



What is Web 2.0 and how can it benefit your business?

Today millions of us use the internet to speak to friends, share our thoughts and gage the opinions of others. The web is constantly evolving and becoming more interactive but what does it mean for you?

The Web 2.0 generation is about people connecting, collaborating and sharing information online which can be for personal or business use.

For businesses Web 2.0 means sharing and passing on knowledge to those with the same professional interests.

Social networking, forums, Wikis and blogs all belong to the Web 2.0 generation. Social networking is one of the most popular forms of online sharing today, with sites such as [FaceBook](#) and [Friends Reunited](#) used to re-connect old friends and share experiences via audio or video. Business networking sites exist too to help business people extend their networks, create referrals and develop professional relationships on websites such as [LinkedIn](#).

Conversing with your customer

Web 2.0 offers an opportunity to understand your customer and their issues, by joining conversations in forums, blogs, networking sites.

To get the most of out of Web 2.0 I have learnt three simple things, a) accept social media is here to stay - it's a new way of communicating so must not be ignored, b) join in the conversation and have your expert voice heard on blogs, in forums etc and c) monitor activity so you know when your company is mentioned and can respond accordingly – [Google Alerts](#) is a good way of monitoring web content found by Google.

To be heard in a worldwide web full of conversation you must be sociable – join in when you can and catch up with the people that are most important to your business: your customers.

Search engines love blogs

We will touch on a couple of new media explaining how your business can benefit from using them.

Blogging is when users write an online journal and is a popular feature of Web 2.0, containing copy and links, which invite others comments and discussion. Blogging isn't for everyone but it can have its benefits to your business - search engines love blogs as long as they contain keywords, links and rich content. But if you're thinking of starting up a blog, bare in mind it's an ongoing journal which needs to be updated regularly, otherwise it's worthless.

Getting started on a business blog:

There are many different platforms you can start a blog from, Google have their own bloggers platform, which is free to use and an easy way to get started at www.blogger.com.

Things to consider before starting up a blog:

- You need to think of something relevant in the business world and a subject you feel very strongly about and have some knowledge in, which can be passed on to others.
- You don't need to blog everyday, once a month is sufficient as long as you make your post enriched with knowledge. You can include your own articles too.
- Bear in mind, if your content will only attract a small number of business people you must accept that you will not become part of the mainstream. As long as you attract interest that's ok.
- It's worth commenting on others blogs within the same field, this way you can exchange links and get respect for your words of wisdom.

Forums are also very useful in the business world, especially for link building. Search engines also pick on these links and index them which can form a good page ranking. You can check your website page ranking using the [SEO tool](#).

Joining a discussion forum

- Shop around and register on a forum that is of related interest to your business for example, if you mainly work with small businesses then sign up to a small business forum, such as [UK Small Business Forums](#).
- Aim to look for around three to four forums, making sure they have a good page rank, a minimum of page rank 5.
- Once signed up, create a profile page making sure you include a link to your website or blog.
- Begin by being helpful and answering any questions that you are qualified to answer in discussions.
- Try and avoid self promotion as your reputation could suffer.
- If any questions are around your business area, try posting them back to your site or blog for useful information. You may get a customer or two!
- Make sure you don't go mad on your posts, keep it sensible and don't sway from the business topic into a business pitch. These sites are there to collaborate and share your knowledge, as well as passing on your link if relevant to the question.

Summary

The Web 2.0 generation is changing the way we do business, making it more interactive than ever before. All of the activities we traditionally did offline like networking and meeting have been transferred to the web offering a new opportunity to share our knowledge and understand our customer.

Where before the web was predominantly used to promote and exchange, it is now used equally to share and connect with others. To join the Web 2.0 generation understand which media suits your business most and select the websites you will use to get involved.

If you need more guidance on making the most of Web 2.0 get in touch with the National B2B Centre on 02476 574384.

By Steph Williams, National B2B Centre, 28 April 2008