



The ant society - swarm | The Xpragmatic View



The Xpragmatic View #78
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In the present Xpragmatic View, we briefly discuss our last category of Web 2.0 initiatives, the aggregators and the mashups. In addition, we draw some first conclusions regarding the essence of successful 2.0 initiatives.

Aggregators and mashups

According to [Wikipedia](#), "an aggregator or news aggregator is client software that uses a web feed to retrieve syndicated web content such as weblogs, podcasts, vlogs, and mainstream mass media websites, or in the case of a search aggregator, a customized set of search results." As previously discussed, aggregators are an essential component of the blogging phenomenon.

As for the so-called mashups, Wikipedia tells us that "a mashup is a website or Web 2.0 application that uses content from more than one source to create a completely new service."

To some extent, aggregators can be considered as being some kind of subcategory of mashups. The main difference is that aggregators will typically combine content of the same type, whereas mashups will combine content of fundamentally different types.

A typical example of a mashup is a website that provides travel information about a specific country and links into the country-related photos, videos and maps that are stored on websites such as [Flickr](#), [Youtube](#) and [Google Earth](#). Doing so, the mashup site enriches the user experience for its visitors without having the need of collecting and managing this type of content itself.

One of the interesting things about such approach is the fact that the links to this external content are dynamic. The selection of the returned photos, videos, etc. will be based upon the tagging that is done by the users of these other sites while categorising the content. However, the mashup site itself has no control over this tagging and therefore, has no full control over the returned content.

Aggregators and mashups are generally seen as separate categories of Web 2.0 applications, but we view them more as forms of technology that allow for certain types of Web 2.0 approaches.

Indeed, neither aggregators nor mashups by themselves have the basic characteristics of what makes a Web 2.0 initiative successful or not.

So, what are these characteristics?

Web 2.0 fundamentals

Given the current Web 2.0 hype and the financial successes of a number of players, this is of course the billion \$ question everyone wants an answer to.

What is needed to transform your website into a successful Web 2.0 initiative?

Well, the answer to this is very straightforward. Unfortunately, knowing the answer is still no guarantee for your Web 2.0 success.

In essence, a successful Web 2.0 solution needs only two things:

- It must allow for user provided and user controlled content.
- It must provide functionality allowing the creation of an individual "context" for each participant that results in "stickiness" (read: the act of using the solution must create an increasing value for the individual and for the user community as a whole, making all of them wanting to continue using the solution, be it often in very different ways).

The first requirement is rather straightforward. You can build this or even buy it. The second requirement is the hard one. The majority of today's so-called Web 2.0 solutions do address the first requirement but fail to address the second one adequately. There is no magic solution to this (and certainly not a technological one).

Indeed, the very essence of Web 2.0 is that it has little to do with technology and a lot with day-to-day human behaviour. Correctly assessing this and exploiting this to its full extent is a major challenge.

Therefore, for everyone who wants to explore this in more detail, I highly recommend reading both "The Tipping Point" of Malcolm Gladwell and "The Wisdom of Crowds" of James Surowiecki.

Both books are non-technical and very readable. They do not discuss the subject of Web 2.0 in any detail. Instead, they extensively discuss some of the social and psychological aspects that drive or determine today's Web 2.0-ish behaviour.

As with all business books, they are both 150 pages too long and they discuss too many aspects of the main theme in not always in the most appropriate way. In addition, there are several cases where we do not agree with the statements that are made.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding these shortcomings, these two books remain "must reads" for anyone who tries to understand the Web 2.0 phenomenon. Any businessperson who wants to assess the usefulness of a Web 2.0-style initiative for his own organisation must truly understand the concepts that are discussed in these books.

And that will also be the subject of our next View: Show me the money!

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.



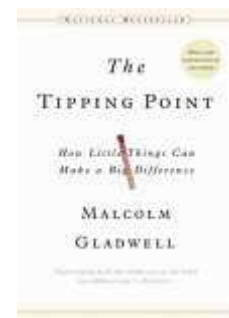
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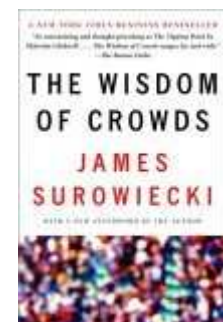
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[The Tipping Point
How Little Things Can
Make a Big Difference
Malcolm Gladwell](#)



[The Wisdom of Crowds
Why the many are smarter
than the few
James Surowiecki](#)

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