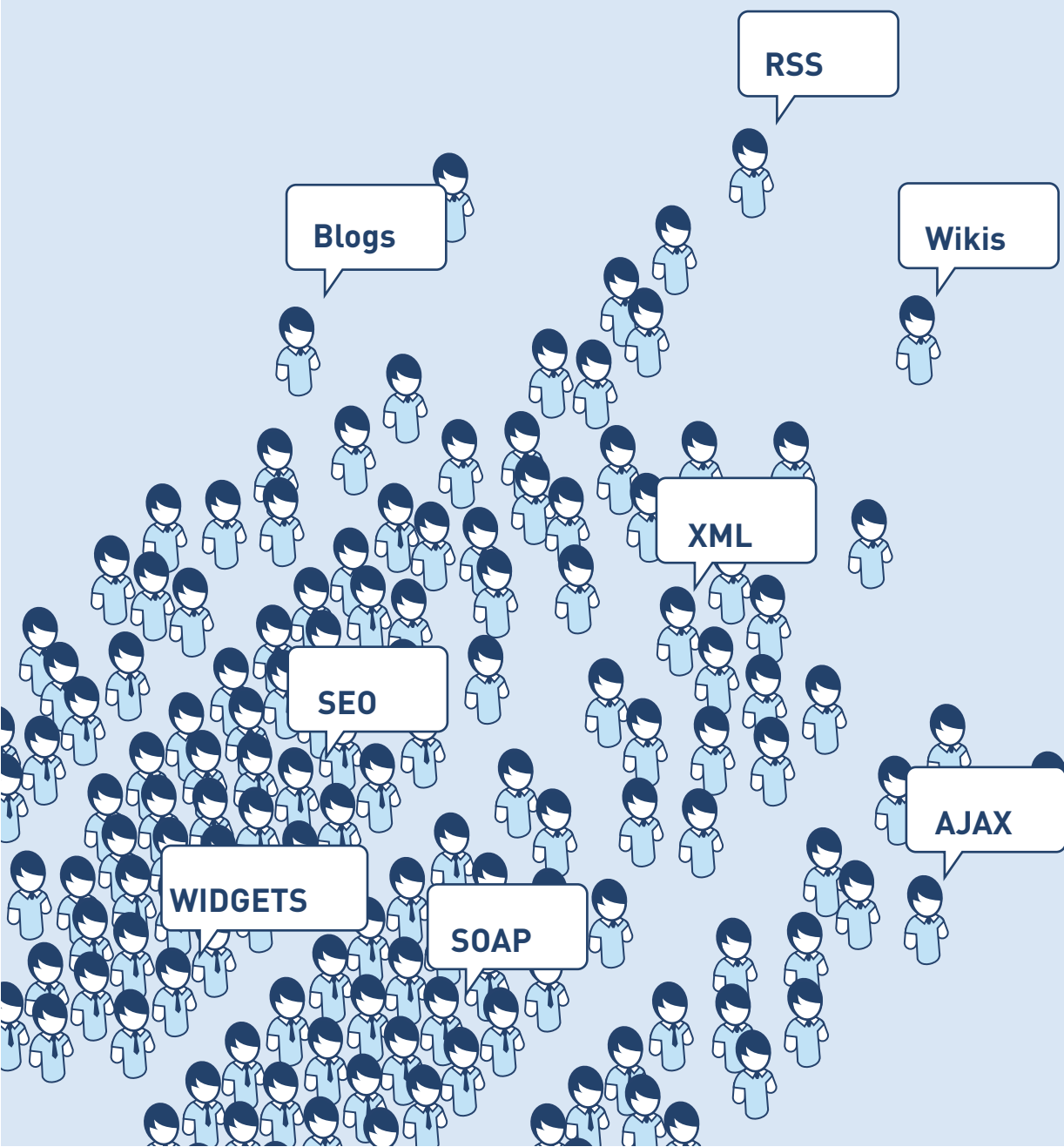


# 5 Ways Businesses can benefit from **Web 2.0**



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## Contents

What is Web 2.0?

Idea 1: Finding new customers on the social networks

Idea 2: Using blogs to enhance customer relations

Idea 3: Use community tools for knowledge management

Idea 4: Allowing customers to self-support

Idea 5: Creating a mash-up to add functionality to your site

Conclusion

Whether we like it or not the technology and culture of Web 2.0 is something all businesses should take note of – but as usual businesses are left trying to work out how it all affects them.

To offer some guidance through simple explanation of the technology and 5 Ideas where real issues can be addressed, this white paper goes some way towards clearing the way for businesses to work with Web 2.0.

The aim is not to blindly evangelise and urge everyone to become involved – rather to help our clients align Web 2.0 with their business strategy in an appropriate and realistic fashion.

## What is Web 2.0?

Sceptics may see Web 2.0 as nothing more than a game of buzzword bingo. So rather than trying to defining Web 2.0, let's talk about the companies and websites that are causing the buzz.

The most talked about aspect of Web 2.0 is social networking and the most talked about social networking site is MySpace – so much so that the predominantly youthful users have become known as the MySpace Generation. MySpace recently had more page views than Yahoo!, Google and MSN. No one can argue with its influence.

So how does MySpace work? Users begin by creating a public profile. They can embellish their basic details with photos, music, videos and thoughts for the day. Users then begin building their network of friends. These friends can be people they know, or stars from TV, radio and the movies. Many bands now start their careers with a profile on MySpace.

MySpace is essentially a teen phenomenon. These are people who have grown up with text messaging and instant messaging online. For them, the message boards on a users' profile have effectively replaced email as the primary method of non-instant communication. No longer will dating teenagers swap phone numbers or even an email – instead they will find each other on MySpace.

You can see why Rupert Murdoch paid \$580 million for access to the youth market.

The concept isn't unique. Facebook provides a similar set of functionality specifically for students, but you'll need an official academic email to sign up.

## MySpace made Lily smile

After uploading her tracks to MySpace in November 2005 Lily Allen reached no. 1 in the UK with her single "Smile".



Flickr and YouTube apply the social networking concept to sharing photos and videos. One feature of Web 2.0 to have emerged from these sites is social classification. The sites provide a mechanism where users can tag their uploaded content. The most popular tags float to the top, an incentive which ensures people reuse tags where possible. This tag structure has become known as a Folksonomy.

**What makes a social networking site?**

So what makes up a social networking site? The site must allow users to share, discuss, rate, collaborate, show and interact



The strength of these Folksonomies over more traditional tagging systems is that tags directly reflect users' own vocabulary. This makes searching and navigating around a site with millions of pages intuitive for the users.

Once it was the case that the website owners created and owned content on the web. This is not the case any more. Content is created by individuals in weblogs. Content is shared freely, using a protocol called RSS (Real Simple Syndication). Websites like Technorati index over 50 million weblogs. These blogs are collectively known as the blogosphere.

It doesn't stop there. Sites can share more than just content. Now they expose all their functionality to other sites using an API (Application Programming Interface).

MySpace users can upload their photos using Flickr, and their videos using YouTube, and then display them on their profile page. This mixing of functionality is known as a mash-up. The king of the mash-up is Google Maps. Google's easy-to-use mapping interface has created an explosion of mapping applications that add features and data to Google's Map interface.

**Techie sound bite**

MySpace.com is hosted using Microsoft ASP.NET 2.0. It can handle 2.3 million concurrent users and serves up 1.5 billion page views per day.



Of course there is already a mash-up for showing your location-tagged flickr photos on a Google Map, so finding a picture of your town or holiday destination is as easy as entering a postcode.

While the definition is never exact (this a rapidly evolving new world), Web 2.0 is creating a paradigm shift in the way businesses utilise the internet. So how can this help you and your customers?

### Map mash-ups

There are hundreds of Google Map mash-ups covering things like cheapest petrol prices, crime statistics and house prices.



## Idea 1: Finding new customers on the social networks

Creating a social network from scratch would be near impossible for a marketer to achieve. These sites grow from a grass roots level. Instead the opportunities are available by partnering with existing communities.

Facebook noticed that the students were starting groups with names like Apple User Group, where they swapped information about how to use their Macs. So Facebook asked Apple if it wanted to form an official group. Now Apple sponsors the group, giving away iPod Shuffles in weekly contests.

You don't need to be Apple to advertise on Facebook. It's possible for other business to target a message at a specific college. Just go to Facebook and sign up for their Facebook Flyers.

***At True Clarity we see the social networks as powerful and exciting environments for companies and organisations to become involved in. However, as in all IT related projects, careful planning is fundamental to success – if anything, it's even more crucial when you're planning a foray into dynamic, fast moving social networks.***

Check the [Business Consultancy](#) section of the True Clarity website.

## Idea 2: Using Blogs to enhance customer relations

Thanks to the huge rise in blogs, if a customer has a bad experience you may read about it first on the web. Dell found this out when Jeff Jarvis, frustrated with his Dell laptop, coined the term Dell Hell on his blog. His posting attracted hundreds of responses and soon Dell had to take action to avoid long term damage to its brand.

Keeping an eye on what bloggers are saying about your company is the first step to using the blogosphere to enhance customer relations. Use sites like Technocrati, which allow more effective searching of blogs than traditional search engines like Google and MSN. The information you find is free market research.

Creating your own company blog can be an effective communication tool, but don't underestimate the effort required.

***At True Clarity we see customer relationship issues as one of the key areas of concern for businesses today – partly because with new customers so hard to attract it's becoming increasingly important to retain existing ones. Strategy is important here – so also are the correct technical and creative components. Establishing the correct processes, supported by robust technology and just the right degree of creative content, is vital.***

Check the [Web 2.0](#) section of the True Clarity website.

### **Idea 3: Use community tools for knowledge management**

Applying the techniques used by the big social networking sites internally in your organisation can help enhance your knowledge management.

The ease of collaborating online using blogging and forum software encourages employees to post more frequently than with more traditional content management tools. The key to success is to encourage users to post rather than email solutions and ideas.

***At True Clarity we regularly see how powerful a well structured and well managed intranet can be, especially when a new system replaces an outdated intranet. True Clarity provides that vital and effective mix of consultancy, planning, technical and creative input to bring together a really effective and productive package.***

Check the [Corporate Websites](#) section of the True Clarity website

### **Idea 4: Allowing customers to self-support**

Even with email and website FAQs, customers can find it hard to get the support they need without some help, typically from a call centre. Customer support can be an expensive business.

With community tools, a website can move their support online. With a combination of blogs and message boards, a traditional FAQ can come alive – with the added advantage of communicating in your customers' own vocabulary.

This approach isn't suited to all markets, but if you already have a loyal customer base and a product people feel passionate about, then creating a community is an achievable proposition.

***At True Clarity we are always looking at how businesses can exploit the technologies and evolving culture of the internet. Now, more than ever, people turn to the internet to resolve questions and problems. Businesses with medium or large support departments can vastly improve their service while reducing costs by plugging in the right technology and allowing users (who might be clients or just visitors to the site) to access a system of support which is user friendly, intuitive and highly relevant – without having to revert to speaking directly to staff.***

Check the [Corporate Websites](#) section of the True Clarity Website.

#### **Making a better Britain**

When eBay launch a campaign to promote British items, what better than creating a showcase mash-up. The Better Britain campaign used flash to speak to the eBay backend using XML technology.

At the end of the two week campaign a million visitors had experienced the offers.



## **Idea 5: Creating a mash-up to add functionality to your site**

If you want your customers to upload pictures, then why not use the fantastic flickr interface, and pull the images into your site with a mash up? If you need to show your outlets on an easy to use mapping interface, why not use Google Maps API? Or if it's an auction you require then link to eBay.

Whatever the functionality, if there's a site out there doing it then consider doing your own mash up.

### **Real world case study the Army on Everest**

[www.armyoneverest.mod.uk](http://www.armyoneverest.mod.uk)

Features footage from the three expedition teams as they made their attempt on three separate peaks in the Himalayas.

Sent from base camp at the foot of Everest, the teams' reports and updates have been made available online and through RSS, email updates, mobile text alerts and video clips sent to Symbian handsets.

Podcasts told the story of the climbers in their own words. Downloadable video clips of the teams in action brought the attempt to life and blogs from the climbers gave an insight into the daily life of the soldiers.

It is the innovative use of Web 2.0 techniques that made this Everest climb the most publicly accessible to date.



**At True Clarity we can review, manage and provide the technical structure and support to implement exciting, personal and effective video clips, maps and podcasts for our client's websites. Again, planning before you implement is key to ensuring successful results.**

**For an example of our work with mash-ups, check the Army Everest Case Study**

### **Conclusion**

Whatever your thoughts on the definition of Web 2.0, you can't deny the paradigm shift that is currently taking place on the Web. Your customers are taking control of the web if you like it or not.

So even if you just start watching the blogosphere for customer feedback, or take the opportunity to create a complete online community for you loyal customers, the new concepts emerging in Web 2.0 can make a real difference to your business.

Visit <http://www.trueclarity.co.uk/> to find out more about how True Clarity can help you with your online customer management.

***Now that you have read this whitepaper are you any the wiser? Have we touched on any issues that you're interested in? Please feel free to make contact with us – ask for Andy Davies or Rory Musker, and we will be delighted to answer any questions or discuss how we might be able to help with your future plans.***

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