitations, some of which we list here:

1. Question posters must have some level of specificity in their query. Queries that are too general will yield too many irrelevant responses, but sometimes it is difficult for the poster to narrowly specify their quesiton
2. Answers are voluntarily given by people who choose to browse these sites, so there can be selection bias or a slow response time
3. Questions can often be too specific for the general public to adequately answer, and some questions must be taken in the context of the person that is asking the question

Along with these general limitations, sometimes, a user may prioritize information from somebody that they are familiar with, particularly if they are looking for more subjective information like a recommendation. However, it is difficult for us to know from our own memory who to ask for certain information. It is too much information for us to keep track of off the top of our heads, and oftentimes we are simply unaware of certain hidden credentials that a friend may have for answering a particular question. For example, we may be interested in working at Google and be unaware that a friend had recently interned there and may have valuable feedback from their experience. Agent attempts to solve this problem by recommending “experts” on a topic to users from their Facebook friends.

When first navigating to our site, the user will log-in to our service using their Facebook account (our service can be extended to support providing additional accounts from other social networking sites), fill in the end of a preset query such as “I want to learn about \_\_\_,” Agent will match their query subject with the knowledge sets of each of their friends (based on their Facebook data), and recommend a subset of their friends as likely experts. For example, user Alice gives the query “I want to learn about working at Google,” Agent may notice that Alice’s Facebook friends Bob and Carol have worked at Google and list Google among their interests and determine that these are good people for Alice to ask about working at Google.