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CHAPTER 3

What is Web 2.0?

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*I*n 2005 and 2006 the media was full of talk about Web 2.0 in different media. To a large extent, this interest was justified, given the boom in social networking sites and the billion-dollar sums being paid for some of the most emblematic websites.

But **do you know what Web 2.0 actually is?**

If you don't, try answering these questions:

Have you ever used [Google Maps](#)?

Have you ever watched a video on [YouTube](#)?

Do you have your own profile on [MySpace](#)?

Have you ever walked through the streets of [Second Life](#)?

If you have, then you've experienced Web 2.0, even if you wouldn't know how to define it.

Try Googling "Web 2.0" and you'll get around three hundred million hits. As is so often the case with any new concept appears, opinions are divided. While Web 2.0 has sparked interest among many users and programmers around the world, others are not only sceptical about the new development—they're downright irritated by it! They say that it's nothing more than advertising hype to try to sell existing services under new names.

Whether it's a fad or not, the term Web 2.0 (coined by Dale Dougherty of O'Reilly Media in 2003) obviously means something to everyone in the Internet world: All over the Internet, thousands of **blogs**, **wikis** and websites are either enthusing about Web 2.0 or putting it down.

But [what is Web 2.0?](#) The term itself can be misleading, so let's start by looking at what it's not. Despite appearances, Web 2.0 is not a new version of the Web, or a communications protocol, or even a new programming language. It's not even something that's uniquely associated with the Internet.

Web 2.0 is really a new way of doing things so it's hardly surprising that, in the technological arena, the basic standards on which Web 2.0 applications and



Wiki

A **wiki** is a web-page written in hypertext that can be freely visited and edited. This means that different people can post their own contributions to the same online document.



Blog

A **blog** is a regularly updated website, with a chronological set of texts or articles by one or more authors.

services are based already existed long before the concept was given a name. Technologies that were once inaccessible to the majority of users are now far easier to use, more developed and free and **the result is a massive increase in the number of social networking sites with active participation**. The website has ceased to be a goal in itself –the ultimate aim of the interaction with the user– to become a platform that enables inter-relation between users, active members of a community sharing a common interest or need. The result is that the users play an active role: they not only have access to information, they also **contribute content and knowledge**.

The result has been a decentralisation of the Internet in which each client is, at the same time, a server (i.e. a content creator). The more people access the service, the greater the value for other users (**this is called the network effect**).

Although the term “user” is often used, probably due to an association of Web 2.0 with the Internet, the Web 2.0 philosophy is not limited to a single platform and it might be more accurate to talk about “active clients”.

We could therefore define Web 2.0 using [three principles](#):

- Community: the user provides contents, interacts with other users, creates knowledge networks, etc.
- Technology: higher bandwidth allows data to be transferred at formerly unimaginable speeds. Instead of software packages we now have Web services. Our terminal can be both a client and server at the same time, anywhere in the world.
- Modular architecture: favours faster and cheaper creation of complex applications.

The end-of-the-century web was a “companies web”: a set of contents arranged in such a way that the greatest possible number of eyes could gather around it, see the advertising posted on it and with a bit of luck, reach into their wallets for their credit cards. The aim of the Web was largely to be a shopping mall, with advertisements, shop windows and shops, a place where people went to sell advertising and perform commercial transactions.

Ultimately, companies were merely reproducing familiar models from other environments: the Web was viewed as being just another channel. Sites were entirely one-way, receiving no type of feedback whatsoever from “spectators” beyond the “Add to my trolley” button.

Basically, in Web 1.0, users were the recipients of the technology, the contents and business, whereas in Web 2.0 they are also involved in developing the technology (open-source software), **producing contents** (blogosphere) and **getting involved in business** (Google AdSense).

The table below compares some of the different features of Web 1.0 and Web 2.0:

Web 1.0	Web 2.0
Personal pages	Blogs
Speculation with domain names	Optimisation in search engines
Pages viewed	Cost per click.
Informing	Participating, sharing
Content management systems	Wikis
Directories (taxonomy)	Tagging (folksonomy)
Loyalty	Syndication
Advertising with banners and pop-ups	Contextual advertising

Table 1. Differences between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0.
 Source: Drawn from conclusions within the Future Trends Forum.

Should we therefore see Web 2.0 as a revolution? As we have said, the technologies on which Web 2.0 is based were already around for some time before, so technologically speaking, it would be more accurate to talk about a development. In social terms, though, it is a revolution: Web 2.0 services allow users to interact and enable information to be obtained from a group, rather than a single poster, thus **encouraging the development of collective intelligence**.

These changes have important implications for marketing and advertising models, and present numerous new business opportunities, as we shall see.

To sum up, Web 2.0 is a new philosophy which has arisen as a result of the developments in technology (bandwidth and modular architecture) **making it possible for users not only to access information but to create contents and add value**. The primary maxim is "if it isn't shared it's lost": the more users there are contributing content, the greater the perceived value of the service.



Syndication

Syndication is when the original issuer of information or entertainment licences a third party to "rebroadcast" it.



Contextual advertising

Contextual advertising is when advertisements are selected and published by automatic systems, depending on the content users access.