

Web 2.0 – a re-hash or a revolution?

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It's a broad term, mostly overused and has spawned such a multitude of 2.0's in every other genre of technology and business concepts that we have to hope that some are ironic or sarcastic. But do the changes most Web2.0 concepts encompass really justify such an increment - isn't this really only Web 1.1?

We could argue about what it all means, but overall it describes a more interactive and 'democratic' internet where anyone can easily create anything to share with anyone else. Those with something to get off their chest can blog, those who want to let others know what they're doing just now can twitter (twitter.com), and everyone can add their interpretation to a definition on a wiki. We can go further, sharing experiences, images and videos with everyone, or just our 'friends' via social networking sites.

Enthusiasts will say that with more input from a wider set of contributors, the content produced is more timely, 'real' or accurate. There is no doubt there is now more digitised data, with some structure we could also say it is useful information, but has it evolved into 'wisdom' from the crowd? Often it is difficult to tell fact from opinion.

Web 1.0 is often derided as organisations simply putting brochures or existing content online, but much of this content would have come from the rigorous publication and editing processes they were familiar with in the 'old times'. These processes may have had some inefficiency, bottlenecks and limitations, but structure and organised workflow can be useful and there is no reason to assume that the noise of the crowd is the only game in town. Far from it, frequently the contributions of the 'crowd' are simply the hubris of a vocal minority.

For a second generation, Web2.0 also seems a little slow with significant latency inherent in the processes. Content is uploaded and then contacts, friends or colleagues have to be notified or have to be sufficiently adept to be using a syndication service. Much of the ensuing collaboration is serial, with blog threads and social forums looking like the newsgroups of the

1990s and bulletin boards of an earlier generation. Hardly immediate or interactive, and there's always a risk that errors made at the start will propagate, and corrections made later on either get lost in the noise or can obviate the meaning of comments made before the correction.

Wikis and social networking sites give an element of more parallel interactivity, but since most of the interaction is delivered via regular looking web pages – great for familiarity - this ties those contributing to a PC screen and a desk or lap top. Evenings in front of the PC might be a fun social experience for some, but many find it limiting and look to get further digital social contact during the working day. As you would expect, this doesn't go down too well with many employers.

Content is hailed a king, but given the potential for anyone to produce anything in any digital media, whatever their artistic ability or quality, how will it be possible to sort wheat from chaff? Proponents of 2.0 would say this is self regulating with feedback, endorsements and recommendations.

Given the simplicity of artificially generating comment, validity is hard to gauge, so we may end up finding it even harder to sort healthy wheat from diseased with an overload of SPAMback, SPAMdorsements and SPAMendations. There are also content police – companies with a deliberate policy of searching for negative comments and getting them removed – and those who take a step further and Web2.0 becomes Marketing Propaganda 2.0.

Finding real value in the content and services may not matter in the early days of growth where success is measured by numbers of names in the address book, but as eBay has found with Skype, this value is ephemeral, and commercialisation requires the offer of services that customers will value, use and ultimately pay for.

So what will justify a 2.0 (or will it perhaps in reality become Web 3.0)?

We need a return to focus, bringing in context, relevance, and personalisation. That means reaching the individual with content, services and contacts of value at that moment in time and in a specific location.

It's the chance to plait the long tail of content into specific strands of relevance, and condense the social networks of 'friends' into the segmented social groups, clubs and teams we all really belong to, with direct access from the communications gadgets in the palms of our hands.

It does mean exerting some control over the process, so that it generates valid, accurate and timely results that have value to the individual.

Off the desktop and into the pocket, web2.0 should be user-centric and mobile, not simply user generated – that's only one step on the way.

About Quocirca

Quocirca is a primary research and analysis company specialising in the business impact of information technology and communications (ITC). With world-wide, native language reach, Quocirca provides in-depth insights into the views of buyers and influencers in large, mid-sized and small organisations. Its analyst team is made up of real-world practitioners with first hand experience of ITC delivery who continuously research and track the industry and its real usage in the markets.

Through researching perceptions, Quocirca uncovers the real hurdles to technology adoption – the personal and political aspects of an organisation's environment and the pressures of the need for demonstrable business value in any implementation. This capability to uncover and report back on the end-user perceptions in the market enables Quocirca to advise on the realities of technology adoption, not the promises.

Quocirca research is always pragmatic, business orientated and conducted in the context of the bigger picture. ITC has the ability to transform businesses and the processes that drive them, but often fails to do so. Quocirca's mission is to help organisations improve their success rate in process enablement through better levels of understanding and the adoption of the correct technologies at the correct time.

Quocirca has a pro-active primary research programme, regularly surveying users, purchasers and resellers of ITC products and services on emerging, evolving and maturing technologies. Over time, Quocirca has built a picture of long term investment trends, providing invaluable information for the whole of the ITC community.

Quocirca works with global and local providers of ITC products and services to help them deliver on the promise that ITC holds for business. Quocirca's clients include Oracle, Microsoft, IBM, Dell, T-Mobile, Vodafone, EMC, Symantec and Cisco, along with other large and medium sized vendors, service providers and more specialist firms.

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