

# Why Web 2.0?

## Do you or don't you?

When considering your website and the possibilities of Web 2.0, a philosophy of innovation is useful, but only if it aligns to your business purpose and your brand. If you are intent on building an online experience that is integral to your brand and your business, how up-to date do you need to be? Unless you get clear on your strategy for your business and how your website delivers to that, you might get distracted by what is technologically possible. Like the kid in the proverbial candy store, do you: funk up your site with the latest design? harness the latest technologies to automate and enhance interactivity? segment visitors to your site and create a targeted, compelling experience? invest in eye-tracking and the like? connect to your mainframe systems to automate standard processes? soup up your site with on-line surveys? The answer is simple. Just because you can, doesn't mean you should.

## Understanding the true cost

There are a lot of hidden costs to implementing or enhancing a website. And these costs jump markedly when introducing web 2.0 technologies. A holistic approach to understanding the cost is best. It goes beyond the project management time and the development cost of producing lengthy prototypes. There are the legal, compliance, process and procedural implications. The potential risk to your brand is also real. Taking all these elements together, it isn't so surprising that we are not seeing a wholesale take-up of Web 2.0 technologies in the corporate space.

## Demystifying the magic of web 2.0

In an Enterprise 2.0 survey conducted by AIIIM last year, 74% of respondents said they were only vaguely familiar with Web 2.0, or had "no clear understanding" of what it was. This sort of ambiguity highlights the need to spend the time to identify and measure potential enhancements to your site. Regardless of whether people inside your organization understand what web 2.0 is, they can at least understand the potential of what it can deliver to your organization. On the bumpy web 2.0 landscape, there are some organizations that are experiencing positive results and reasonable returns in parallel.

Those who have experienced success with web 2.0 are not always the ones making the most noise. And while they continue to gain an advantage, why wouldn't they keep their own counsel? Sometimes the magic lies in the obvious. Delivering a site that does not require your web audience to constantly adapt, could be the greatest innovation of all.

## Getting cozy with your customers - How cozy is too cozy?

Customer intimacy and interaction on the web are useful in context. Sometimes your relevance to your web audience dictates a closer touch. You need to stop and think about the relationship your customers want to have with you. Rather than the relationship you want to have with them.

Imagine if every website wanted to interact with you. It's like the bus ride to hell. At every turn, someone wants to strike up a conversation or gain feedback on how you're enjoying your trip.

Sometimes it's enough to deliver your customers from A to B. Safely. Quickly, with little fuss or fanfare.

## And don't forget the roadmap

*"Not all who wander are lost".*

- J.R.R. Tolkien.

Some websites are doomed to become complex mazes of interaction. Visitors feel stuck in a virtual shopping mall where unless you pay close attention to where you entered and where you've been, you'll never find what you went there for. Investing your money in improving the structure and usability of your site might reap far greater rewards than the latest technological bling.

## Web 2.0 - Career maker or career breaker

In this tough economic climate, making the right investment in your website might be a career making or breaking decision for web marketers. One of the biggest mistakes made around online customer collaboration is the assumption customers care about what others are reading or want to interact with your or others all the time.

An over-ambitious web experience may become a frustrating obstacle for people who come to your site. Can you be sure you know what visitors want? In many cases, your visitor's needs and behaviour will change with each visit and evolve over time. Your investment in explicit personalized interactive sizzle may become a fizzle. A fad that morphs to an irritation.

Achieving an environment that is consistently interesting and useful is not easy. Showing respect and listening to your web audience, when each and every individual has their own ever-changing motives and personality is possibly the major challenge for Web 2.0 projects. How can you achieve a balance without tipping the scales on the cost?

Most ebusiness evangelists would agree research is vital for getting the user experience right. Unfortunately it can be costly and might not have the longevity that you might hope for. Equally, if you launch a new website and you get it wrong, you are unlikely to get a second chance.

There are ways of reducing the requirement for so much pre-analysis and ensuring that your visitors will be provided with an adaptable, flexible, responsive web experience that requires minimal ongoing intervention. More on that in a moment.

## So what is Web 2.0 all about?

"Web 2.0 integrates social/community media tools into apps/services: wikis, podcasts, blogs, content sharing tools, user communities, and the like are associated with communicating with others online". 74% of people cannot agree what a definition like this means. Perhaps a different question needs to be asked.

## Why We Should Care About Web 2.0?

The claim is that Web 2.0 can change human behaviour. Another approach suggests in order for a website to become popular and useful, it might somehow imitate off-line human behaviour. In his column discussing Web 2.0 and The Evolution of the Ego, Yarden Lewinsky takes a close look at popular websites and makes some interesting parallels with real life:

- MySpace - or Facebook are based on the way in which we manage our social contacts
- Skype - is based on our need to talk with others
- Google - is based on the way that we rank things
- Flickr - is based on the manner in which we share experiences with others,
- Amazon - is based on the way we talk about books
- Delicious - is based on the manner in which we try to remember things.

In essence, Lewinsky says that the innovativeness of these sites comes from the way these sites allow us to do what we've always done - better, more times, in more places, and faster. The sites themselves are not doing anything new.

For anyone interested in history, I am reminded of the Norman conquests of England and the approach to innovation for castle siege strategies. A great many siege craft were constructed during this period including battering rams, scaling ladders, siege towers, and projectile throwing engines all designed for frontal assault. Perhaps the most interesting point here is that the best means of taking a castle has consistently proven to be mining, starvation and treachery.

Innovation online, and more specifically around web 2.0 can be beneficial if you are able to echo tried and tested off-line strategies that apply to your business. If you simply attempt to invent the newest "battering ram", you might find the cost difficult to justify and the result underwhelming. Most people make purchase decisions or read information that has been recommended by like-minded peers. There is a need for social networking to facilitate a dialogue. This dialogue can help organisations better understand and listen to what their customers need and want. This has almost nothing to do with the old website most of you know, which believe it or not, did have a purpose and did provide a benefit.

Although Lewinsky's blog is written in Hebrew, thankfully you can find some translations and observations by Ayelet Noff at her blogsite [www.Blonde2dot0.com](http://www.Blonde2dot0.com), which is well worth a read.

## The fastest path to Web 2.0 returns?

Software as a service (SAAS) may be one of the best kept secrets on the online world. You pay a reasonable fee and let the experts work with you to increase traffic, eyeballs, subscriptions, unique visitors and the like.

The rise of SAAS based options for reports, analytics, personalisation, recommendations and search is not a new thing, but what is relevant for today's digital innovator is that these things are becoming mature. This is a nice way of saying that they actually work.

You could say that SAAS as a technology has been proven as a viable model for increasing throughput and reducing cost. This can work exceptionally well under an operational expense budget that may be enhanced, replaced, postponed or rapidly deployed across multiple areas of the business with only a minor cost associated with change management, legal, regulatory, compliance, IT and any other bottlenecks that might be causing you concern.

SAAS security is a plus. No longer should you feel the privacy and security concerns that have omitted this option from past digital marketing agendas. To the contrary, with such a big focus on maintaining their own brand value, these services might now represent a more secure approach than your own IT guard can proffer.

Many of these technologies that were formally a "no brainer" for online retailers are becoming the same for companies with other aims and goals for their web properties. Let's assume you have decided to entertain a SAAS based approach. Possibly the greatest challenge with a SAAS option is the tendency for feelings of freedom from the shackles of IT encouraging the marketing strategists to try a different approach. This is a really great way of taking a viable opportunity and setting it up for failure.

Using a new technology or service is not necessarily going to improve on a flawed strategy. It is however likely to reduce the cost of implementing a proven strategy and provide fast feedback mechanisms.

Regardless of the approach, some proper research and observations or analysis is crucial.

So when considering where and if your organization fits with web 2.0 technology, listen and observe your customers off-line. It will give you're your best shot at understanding what works best online.

And if you decide web 2.0 technologies can help deliver to your brand and business strategy, you need a plan. Marry this with a good understanding of the timeline, processes, technology and the capabilities of your team. This will help you understand the likelihood of success in your market.