

The ant society - conception



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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. So, what then makes Web 2.0 different?

As we said in our previous [article](#), Web 2.0 refers to a wide variety of Internet-based initiatives that have emerged after the Web 1.0 meltdown and do things somewhat "differently". How different?

Well, in order to answer this question, we first have to define what exactly a Web 2.0 initiative is. Unfortunately, this is not the easiest thing to do. There are so many different types of solutions that all carry the label "Web 2.0" that it is impossible to give an all encompassing definition.

For the interested reader, we can suggest visiting Bob Stumpel's blog "[Everything 2.0](#)", where he keeps the "complete" list of all Web 2.0 initiatives and solutions on this planet. As Bob puts it: *"Any sign of: collective intelligence / wisdom of crowds, collaboration / sharing, reviewing / ranking / rating, community / social software, enabling / empowering users is good enough for a listing"*.

At our latest count, there were 52 different categories and for the purposes of this little series, that is a bit too much. So, we will simplify things a bit and regroup the Web 2.0 phenomenon into a couple of main groups of initiatives that have some "similar" characteristics.

Communities

In this article, we will start with the first and also the largest group of Web 2.0 initiatives, which we call the communities group. Basically, this group encompasses the solutions for social networks and a large group of "sharing" initiatives (e.g. sharing of photos, but also sharing of opinions). The two together are sometimes referred to as "social software" or "collaborative software".

So, what are the essential characteristics of these types of Web 2.0 initiatives?

Well, we think there are four characteristics that make these initiatives somewhat "different":

Participation platform

First, the basis for nearly all these Web 2.0 initiatives is a participation platform.

(We prefer using the expression "participation" instead of the more often-used expression "collaboration", because the latter assumes some form of mutually agreed common goal. While most Web 2.0 initiatives do have a loosely defined common goal, the user does not have to agree on this and the reason for participation will vary.)

The Web 2.0 applications in this group do not deliver a well-defined product or experience. They simply provide an application environment allowing the user to participate and this participation will create some form of product or experience. Without participation, the application is an empty shell.

Experience creation

While Web 2.0 initiatives can support the sale of physical products, their real deliverable is always virtual, sometimes informational and nearly always emotional.

Web 2.0 initiatives create value for the participant since they provide some form of desirable "user experience".

This might seem obvious, but it is important to understand this reality. While many initiatives seem to deliver some kind of non-emotional service, the participation in the initiative often is a very emotional thing.

For many participants, aspects of self-expression, recognition, social contact, etc. will be much more important than the real service that is delivered. Moreover, such participants are often the real drivers for the success or the failure of the initiative.

Affected

Another basic principle of these initiatives is the fact that the participation of a given user will affect (hopefully improve) the participation experience of the other users.

When you visit a regular website and leave again, the visiting experience of later visitors will not be affected. While visiting a Web 2.0 website, one of the prime objectives is to leave "something" behind by adding content that will make the visiting experience for the other visitors "different", hopefully better.

Leveraged

A final characteristic for these types of Web 2.0 initiatives is the fact that quality and quantity go hand-in-hand. More participants result in more content, more opinions, more categories, more emotional value... Not reaching a certain critical mass soon enough is likely to initiate the disintegration process.

Web 2.0 versus Web 1.0

How does this compare to the web before the bubble? Well, the answer is simple: it does not compare. These are two different worlds aiming at completely different things.

Before the bubble, the web was intended to be the low-cost sales and marketing channel to bring traditional products to the masses. Technology development was focused on supporting and leveraging this channel. The enterprise owned the Internet.

With today's Web 2.0, it is quite the opposite. No traditional companies, no product to be seen. The Internet as a platform for self-expression, self-development and social contact. For fun. For free.

However, as the saying goes, "There ain't no such thing as a free lunch".

To be continued...

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