

Case Study – Stephen Meyer, MIT Faculty Member

Background

Prof. Stephen Meyer is a faculty member in the Political Science department of MIT, specializing in environmental policy issues. In the course of his research he regularly uses databases such as Lexis-Nexis; the World of Science; Social Science Abstracts; Citation Abstracts, and others. In addition, he has access to a huge electronic library including thousands of journals.

The Problems:

1. Organizing disparate material

The end product of a typical research project was a huge number of files in every conceivable format – html, pdf, any flavor of Word, Excel files, database records, and Tex files (the standard academic/ technical word processing format). Professor Meyer found it almost impossible to organize all this disparate material coherently.

2. Accessing previously-saved material

Professor Meyer frequently needed to re-read research material saved at an earlier date – but where exactly had he put it? “My problem”, he says, “was always going back and finding things I’d culled before.”

3. Time wasted on technicalities

Professor Meyer was spending too much time on brute-force processing. “I’d copy things to Word,” he explains, “possibly save them later as a PDF. Most selections had to be reformatted, and the result didn’t really represent the original; and I had to insert the graphical material separately. Then there was the problem of deleting unwanted material, such as ads; and how to integrate supplementary material, such as sidebars from articles. The whole process was highly inefficient.”

The Solution: Net Snippets

Professor Meyer researches all his articles himself, and doesn’t usually collaborate with others, or send out professional reports. He was looking for a tool that would help him organize and manage a huge, private information resource. He chose the Personal edition.

The Results

1. Quick, efficient organization of research materials

”I really couldn’t have written my last article – a review of human impact on ecosystems worldwide, including an examination of many different environments – without this tool,” Professor Meyer explains. “I found myself using it as a meta-analysis tool.” He especially likes the ability to save materials from any format in large, deep hierarchies of folders.

2. Added value on-the-fly

The ability to add comments and keywords turned an amorphous group of disparate files into a meaningful collection. These commenting and keywording features of Net Snippets, Professor Meyer emphasizes, “are especially why I think this tool is important.”

3. Easy retrieval of previously-saved material

-- based on the keywords assigned to each snippet when saving it. Professor Meyer especially enjoys the ability to call up material six or twelve months later, “almost without having to look for it.”

4. A huge saving of time and increase in productivity

”With Net Snippets it takes me minutes to do things that used to take me hours,” says Professor Meyer. “It’s like having a personal research assistant.” A recent project involved saving snippets from a massive number of medical journals – abstracts, graphs, tables, diagrams and graphics – and keywording them for later recall. “There’s no way,” Professor Meyer adds, “that I could have filed all that disparate material without Net Snippets.”

Unforeseen bonuses:

1. Automatic source recording

Professor Meyer especially appreciates Net Snippets’ ability to take him back to the original document, months later, with a single click on the automatically-recorded source URL.

2. The freedom from “housekeeping”

- never having to worry about whether he’d remembered to quote the source and whether he’d copied the URL correctly.

3. Easy learning curve

”It’s so intuitive,” Professor Meyer explains. “I heard about it from a newspaper article, tried it out, and it was so easy that I just bought it.”