

GOOGLE MAPS

CITIZEN MEDIA

YAHOO ANSWERS

MASH-UP

RATING

CONTENT

web 2.0 and the travel industry

practical strategies for exploiting the social media revolution

FEEDS

BIT TORRENT

PODCASTS



BLOGGING

YOU TUBE

SOCIAL MEDIA

THE LONG TAIL

RSS

FOLKSONOMY

TAGGING

WEB SERVICES

WIKIPEDIA

RICH USER EXPERIENCE

TECHNORATI

FLIKR

ellion

design ■ process ■ technology

what is web 2.0?

Web 2.0 is one of the biggest buzzwords around at the moment but what does it actually mean?

Well, let's start by discussing what it isn't.

The phrase suggests an improved form of the world wide web and the application of more advanced technology. However Web 2.0 has nothing to do with new technology but is rather a term used to describe the latest phase in how the web is being used.

Those who have studied the evolution of the web have identified several distinct phases:

- pre-1998 it was used essentially to publish information - its *information phase*
- the increasing use of the web for ecommerce and trade distinguished the next period - the *commercial phase*
- analysts now believe we have entered the *networking phase* when the web is predominantly used for social interaction

Web 2.0 is therefore the term used to describe the practice of using the web to communicate and interact with other like-minded people by requesting, obtaining and sharing information that is relevant to them. It is characterised by online social networks such as MySpace, blogs, automatic information feeds, information pull rather than push and the sharing of user generated content e.g. Flickr, YouTube.

This publication discusses all of these concepts and suggests ways in which travel companies can participate and exploit web 2.0.

Web 1.0	Web 2.0
publishing	participation
personal websites	blogging
content management systems	wikis
page views	pay per click
domain name speculation	search engine optimisation
Britannica Online	Wikipedia
mp3.com	Napster
DoubleClick	Google AdSense
Ofoto	Flickr
Akamai	BitTorrent
screen scraping	web services
directories (taxonomy)	tagging ("folksonomy")
stickiness	syndication

the rise of social networking

Social networks are all around us and involve our friends, neighbours, colleagues and everyone else we regularly come in to contact with on a daily basis. Until recently, the information exchanged within such a social network was limited because it would only be transferred between a finite number of people before certain barriers prevented it becoming more widespread e.g.

Personal barriers - number of friends

Geographical barriers - distance between social networks

Demographic barriers - differences between people within networks, range of interests.

One of the limitations of traditional social networks is the means of communication, as most information is transferred through word of mouth and therefore has no record - unless each individual within each social network recorded everything they spoke about and made it available for others to listen to - the true message would stay within that information flow.

However, the Internet has transformed the way we communicate and interact with each other. Emails which can be forwarded to many recipients went part of the way, but now online social networks (which are formed on the web through social networking technologies) around shared interests or themes have made the process far simpler and yet far more powerful because of the way that they're able to cross the traditional boundaries and overcome the barriers.

The corporate world has been using social software technology for some time, through online 'networking' websites such as 'Linked In'. However this concept has exploded in recent years through websites such as MySpace that empower anyone to have an opinion on any subject matter. Increased access to fast

Internet connections (by 2010 over 70% of UK households will have broadband) and the fragmentation of broadcast media (satellite/digital channels) have also helped fuel the rise of online social networking.



Online social networking has become an increasingly influential part of contemporary popular culture. Before their introduction you may only have been able to directly share your opinion with 20-30 people, but by using a blog or an online community such as MySpace you can now share that opinion with hundreds or even thousands of people. What's more, the more valid your opinion is judged to be by other members of the online community, the more people are likely to see it.

Through new techniques such as 'social tagging' (applying keywords to content), 'ratings' (judging how good a piece of content is) and 'content sharing' (viral networking) it is now possible for opinion and common themes about particular subjects to emerge and spread to a far greater audience than before with some blogs and communities now attracting tens of millions of hits per month.

It is estimated that there are over three hundred known social networking sites on the web. The largest, MySpace, is the sixth most popular site on the web and attracts 300,000 new members every day.

blogging

Anyone who has been on the Internet in the last 12-months will have heard the phrase 'blogging', or 'blog'. A blog (or 'weblog' to give it its full name) is a personal publishing platform driven by a simple content management solution (CMS) that allows Internet users to publish their thoughts and opinions on a web page.

Blogs do have distinct characteristics though, which differentiate them from a normal website, or standard messageboard/forum structure:

- Pages are normally published as HTML, performing well on search engines
- Pages can contain text, images and video
- Pages are date time stamped
- Pages are displayed in reverse chronological order
- Blogs allow comments to be made against each post
- Blogs can be easily linked to other blogs (or automatically through 'trackbacks')
- Blogs contain 'tags' to categorise content

There are generally three types of blog emerging in the online community of blogs, or the 'blogosphere':

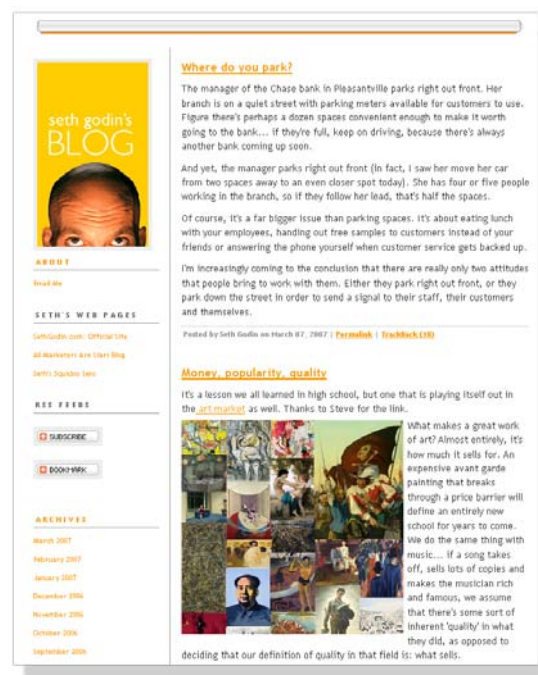
1 General 'personal' blog

A blog created by an individual to talk about whatever they feel like talking about in any given moment. This is more of an online journal and can cross a variety of subjects.

2 Specialist blog

A specialist blog will normally focus on a specific topic, such as a hobby or interest. In recent years travellers have been using this type of blog to talk about their holiday or travelling experiences, allowing other travellers

to get a better understanding of the experience from a personal perspective.



Corporate blog

A corporate blog is specifically owned by a company and used to provide regular updates on news, events and other subjects. An example of this is 'Gizmodo', which is a technology blog displaying the latest gadgets, but there are now thousands of different corporate blogs available.

There are now many blog engines (publishing platforms) online, with consumer uptake at an all time high. It is estimated that there are over 100 million blogs although such is the speed of growth (the blogosphere is doubling in size every 200 days) by the time you read this it is likely to be much higher!

user generated content

The media landscape is changing dramatically before our very eyes. The sudden affordability of complex consumer electronics together with the advent of user-generated websites has dramatically reduced the cost of producing and distributing content.

Anyone with a mobile phone and access to the Internet can now create a film and share it with a global audience. The viral nature of the Internet means that your short movie, shot on a mobile phone, can be seen by thousands, even millions of people all over the world in a matter of minutes.

Moreover, the lines between broadcast media and user generated content (UGC) are becoming blurred. The BBC set up a user-generated content team as a pilot in April 2005 with 3 staff. In the wake of the 7 July 2005 London bombings and the Buncefield oil depot fire, the team was made permanent and was expanded, reflecting the arrival in the mainstream of the 'citizen journalist'. During the Buncefield disaster the BBC received over 5,000 photos from viewers, many of which it published in its TV coverage on podcasts and the website.



We no longer rely upon traditional media outlets such as production companies or broadcasters - increasingly we are creating and distributing our own news and entertainment on the web.

The dramatic success of websites such as Flickr (images), YouTube (videos) and Wikipedia (knowledge) are testament to the credibility and popularity of user generated content.

push vs pull

Another key development, driven by the growth of the Internet, is the concept of content pushing versus content pulling. Traditional broadcasting such as radio and television uses content push i.e. they deliver pre-determined content to viewers/listeners at a certain time in a certain format and the consumer decides whether to accept it or not.

However, the rise of on-demand technologies such as digital television and the web allows consumers to decide what they want and when they want it i.e. they select specific content to digest at a time of their choosing, they are pulling the content to them.

Regardless of the type of media involved content is now, more than ever, consumer driven. No longer does the public want what the public gets - consumers have choice and they are exercising this new power to take control of their online and offline experiences. Increasingly they are also the source of much of this content as well i.e. YouTube.

Content feeds

Changes to the way information is delivered online has made it easier for it to be fed from one place and displayed automatically in another. Known as data feeds they enable information to be automatically processed and delivered into new formats and onto different media.

An example of this is RSS, which stands for 'really simple syndication'. This is a technology that allows users to install a desktop application (the 'RSS reader'), which can be



'tuned' in to the online channels that are important to them, selecting keywords or themes that they want to know about.

Whenever a new item is published on an RSS enabled website, under a particular theme or combination of themes (e.g. 'holiday sale') that item is delivered to the user's desktop, in almost real-time. Any items that are not of interest to the user are simply not picked up by their 'RSS reader', giving customers full control over what they see.

Although RSS adoption is still on the rise, its importance can be seen through its adoption by holiday companies such as Lastminute.com, Thompson, Virgin and many other holiday companies.

Podcasts

Podcasting involves users signing-up to receive an information feed (usually an audio or video file) automatically by subscription for play-back on mobile devices (phones, mp3 players etc) as well as the web.



They first became popular in late 2004. The term "podcast" is derived from Apple's portable music player, the iPod.

While podcasting is a version of push technology, in that the information provider chooses which files to offer in a feed, the subscriber chooses among available feed channels.

While the user is not "pulling" individual files from the web as such, there is a strong "pull" aspect in that the receiver is free to subscribe to (or unsubscribe from) a vast array of

channels, each with specific relevance, maintaining consumer choice.

Traditional broadcasters such as the BBC and radio stations use podcasts to distribute snippets of news or entertainment. Some analysts predict that the feed system could also be used to share software updates or any of a myriad of other file types.

Mashups

A mashup is the consolidation of content from more than one source into an integrated experience e.g. chiagocrime.com displays reported crimes on a map of the city by combining crime data fed from the CPD's Citizen ICAM Web site and map data from Google.

The website's authors own neither of the sources of this data yet they have created a clever website which provides a useful service to the citizens of the city.

The power of this approach is that it negates the effort required to manually maintain rapidly changing information on your website that already exists and is maintained elsewhere.

why should you take notice?

One of the biggest challenges facing the marketing professional today is how to engage the new generation of consumers that, in 5-10 years time, will form the core customer base of many organisations. A lot of market research and analysis of the current 'youth market' (15-25 year olds) has revealed some statistics that marketers may find worrying:

- Propensity to watch TV is reducing
- Propensity to purchase newspapers is reducing
- Internet usage has significantly increased
- There is an increase in 'specialist' media - e.g. specialist magazines
- There is increased cynicism towards brands
- There is increased cynicism towards traditional marketing

This is no secret and the Internet is full of articles about the new, 'savvy', marketing-resistant customers that are now emerging. This isn't all doom and gloom though, as the same research has shown that brand awareness and perception is as important as ever.

The challenge is how to position your brand, products and services to appeal to this target audience, which involves more than tapping in to the technology that they're familiar with (email, SMS etc).

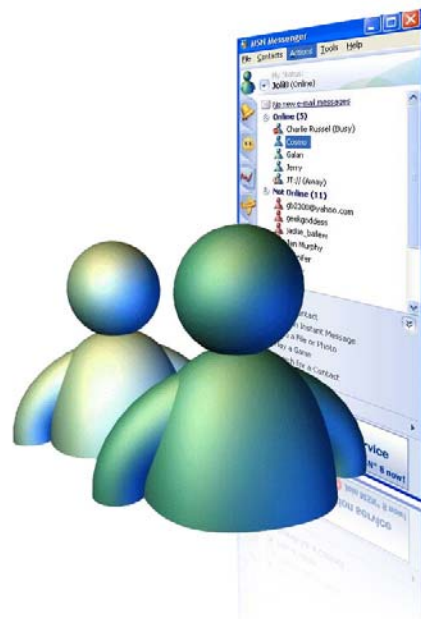
Not only is there a new market in terms of a new generation of consumers, but there is also a new market within the current generation of consumers who have developed the same attitudes as the younger market, and who know what the Internet can provide them with.

That said, social networking is not just for teenagers - the largest demographic using MySpace are 18-34 year-olds. You therefore need to at the very least take account of the new landscape of choice which is available to consumers, identify what drives their choices

and make sure that you can provide what they are looking for. This can simply mean delivering the right product at the right price, at the right time. More than this though, it also means acknowledging customer preference, attitude and opinion and being seen to be acting upon it.

How do you know what consumers are looking for?

Web 2.0 technology allows you to communicate directly with your customers and increase their understanding of your brand and your offering. It also enables you to harness consumer opinion, in an environment from which you can monitor and derive valuable intelligence. As the mistrust of the Internet reduces through increased familiarity, especially within the younger audience, more and more consumers are prepared to voice their opinion. The big question is; are you listening?



how can you benefit from web 2.0?

Intelligence

Web 2.0 technology empowers people who previously didn't have a voice - trying to speak directly to a brand was perceived as worthless to all but the die-hard complainer. This empowerment means that the volume of consumer opinion available online is growing at a phenomenal rate.

There is obviously some information within traditional social networks that has little or no value to anyone except the individuals within that network; however, there is also some information that, if it could be harnessed, would be extremely valuable:

- Personal opinion of products and services
- Personal opinion of brands
- Personal experience of products and services
- Personal experience of brands
- Friends/family opinion of products and services
- Friends/family opinion of brands

This information is manna from heaven to the marketing professional. Major brands invest tens, even hundreds of thousands of pounds in surveys and research to gather this data - yet it is freely available on the web. Providing your customers with a platform to express their opinions gives you a medium to harvest this information and act upon it.

One of the common fears is that the platform will generate complaints and grievances. Don't be afraid of negative feedback - all feedback is useful. Even bad news gives you vital intelligence you might not have had and you can use it to refine your business offering. Encouraging complaints can identify problems sooner rather than later, and enable you to be more proactive about improving customer experience.

Don't bury your head in the sand - if you don't offer them a forum to express their opinions they will find an alternative that does, which you may not know about.

The simple fact is that consumers won't go out of their way to complain to your face. In fact, unless you make it simple for them to voice their opinion the chances are you'll never know, unless your attention is drawn to one of the many consumer websites now available and you see where your disgruntled customers have been going to vent not only their frustration at a poor product or service, but also the lack of a facility to tell you about it.

There are even examples of disgruntled consumers creating entire websites to voice their dissatisfaction at the way a particular holiday brand has treated them, in such a way that a Google search for certain holidays returns the complainants site before the brands website in the search engine rankings!



Influence

Think about some of the most significant purchase decisions you have made. Then, think about how many people you spoke to when making those decisions and how much weight you put on the opinion of the people you TRUST. You may have been buying a car, at which point your friends and/or family will almost certainly have given you their experience of owning a car of the same brand, or even the same model.

Now compare what your friends and family told you against what the brands told you and answer the following question:

Was your experience of brand-published information (brochures, literature etc) the same as that of peer-to-peer information?

In most people's experience the answer to that question is no. So, the next question is:

Who do you believe gave you the most honest appraisal?

I'm sure that most people's answer to that question is their friends, as they trust that a friend or colleague is not going to recommend something that is of poor quality. That is the key to the power of social networks, and something that marketers have been trying to tap in to and leverage for decades.

Now let's think about this in the context of the holiday industry. Holidays play a very important part in the annual lifecycle of a family, as for many people they have only one opportunity to relax and spend time with their children without having to worry about work. The pressure of choosing the right holiday and fear of dissatisfaction combine to make personal recommendation increasingly important when selecting a holiday destination, or even a specific resort or hotel. After all, nobody wants a 'holiday from hell'.

You only have to look at the success of travellers guides, such as the 'Lonely Planet' books and specifically their online 'Thorn Tree' forum to see how important impartial advice and experience is to today's holiday-maker, and conversely, how today's holiday-maker is now more willing to voice their opinion online and help others avoid bad experiences.

A recent study of online shoppers carried out by Nielsen/Netratings revealed that almost half still book holidays based on personal recommendation from friends, family or colleagues. This explains the popularity of dedicated websites such as Thorn Tree forum and 'TripAdvisor.co.uk' which are designed specifically to gather and share consumer experience of holidays of all types, with over 5M reviews currently available.

Knowing where and how people are commenting and sharing their opinions about your brand gives you the opportunity to respond and influence their perceptions of you. Whether it's participating in the debate to educate, or to rebut accusations or explain your actions, just sharing the platform with them is an opportunity.

If you are able to control the environment by hosting the community it gives you an opportunity to set the agenda rather than respond to others. Furthermore, it shows them that you are interested-in and willing to listen to their opinions. If real people in your organisation are identified in the conversations it will add a human touch to the organisation - making your company feel more accessible to them. This alone should enhance your reputation in their eyes - and the viral nature of the web will mean that this goodwill will be circulated far and wide.

Content

Have you ever heard the expression 'content is king'? If not it probably won't be long before you do. It is increasingly used in the media world to describe the high value that is now placed on relevant, regular content. Fuelled by the changes in the way information is consumed we are becoming more demanding - consumers are no longer willing to accept content that is not interesting or relevant to them - increasingly we demand specific content about niche topics.



WIKIPEDIA

The days of the mass appeal of say, TV shows, are coming to an end. We have so much choice with digital/cable TV that audiences have naturally fragmented into smaller and smaller groups watching ever more targeted programmes.

Content is now a valuable commodity and there is a huge market of consumers hungry for specific information and that includes holiday-makers. Does your website contain enough relevant and compelling content (e.g. descriptive copy, images or even video footage) to attract and retain the interest of your visitors?

If not, you have a choice. Spend a fortune creating and compiling your portfolio yourself or the clever option - harness the coalition of the willing, that are your customers, to populate it themselves. They will probably make a better job of it!

It is no coincidence that three of the most visited websites on the web are populated entirely by user generated content - Yahoo Answers, YouTube and WikiPedia.

Why not invite visitors to submit their experiences to compile travel guides of the destinations you offer or their photos and videos to illustrate them?

As nearly every holiday-maker now carries either a digital camera or a digital camcorder, the travel industry is ideally placed to capitalise on the thousands of photos and videos generated each year, by encouraging consumers to share key moments of their holiday with other consumers. After all, the best way of reviewing your holiday destination is through the eyes of someone taking a holiday there! Over time you can even develop an independent video portal where consumers can select a 'channel' to view relevant video content.

We need to get away from idea that we have to own the content - use whatever content is available - it's cheaper and probably more relevant and a great way of involving your customers and attracting new ones. If they are

willing to invest their time and feel involved or even able to influence your site or your offering this can only increase their loyalty to you.

Traffic

Engaging with social media such as blogs and content feeds will also have a positive effect on your website's visibility on search engines. Blogs are structured in a way that facilitates indexing and linking between other blogs and sites. Your website's link popularity (i.e. number of other sites/pages which link to it) is a major factor in your search engine ranking. The more links you can attract the higher you will be ranked - which should translate into more traffic and ultimately more custom.

what should you do?

The good news is that we don't suggest that your marketing strategy needs to be re-invented over night to take account of Web 2.0. Nor should it cost a fortune - in fact adopting and engaging in web 2.0 activities will almost certainly save you considerable marketing expenditure in the long run and build far stronger brand loyalties. Instead we suggest that you experiment with some of the activities below to find the mix which suits your own circumstances:

Online reviews

Reviews are probably the most powerful tool at the disposal of the modern consumer and if you've ever purchased from Amazon you've almost certainly read at least one.



Customer Reviews

Average Customer Review: **★★★★☆**
[Write an online review](#) and share your thoughts with other customers.

18 of 20 people found the following review helpful:

★★★★☆ Entertainingly Educational, 1 Aug 2002
 Reviewer: ["caroline_hamilton"](#) - [See all my reviews](#)

This book provides readers with a very accessible introduction to the works of Tennessee Williams. Not only does it include the very well know plays "A Streetcar Named Desire" and "The Glass Menagerie" but also "Sweet Bird of Youth" and "A play of four parts".

The fact that there are four plays means that the reader can gain not only a knowledge of the individual plays, but also a feel for Williams' style of writing. This makes it an indispensable tool for anybody studying Tennessee Williams' work as part of their studies or indeed recreationally.

A good feature of the book is the way it introduces each play to the reader. By including detailed forewords and background information (including details of the authors personal life at the time of writing) the first reading of the play becomes much more rewarding.

The plays themselves are entertaining and insightful. In each play Williams' tells a story of seemingly ordinary folk, and then introduces the reader/audience to what's going on in their minds. By the clever use of different stage techniques and sharp observations Tennessee Williams presents us with a collection of wonderfully enjoyable and atmospheric plays. Very highly recommended.

Was this review helpful to you? ☐ Yes ☐ No [Report this](#)

Obviously, one review doesn't build a compelling case for or against a product or service, which is where many independent review sites fall down, but a library of many reviews allows a more accurate overall picture to emerge and there is no better place to gather these than with the company who sold the product.

As well as providing a written review, consumers can rate different aspects of their holiday in the form of a simple survey, giving a score to things such as:

- Overall holiday rating
- Quality of travel
- Quality of accommodation (e.g. location, service, cleanliness)
- Quality of food

You can also empower people with specific needs, such as disabled guests, by rating things like wheelchair accessibility, availability of disabled facilities, local medical care.

This not only provides impartial advice, but allows the best rated holidays to be highlighted to consumers, as well as allowing you to identify those rated the lowest.

Obviously, it takes time to read a lot of reviews, so the concept of 'content rating' can also be used to quickly and efficiently allow the best reviews (as voted by other consumers) to become the most visible. This gets consumers involved, both in writing their own reviews and rating the reviews of others on criteria such as the quality, accuracy and relevance of the review.

To make reviews easier to find they can also be tagged by consumers, which basically means allowing people to add additional keywords to reviews, which ensures that popular content can be identified quicker and easier, allows 'shortcuts' to reviews that share common themes and enables you to identify emergent trends in reviews. It also introduces 'folksonomy' navigation which is created and used by your consumers.

User review technology has been available for some time, but can easily be modified to include Web 2.0 technology through additional customer-facing features. The key to this is to identify what is important to your customers and then develop your strategy to meet their information needs.

In short, user reviews are a powerful medium that allow the experiences of current consumers to be aggregated, measured and harnessed to inform the buying decision of your customers, as well as providing valuable business intelligence that can be used to drive improvements in the products and services you offer.

User-generated content

For content that you expect customers to generate through your website (e.g. user reviews, blog post entries, comments, ratings, tagging and multimedia) you will need to provide appropriate tools, ensuring that the process is made as intuitive and simple as possible. It's important to remember that website users will receive some personal gratification from seeing their content on your website, especially in the early days, but if the process is too arduous this will not be enough of a reward to make them continue. Therefore, whatever you implement must meet the usability requirements of the customers you are targeting.



A simple way to encourage users to submit content to your website is to hold an online holiday photo competition, allowing your customers to upload their best holiday snaps and to rate each picture to decide the winner. This introduces several Web 2.0 features and will engage customers in a new way.

Moderation

If you are considering populating your website with user-generated content you have almost certainly thought about moderation, as risk reduction is high on every Webmaster's list of priorities. Moderation is the process of checking content before it is published to ensure that it doesn't contain any offensive material. There are different approaches:

- Profanity Filters - check all entered text for common profanities and other insulting language (e.g. racial slurs) to provide an immediate method of blocking obviously obscene material. The level of filtering can be controlled by you and normally varies depending on the target audience. This approach can only feasibly be used on text content, not photos or videos.
- Pre-moderation - this is the checking of content after it's submitted by a website user, before it's published on the website. This is a good approach for small volumes, however it doesn't scale particularly well due to the resource required to monitor all website traffic and the subsequent delay before content appears on the site.
- Post-moderation - this relies on website users to highlight any content that they find offensive, which is then removed from the website and notified to a moderator for checking. This puts the customers in control and minimises the moderation resource, as they only need to check content that is flagged as offensive.

The recommended approach is to have a combination of a profanity filter and post-moderation to ensure that content can be quickly and easily entered, the users get the instant gratification and that the level of acceptability is established by the community of customers providing the content. Any defamatory content is instantly blocked, and the ability to 'flag' content that isn't appropriate is made very simple.

It is important to ensure that there are clear guidelines for what is acceptable, in easy to read phrases that match the language of your users and not the standard legalese that people very seldom bother to read and very few consumers can actually understand.

As an extra level of protection, part of the process for publishing content may contain a verification step (possibly through entry of a booking reference), ensuring that you have the actual identification of your website users.

Mashup

A relevant example for the travel industry would be to show information on a holiday destination by aggregating as much relevant information as possible from specialist providers. This could include information such as:

- Airport parking information
- Travel time from their home to the airport
- Route planning service and real-time traffic updates
- Real-time flight arrivals and departures
- Real-time weather at the destination
- The current exchange rate and location of exchange bureaux
- Local transport information (flights, buses, trains)
- Local news and current affairs
- Entertainment information

Messageboard

Messageboards, or 'forums', have been around for some time now, making them one of the quickest and easiest solutions to implement in terms of community technology. This is because their popularity in the last decade has led to many good quality 'off-the-shelf' solutions now being widely available, with most simply requiring a design to be applied to become operational.

As with any online space containing user-defined content, access to a forum requires users to create a profile during the registration process, which identifies them and allows access to be controlled by the forum owner. Forums can also be integrated with current online accounts if your website already has a password-protected area for consumers.

Standard forums display items in chronological order, with the latest active thread displayed first, although the display order can normally be changed and some threads can be made 'sticky', so they stick at the top of the list.

Although there is some overlap in the perceived capabilities of forums and blogs in that posts can be generated and replied to, the social structure and use patterns of these environments is very different. A forum (and the threads it contains) is normally based around a specific subject matter and will have many active entries at any given time, relying on this continued activity to maintain interest for its members. This makes them ideal for community discussions, such as on the Slashdot website for technical discussion.

Blogs provide a personal publishing platform that doesn't rely on an instant response, so entries are made outside of the context of a social gathering and differ accordingly. Blog posts tend to be more comprehensive and a more accurate reflection of the publisher.

The easiest way to understand the difference is to think of a forum as a meeting, where there is a high level of short interactions between the attendees, whereas a blog post is like a presentation that provides information on a subject, only after which questions can be raised or comments made to the presenter.

Forums are currently evolving to include more Web 2.0 features, such as tagging and content ratings, but because of the core differences it's important to identify the type of environment that you wish to provide to your customers, based on the type of interaction you wish to develop.

Blog

There are different ways of introducing blogs to your website. The easiest way to get started is to have a company blog, where a post is published on a regular basis, on a particular subject and consumers are invited to respond by adding comments and maybe adding 'tag' keywords or even ratings.

This is a simple way of building interaction with your consumers in a friendly and usable way and can be scaled over time to have a series of blogs on different subjects, possibly in an 'interactive magazine' format - e.g.

- Planning blog - How to plan your perfect holiday
- Flight blog - Things to improve the flight experience (advice and tips etc)
- Kids' holiday blog - Holiday suggestions for kids (locations, facilities)
- Adventure holiday blog - For those looking for more excitement
- Language blog - Helpful phrases for overseas travellers

Over time you may then invite trusted consumers (those with a history of good quality contributions) to write their own blog posts in exchange for rewards (holiday discounts etc), increasing your publishing capacity and building a new network of consumer brand advocates that will help to market your company.

Content feeds

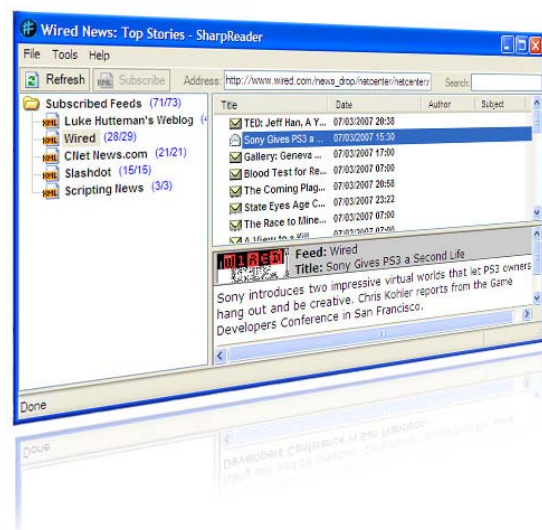
Content feeds can be introduced to allow people to 'tune in' to your latest special offers, or to monitor your blogs for useful information. In order for content feeds to be adopted it's necessary to provide information on what a content feed is and how it can be used, as well as providing links to popular RSS readers. You can even offer your own branded RSS reader that can be downloaded to a customer's desktop.

RSS is a relatively simple concept that is often complicated by terminology but, by

communicating the core benefits in simple terms, it is possible to grow adoption in people who wouldn't normally consider RSS as being relevant to them.

If using an RSS reader is still a step too far for your customers, a simpler way of introducing content feeds is to have an online reader, which is simply an area of your website where a customer can log-in and read the latest content articles they have subscribed to. Once they're familiar with this concept they can 'graduate' to having this content delivered straight to their desktop.

You can start by just offering special offers, allowing customers to pick the countries or popular destinations they wish to receive offers on. You can then grow this to offer a series of content feeds or 'channels', based on the same structure of countries or popular holiday destinations, to allow customers to monitor their preferred destination and receive information on:



- Important news from holiday destinations (airport strikes, political unrest)
- Important weather information (severe weather etc)
- Foreign Office information

The key is to identify the information that will be useful to your customers and provide a simple delivery mechanism to ensure that they receive it.

Usability

Probably the most difficult aspect of a Web 2.0 implementation is breaking down the technology barriers to facilitate adoption by your customers and other website users. Although there are many popular buzzwords starting to appear (blog, RSS etc), very few consumers understand exactly what this means. You therefore need to understand the capabilities of your consumers and adapt your strategy to suit.

The best way of achieving this is through a usability study, perhaps including some user workshops, to get a thorough understanding of the customers you're trying to appeal to. You can then plan a robust strategy for engaging early-adopters and then grow the functionality over time, whilst growing the capabilities of your customers. Try to understand the attitudes and opinions of your customers towards the Internet and websites, and what their usage habits are, as this will help you to create the best environment for them.

It's very important not to make any assumptions about the capabilities of your customers, as this is a common mistake that often leads to adoption barriers that weren't even considered. It's very easy to intimidate novice Internet users through inappropriate language and terminology, especially as many website features are defined by Marketers and Webmasters who fall in to the 'expert user' category (even though they may not realise this!), but if you hit the sweet spot your customers will really appreciate the ease with which they can participate.

and finally...

Don't be afraid to experiment. Even if you get it wrong first time your customers will still appreciate that you are trying to connect with them and they will appreciate that.

Note: If you would like advice on formulating a strategy to address web 2.0 or just help integrating some of these features into your website please call Ellion on +44 (0) 1732 770 828 and ask for the web marketing team.

glossary of terms

AJAX

Ajax is shorthand for Asynchronous JavaScript and XML, is a web development technique for creating interactive web applications.

BitTorrent

BitTorrent is a peer-to-peer (P2P) file distribution protocol which is used to distributing large amounts of data widely to recipients who each also supply data to newer recipients, thus significantly reducing the cost and burden on any given individual source.

Blog

A blog is a user-generated website where entries are made in journal style and displayed in a reverse chronological order.

Flickr

Flickr is a photo sharing website and web services suite, and an online community platform, which is generally considered an early example of a Web 2.0 application.

Folksonomy

A folksonomy is a user generated taxonomy used to categorize and retrieve Web pages, photographs, Web links and other web content using open ended labels called tags

Google Adsense

AdSense is an ad serving program run by Google where website owners can enroll in this program to enable text, image and, more recently, video advertisements on their sites.

Mashup

A mashup is a website or application that combines content from more than one source into an integrated experience

Podcast

A podcast is a media file that is distributed over the Internet using syndication feeds, for playback on portable media players and personal computers.

RSS

RSS is a family of web feed formats used to publish frequently updated digital content, such as blogs, news feeds or podcasts.

The long tail

The long tail is the colloquial name for the statistical distributions of weblogs characterised by a handful have many links going into them with "the long tail" of millions of weblogs may have only a handful of links going into them

Web 2.0

Web 2.0, a phrase coined by O'Reilly Media in 2004,[1] refers to a perceived second-generation of Web-based services—such as social networking sites, wikis, communication tools, and folksonomies—that emphasize online collaboration and sharing among users.

WikiPedia

Wikipedia is a multilingual, Web-based, free content encyclopedia project, which is written collaboratively by volunteers and can be edited by anyone with access to the Web site

about ellion

For many years Ellion has assisted some of the biggest names in the UK travel industry to increase yield through developing information management systems, providing systems analysis, business consultancy and web development. During this time the company has built-up significant resources and expertise to advise clients in the travel industry how to exploit emerging technologies to refine their business processes and maximise efficiency, productivity and ultimately their profitability.

Ellion has developed and implemented online booking, reservation and yield systems as well as CRM, business intelligence and marketing systems and websites for some of the largest operators in the UK holiday industry including Bourne Leisure, Haven Holidays, Warner Holidays and Siblū.

For more information about our services to the travel sector including case studies please visit: www.ellion.co.uk/travel.



Website Evaluations

We have teamed-up with travel specialists Equinus to offer travel and holiday firms a detailed assessment of their online presence.

Our panel of experts can analyse the eight fundamental elements of a travel website i.e. visibility, design, navigation, content, accessibility, interactivity, personalisation and commercial elements. Your report will outline our findings and include, where possible, recommended actions to take.

Cost: £499 (which is refundable against any subsequent work we do for you)

A sample report can be downloaded from our website at www.ellion.co.uk/travel