



# Automating Friendship

**M. Brian Blake** • *Drexel University*

I could not be more different than one of my best friends. Sometimes he says things that I believe I would never say. His taste in movies can, at times, be totally different than my own. Although we have similar preferences in fashion, we disagree on the best colors and patterns. I despise his favorite football team. He likes upbeat music, and I like rhythm and blues. Perhaps the most interesting fact is internally ... I wouldn't have it any other way. I guess this friendship embodies the phrase, "opposites attract."

Currently, there's a wealth of information on the Internet about individuals – and moreover, the interactions among a large body of diverse people. With the onset of personal information shared by social networking and sensor-oriented, Internet-enabled capabilities to capture personal activities, we capture information about people in more dimensions than ever before. This shared information has been used to enable matchmaking sites who have monetized the business of recommending people with complementing interests and backgrounds. There are some interesting studies that leverage the use of self-declared, online "friends" to determine satisfaction with life and with personal interactions.<sup>1,2</sup> This leads me to one question, "With more information, will we eventually quantitatively support the notion that the nature of friendship is less about preference matching and more about personal connection?" If so, then what is the remaining role for how we use profile and activity information to compare and contrast the individual? If true friends are made through personal interactions, then wouldn't that suggest a less active role for automation tools in the context of social networking?

How are true friendships defined? Particularly, if we mechanize the creation of friends, would it be a matchmaking of information or

would it be an articulation of shared activities to enhance the personal interaction? I believe that new Internet computing techniques will be helpful in enhancing the journey to friendships rather than suggesting when friendship is possible. As such, I recommend a few opportunities for Internet computing professionals.

**Proximity-based matchmaking.** Recent location-based mobile services allow individuals to anonymously communicate with other persons in close proximity. I suggest that we extend such capabilities with profile matching. When approaching someone for the first time, would it be helpful to know that you and another person agree on a number of personality type attributes? Would it be helpful to get a signal that alerts you secretly to the fact that you and another person share 8 out of 10 of the same preferences for restaurants or other activities?

**Emotion-tracking bio-sensors.** For those of us who are "tone-deaf" to personal cues sent to us by others, emotion-tracking devices could help us understand how what we say or do affects our friends or potential friends. Such devices might be helpful in social networking sessions where emotions are difficult to judge by text-based communication.

As more applications are created to enable friendships and other personal relationships offline, it will become important for other applications to continue facilitating in-person human interactions. With that in mind, the November/December 2015 special issue, "The Internet of You," features multiple approaches to capture information and leverage information made accessible on the Internet about the individual. Researchers and developers can use this information in any number of ways – including, but not limited to, facilitating friendships. I would

like to thank our guest editors, Deborah Estrin and Craig Thompson, and our committed reviewers for producing this special issue.

**S**peaking of building relationships, I am happy to make a couple of announcements regarding *IC*'s editorial board. In addition to welcoming Hilarie Orman as a new editorial board member (see the related sidebar), I would like to welcome and thank another editorial board member, George Pallis from the University of Cyprus, for accepting my invitation to become one of our new associate editors-in-chief. His research interests focus on large-scale distributed systems with emphasis on designing, implement-

ing, and experimenting with systems and tools for cloud computing, content distribution systems, and decentralized social networks. He

has published more than 50 original peer-reviewed scientific papers in his area of study and he has co-edited a book on Web data management. ☐

## Welcome Aboard!

Please join us in welcoming Hilarie Orman to the *IEEE Internet Computing* editorial board. Currently, she writes the "Practical Security" column, and we look forward to working with her on additional contributions.



Hilarie Orman is a security consultant and president of Purple Streak. Her research interests include applied cryptography, secure operating systems, malware identification, security through semantic computing, and personal data mining. Orman has a BS in mathematics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She's a recent co-guest editor of a special issue for *IEEE Security & Privacy* magazine, and the former chair of the IEEE Computer Society's Technical Committee on Security and Privacy. Contact her at [hilarie@purplestreak.com](mailto:hilarie@purplestreak.com).

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**M. Brian Blake** is the provost and executive vice president of academic affairs at Drexel University. As a professor of computer science and electrical engineering, his research interests are in service-oriented computing, adaptive distributed systems, and Web-based software

engineering. Blake has a PhD in information and software engineering from George Mason University. Contact him at MBrian.Blake@drexel.edu.

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