



## Who owns your opinion? | The Xpragmatic View



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Recently, there was some upheaval in the blogosphere on the subject of ownership of comments on postings. One step further towards Copyright 2.0?

### Everything for free

"Free" is the mantra of the Internet economy and more specifically, of Web 2.0. Today, nearly every type of information or service is available for free on the Internet. Of course, quality will vary and often, the free offering will be limited to some basic functionality. Still, you can do and find quite a bit for free and the offering continues to grow.

Now, "free" is an interesting concept, especially when you don't own anything. However, once you become an owner, your view on "free" is likely to change. The same now occurs in the blogosphere.

### Who owns the comments?

One of the more interesting things of a blog is the comments section. We think they are extremely boring. The blogosphere thinks they are great.

Today, all blogging platforms provide ample functionality allowing visitors to leave a reaction to the posted article. Although this often results in a messy list of replies and introduces other problems such as spam comments, most bloggers are big fans of the use of comments.

Of course, providing an easy way to react is likely to stimulate interaction and therefore, will improve the completeness and the value of the posting.

However, the main reason why bloggers are such big fans of comments has to do with crosslinking.

Indeed, comments are also a flexible way to say something about yourself, to mention your own website, to reference a posting you wrote, etc. So, you basically leave a link to your own site. Basic blogosphere courtesy then requires that you provide a reciprocal link, which is the basis for crosslinking.

Crosslinking is important since search engines, such as Google, use the number of incoming links as an indication for the relevancy, hence the importance of a webpage. As a result, crosslinking on blogs has become a national sport.

In essence, the blogosphere is about free content. Each blogger writes about his/hers own subject of interest and this content can be freely accessed and even copied, as long as the author gets the credit for the content.

However, while this content might be free, not all blogs are without any commercial ambition. Not accidentally, "How to make money with your blog" is one of the more popular subjects in

the blogosphere.

As we all know, to make this money, there are not a thousand options. Nearly all of them build on the theme of advertising and for advertising, it all is a matter of quantity. Huge quantities of visitors to your blog.

## Enter the aggregators

Now, until recently, the comments section was an undividable part of your blog and therefore, one of the things that increased the number of visitors to your blog.

Unfortunately, a new generation of solutions has become available that are disturbing this cosy environment. Platforms such as [Twitter](#), [FriendFeed](#) and [Shyft](#) allow for the creation of communities whereby members can share and exchange their opinions on interesting things, including the RSS feeds of blogs.

In essence, these are forums that aggregate the content of various sources of information, but the discussion remains contained within the platform. On such platform, the most interesting discussion on a given posting might occur, but it will not be visible in the comments section of the blog and therefore, there is no guarantee that this will lead to additional visits to the blog of the author.

## Who owns your opinion?

In this, we see an interesting business model developing. What item has the most value? The original posting or the subsequent discussion?

It is all irrelevant. The aggregator completely relies on free content being created. The basic input source is the free content published on blogs. The customers are the members of the platform who come in to follow their items of interest and to give their opinion, again for free. While doing so, they are creating a viral environment that is a solid basis for yes, advertising revenue.

Revenues for free.

Wasn't there someone who once said the end-user was in control?


In control of what?


## 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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