



Web Revolution in Users' Hands

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By the end of 2007, Netcraft says that there will be over 135 million websites, while Technorati calculates that there are currently 72 million blogs in existence. Currently, over one billion people use the Internet, according to the World Internet Usage Statistics. Much of this growth is due to the “next-generation Internet” or Web 2.0.

But what exactly is Web 2.0? While there is no clear definition, we could describe it as the part of the World Wide Web based on one or more of the following seven technologies: RSS (Really Simple Syndication), wikis, blogs, social networks, peer-to-peer networks, group intelligence and mashups.

While the introduction of these technologies has been gradual, it could be said that it was when RSS and the online encyclopedia Wikipedia surfaced in 2001 that the use of Web 2.0 actually took off. RSS is a technology enabling the syndication of content from web pages, which means the simultaneous publishing of content on different media through the use of an original source. One example of how this technology has been successful is the RSS-based Digg. The company founded in 2004, along with its Spanish counterpart Menéame, owns the premier website for those looking to keep up to date with web content catalogued by other users. And then there is Wikipedia, the product millions of users' contributions, which now has more than eight million articles in over 250 languages.

Meanwhile, the portal Blogger.com (for creating personal blogs), the University of Minnesota and the Harvard Law School have already developed university blog projects to support professors and students, providing constant feedback between the two sides.

Likewise, MySpace and Facebook are currently the most important social networking sites, hoarding 57 and 25 millions of users, respectively. The success of each lies in the plethora of applications being offered to their online communities: Web profiles, blogs, [instant messaging](#), email, music downloads, photo galleries, events, groups, chats and forums. Altogether, it creates a giant online community where users can share their lives.

The peer-to-peer network BitTorrent, since its debut in 2001, has become a benchmark site for exchanging and downloading all kinds of files, from music to videos and games.

YouTube, created in February 2005, was quickly taken to by Internet users as a preferred site for showing and sharing videos. Every day, around 65,000 new ones are posted. Its social triumph sparked such an interest among the competition that Google finally decided to purchase it in October 2006 for over \$1.6 billion.

These new applications go hand in hand with new user licenses, such as those of Creative Commons, which aim to be in harmony with the interests of both content creators and users alike. The so-called free or copyleft licenses have provided a more lax alternative in terms of the excessive protection on Internet content, with the goal being to promote open and cost-free access. Using a clear nomenclature based on a series of icons, it regulates the usage and distribution of content. This lets each copyright holder decide the manner and conditions by which their content shall be used.

And the fact is that this “revolution” comes largely from the users who, being anxious to make themselves heard through all of these online applications, play an active role on the Web. Companies are aware of this and see these technologies as a chance to establish constant interconnectivity along with more direct ties for collaborations between themselves and the users. For this reason, organizations believe more and more in achieving a long-term competitive advantage by investing in these technologies.

According to McKinsey & Co, the reason why companies and business leaders have banked on this new wave of technologies is that these innovations provide new ways of doing business, by optimizing some of the processes thanks to their flexibility and easy implementation. For instance, many companies use the so-called “corporate blogs” since they greatly increase the feedback companies have with their customers or other business partners, as well as facilitating internal communication. Nevertheless, these new channels of collaboration between different users, and the competitive advantage they bring, are still in the experimentation phase.

It is still too early to assess the benefits being generated by Web 2.0 and, even more so, whether these will hold up consistently over time. What is clear, however, is the changing conception of the Internet and the infinite possibilities it offers: increasingly personalized systems that facilitate browsing and Web searches and make users’ lives easier, more convenient and entertaining.

Whatever the case may be, the keys to the next step in this revolution are in the hands of the users and how they utilize the tools available to them.