

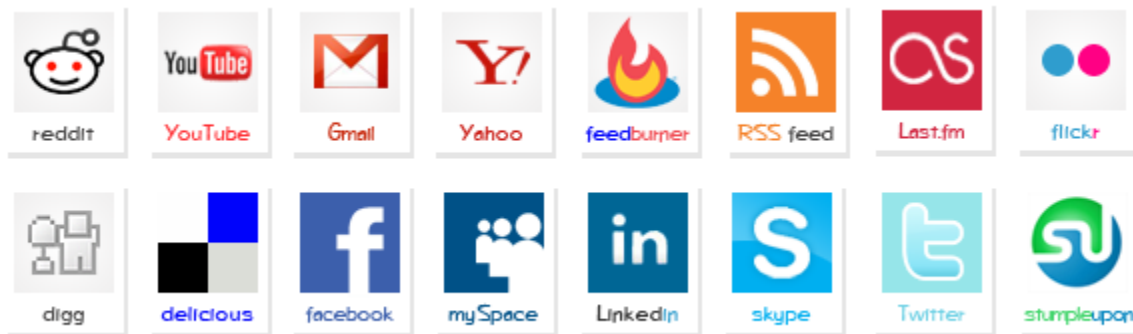
Button Sluts and Web Actions

[Design](#) / [Technology](#) / [Web Design](#)

By [Erin Jo Richey](#)

August 7, 2011 [30](#)

tl;dr - Web actions are actions a visitor to your site or application does to another site or app. They create a cleaner and more seamless user experience.



Introducing the Concept of Web Actions

It's been over a month now since [IndieWeb Camp](#) took place in Portland, OR. Over the course of the weekend I was introduced to concepts and terminology new to me – like [web intents](#), [sharecropping](#), and the NASCAR idea – and I had the opportunity to brainstorm more freely than I typically get to on a normal day.

After learning about the concepts behind web intents, I was captivated by the idea of organizing basic website actions (like tweeting, emailing, hearting, liking) into their root categories. I was also inspired by the notion that we – as web creators – are often needlessly cluttering sites with ill-placed social media buttons and confusing action forms.

Working with several ideas in mind, I joined in to focus on web intents, but soon noticed that the original pilgrims had moved on to [web introducers](#) as a concept [[see also](#) - and note that [Paul Kinlan](#) is now back focusing on web intents]. [@t](#) and I agreed that something was missing and that this space in general was confusing and lacked definition.

We agreed to continue our brainstorming, working out a few ideas we had shared. Moving forward, we began using the term “web actions” to describe the space we were working in.

What Are Web Actions?

It's taken me awhile to get my head around what a web action really is and which alternatives are just collections of buttons and links. As we are using the term now, web actions are actions your visitors take on your site or application to another site or application. Having an account and an authentication level are implied aspects because your visitor has to log in to the second site or application in order for a share, save, or send to take place. Web actions mean that the visitor stays on your site while completing the action, rather than opening up a new page on another site or launching an application.

The NASCAR Effect

Web actions begin to solve the problem of the NASCAR effect, where many sites today are completely littered with social buttons and share widgets. Like race cars slapped with promo stickers, blogs and businesses have filled their footers, sidebars, and whitespace with buttons for saving and sharing posts or pages on each and every remotely popular social site.

Companies like AddThis made it easy for even the less-technically-inclined to include a snippet of Javascript on their sites and generate an array of social options. It's also easy to justify the inclusion of various buttons on your site by just noting that everyone else is doing it. I've done that myself.

(Incidentally, the current version of this blog doesn't use web actions as I ultimately see them occurring. However, since it's my own testbed for new items, expect some changes in the near future.)



Button Slut – n. A blogger or website owner who adorns his or her site with a large number of buttons or badges.

Fixing the Button Candy

These collections of digital kitsch add clutter to sites and often slow them down. I would also guess that for many sites, having an abundance of social share buttons actually decreases the effectiveness of each button. Social buttons and similar features were originally intended to provide visitors with easy shortcuts and to encourage a behavior of sharing. I have a hunch that on many sites today, NASCAR arrays are often ignored like in-page ads.

Web actions break down visitor behaviors into simple, clean, less arrogant interactions. They should allow visitors to your site to be able to share or save content without giving it a second

thought. Web actions should not be intrusive to the content or the design. They are the more effective, more minimalistic alternative to social button overgrowth.

Examples of Web Actions

An area that initially attracted me to the concept was the idea of breaking down and organizing existing on-page actions – likes, sends, tweets, hearts, stars, saves – into categories based on the underlying intention of the person. If you ignore the underlying social network, site, or application and think just about the motivation behind the behavior, similarities begin to emerge.

While by no means a complete list, a few examples are:

- Saving content, such as bookmarking it, adding it to a list, or marking it some fashion so that it's easy to identify later.
- Sharing content, such as announcing a link to friends or family, emailing an article, or redistributing a message.
- Showing support (for an author or for an organization in general); this might loosely be called, 'giving props to,' or adding your stamp of approval.
- Purchasing something, where a click and a confirmation executes a transaction with a separate site.

For a more specific example of a sharing web action, we can look at emailing. If you're reading a great blog post and you want to pass it on to a friend, along with a note about the article, you might choose the "send" action. From there you have a saved preference of email. Once you choose to email the article, a pre-populated message window opens up that includes a link to the article in the body and the article title in the subject line. You can add your message, your recipient's address, and send it off without leaving the original page.

Moving Forward in the Space

I see a mix of interactions on sites and apps today, ranging from overblown NASCAR arrays to scenarios very similar to the one described above. What we have seen as much of during our initial discussion of web actions, is the devious and classification of specific actions by the visitor's overarching intention, or the conscious placement of certain actions on the page in a position that is most usable for the visitor.

These areas are open for research and discussion. Is it better to put an action for reading a post later at the top of the post assuming they haven't read anything? Does it make sense to place a sharing action at the bottom of a post and assume this is where the reader will look when he wants to tweet the article out to followers? I don't know, but I'm excited to perform the research.

I also don't know if the way I breakdown and categorize various buttons and badges into web action clusters is the same way someone else might instinctively group this information. But I do know how to solicit this type of information from others.

In the immediate future, @t and I will be solidifying more details on web actions, including performing some of the research I've mentioned above. I've started screenshotting a few of the [web action examples](#) I've come across, and I'll add to this Flickr collection over time. I would encourage others to contribute their own with [#webactions](#). Thoughts, questions, and positive discussions are always welcome.

Button arrays via [icondock.com](#) and [webtoolkit4.me](#).

A More Visual Example of Web Actions

Web Actions: A Beginner's Guide

by Jane Doe

August 15, 2011

[Save to Read](#)

Far far away, behind the word mountains, far from the countries Vokalia and Consonantia, there live the blind texts. Separated they live in Bookmarksgrove right at the coast of the Semantics, a large language ocean.

A small river named Duden flows by their place and supplies it with the necessary regalia. It is a paradisiacal country, in which roasted parts of sentences fly into your mouth.

Even the all-powerful Pointing has no control about the blind texts it is an almost unorthographic life One day however a small line of blind text by the name of Lorem Ipsum decided to leave for the far World of Grammar. The Big Oxmox advised her not to do so, because there were thousands of bad Commas.

First: One button summarizes the root intention

Web Actions: A Beginner's Guide

by Jane Doe

August 15, 2011

[Save to Read](#)

Far far away, be
countries Vokali
Separated they
the Semantics, a

A small river nar
it with the neces
in which roasted

Even the all-powerful Pointing has no control about the blind texts it is an almost unorthographic life One day however a small line of blind text by the name of Lorem Ipsum decided to leave for the far World of Grammar. The Big Oxmox advised her not to do so, because there were thousands of bad Commas.

 [Read this in Read it Later](#)

 Evernote is not configured

 [Read this in Instapaper](#)

Second: The visitor's preferred services for the action are shown



Web Actions: A Beginner's Guide
by Jane Doe
August 15, 2011

Save to Read

Web Actions: A Beginner's Guide
<http://www.example.com/web-actions>

Notes...

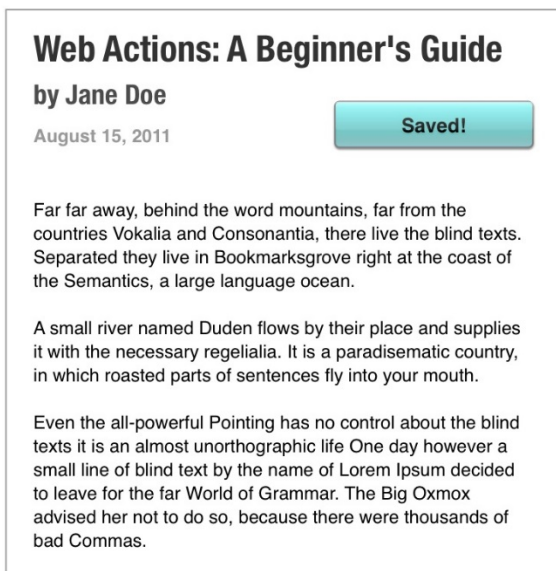
You're logged in as erinjo. Save to Read it Later

Far far away, behind the word mountains, far from the countries Vokalia and Consonantia, there live the blind texts. Separated they live in Bookmarksgrove right at the coast of the Semantics, a large language ocean.

A small river named Duden flows by their place and supplies it with the necessary regellia. It is a paradisematic country, in which roasted parts of sentences fly into your mouth.

Even the all-powerful Pointing has no control about the blind texts it is an almost unorthographic life One day however a small line of blind text by the name of Lorem Ipsum decided to leave for the far World of Grammar. The Big Oxmox advised her not to do so, because there were thousands of bad Commas.

Third: The content is saved to the visitor's account with the option to edit accordingly



Web Actions: A Beginner's Guide
by Jane Doe
August 15, 2011

Saved!

Far far away, behind the word mountains, far from the countries Vokalia and Consonantia, there live the blind texts. Separated they live in Bookmarksgrove right at the coast of the Semantics, a large language ocean.

A small river named Duden flows by their place and supplies it with the necessary regellia. It is a paradisematic country, in which roasted parts of sentences fly into your mouth.

Even the all-powerful Pointing has no control about the blind texts it is an almost unorthographic life One day however a small line of blind text by the name of Lorem Ipsum decided to leave for the far World of Grammar. The Big Oxmox advised her not to do so, because there were thousands of bad Commas.

Fourth: The content is saved to the account