

Publishing in Web 2.0

Added by [James Matheson](#), last edited by [James Matheson](#) on Nov 29, 2006 ([view change](#))

Changes in the way people are using the internet are a constant source of interest in the publishing industry. Events such as Rupert Murdoch buying mySpace for \$US629m in July last year show how the industry is watching and investing in new media.

The internet is a constantly evolving place. New ideas and new communities are springing up and disappearing at a rapid rate, changing the network as they go. Some ideas are more significant and lasting than others, with the potential to affect the way we live and work.

The first big idea to gain widespread familiarity was email. From its beginnings in 1971, it has steadily grown to become today's fast, efficient and ubiquitous one-to-one communication. The next big step was the World Wide Web - web pages - which really kicked off in 1991 and brought to a peak the concept of one-to-many communication. Since the introduction of the web, internet growth has mushroomed; in Australia alone, more than 14 million people use it.

The next big step, which is happening on the internet now, has been popularly called 'Web 2.0'. The term Web 2.0 has been criticised as a meaningless marketing buzzword, and it is difficult to find a common definition, but with millions of Google citations, it has clearly taken hold. Web 2.0 can be broadly characterised by one basic concept: many-to-many communication. Blogs, mySpace and Wikipedia are good examples of Web 2.0, where many thousands of people communicate directly with many thousands more on sites that completely bypass traditional media channels.

So where does this leave the publishing industry? Recently released statistics from the Commercial Economic Advisory Service of Australia show that online advertising spending in Australia actually exceeded magazine advertising expenditure for the first time. As a publisher, if you don't have a spare \$US629m lying around to purchase the latest Web 2.0 phenomenon, how can you benefit from the new digital world? Will today's publishing companies be displaced by the new business models of startup companies?

One way to answer these questions is to take a look at some examples of what people are doing in the publishing world on the Web 2.0 front.



Pacific Magazines have recently taken a bold step and rebuilt their intranet's web site based on an enterprise version of the same technology that has been used so successfully by Wikipedia. Rather than use a traditional content management system, Pacific have chosen wiki software. Wiki software is web server software that allows users to easily create and edit web pages using their web browser, the software provides many of the same features as content management software, but its simplicity and ease of use give a low entry barrier, which in turn promotes more users to get involved. Pacific Magazines now has a solid platform on which it can experiment with new ways of working with the new technology, all within the security of its own firewall.

Meanwhile, ACP is looking at the potential of web-based collaboration software to manage editorial workflow. Most of their current workflow systems are basically paper based, with a file server being used to store digital versions. The existing systems work well enough, but being manual they are inherently limited and can't provide things that editors want, such as a dashboard that shows the progress of an issue's production in real time.

Wired magazine is experimenting with collaborative journalism at its *Wired* Wiki site. Their experiment involves an article about wikis (what else!) and a huge range of people, including some of the big names in the wiki world, have contributed hundreds of quality edits.

The *Wired* experiment follows on the heels of a similar experiment by the *LA Times* a year ago, where an editorial about the war in Iraq was chosen as the topic. To the publisher's dismay, the experiment quickly descended into a chaotic edit war, where opinions polarised and consensus could not be found. The site was pulled within a day.

So why is the *Wired* experiment working where the *LA Times* experiment failed? The reason is probably because the contributors to the *Wired* article have a common interest, which is to promote wiki technology. Fierce competitors in the crowded wiki software space have come together to communicate what wiki is because it is in all of their interests to get the word out as lucidly as possible. In contrast, the contributors to the *LA Times* had no common interest and if they couldn't get their opinion heard, they were satisfied just to spoil the opposing one.

 [Wikis as Knowledge Management Tools](#)
 [9th August 2006](#)
[Sydney headquarters open for business](#)

But that is not to say that conflicting opinions cannot collaborate successfully in the new Web 2.0 world. Abortion is an issue that has spurred some people into murdering and bombing in defence of their beliefs, and some of that passion is on display in the history of the Wikipedia entry on abortion. Yet the current version (excluding transitory vandalism) is a very good resource on the subject. Its success derives from the success of Wikipedia, which has been attributed to its openness and its strong policy of maintaining a neutral point of view. The point to take away from the *Wired* and *LA Times* experiments is that harnessing the power of the masses is not as simple as just pointing the latest Web 2.0 technology at them and expecting them to build something fabulous. The philosophy and rules are at least as important as the enabling technology.

The perennial question that necessarily drives most publishers, however, is how to make a buck out of it. Murdoch invested his millions in mySpace, yet Wikipedia, which has an even bigger presence on the internet, earns nothing for its founder, Jimmy Wales; it employs two people and asks for donations. In contrast, the greatest success on the internet today is Google, which capitalises on its search engine and advertising programs to make billions.

The first step is to learn how this new technology can improve your internal processes. For instance, how can two people at Wikipedia HQ manage to build in just a few years an encyclopedia that is 20 times bigger and almost as accurate as the Encyclopaedia Britannica? One thing is sure: they didn't write it themselves. Pacific Magazines has taken the first step down a similar path by using wiki technology to improve the way its intranet works, and the most powerful way to harness this technology is to incorporate it directly into your critical business processes, the processes that can differentiate you from the competition.

Given the speed with which new technologies change our environment and the way we operate, one thing is clear and that is that early adopters have the advantage.

EVALUATION LICENSE - Are you enjoying Confluence? Please consider [purchasing it](#) today.