

Are you keeping up with recent developments?

While nothing new, social media and other web 2.0 technologies are in a continuous state of growth and evolution. They can be used to create, communicate, collaborate, inform, share, recommend, promote and research. Whether your goals are to: build your personal profile, expand your professional network, land your next job, elevate your brand, drive sales, improve customer service, communicate more directly, gain media attention, attract sponsorship, build a community, attract new talent or better engage your workforce, contemporary technologies falling under the web 2.0 umbrella can help.

According to Wikipedia, “**Web 2.0**” refers to a perceived second [generation](#) of [web development](#) and [design](#), that facilitates [communication](#), secure [information sharing](#), [interoperability](#), and [collaboration](#) on the [World Wide Web](#). Web 2.0 concepts have led to the development and evolution of web-based communities, [hosted services](#), and [applications](#); such as [social-networking sites](#), [video-sharing sites](#), [wikis](#), [blogs](#), and [folksonomies](#).

The sad reality is that most of us don’t realize the extent of the help that is available to us. While not new, many of us haven’t seriously adopted Web 2.0 technologies yet, and the evolution to Web 3.0 is imminent. Some of us are inherently resistant to change. Others pass these tools off as “trendy”. We may interpret new technology as “impersonal” or “geeky” or outside the scope of our expertise. We don’t take the time to investigate it and if we do, often it’s only on a cursory level. Some of us are willing to explore, but nasty corporate firewalls are foiling our attempts. And then there are those of us who are content to curl up with the status quo.

The current financial crisis has issued a rallying cry . . . we need to find new ways - the old ways don’t cut it. To be successful, we need greater innovation, increased efficiency and better results. Oh, and we need it now!

So, as communicators, advisors, PR practitioners, marketers, strategists and relationship managers we owe it to ourselves, our careers, our employees, our investors and our clients to have a better than average understanding of the tools available to us. To do that we need to embrace them, adopt them, understand them and share our experiences with them. Then, with first-hand experience and understanding, we can effectively implement them for our own purposes and knowledgeable advise on their appropriateness and usefulness within the strategies we recommend.

We know that Web 2.0 technologies and social media are not magic bullets, but they can be powerful components of a strategic multi-media solution. And they offer some lower cost, innovative and efficient alternatives. But, to identify their appropriateness, we need to understand the capabilities of each. We should be able to compare and contrast the pros and cons of choosing one over another. And we should know what tools are attracting our audiences.

Where are you on the Web 2.0 and social media adoption spectrum?

Are you an early adopter with expert knowledge of most of these resources who can’t wait to see what’s next? Or, are you still reveling in the awesomeness of email as a means for innovative communications?

Think about your answers to the following questions. Which of the following tools have you heard of? Which have you and your organisation tried? Are there any you are using regularly? Which do you understand? Where is your expertise?

- Are you creating and/or reading blogs? Are you building or participating in internet discussion forums? Are you micro-blogging through applications like [twitter](#)? Are you connected to social networks like [LinkedIn](#) and [Facebook](#)?
- Do you use social network aggregators or event listing/planning portals like [meetup.com](#)?
- How do you collaborate? Are you leveraging the available online collaborative strength of wikis or social bookmarking tools like [del.icio.us](#)? Are you tuned into social news channels like [Social News Watch](#) or tapping into news sharing and discussion sites like [digg](#)?
- Are you embracing communication tools like [Skype](#) to promote conversations and bring independent forces together? Are you holding Flash meetings or using [gotomeeting](#) to brainstorm or share concepts?

- Have you even entertained the possibilities of using [Flickr](#), [YouTube](#), [Google Earth](#), [Ustream.tv](#) or [Second Life](#) to add creativity and depth to your next pitch, presentation or contest?
- Have you invested any time in searching out opinions on your brand through [epinions.com](#)? Have you created a community of raving fans using a ning? Are you listening to customers on [getsatisfaction.com](#)
- Are you using podcasts to entertain, educate and enlighten your stakeholders? Have your thought leaders embraced this media outlet? Do you listen to the multitude of podcasts available for free on [itunes](#) to further your own education or professional development?

If you're answered "yes" to a number of these, congratulations! Reach around and give yourself a great big pat on the back.

If you've been chanting "no", shaking your head, or responding with "I've been meaning to get to that", then I'm issuing you a challenge – pick one of the tools mentioned above and get to know it. Research it, download it, experiment with it, consider its usefulness, talk with others who use it and look for ways to incorporate it into your life and then share your experiences with others. Sharing is the cornerstone of the Web 2.0 culture, especially within social media – I encourage you to ask advice from others, learn from each other, share your journey and then pass this new found knowledge along. That's community. That's collaboration!

Or, you can continue on your merry old way, do what you've always done, in the way you've always done it, getting the results you've always gotten...but, you may find you're on your own.

And for those of you who may be social media skeptics, this article is a direct result of an impromptu conversation that took place on twitter between two virtual strangers [@PRIANational](#) and [@abroadabroadeh](#).

By Linda Johannesson