Reputation Systems for Genealogy
Jimmy Zimmerman, RootsTech 2012

Reputation is common in our everyday web experience. For example, we shop for products with 4 or 5 stars, and we trust Ebay merchants with good seller feedback. Surprisingly, reputation is practically nonexistent in genealogy's tech world. This presentation will cover: the potential benefits of reputation in genealogy; patterns for creating reputation; motivations for using specific reputation models; and examples of successful reputation systems.

Benefits of a Reputation System in Genealogy
A reputation system can benefit genealogy by encouraging good behavior, building trust, and catalyzing collaboration.

Encourages Good Behavior. If reputation is earned by performing accurate research, providing citations for conclusions, doing thorough evaluation of evidence, and by providing volume of contributions, then the community will do genealogy in ways that will benefit each other.

Builds Trust. When shopping at Amazon, I can trust the quality of a product and vendor because of their feedback reputation. If genealogy had a reputation system, researchers could spend more time on new research and less time re-evaluating the quality of a conclusion, a citation, a transcription, etc.

Catalyzes Collaboration. Reputation systems can encourage collaboration by identifying trustworthy, competent people to help on a project, answer a question, or give research assistance.

Reputation Patterns
Please Note: The patterns, images, descriptions, and Competitive Spectrum Framework provided here come from the Yahoo! Design Pattern Library\(^1\), licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License. Many thanks to Cristian Crumlish for his excellent work in this space.

Reputation patterns we will cover include: Named Levels, Numbered Levels, Identifying Labels, Points, Collectible Achievements, and Ranking.

Named Levels
Named Levels define a family of reputation levels on a progressive continuum. Each level is higher than the one before it. Unique *names* give the levels a fun and approachable quality.

When to use this pattern
- You want to enable consumers to discover and identify high-quality contributors.
- The community is competitive, but not highly competitive.
- You want to enable your users to track their individual growth in the community and suggest ways that may attain the next level in the hierarchy.

Examples
*SitePoint Forums*: Member, Enthusiast, Zealot, Addict, Guru, Wizard
*World of Warcraft*\(^2\): Neutral, Friendly, Honored, Revered, Exalted

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**Numbered Levels**
Establish a family of reputations on a progressive continuum. Each level achieved is higher than the one before it. Refer to each level by its *number*, which makes comparisons between levels very straightforward and easy to do.

**When to use this pattern**
- You want to enable your users to track their individual growth in the community.
- You want to enable easy comparisons between users. (Level 1 < Level 5)
- You’re trying to encourage a more-competitive community spirit

**Cautions**
- Numbered levels can be perceived as cold and impersonal.
- Highest levels should maintain a level of exclusivity.

**Examples**
*World of Warcraft*: Level 5 Guild

**Identifying Labels**
Define a family of reputation labels that are not sequential in nature. Craft each one to identify and reward particular behaviors or qualities within a community. These labels are helpful for consumers in identifying more-experienced contributors who possess these qualities.

**When to use this pattern**
- You have identified some *desirable behaviors* for your community that you’d like to promote.
- You want to allow users to *volunteer* for a ‘role’ or responsibility within the community.
- You need a reputation to reflect that a user has been *vetted* or *validated*, either by your organization or a trusted 3rd-party.

**Examples**
*Get Satisfaction:* Employee
*Yelp:* Elite Squad
*Boy Scouts of America:* Patrol Leader, Historian, Quarter Master
*Yahoo! Answers:* Top Contributor

**Points**
Maintain and display a cumulative count of the number of *points* user has earned within a community. The points generally come from performing specific activities on the site. Points are best awarded to congratulate performance rather than merely to acknowledge activity.

**When to use this pattern**
- Your community is highly competitive, and the activities that the users engage in are competitive in nature (e.g., player-vs-player contests, or coaching a fantasy football team).
- The primary purpose of the community is competition.

**Don’t use this pattern when**
- The activities are *not* competitive in nature (e.g., writing recipes, or sharing photos).

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The awarding of points might demean or devalue the activity that they’re meant to reward. By pinning an arbitrary incentive value to an activity, you may unintentionally replace a user’s satisfying intrinsic motivation with a petty extrinsic one.

Examples
Yahoo! Answers: Points awarded for a variety of actions
StackOverflow: Points given for having a question or answer up-voted.
Ebay: Feedback Score based on the number of successful transactions.

Collectible Achievements
Collectible Achievements are virtual awards, badges, etc. They may seem silly or trivial, but they can have an addictive quality that may compel your users to explore parts of your offering that otherwise might not appeal to them.

When to use this pattern
- You want to leverage users’ compulsive natures.
- You want to encourage the community to try out all aspects of your offering.
- There are features of your product that you’d like to promote: trading, completing a profile, etc.

Examples
StackOverflow Badges: Teacher, Editor, Commentator, Supporter, Student, Autobiographer
Boy Scouts of America: Merit Badges, Rank Advancements

Ranking
In highly competitive communities, users may want to compare their performance against that of their peers. A user may want to understand, relatively speaking, where they "rank" in the community and how far they must progress to "outrank" someone else. This includes the Leaderboards and the Top X Pattern.

When to use this pattern
- Your community is highly competitive. (Leaderboards)
- Your users want to be able to settle “Who is better?” arguments. (Leaderboards)
- You want to encourage top, top contributors to continue to provide high-quality content. (Top X)
- You want to encourage heavy (but not yet top) contributors to increase the quality and frequency of their contributions. (Top X)

Caution
These patterns can lend themselves to gaming and compulsive, non-constructive community behaviors. Use with caution!

General Recommendations
- Many successful reputation systems use a combination of reputation patterns (Named Levels, Points, and Ranking)
- Give reputation for performance rather than activity. For example, give a user reputation points when others vote up or rate that user’s contribution positively.
- Refer to the Competitive Spectrum Framework (next page) as a guide to selecting patterns.
  Match the reputation patterns with goals you wish to achieve within your community of users.
### The Competitive Spectrum Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caring</th>
<th>Collaborative</th>
<th>Cordial Goals</th>
<th>Competitive</th>
<th>Combative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Members are motivated by <em>helping</em> other members - giving advice, solace or comfort.</td>
<td>Member goals are largely <em>shared</em> ones. Members work together to achieve those goals.</td>
<td>Members have their own intrinsic motivations, but these goals need not conflict with other members' goals.</td>
<td>Members share the same goals, but must compete against each other to achieve them.</td>
<td>Members share opposing goals: in order for one member to achieve these goals, others must necessarily be <em>denied</em> their own.</td>
</tr>
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**Use Reputation to...**

| Identify senior community members of good standing, so that others can find them for advice and guidance. | Identify community members with a proven track-record of being trustworthy partners. | Show a member's history of participation, that others may get general sense for their interests, identity and values. | Show a member's level of accomplishment, that others may acknowledge (and admire) their level of performance. | Show a member's history of accomplishments, including other members' victories and defeats against them. Reputation is used to establish bragging rights. |

**Represent Reputation with...**

| Accept volunteers (of good standing) from the community to wear an Identifying Label: 'Helpful' or 'Forum Leader'. New members can trust these folks to help initiate them into the community. | Use *Named Levels* to communicate members' history and standing: members with higher ranks should be trusted more easily than newbies. | Consider Statistical Evidence to highlight a member’s contributions: just show the facts and let the community decide their worth. Optionally, *Top X* designations can highlight members with numerous valued contributions. | Allow easy comparisons between members with *Numbered Levels*. Provide mini-motivations by awarding *Collectible Achievements*. | Let a member track her own progress by assigning *Point Values* to different actions. *Rank* members against each other, displaying winners and losers. |

**Example Communities**

| Most Forums | Wikipedia | Yelp | Yahoo! Answers | Slashdot | Ebay | Y! Fantasy Sports | Xbox Live |