

The ant society - infection



The Xpragmatic View #77
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In the [previous article](#) of this series, we discussed a first group of Web 2.0 initiatives: the Communities. This group included things such as social networks, collaborative initiatives, sharing communities, etc. The present article will cover the subject of weblogs or blogs. Show me your blog and I'll tell you who you are!

Blogs and blogging

According to the Wikipedia definition, "A weblog, which is usually shortened to blog, is a type of website where entries are made (such as in a journal or diary), displayed in a reverse chronological order."

In general, blogs are considered being an essential part of the Web 2.0 phenomenon, although blogs do not share the same characteristics as the initiatives in the Communities group. Nevertheless, if you want to get a better understanding of what Web 2.0 is or might be, you better have a closer look at blogs.

One of the first things that differentiates blogs from the initiatives in our previous Web 2.0 category is the fact that all blogs are based upon a common piece of technology called RSS.

RSS

In general, RSS is seen as a piece of technology, but in reality, it is just a series of standards and conventions.

The essential element of RSS is the RSS feed, which is nothing more than an XML-formatted web page containing references to a series of web pages or pieces of web content. Web owners, publishers and news agencies who want to inform the world about new content being available on their website update the RSS feed adding the references to this latest content.

Users or readers can then "subscribe" to such RSS feed, which means that they will store the web address of the RSS feed in a feed-aware browser (e.g. [Firefox](#)), a dedicated web application (e.g. [NewsGator](#)) or a desktop program (e.g. [Feedreader](#)).

Once this is done, the browser, the web application or the desktop program will at regular intervals access the RSS feed to verify whether any references to new content are present. In that case, the user will be informed about the changes via the user interface of these programs. In general, this is done by presenting a link with the title of the new article(s) and a short summary. The user can then access the full content on the website by clicking on this link. The exact behaviour will depend upon the specific program that is used and the user settings.

As we already mentioned in a [previous article](#), the major advantage of this approach is the fact that there is no longer the need to revisit websites checking for updates, neither is there the need to share personal information such as your e-mail address in order to subscribe to the newsletter of such website. The use of and access to the RSS feed is completely anonymous.

Of course, you will only be informed about the changes that are explicitly mentioned in the RSS feed.

All blogs rely on this same RSS mechanism to inform the world about new content (postings) being available. However, not all feeds are blogs...

Blogs versus RSS feeds

As you know, since a couple of months, we have added an RSS feed for The Xpragmatic View. If you want to see the content of the RSS feed, you can see it [here](#).

Adding an RSS feed to an existing website is easy. It is just another page, be it somewhat differently formatted. However, this does not make it a blog. The Xpragmatic View is a column on this website, accessible via an RSS feed, but it is not a blog.

So, what is a blog?

Well, as mentioned above, blogs are a type of website where entries are made, such as in a journal or diary. This already suggests that the update frequency of blogs is somewhat higher than our own more or less monthly update. In addition, there are some other aspects that differentiate blogs from regular feeds, but all of these are rather "behavioural" things. From a technical point of view, there is no difference.

Of course, above definition also highlights one of the initial challenges for the blogger: you have to know how to make a website.

Fortunately, over the past years, several solutions became available that allowed people to develop their own blog, without the need for any serious HTML or CSS knowledge. Examples of such solutions are [Blogger](#) and [TypePad](#), which are both hosted solutions, and [MovableType](#) and [WordPress](#), which are products you install on your own server or PC.

Using this type of solutions, you can just focus on producing content. You combine this content with some templates that will determine the look-and-feel of your blog and off you go! Piece of cake.

The availability of this type of tools has been the basis for an explosion of the number of blogs and bloggers. Suddenly, anyone could have his/her presence on the Web. And they did and created what is commonly known today as the "Blogosphere", the ever-growing community of bloggers and blogsites sprawling all over the Internet.

Blogs are viral

Now, let us compare the characteristics of blogs with those of our previous group of Web 2.0 initiatives, the Communities.

First, blogs are not really built on top of a participation platform. Of course, you might call solutions such as Blogger and WordPress some form of participation platform, but it still is quite different. In essence, blogs are first of all an individual thing. They are the most individual expression of your most individual emotion.

Doing so, blogs certainly have in common the second characteristic of Web 2.0 community initiatives: blogs are very "user experience driven". More than everything else, blogging is a matter of self-expression, identity creation, recognition, social contact and emotion.

And also the other two characteristics are present: "affected" and "leveraged", be it in a somewhat different way.

As we said, blogs are a very individual thing, the result of the work and the inspiration of a single individual. However, the blog "culture" is a very social one that encourages reader feedback (comments), that promotes the work of other individuals by crosslinking to their blogs and that makes the own life somewhat easier by allowing for new posts to be created that are little more than a reference to other bloggers' content.

Doing so, the blogosphere becomes one large network of blogs that crosslink to each other, creating some kind of Web 2.0 super-community initiative. As a result, a posting that appears in one of the more "influential" blogs will spread over the Internet at warp speed. As a virus. As a disease. A dream for marketing people.

To be continued...

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