



Can Twine tie its future together? | The Xpragmatic View



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 by [Marc Buyens \(@mbuyens\)](#), Xpragma
marc.buyens@xpragma.com
 url: <http://www.xpragma.com/view108.php>

Since October 20, Twine is no longer in private beta. However, many question whether there is a real future for Twine. The promise of the semantic web is not really there and the product has been criticised for its confusing interface and poor performance. Can Twine tie its future together?

Twine 1.0 launched



October 20, 2008, Radar Networks released the 1.0 public release of Twine. Compared to the initial announcement of the product, more or less a year ago, media attention was rather limited and the few articles that popped up, like in [ReadWriteWeb](#), were rather sceptical. Somehow, Twine did not live up to the expectations.

Also on Twine's own Feedback forum, comments during the past months of the private beta were not always very pleasing. A cluttered and confusing interface and slow response times were some of the most common complaints. To some extent, we have to agree.

So, is this another Chronicle of a Death Foretold?

Too many promises

We might be wrong, but we do not think that the main problems of Twine are in its interface or performance. Both can do better, but the main problem for Twine is that it carries too many promises. It can be used as a bookmarking service, it enables information discovery and organisation, but it can also be viewed as a discussion forum or a social network. Not to forget the semantic stuff on top of that. As a result, it means different things to different people and everyone has his/her own idea of what Twine should look like.

The problem with such positioning is that for each of these individual "features", Twine will rarely be the better solution. There will always be a more focused (but more limited) solution that has the better interface, performance or functionality for that specific feature.

In addition, Twine's perceived differentiator of being one of the first so-called Web 3.0 solutions has been largely oversold. Although some of the basic ideas are OK, the level of functionality and the added value of the current implementation are still too limited to make it a major selling point.

So, where is then the real value that Twine brings?

Twine as the super knowledge aggregator

Well, we think that Twine's main value proposition (at least, today) is its unique combination of all these different "features" creating a platform for knowledge creation, sharing and aggregation that is unmatched by any other solution we are aware of.

Of course, this also sounds complex and confusing and therefore, we might need simplifying our perception of Twine and just look at it as being some kind of "super blogging platform".

Agreed, this is less sexy than Web 3.0 and very likely, is not the type of message the marketing boys and girls at Twine want to give, but in essence, that's what it is. At least, it is something people will understand and therefore,...

Twines are blogs

Indeed, what's the difference?

OK, items in a twine can be notes, documents, bookmarks, audio and video media, etc. but where's the difference with a blog post? Every item added to a twine carries a value perception of the person who added the item (although the actual content might not be written by that person). Every item can be commented upon. All items are time stamped, archived, tagged, etc. Every twine has an RSS feed. Where's the difference?

Of course, there are several interface differences compared to blogs running on platforms such as WordPress, but that's not the main issue. The important thing is the fact that a twine is, by definition, a "shared" environment. Although twines can be kept private or can be set up for allowing only the owner to add content, their main strength is in openness, in creating an open discussion forum about a specific topic. An open forum that attracts both content and opinion from multiple sources, including external blogs.

Agreed. This is not the way most people are using Twine today. Apart from a few specific twines where discussion is the main theme, most of the twines remain focused on simple item collection, hence information discovery.

However, gradually, people will understand that the main value proposition of Twine is not the information discovery and collection, but the possibility for an exchange of opinions and ideas about this collected information.

Today, we already see the first members adding their own blog content to specific twines, making this content available for review and discussion, just as it would be on their personal blogs. Once Twine will allow for mechanisms to feed-in RSS streams into Twine, we will likely see much more of this.

Current commenting level is still low. With today's 20.000 twines and only some 50.000 "active" (at least one visit per month) users, attention is likely thinly spread.

Nevertheless, when looking at Twine from this perspective, things look quite a bit more interesting. Current weaknesses, such as the interface, are no longer a major issue. People don't use WordPress to read blogs; they use something like FeedDemon or Google Reader. The same can be done with Twine.

We also, we monitor all the twines we subscribe to via FeedDemon, not via our so-called "Interest feed" on Twine. Of course, we hope for a better, more streamlined interface within Twine. However, as long as there are other feeds, outside Twine, that we want to monitor, there is little reason for abandoning FeedDemon.

No, let Twine be the aggregator, the database. Let it allow for cross-referencing, content sharing and discussion, let it tag, let it recommend and let Radar Networks focus on improving these capabilities. When done well, this can grow into an enormous community of interests that is unmatched by any other solution.

Not Web 3.0 yet, but perhaps Web 2.0 on steroids.


Whether this will be enough to attract the masses to Twine and to create an environment where monetisation is more straightforward than in other social network environments is another question. Although, of course, this is not really one of our primary concerns.

About the author



Marc Buyens is analyst, management consultant and owner of Xpragma. Marc started Xpragma in 1999 after a 20+ years career in the IT sector. Today, he provides advice, training and mentoring services focusing on the intersection of technological evolution, organisational change and business strategy: a messy world of unfulfilled promises.

 <http://www.facebook.com/marcb254>


 <http://www.linkedin.com/in/marcbuyens>


 <http://www.twitter.com/mbuyens>

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Xpragma bvba - Mechelsesteenweg 254 - 2820 Bonheiden - Belgium

Tel. +32-(0)15-340 845 - info@xpragma.com - www.xpragma.com

 RSS feed: <http://www.xpragma.com/english/rss/xpven.xml>

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