XEBIDY

Technology Web 2.0

I was listening to a podcast about folk-sonomies so I wrote a post about it on my blog which someone read via an RSS feed and as a result updated the definition on a wiki; what the hell are you talking about!!! These are just some of the buzzwords surrounding the "new" Internet. In this article we look at some of the applications or services that are shaping Web 2.0.

Voice over IP

Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) is already a huge industry and one that is set to continue to grow exponentially. The leading service provider being Skype (recently acquired by eBay for x-billion) which allows completely free phone calls via the Internet between two Skype users, and reduced rate calls from computer to land lines or cellphones. Skype users can also have inbound static phone numbers and message services. The downside to Skype is that a user must install a small application on their computer to first be able to use it. The upside is that phone costs can be almost eliminated!

Blogging

In a very short period blogs have gone mainstream. The term web-log, or blog, was coined by Jorn Barger in 1997 and refers to a simple webpage consisting of brief paragraphs of opinion, information, personal diary entries, or links, called posts, arranged chronologically with the most recent first, in the style of an online journal. Most blogs also allow visitors to add a comment below a blog entry in what is often referred to as a 'weighted conversation' (between the primary author and a group of secondary comment contributors). One of the key differences between a blog and a personal web page is the regularity with which blogs are updated (many almost daily).

Part two of three

This article is the 2nd part of a 3 part series about Web 2.0. In part 1 we looked at What is Web 2.0 and built up a picture of your website as a tiny piece of a much larger experience with engaged customers connecting through technology. In part 3 we look at how some of the Web 2.0 technologies can be applied to the travel industry to create Travel 2.0.

In this paper we will introduce you to VoIP, blogging, RSS, wikis, multimedia sharing sites and for those still hanging in there we have a few extar geeky technologies summarised.

Posts are ordered by category, which also provides the primary source of navigation around a blog site linking other posts of similar nature. Unlike traditional websites navigation is usually situated in a sidebar (most often on the right hand side).

One key difference between blogs and other types of consumer generated media – such as discussion boards and forums – is the interconnected nature of blogs. As a result, blogs often reference each other – and both good and bad news travel quickly in the "blogosphere". Blogs can use Trackback (or pings) to notify another blog that they have referenced or commented on one of that blogs' posts.

As technology has become more sophisticated, bloggers have begun to incorporate multimedia into their blogs and there are now photo-blogs, video blogs (vlogs), and, increasingly, bloggers can upload material directly from their mobile phones (mob-blogging).

Search engines naturally push blog postings to the top of search results because the blogs are heavily linked to one another made up of individual posts that can be indexed as seperate files by search engines. As has been discussed in earlier articles - the more you cross reference with other sites, the more your site rises in search engine. Many blogs use RSS feeds to their distribute content.

RSS

Really Simple Syndication (RSS) is the next generation of email marketing, but without the irrelevant mes-

sages, inappropriate segmentation and spam - or from a marketers point of view gamble of delivery, blocking by firewalls or the risk that the emails go unopened. RSS feeds are published in XML which users setup to receive news, promotions, articles, updates etc., separate from the presentation, into any reader whether it be their email client such as Outlook, their Internet Browser or a specific RSS feed reader such as provided by Google, or any of the many aggregators. RSS readers pull together all of a users selected feeds, checks for updates, and keeps track of what has been read. RSS feeds are being adopted rapidly because of their ease of use, flexibility and the control it gives to the user. In effect RSS is "pull" marketing as the consumer determines the information they receive and the speed with which they consume it.

Blog Design

Many blogs are poorly designed. At the minimum company blogs should include details of all the authors. Make sure RSS feeds have clearly labelled links – like "subscribe to this blog". Even better; answer basic questions like, "What are feeds?" and "How do I subscribe?"

Users set the parameters of the information that is piped to them, whether it be the title, the introductory content or the whole content without the need to regularly visit the website or blog to see if it's updated. RSS is easily recognised on a website by the orange button with concentric quarter circles emanating from the bottom right hand corner. Finally, for the most part, feeds are anonymous. Unlike email newsletter subscriptions, RSS users don't have to be concerned about what happens to personally identifiable information when they subscribe to RSS feeds.

Today, RSS is all about making it easier for consumers to get content to the place they want it. RSS readers are being complemented by such technology as feed rinses and feed filter which sort feeds for increased topical relevancy and meta-feeds which aggregate feeds from numerous sources to minimise the saturation of information and again increase relevancy of information being delivered to the user.

Wikis

A wiki is a webpage or set of webpages that can be easily edited by anyone who is allowed access. The most well know example being Wikipedia, hich is an online collaborative encyclopedia. Wiki pages have an edit button displayed on the screen and the user can click on this to access an easy-to-use online editing tool to change or even delete the contents of the page in question. Simple, hypertext-style linking between pages is used to create

a navigable set of pages. Proponents of the power of wikis cite the ease of use of the tools, their extreme flexibility and the wisdom of the crowds as some of the many reasons why they are useful for group working. There are undeniably problems for systems that allow such a level of openness, and Wikipedia itself has suffered from problems of malicious editing and vandalism. However, there are also those who argue that acts of vandalism and mistakes are rectified quite quickly by the self-moderation processes at work. Alternatively, the possibilities for internal profession group work are endless by restricting access to registered users only. Two leading providers of wiki solutions are Jotspot and Socialtext. Business can use wikis to provide more relevant up-to-date information often empowering staff and customers to contribute the content.

RSS versus Atom

It is worth noting that technically RSS 2.0 is not simply a later version of RSS 1.0, but is a different format. In 2003 a new syndication system was proposed and developed under the name Atom in order to clear up some of the inconsistencies between RSS versions and problems of interoperability. There is considerable debate between proponents of RSS and Atom as to which is best for syndication. The two most important differences are, firstly, that the development of Atom is taking place through a formal and open standards process, and, secondly, that with Atom the actual content of the feed item's encoding (known as the payload container) is more clearly defined. Atom can also support the enclosure of more than one podcast file at a time and so multiple file formats of the same podcast can be syndicated at the same time. RSS however holds sway in market share.
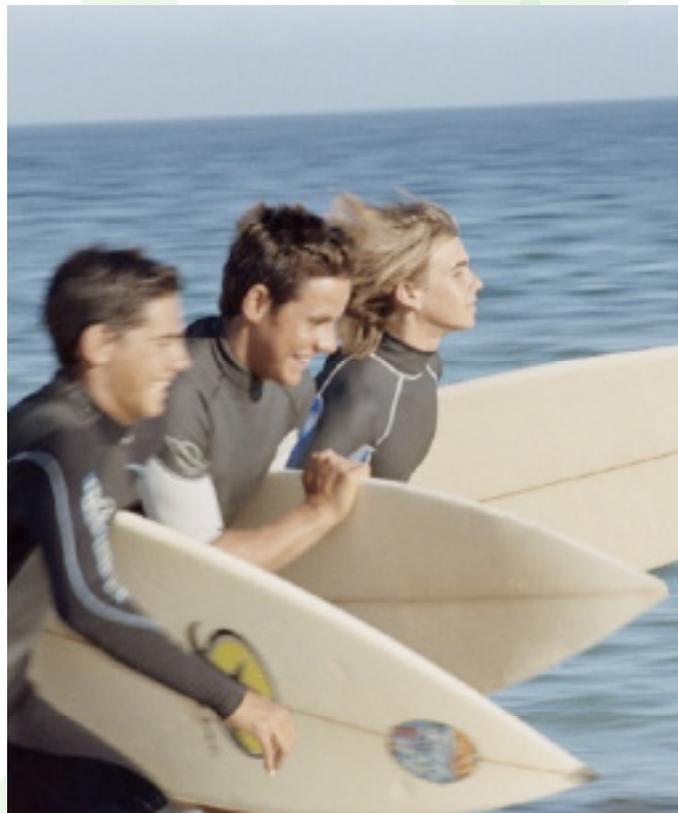
XSD specialise in search engine optimisation and Internet marketing in highly competitive industries where search engine rankings for keywords are highly competitive. The thoroughness of XSD practices and methodologies lead to higher sustainable results than many other competitor offerings.

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Multimedia

Multimedia sharing sites are probably the biggest area of growth of the Web 2.0 era. Well known examples include YouTube (video), Flickr (photographs) and Odeo (podcasts). Literally millions of people now participate in the sharing and exchange of these forms of media by producing their own podcasts, videos and photos. This development has only been made possible through the widespread adoption of high quality, but relatively low cost digital media technology such as digital video cameras. Services like flickr allow users to send photos from their camera phones and automatically load them into their blogs. The implication is that everything from celebrity sightings to accident reports can be quickly published online.

One of the biggest criticism of online multimedia sites is the emphasis on content over quality and structure. A lack of importance by producers and distributors to meta-data has created a sea of virtually unseen and untraced content.

Podcasts are in effect portable infomercials. Users can download audio and video files, usually in MP3 or MP4 format, directly to their portable medi devices, such as interminable iPod. Originally called audio blogs they have their roots in efforts to add audio streams to early blogs. Podcasts also comprise the broader application of audio and video streams through the Internet. While consumers have demonstrated an appetite for paying for content such as songs and movies, the shift to advertising models is inevitable. Content such as short ads, longer product demos, shows with product placement, and travel guides are all possible.

An Explosion of Technology

As we have seen, there are a number of technology services that are posited as representing the Web 2.0 concept in some way. In the last 12 months however, there has been an explosion of new ideas, applications and start-up companies working on ways to extend existing services. Some of these are likely to become more important than others, and some are certainly more likely to be more relevant to business than others. There is such a deluge of new services that it is often difficult to keep track of what's 'out there' or to make sense of what each provides.

To make sense of what new technologies are trying to achieve in the overall context of Web 2.0 as presented in our previous article What is Web 2.0? categorise the new services broadly in terms of what they attempt to do, efor example, aggregate user data, construct a social network etc. User generated content and communication is fundamentally changing the rules of business. Technology and social changes are creating a potent mix of forces that will transform the way all businesses operate, create products, and relate to customers. Web 2.0 encompasses fast growing peer to peer services like blogging, RSS, file sharing, open source software, podcasting, search engines, and user generated content.

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More Geeky Stuff

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Asynchronous Javascript and XML (Ajax)

Ajax is a web development technique used to create rich experiences with Javascript and XML, and even other technologies such as Flash. AJAX can simplify features like product zoom and enlargement, or shopping cart editing. The principle advantage is that Ajax interfaces batch information submitted by the user and post it to the server at intervals, as opposed to making a round trip to the server each time the user submits data; meaning minimal clicks and less annoying page refreshes. DHTML is a similar technology to Ajax.

Rich Internet Applications (RIAs)

RIAs are usually the domain of Ajax developments and they offer innovative ways to streamline complex functionality on the web. RIAs often resemble desktop applications in their complexity and flexibility; as well as the physical richness of the user experience.

Bit Torrent

Intelligent delivery systems such as BitTorrent for downloading are becoming essential in the armory of any new web development as more rich content like movies, TV shows or interactive catalogues find their way online and developers are tasked with making that content accessible to consumers. BitTorrent breaks big files into smaller pieces which are then shared for distribution across multiple users. The ability to seamlessly view enormous files via the Internet has tremendous implications for tools such as product demonstrations, direct response videos and infomercials, and product placement.

Open APIs and Mash-ups

Open Application Programming Interface (APIs) are in essence how my software can get to your data or vice versa. Google Maps is the most obvious example where Google makes available their mapping data to any website, which can then combine it with it's own data to generate new and unique user experiences - mash-ups as they are called. Releasing your data to users could be like opening the door to a thousand new clients or agents. Users will build their own experiences using your data to achieve their desired goals.