

# Debate 2.0—Web Services and Tools to Enhance Your Coaching

by Richard Glover

**D**ebate is my hobby, and has been for nearly 15 years now. I make my living in the technology industry. My career has afforded me a chance to engage with technology in some really exciting ways. Many of the technologies I interact with have made their way into my debate coaching. Joshua Gonzales from Wake Forest covered some great tools and technologies in this column this past May. I'd like to build on his work and discuss a number of tools that I find useful for coaching debate.

One of the primary tools I use with my team is the Google Apps package. Google provides a complete suite of applications that you can use to host a Web site, control your practice and tournament calendar, share and collaborate on documents and cases, chat, and even provide an e-mail address for team members and coaches. For the negligible price of around \$10/year, you can register a domain name for your team. Google will, upon providing proof that you're a non-profit or educational organization, give you free access to their premium class of services. There are unbelievable organizational benefits to these applications. The ability to work collaboratively on documents, track changes, and share research alone is enough to make this option well worth looking into. Google's tools are powerful, functional, and easy to use.

One of the Google Tools that Joshua mentioned is Google Reader. Syndicated

feeds are one of the biggest boons to research I've ever encountered. Almost all regularly updated content on the Web these days has an associated RSS feed. Google Reader aggregates those feeds so that you can examine all of the content you're interested in in one simple place. Even better, Google Reader has recently introduced a feature where you can create bundles of RSS feeds to share with others. Say, for example, you wanted to create a package of feeds that you've collected on the subject of poverty to share with your Policy debaters. Google Reader makes it very easy to do just that. If you're already a Google Reader user, you can find this bundle functionality under the "Browse for Stuff" category in the sidebar. Simply click the button entitled "Create a Bundle," add a title, a short description, and then drag the feeds you wish to share from your sidebar into the bundle area. Once you've saved the bundle, you're given a number of different ways to share it, from e-mailing a link, to sending an OPML file to people who use feed readers other than Google Reader.

There are a host of other awesome tools available for free on the net that make research a real joy. One of my personal favorites is Evernote (<http://www.evernote.com>). Evernote is working to create a ubiquitous capture utility. They've done some remarkable work to this end. They have an excellent Web application, as well as a fully featured desktop application that syncs with the Web app. The best part of the

service that Evernote offers is its ability to take a number of types of input, categorize it, and provide searchable access to it. Evernote will even index words that it recognizes in photographs. This means, effectively, that you can use the camera on your cellphone to take a picture of the whiteboard upon which you've just written a case outline, send it to your Evernote account, and Evernote will create a searchable index of the text it recognizes in the image, allowing you to search for it and use it later. Clearly this particular technology has myriad benefits for research and writing.

For sharing files that are too large to be e-mailed, there's Dropbox (<http://www.getdropbox.com>)—two Gigabytes of space that syncs between computers, with the Web, and can be shared with other users. The beauty of this program is that it looks and functions like a normal folder on your computer. It takes the contents of the folder and syncs them between computers that use the software, or between folders that you share with other dropbox users. Changes to the files are tracked in the DropBox Web application, allowing you to examine revisions to files, revert back to old copies, and guarantee that things are backed up and remain useful and accessible anywhere you have access to the internet. Imagine the possibilities! Never again will you have to worry about a debater who has forgotten their cases, because they've saved them to the team's shared Dropbox folder. All this, again, for the low, low price of *free*.

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All of the notetaking and research sharing tools in the world are nothing if you don't have the research to back them up. To that end, there is one tool that stands out above all others: Mozilla Firefox. The open-source Firefox Web browser is fast, functional, and highly extendable. Firefox has an extensive add-on architecture that has spawned thousands of plugins and additions that create some extraordinary functionality. The ad-block extension alone is worth switching to Firefox. I have compiled a collection of add-ons for Firefox that extend its functionality in ways useful for doing debate research. These add-ons include highlighting tools, deep search tools, annotation tools, communication tools, social media tools (particularly Delicious and StumbleUpon—great for finding and sharing relevant information), and the most-excellent Debate Copy add-on by Alex Gulakov. Debate copy has some great features, particularly its ability to make debate-formatted cites from Google News search results. The add-on collection is called "Debate Research Tools" and can be found at <http://addons.mozilla.com/en-US/firefox/collection/debate>. Please, subscribe to it and use it as you see fit.

In addition to being a great all-around Web browser, Windows users can download a portable version of Firefox to be installed on a standard USB thumb drive. Think of the possibility of being able to carry your browser, your bookmarks, and all of your trusted research add-ons with you wherever

you go. All you need to do is plug in your USB key and launch the application. PortableApps provides a portable version of the most recent build of Firefox. It is compatible with all of the extensions in my Debate collection ([http://portableapps.com/apps/internet/firefox\\_portable](http://portableapps.com/apps/internet/firefox_portable)).

Beyond search and annotation tools, there's more to the Web than just Google. Twine (<http://www.twine.com>) is an interesting service that creates webs of interconnected ideas and spaces for collaborative research. Digg (<http://www.digg.com>) and Reddit (<http://www.reddit.com>) are social news sites that provide an insight into what is popular and interesting on the Web in a vast number of different categories. Twitter (<http://www.twitter.com>), especially when used with a tool like Tweetdeck (<http://tweetdeck.com>) can be used to find relevant information on a vast number of subjects being discussed. Setting up a Twitter account for your team, incidentally, gives you a really handy way to send announcements out to your team members. And, of course, Joshua thoroughly covered the rich ground that is a team wiki. There is some excellent free wiki software available that can be set up with your team domain name to create an excellent resource for your team to collaborate and share ideas. The great thing about the wiki model is its ability to cross-reference and connect ideas. You can allow or restrict access to the editing functionality to whomever you wish.

There are so many excellent tools and utilities available that could revolutionize the way we coach debate. There are even more around the corner. This month, Google will be granting limited access to their new Google Wave application, which promises to transform the way we communicate on the internet forever. I think it may be one of the biggest technology game-changers on the block, and has the potential to revolutionize our community and the way we interact. As these technologies become more prominent, it is incumbent upon us as educators to seize upon them, find new uses to which they can be put, and give our students access to tools that will serve them beyond debate rounds.

If you have questions about any of these technologies, if you'd like to know more, or if you're interested in providing feedback or suggestions for the add-on collection I can be reached at [rglover@mclintockspeech.com](mailto:rglover@mclintockspeech.com). I hope that everybody can find something useful here that will serve their students and make their team more functional and productive. ■

## *About the Author*

**Richard Glover** coaches debate at McClintock High School in Tempe, Arizona. He makes his living as a technology consultant and Web geek.