Scenario

Bryant is enrolled in a "Marketing and Visual Media" online course. The class is using an application that captures and aggregates visual content from the web. For last week's assignment, Bryant spent a couple of hours browsing the web for ads that he thought were eye-catching and saving them in his project folder in the curation tool. To each image he added a brief analysis of the ad's effectiveness. Because Bryant liked the quick capture that the application afforded for that assignment, he also began using the tool to collect and comment on intriguing images for his upcoming term project. As he pondered the gathered data over several days, he saw one surprising pattern: He really liked the visual content of some ads, but couldn't remember later what product they promoted. He made notes on his captured choices accordingly, sparking some interesting feedback from his instructor, Dr. Ramsey, who presented Bryant's page for class discussion.

Today the class is investigating the changing character of advertising. Their assignment for this class session was to find ads in places where they would not have existed 10 years ago. Extra credit was offered for those who could provide example photos. Dr. Ramsey asks everyone to send these images to the project folder designated for class discussion.

Bryant sends a photo of an ad on a Kindle. Then he watches as other advertisements populate the curation site, including images of a screen in a coffee shop showing a running ad feed, a jockey with advertising on his silks, a TV screen in mid-episode displaying an ad for an upcoming program in the bottom left corner, and a school bus with an ad for an office store on its side. Watching the images pop up, Bryant begins to wonder how many of these places really had no advertising 10 years ago. Someone has even sent in a video clip from a recent television series with an embedded car ad. The actors discuss the car features as part of the story script without breaking character. For Bryant, the video and several of the images trigger ideas about some points he would like to make in his term project, so he adds selections of the content to his curated page. But he can't resist joining the class discussion, and so decides to finish his own visual curation efforts once class is over.

1 What is it?

As the Internet puts seemingly limitless resources at anyone's fingertips, people search for practical ways to sift through the growing pile, choosing, organizing, and presenting bits relevant to a specific purpose. **This kind of "curation" refers to the collection, display, and labeling of information**, not unlike the work of a museum curator, who assembles artifacts and offers viewers information about the provenance and importance of each item. Among the types of tools that do this with online content, tools such as Pinterest, Scoop.it, Learnist, Tumblr, Storify, and EduClipper provide users with a "pin-board" interface where they can exhibit, categorize, remark on, and share content found on the web. These tools are not unlike social bookmarking sites but with a focus on visual content and on building collections of resources. The strength of these kinds of tools lies not so much in deep, systematic organization but in the easy, quick curation of images and other visual online content. Educators both in K–12 and in higher education have embraced these tools, adapting them to a variety of purposes that include creating resource boards, aggregating ideas, and using the search functions to locate content of similar character.

2 How does it work?

Curation tools that aggregate visual content generally provide a straightforward mechanism for quickly grabbing web-based content. Pinterest, for example, adds a "bookmarklet" button to a browser's bookmark bar. Users tap the icon to capture web images and "pin" them to their Pinterest pages. If a web page contains multiple images, a menu of thumbnails appears, from which the user chooses. Visitors to a user's space can view the content, comment on it, and "re-pin" it to their own sites. While most of these curation tools offer a limited tool set, categories and tags can be applied to captured content and explanatory text can be included. All these tools offer the ability to share content with others, which may include integration with additional social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. Pinterest, notably, does not offer privacy controls, a choice that may have fueled the rise of visual curation apps for the education market that do allow users to set restrictions on who sees their content.

3 Who's doing it?

These tools are increasingly common in arts-based courses because they encourage visual thinking as they support teaching and learning in these disciplines. In a course at New Hampshire's Keene State College called "Design for the Performing Arts," students capture web images using Pinterest, explaining in accompanying text why they made the choices they did. The explanation obliges students to evaluate their visual aesthetic and consider how it shapes their own artistic efforts. Another interesting use of

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such curation tools is the resource board. A group of instructors at Penn State College of Earth and Mineral Sciences uses Pinterest in a collaborative effort to brainstorm online course development. Participants pin images to a shared board, tagging the content by lesson and topic. All selected images have been offered under Creative Commons licenses that allow reuse, so that instructors can choose any curated content from the board and employ it in the classroom. This saves the individual instructors' time spent searching and downloading images and citations. Students in some American Studies courses at University of Mary Washington create Pinterest boards that represent their relationships to food and consumer items, and compare it later in the courses to see how their attitudes have changed. At the University of North Carolina Charlotte School of Education, one faculty member presents a Pinterest board with thumbnails that spotlight current student projects. Each project focuses on use of a collaborative media tool. Clicking any thumbnail on the page expands the image and shows a case study explanation of how the spotlighted tool was used effectively in a classroom setting. The Pinterest board allows students to share ideas and encourages these future educators to design similar projects and present their own educational boards. Students may even be inspired to collaborate with those whose work parallels their own**.**

4 | Why is it significant?

Curation tools make it easy to collect and post disparate bits of content, providing visual groupings at a glance that can reveal important patterns to the curator. For students who are less comfortable sharing text-based content on social networks, wikis, and blogs, this kind of tool can provide a more inviting model that allows users to collect and share content without the stress of creating a compelling and carefully edited text composition. At the same time, users can enjoy the enrichment available from sites curated by scholars, instructors, colleagues, librarians, friends, and family. These boards may provide faculty and students with a place to organize and stimulate thought, particularly as it relates to the visual world. In this regard, curation sites may function as visual scrapbooks, allowing curators to assemble information that can later be used for research and scholarly consideration.

5 | What are the downsides?

Because these curation tools allow users to quickly grab online content and repost it, **some argue that the tools encourage—or at least enable—more frequent violations of copyright** by users who don't take the time to understand the issues. These tools also tend to separate content from its context by pulling just an image, for example, rather than using a link to the website that hosts not only the image but also related information, including copyright notes or original source details. Moreover, most of the tools have few if any privacy controls—all content is visible to all users. In some academic contexts, the inability to restrict access might pose problems, particularly if a curation tool is to be used in conjunction with an institution's LMS or other systems.

6 | Where is it going?

Use of these products on smartphones and tablets has so far been enthusiastic, with some claiming the mobile versions are easier to use. Regardless of platform, **these tools will have greater potential if they develop beyond the simple collection and tagging of content** and begin to offer more sophisticated means of sorting and organizing that content. In this regard, the somewhat related "corkboard" tools, such as Spaaze and Corkboard.me, offer a valuable utility, allowing users to arrange visual items on a large canvas, move them about, set them in proximity to one another, and post virtual sticky notes on them as desired. If these curation apps expand their feature sets, they may provide a free basic version while offering expanded versions for a recurring fee or through a site license.

7 | What are the implications for teaching and learning?

Brainstorming sessions, either scholarly or administrative, can benefit from curation tools that present ideas in a visual format. Students in fields such as architecture, design, studio, dance, and marketing can gather a portfolio quickly and present it publicly, or—where the tool permits—reserve it for a more select audience. Curation sites may be used for work-in-progress studies, allowing artists to analyze their own work by capturing the same image presented in different media or at various stages of completion. Where these tools are used to compile a visual log or journal, they may reflect topics that a scholar is interested in exploring over time, resulting in photos of work from multiple locations that inspire or inform. Such tools add a visual element to any assignment or project and offer **particular utility where students or faculty are compiling clusters of visual content in support of collaborative projects**.