

How I learned to love Facebook (but haven't stopped worrying)

Nicolas Kruchten



engineers without borders
ingénieurs sans frontières
Canada

A Canadian non-profit called Engineers Without Borders Canada, where I was the Director of Technology for a few years before moving to Montreal last year. Now how many of you have heard about EWB?

Engineers Without Borders Canada - Home - Mozilla Firefox

File Edit View History Bookmarks Tools Help http://www.ewb.ca/en/index.html

news ref daily Tech News in Montreal My Git Workflow Montreal NEWTECH Review of 2008: 100 ... Data Mining with R: le

Engineers Without Borders Canada

 Building a world of opportunity

Who We Are What We Do What You Can Do What's New Search EWB Go français donate now!



Warm greetings to Canadians from Misuku, Malawi. I am a coffee farmer and the Chairman of the Misuku Coffee Cooperative. We recently received Fair Trade certification, so our customers all over the world can be confident that the price they pay directly benefits our smallholder coffee farmers here in Malawi. I hope that Canada will soon open its market to our coffee. As we trade we will begin to know each other, Canada and Malawi, and we will become closer to each other this way... [Read more in the pages of the 2010 Calendar »](#)



EWB on Twitter
Follow Engineers Without Borders' Overseas Volunteers: http://twitter.com/ewb_ovs
Updated regularly! [about 4 hours ago](#)

Follow Engineers Without Borders' National Office Staff: http://twitter.com/ewb_staff
Updated regularly! [about 4 hours ago](#)

About Engineers Without Borders
To promote human development, we strive to drive change in Canada and in developing communities.

Here at home, EWB is raising awareness among Canadians about the impact of their daily actions on developing communities. We aim to make Canada a model global citizen in the fight against poverty.

Overseas, our volunteers promote human development in some of the world's most impoverished communities. They help build knowledge and capacity among local entrepreneurs and organisations so they can spread innovative and appropriate solutions to the challenges of poverty.

[Learn More »](#)

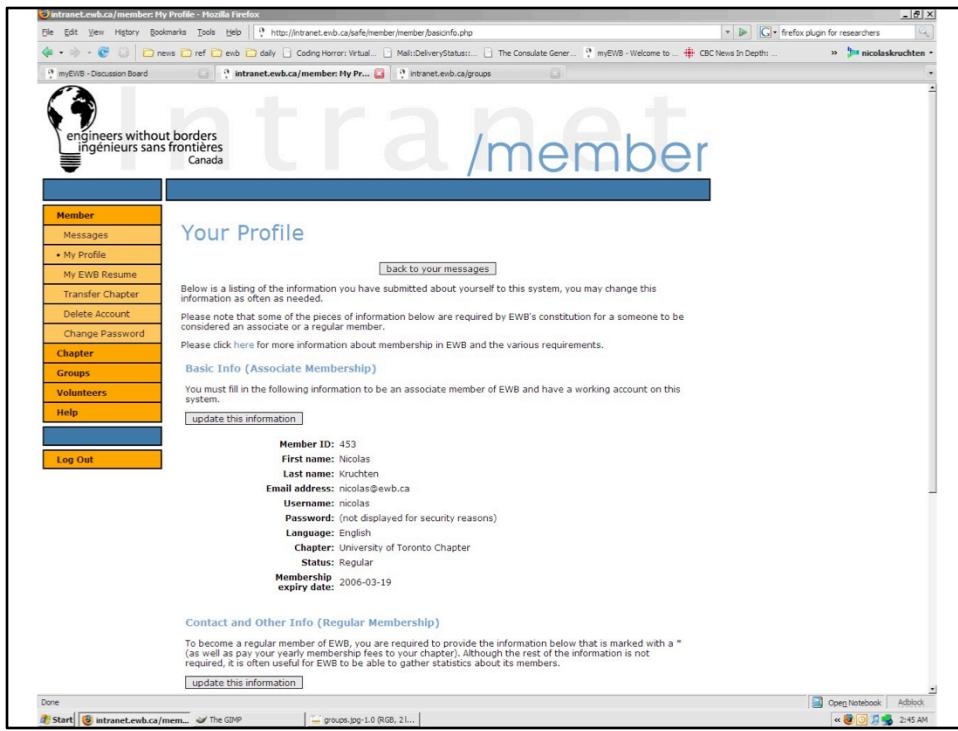
E-newsletter
Enter your e-mail address to sign up for our e-newsletter!
 [Sign up!](#)

OK, well I'm not going to go into a ton of detail about EWB's mission because you can come ask me about it afterwards if you're interested, but for the purposes of my talk, you basically need to know that it's a mostly student-based organization that sends people overseas to Africa and does advocacy and outreach in Canada, with a central office in Toronto and...

The screenshot shows a web browser window for the myEWB - Chapter List site. The top navigation bar includes links for Home, Sign Up, Chapters, Mailing Lists, Events, and Volunteering. A search bar is present with the placeholder "myEWB Search:" and a "go!" button. The main content area features a title "EWB Chapters Coast-to-Coast" above a map of North America. The map highlights chapter locations with red pins, primarily concentrated in the eastern United States and southern Canada. Below the map, a section for "British Columbia" lists the "Simon Fraser University Chapter" from Burnaby, BC. There is also a link to subscribe to the chapter mailing list.

Around 30 chapters around the country, mostly in universities. This idea of having local chapters of an organization is a pretty standard setup, lots of student or professional or religious groups are set up this way.

And in 2003, when I started volunteering at EWB's national office, after having been involved in the University of Toronto Chapter, I realized that we had a major problem, which most similarly structured organizations face, which is that while we knew we were growing fast, we had no real idea who all of our own members were or how to reach them all at once (e.g. via email). And this is something we felt we needed to be able to do, to build the type of movement we wanted to build, raise the funds we wanted to raise etc.



So I put together a web-based membership management system creatively dubbed the Intranet, which you can see here. And that was fine on its face, although no one really wants to just “go and register” for its own sake, so we had to provide some carrots. For example if you wanted to attend our yearly conference, the only way to do so was to register through this system.

Welcome to the groups system!

You are here: Top Level

>>> Choose view... <<<

Browsing: find to the discussion board you are interested in and/or use the pulldown menu above to choose what to see. Click on 'view tree of boards' above to see a complete list or simply look through the sub-sections below.

Posting: after finding the discussion board you want to post to (try to find the most appropriate one) post away! (use the 'new post' button or simply scroll to the bottom of the page) Some boards simply contain other boards and cannot be posted to.

S Latest Posts

Email: LIVE 8 VOLUNTEERS NEEDED! by Laura McGrath, mgmt chapter, on Wed, Jun 22, 2005 6:03 PM	3 replies	latest reply Thu, Oct 20, 2005 11:14 AM
Email: Poverty and the Asia Disaster by George Roten, mgmt chapter, on Thu, Jan 06, 2005 12:54 AM	6 replies	latest reply Tue, Jul 26, 2005 4:35 AM
Email: Notice of Annual General Meeting - January 21, 2005 by Ravi Seetharam, mgmt chapter, on Wed, Jan 05, 2005 2:20 AM	0 replies	latest reply n/a
Email: Asia disaster: EWB's response and involvement by George Roten, mgmt chapter, on Fri, Dec 31, 2004 6:29 PM	14 replies	latest reply Wed, Jan 05, 2005 10:05 AM

Top Level Sub-Groups

University of Toronto Chapter Discussion space for all University of Toronto Chapter members.	8 sub-groups	174 posts	latest post Mon, Oct 24, 2005 9:15 PM
Human Development Discussion space for members interested in development.	4 sub-groups	117 posts	latest post Mon, Oct 24, 2005 7:24 PM
Overseas Volunteer Journals <i>News and thoughts from our volunteers in the field!</i>	6 sub-groups	29 posts	latest post Sun, Feb 19, 2006 3:40 AM

In fact the lovely pan-Canadian group who attended these conferences liked each other so much that they wanted to keep communicating after they'd gone home, which was great, so we obliged by bolting on an ugly discussion board/mailing-list management system, and then cajoled all the chapters' executives into migrating all of their mailing lists to the central system. Boom, problem solved: every EWB member was now in our system.

The screenshot shows the myEWB website's Discussion Board page. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Home, Sign Up, Chapters, Mailing Lists, Events, and Volunteering. A search bar is located in the top right corner. On the left, there is a sidebar with a 'Sign In' form, 'Most-Used Tags' (including Africa, Agriculture, Aid Articles, Cida, Cida aid shift, Conference, Corporate social responsibility, Development, Education, Environment, Env book, Fair trade, Ghana, Hiv aids, Jobs, Malawi, Media, Millennium Development Goals, Ois, Public outreach, Volunteer, Water, Zambia), and an 'RSS Feeds' section. The main content area features a 'Discussion Board' title and two posts: 'We Need to Get Our Government to Explain its Shift in Aid Focus' by Danny Howard (31 replies) and 'The Trade Trap' by David Bibic (1 reply). A 'Hot Posts' sidebar on the right lists various news items and blog entries.

A couple of years later, in 2005, we knew what were doing tech-wise, so we scrapped the whole thing and rebuilt it from scratch in a much more user-centric way and called it myEWB and it was great, we managed to get a lot of usage, which translates into a decent amount of traffic, users were happy, other non-profits were jealous etc. And we continued to evolve this system and it's still in place today.

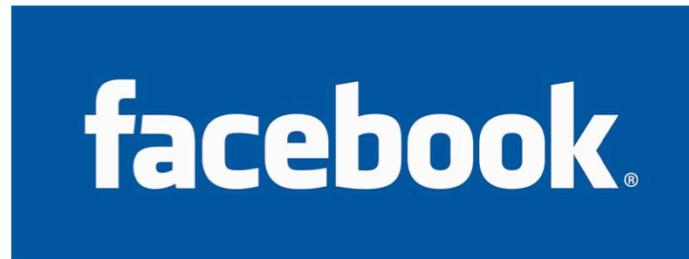
And the fact that it was centralized allowed us to mobilize as a unit quite effectively to run national campaigns etc.

But...

But... there's always a but. At the same time as we were figuring all of this out, this thing called...

“Web 2.0”

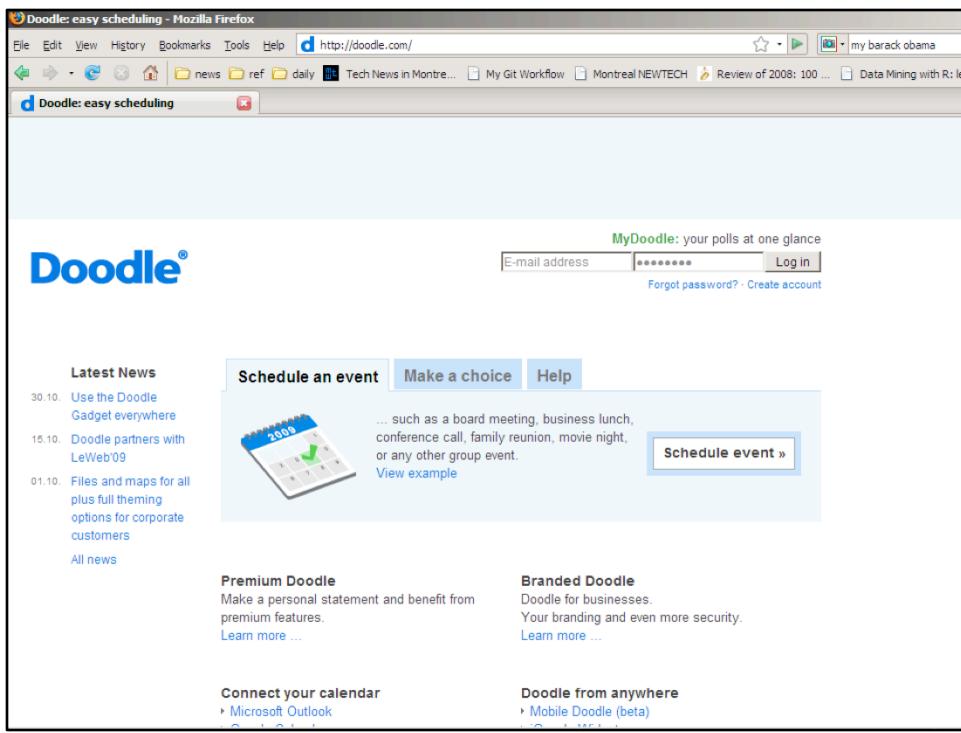
Web 2.0, quote-unquote, started to happen.



First of all, EWB members across the country starting using Facebook a lot to connect with each other directly.

The screenshot shows a Mozilla Firefox browser window displaying the Google Calendar interface. The title bar reads "KESL - Calendar - Mozilla Firefox". The address bar shows the URL <https://www.google.com/calendar/hosted/kruchten.com/render?tab=mc&gSession>. The main content area is the "Calendar" tab, showing a weekly view from October 25 to 31, 2009. The day header is "Oct 25 – 31 2009 Refresh". Below the header are buttons for "Print", "Day", "Week" (which is selected), "Month", and "4 Days". The calendar grid shows time slots from 5am to 3pm. An event titled "Practic" is listed in the grid for Friday, Oct 30, from 12:30p to 2p. The event details show it was updated at 12p by the "Presenter & Q&A Moderator Information - Software". On the left, there's a sidebar with a "Create Event" button, a "Quick Add" button, and a "Tasks" button. It also displays a monthly calendar for October 2009 with specific dates highlighted (25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31). The sidebar includes sections for "My calendars" (Nicolas Kruchten, Philippe Kruchten) and "Other calendars" (Add a friend's calendar). Buttons for "Settings" and "Create" are also present.

They started using Google Calendars to plan their events.



They used web services like Doodle to coordinate meeting times. Etc.

The screenshot shows the homepage of the myEWB website. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for Home, Sign Up, Chapters, Mailing Lists, Events, and Volunteering. Below the navigation is a search bar with the placeholder "myEWB Search: [] go!". On the left, there's a sidebar with a "Sign In" form, a "Most-Used Tags" section listing various aid-related terms, and an "RSS Feeds" section. The main content area features a "Discussion Board" section with two posts: "We Need to Get Our Government to Explain its Shift in Aid Focus" by Danny Howard (3 months ago) and "The Trade Trap" by David Bibic (an hour ago). To the right, there's a "Hot Posts" sidebar containing links to various news items and a "National Office Blog" sidebar.

Which means that they started to stop using myEWB, and we ran the risk of having all sorts of EWB members who we knew nothing about, and weren't on our mailing list etc. Basically, although we'd been able to stay ahead of the curve for a few years, the curve had caught up, and let me tell you, they all had WAY bigger budgets than we did.

And our response was to do our best to try to compete with the world: we added file-sharing and calendaring and wiki-like features to myEWB. But competing with Google with a one-developer team is ultimately a losing game.

EWB - ISF Canada (@ewb) on Twitter - Mozilla Firefox

File Edit View History Bookmarks Tools Help http://twitter.com/ewb

EWB - ISF Canada (@ewb) on Twitter YouTube - ewbcanada's Channel

Home Profile Find People Settings Help Sign out

ewb

Follow Engineers Without Borders' Overseas Volunteers:
<http://twitter.com/ewb/ovs> Updated regularly!

about 5 hours ago from web

Follow Engineers Without Borders' National Office Staff:
<http://twitter.com/ewb/staff> Updated regularly!

about 5 hours ago from web

What's new in the land of the #EWB office? Find out! <http://bit.ly/2l7Dy> (and meet our new long term volunteers in training)

12:28 PM Oct 28th from Seesmic

@habebabe @endeweerd glad you liked the post! Thanks for the RTs!

5:53 PM Oct 27th from Seesmic in reply to habebabe

Name EWB - ISF Canada
Location Canada
Web <http://www.ewb.ca>
Bio Engineers Without Borders Canada - Ingénieurs sans frontières Canada... Building a world of opportunity.

342 717 7 following followers listed

Tweets 616

Favorites

Lists

@ewb/gari
@ewb/avc
@ewb/water
@ewb/mofa
@ewb/zambia
@ewb/malawi

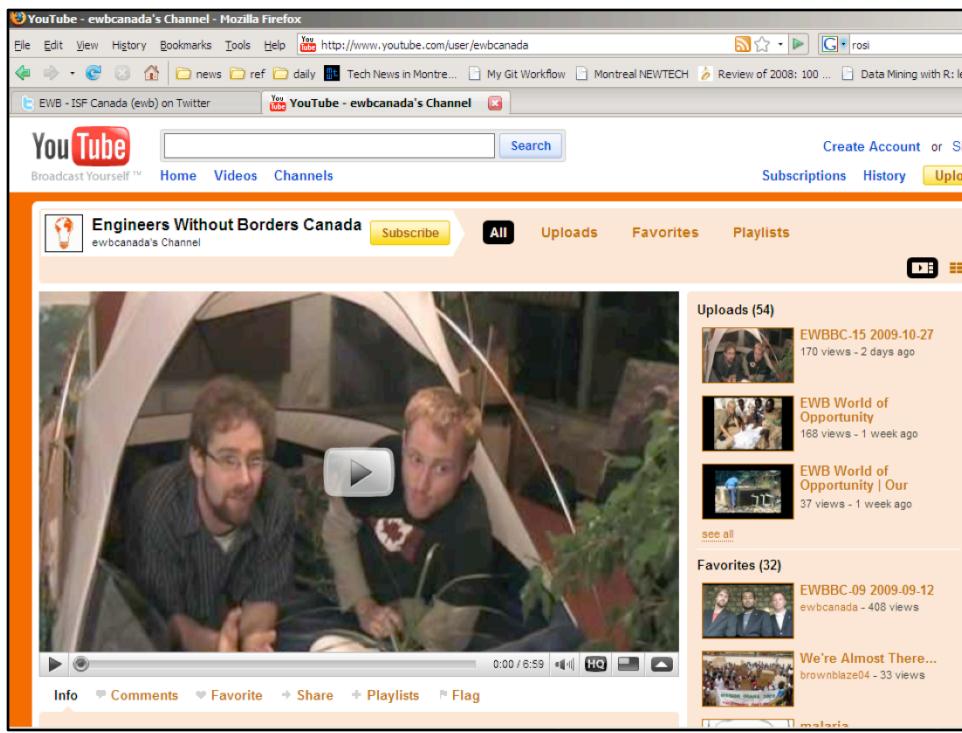
View all

Actions

message ewb
block ewb
report for spam

Following

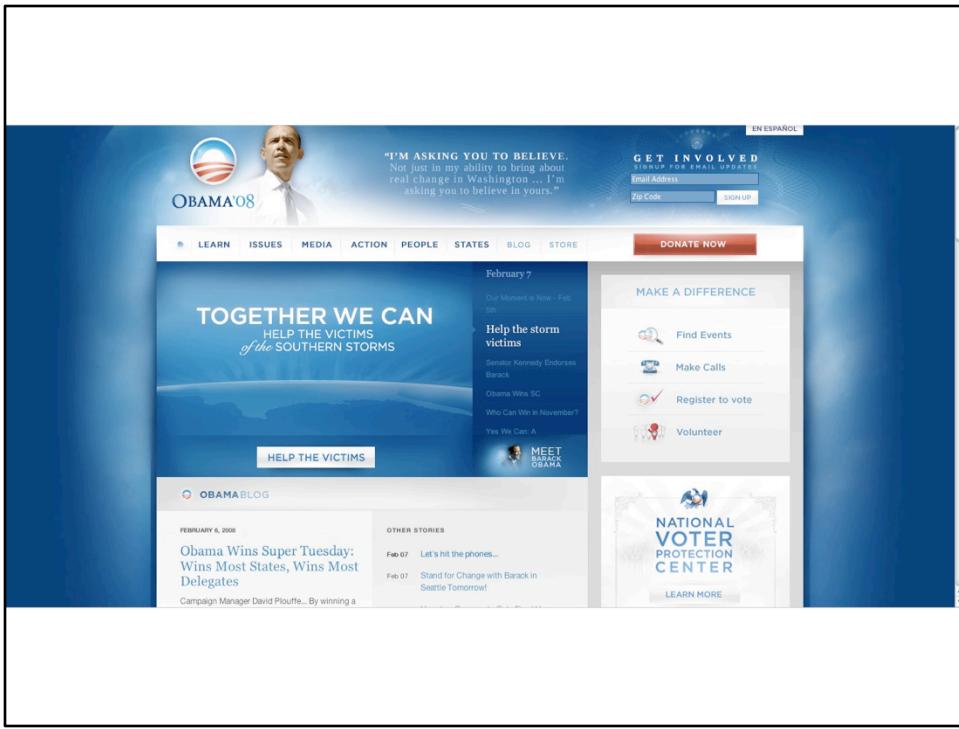
At this point I wound up my involvement and moved to Montreal to work for an unpopular telco, but I keep in touch, and they've set up a twitter feed



And a youtube channel

The screenshot shows a Facebook group page for "Engineers Without Borders Canada". The main content area displays several posts from members. One post by Madhiha Syed asks for candidates for a Transformer Engineer position. Another post by Steve James promotes a local health clinic. The sidebar features a "Create Ad" section with a "Made Men Made Here" advertisement.

And a facebook group. And lots of the chapters have set up facebook groups too. But this has created some real problems... First of all if you can read the slide you'll see there's a lot more spam and a lot lower level of discussion in the facebook group than on myEWB, and secondly, there's a lot less inter-chapter sharing: discussions are much more fragmented because facebook was never designed for this. As a result it's harder to know what's going on in the EWBverse, which makes it tough to raise funds to send people overseas etc.



Now, some people have managed to successfully “harness” social media, like the Obama campaign, but I would argue that a) they spent a ton of money doing it which few groups can do, and b) they were really only aiming for one single thing: to get a bunch of people out on that one day to vote. And his people have since been criticized for having either chosen not to or failed to “follow through” and build a lasting community/movement out of mybarackobama.com.

So... What?

So in the end, (and I'll try to be a bit provocative with a bleak conclusion) I think that while social media and a proliferation of free web apps for collaboration is really neat and exciting for the individual and small or short-lived groups (I tweet, I'm on facebook all the time and I like it), it might actually be a big barrier to the creation of long-lived, large-scale, coordinated social change movements. Or maybe, to rephrase, the centralized, coordinated social change movement is now outdated...

OpenMyEWB - Mozilla Firefox
 File Edit View History Bookmarks Tools Help http://nicolas.kruchten.com/openmyewb.html
 news ref daily Tech News in Montreal... My Git Workflow Montreal NEWTECH Review of 2008: 100... Data Mining with R: le
 myEWB - Discussion Board OpenMyEWB

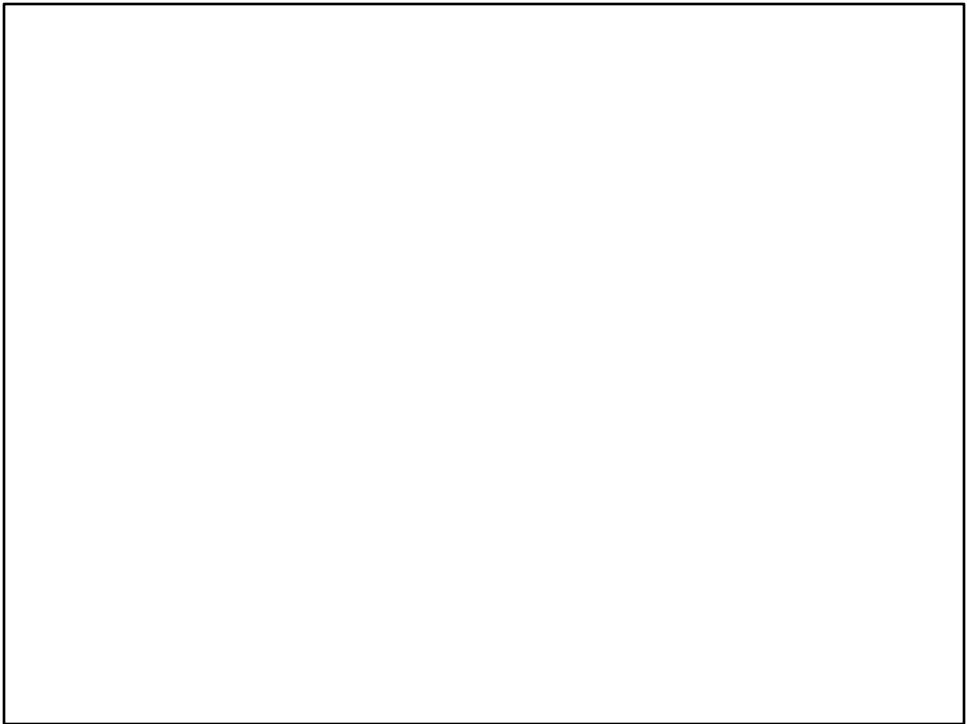
OpenMyEWB

an online community system by [Nicolas Kruchten](#), Francis Kung and others

From 2005 to 2009, myEWB.ca was Engineers Without Borders Canada's official online community system. During that time, tens of thousands of people used myEWB to participate in thousands of online conversations, send millions of emails, schedule hundreds of events, share files, apply to serve overseas, register for conferences, pay their membership dues and otherwise collaboratively work towards eradicating poverty. As the team leader and major contributor to the myEWB project, I am proud to be able to host a small page for OpenMyEWB: the now-open-sourced software that powered myEWB.ca.

Screenshot

The screenshot shows the OpenMyEWB web application interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Home, Sign Up, Chapters, Meeting Lists, Events, and Volunteering. Below the navigation bar, there is a header for "Discussion Board". The main content area displays a post titled "We Need to Get Our Government to Explain its Shift in Aid Policies". The post includes a profile picture of a person, some text, and a link to "Access our site here". There are also other posts visible below it, such as "The Trade Trap" and "Stocks for Creating Global". On the left side, there is a sidebar with sections for "Sign In", "About", "Meetup Tags", and "Recent Posts".



Twitter / Home - Mozilla Firefox

File Edit View History Bookmarks Tools Help http://twitter.com/ my barack obama

Twitter / Home

What are you doing? 140

Latest: Great video on The Open Internet: <http://bit.ly/3EV7da> watch it! about 12 hours ago update

Home

SAVE OUR NET.ca SaveOurNet.ca Coalition Commends New Liberal Open Internet Policies : New Liberal policies forward thinking and.. <http://bit.ly/A8wv4> 18 minutes ago from twitterfeed

 doctorow What's the Brian Eno quote that goes something like "Be the first person not to do something?" about 1 hour ago from web

 doctorow Holy awesome, my Canadian distributors, HB Fenn, are incredibly great. about 1 hour ago from web

 doctorow Dates for my US/CAN MAKERS tour, pass it on! <http://tinyurl.com/kn3cre> Toronto, NYC, Boston, Philly, NJ about 1 hour ago from web

 howardknopf Reading good article on UK three strikes policy - costs more than twice that of even music industry's loss estimate <http://bit.ly/24QlaK> about 2 hours ago from web

Home Profile Find People Settings Help Sign out

kruchtenator 189 tweets

35 58 0 following followers listed

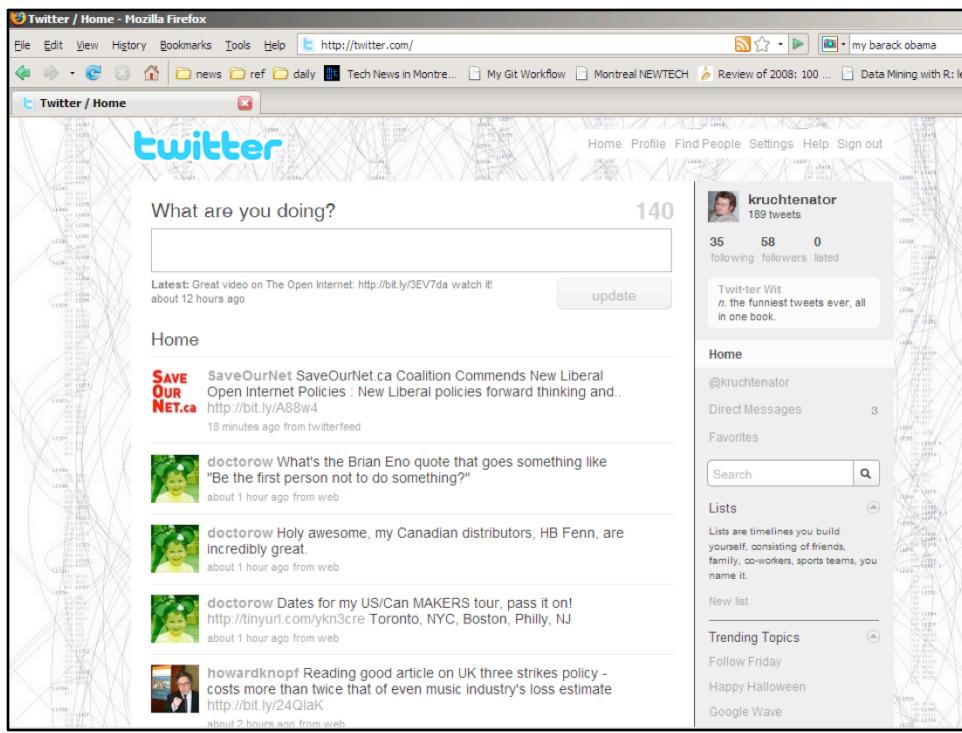
Twitter Wit n: the funniest tweets ever, all in one book.

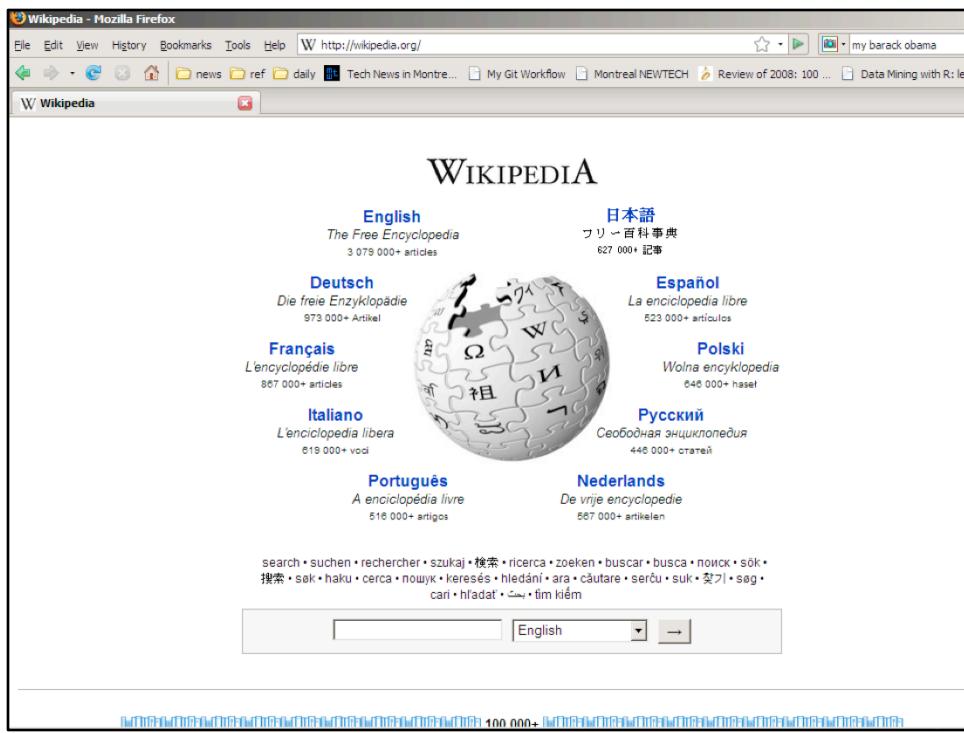
Home @kruchtenator Direct Messages 3 Favorites Search Lists

Lists are timelines you build yourself, consisting of friends, family, co-workers, sports teams, you name it.

New list

Trending Topics Follow Friday Happy Halloween Google Wave





myEWB - Update Picture - Mozilla Firefox

File Edit View History Bookmarks Tools Help http://my.ewb.ca/#/profile/ChangePicture

news ref daily Tech News in Montr... My Git Workflow Montreal NEWTECH Review of 2008: 100... Data Mining with R: le

myEWB - Update Picture

Signed in as **Nicolas Kruchten**. [sign out](#)

myEWB Search:

Home **Profile** **Chapters** **Mailing Lists** **Events** **Volunteering**

My Profile | My Posts | Pay Membership Dues | Delete My Account | **Update Picture** |

Change Picture

With EWB spread out across the country it's often hard to put faces to names when we meet in person at national conferences, retreats and chapter visits. To alleviate this, you can attach a **photo of yourself** to your myEWB account! We would ask that this be a recent, recognizable photograph of yourself rather than something less useful like a cartoon, a baby picture, a picture of yourself in disguise or a picture of someone else.

Your **public profile info** is a place where you can type whatever you like, which any EWB member can see when they view your profile. Suggested uses include telling others a bit about yourself, or posting any contact information (email, IM, phone etc) that you want to make accessible to all signed-in myEWB users so that they can reach you.

Picture:
you can upload large images, they will automatically be scaled

Public Profile Information:

```
I'm an EWB old-timer, having started in the
chapter system at the U of Toronto in 2001. Since
then I've been a chapter VP, co-chaired a
National Conference (Toronto 2004), gone overseas
a couple of times and served as Director of
Technology at the National office for 3 years
```

enter information for all EWB members to see

EWB Chat (beta)

myEWB - Exec Title - Mozilla Firefox

File Edit View History Bookmarks Tools Help http://my.ewb.ca/#/chapter/ExecTitle/43591 montreal

news ref daily Tech News in Montréal My Git Workflow Montreal NEWTECH Review of 2008: 100 ... Data Mining with R: le

myEWB - Exec Title

Signed in as Nicolas Kruchten. sign out

myEWB Search: [] go!

Home Profile Chapters Mailing Lists Events Volunteering

Chapter Info | Chapter Board | Chapter List | Member Mgmt | Email Forwards | National Office | CHAMP | Graphs | Exec Title |

Exec Title Selection

Please make this title sound professional and descriptive of the person's role in your chapter (e.g. President, VP Finance, Director of Events etc). Please stay away from titles like VP Nicolas (not very descriptive of role), or Director of Awesomeness or Super-Duper Princess of Communications (not very professional) etc.

Title: Past VP Communications A.

Student Chapter President? (check if yes)

Finance National Rep? (check if yes)

Member Learning National Rep? (check if yes)

Learning Partnerships National Rep? (check if yes)

School Outreach National Rep? (check if yes)

Curriculum Enhancement National Rep? (check if yes)

Public Outreach National Rep? (check if yes)

EWB Chat (beta)