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Web App Review: IFTTT

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Web App Review: IFTTT

Abstract

Tammy Ivins, Head of Reference at Francis Marion University reviews the web app, IFTTT (If This Then That).

Web App Review: IFTTT

Sometimes in life you discover something that seems silly and useless, but when you start to use it, it becomes incredibly useful.

That was my experience with IFTTT, which stands for "IF this, THEN that." The premise of this free web-based application is simple: if one thing happens, then IFTTT will automatically trigger a response.

How useful could that be? I began using IFTTT because my library wanted to use Flickr as the ultimate repository of our photos, but we also wanted to be able to create library photos on Instagram, share new photos on Twitter, and tag photos on Facebook. That would take a lot of leg work for the webmaster to manually share photos on all those sites. We could share the logins with the entire library staff and ask them to perform those steps to share photos, but 1) we feared the complicated steps would discourage photo-taking, 2) the webmaster would still need to double-check for consistency, and 3) that would allow any member of the staff to post any messages on our social media accounts, for which we are trying to maintain a consistent voice. Enter the solution: IFTTT.

To start, you create a library IFTTT account and activate the relevant IFTTT "channels" (for use, this was the Facebook page, Twitter account, Flickr account, and Instagram account). Activating a channel allows IFTTT access to those services (your Flickr account, your Facebook account, etc.) and/or devices (your computer, smartphone, etc.). IFTTT secures your

data, but it is still recommended that you do not share access to any sensitive information (such as the same login information needed to access your bank account). You should treat your IFTTT security with the same caution that you would any other free web-service: be aware of what services and devices it has access to and monitor for security leaks.

Once IFTTT had access to our library social media and photo accounts, it became a simple matter to create "recipes" based on the simple model "IF this, THEN that":

1. **IF** a photo gets uploaded to our Flickr account, **THEN** the same photo should be posted on our Facebook page in a designated album.
2. **IF** a photo gets posted to our Flickr account, **THEN** a link to that photo is shared on our twitter feed with the tweet "New photo from Rogers Library."
3. **IF** a photo gets shared via our Instagram account, **THEN** that same photo is uploaded to our Flickr account. (This then triggers the previous two recipes).

Now any member of our library staff can upload photos to our Flickr account (or Instagram if that is their preference). Flickr is the repository for all of our photos, but our social media is also effortlessly updated with the photos. We have similar recipes setup for sharing our YouTube videos, and our next library IFTTT project is to create automatic social media reminders about library closings based on events on a Google Calendar. IFTTT can provide

notifications when the recipes are triggered, though we did not find them necessary.

The possibilities with IFTTT are virtually endless, which can become overwhelming when trying to create a recipe from scratch. To make it easier, IFTTT's website lets you browse, copy, and edit hundreds of suggested recipes/uses (ifttt.com/recipes). Among the channels available for creating your own (ifttt.com/channels), "Feed" has some of the most open-ended potential. The Feed channel allows you utilize any RSS feed (such as the Libguides' feeds) to create recipes.

In addition to library uses, creating a personal account on IFTTT can help a busy librarian become more effective and efficient. Turn off your cell phone's ringer when you arrive at work and back on when you leave. Get an alert (smartphone alert, text message, or voicemail) if it is going to rain tomorrow. Move starred Gmail messages to Evernote for follow-up. Give IFTTT a try in your library or life and be sure to send me your cleverest uses and recipes!

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