



The ant society - dawn | The Xpragmatic View



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Over the past years, the Internet has found a new élan, generally coined as Web 2.0. Wikis, blogs, social networks, collaboration tools... They all are gradually becoming part of our daily life. Still, very few of these initiatives have managed to develop a solid business model or at least, one that not heavily relies on advertising. Therefore, the risk remains that we are looking at the build up of the next Internet bubble. Nevertheless, the enthusiasm is enormous. But is there also reason to worry?

The following is the first of what should become a small series of articles on the subject of Web 2.0.

To be clear, these articles will not try to give a complete or in-depth overview or evaluation of all available Web 2.0 technology, initiatives or business models. They will not attempt to give a clear definition of what Web 2.0 is or isn't. There will no scorecards or rankings of companies' Web 2.0ness.

Instead, we will simply focus on some of the underlying concepts, trying to identify the drivers that make the current success of the Web 2.0 wave, but also some of the potential drawbacks of this evolution.

Social networks and Web 2.0

Since a couple of months, I am exploring the wonderful world of so-called social networks, be it on a very limited scale.

According to [Wikipedia](#), "a social network is a social structure made of nodes which are generally individuals or organisations. On the Internet, the creation of such structures is facilitated by so-called social software that enables people to rendezvous, connect or collaborate through computer-mediated communication, forming online communities."

I think I understand the emotional, intellectual and business value of networking, but I am still not convinced that the current social networks on the Internet deliver the value they claim to deliver. At least, not for me. Still, participating in such network is an interesting experience and a way to get in touch with other, sometimes controversial, opinions and subjects.

In this case, it made me fully aware of the Web 2.0 hype.

Indeed, while reading some of the articles and postings in the forums, some of this Web 2.0 stuff seemed much more ubiquitous and important than I had anticipated.

Like most of us, I had read about Web 2.0 and even tested some of the products or initiatives, but in general, I had paid little attention to it. Most of it seemed rather pointless and gave me the kind of feeling expressed by [Guy Kawasaki](#) in his definition of a blogger: "Someone with nothing to say writing for someone with nothing to do."

Of course, very likely there is a high correlation between the group of people who make use of social networks on the Internet and the group of people who are interested in the latest and

greatest developments on the web.

Therefore, the opinions expressed in such social network might not be fully representative for the overall acceptance and success of Web 2.0 initiatives. This said, with figures such as 37 million members on [MySpace.com](#) (bought by Rupert Murdoch for \$580 million and today more or less the #1 site on the Internet) and 47 million blogs indexed at [Technorati](#), this is no longer something marginal.

Web how much?

As said, it is not our ambition to give here the ultimate definition of Web 2.0.

In general, it refers to a wide variety of Internet-based initiatives that have emerged after the well-known meltdown and that do things "differently". This different behaviour is one of the aspects that we will explore more in detail in one of the following articles.

In the mean time, for the interested reader, we want to refer to the excellent article, written by Tim O'Reilly, that you can find [here](#).

While many of the characteristics of Web 2.0 initiatives seem very innovative, very few of the underlying concepts are really new. Most of it builds on concepts that were available to us already in the early days of the Internet. Of course, some of this has been enabled by more recent technology that was not available in these early days.

So, if these concepts were available earlier on, why weren't they used? What then makes Web 2.0 different? Why can it succeed where other business models have failed?


To be continued...

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.


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