



WEB 2.0 AND THE USER EXPERIENCE



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WEB 2.0 DEFINED

Web 2.0 is a term used to describe the second generation of the Web. It's mainly comprised of a group of technologies that include AJAX, Flash, Podcasts, RSS, Social Networking, Folksonomies, Blogs, Wikis, and Mashups.

THE WEB 2.0 HYPE

Seven years ago, online marketers were on a major Flash kick. Everyone wanted Flash because it was "cool" and "the next best thing." What they soon realized was that "cool" does not necessarily equal a good user experience. And without a good user experience, your customers are simply not going to bother with your site because your strongest competitor is just one click away.

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In 2007, Web 2.0 is indeed that "next best thing". Some marketers are still looking to see how Web 2.0 technologies can be incorporated, just because that's what everyone else is doing. However, the reality is that Web 2.0 technologies are not right for everyone. As with Flash, Web 2.0 should be used only to enhance the user experience and your conversion strategy. In today's online environment, the majority of users are going online simply to get tasks done – not to spend hours for enjoyment purposes. Anything derailing them from that task is an obstacle users will not tolerate.

BEYOND THE BUZZ WORD

So, if it's not for the purpose of adding the latest and greatest Internet enhancement, then why incorporate Web 2.0? The answer is – there are plenty of reasons. Web 2.0 technologies can provide a richer, more fulfilling experience for users. It can greatly expedite the research process, checkout, and completing online applications.

It can help users feel more engaged, and allows you to personally connect with your customers. When used correctly it can, and will, increase online conversion.

HOW WEB 2.0 CAN IMPROVE THE USER EXPERIENCE

There are numerous ways that Web 2.0 technologies can enhance the user experience and increase conversion. Some of the top ways include:

- Fulfilling the user's desire to have sites that mimic desktop applications that provide instant feedback
- Eliminating annoying and cumbersome popups
- Making it easier to get from point A to point B, e.g. by drag and dropping items vs. going through multiple steps to get items where you want them to go
- Allowing users to share information and provide content like never before

- Enhancing the experience through touching more senses, such as rich visuals via video and learning through audio vs. time-consuming and tiring reading

WEB 2.0 & USABILITY CHALLENGES

These new technologies are certainly not without their challenges. One of the main challenges is making sure your analytics are up to par with the new experience. Incorporating Web 2.0 will change the way you measure and track your online experience.

In addition, you're providing your customers with something new and different. You need to first find out if your users are ready for it and if they want it. Test concepts with your users as early as possible to ensure value and verify usability.

IS WEB 2.0 RIGHT FOR YOUR SITE?

To answer this question, first ask yourself:

- Who are your users? What challenges are they experiencing that can be corrected through the use of Web 2.0? Conducting usability testing to watch your users in action can help uncover obstacles and opportunities.
- Are your users ready for it? This again ties back to who your users are and what they want. Don't assume they will easily adapt. Test and verify.
- How long will it take to implement Web 2.0 enhancements? Should enhancement be rolled out slowly or all at once? How will this affect your bottom line?
- What is the ROI of introducing Web 2.0 into your site? Do you have analytics in place to benchmark and appropriately measure?

At the end of the day, "cool" doesn't necessarily equal sales, and although Web 2.0 is certainly "cool," you need to ensure it's implemented and used correctly.

