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Web 2.0 Is Just So 2008

By [Mike Grehan](#), March 9, 2009

Every now and then, I have to smile to myself when I hear someone in the industry talk about user-generated content (UGC). Frequently people use the term as if it were a relatively new phenomenon on the Web. I came online in 1995 and immediately hooked up with a number of guys running bulletin boards (now more commonly referred to as forums).

If that isn't UGC, I don't know what is!

I've never liked the Web 2.0 tag. A seismic shift occurred in how people use the Web when we abandoned our 56K dial-up modems and switched to always-on broadband connections. So it's probably more accurate to talk about the broadband era, which has allowed for a more interactive and richer experience for site visitors. Social networking sites are generally at the core of the so-called Web 2.0 incarnation, yet Match.com was founded in 1995. You don't get much more social than online dating sites.

So the concepts of UGC and social networking sites aren't particularly new. What are new are people's expectations online. No longer are we totally satisfied with the millions of static doorway pages SEO professionals threw up to satisfy search engine crawlers during the 1990s and early 2000s.

It's not hard to see that interactivity and a richer user experience are hugely important components when it comes to future online marketing success. But if Web 2.0 is just a bigger, better, faster version of Web 1.0, what will Web 3.0 be all about?

In a [recent column](#), I posited that community is search. We should be thinking audience, engagement, and end-user experience, not crawlers. People don't wake up in the morning and think, "I'll see if there's new content on the Internet." They don't even wake up in the morning and think, "I'll do some searching on the Internet." Maybe in 1995 something like that occurred because of the novelty. But now, search is task-based. People are on a mission, and they want an exciting ride to go with it.

As we move out of this so-called Web 2.0 phase, we're moving away from a basic global hypertext system and toward a universal platform for loosely coupled distributed applications. T.V. Raman, a research scientist at Google, describing it as 2 W, saying it "is a result of the exponentially growing Web building on itself to move from a Web of content to a Web of applications."

Interestingly, when I talk to other SEO professionals, their entire thought process on search is based on a browser. For many people, the browser *is* the Web. But with end users' much higher expectations, developers and marketers are trying to make HTML do stuff it was never intended to do.

Some people in the industry don't believe the search engine crawler may have [reached its zenith](#) when it comes to information retrieval on the Web. Some have this look of "if we don't fix Web pages for the crawler, what *are* we going to do?"

And that is the very crux of textbook SEO's diminishing value.

I've gone on record as saying, "The Web is no longer just a collection of HTML pages linked together. It is a network of networks of people who are totally connected to each other. I believe it's the understanding of these connections that will shape not just search, but all of marketing."

The original Web grew and grew, and everyone wondered how we would we find anything. Google became the dominant force it is by solving that problem. Now there is another explosion of data on the Web that needs to be harnessed and mined. It's a new problem space for search engines and a new marketing space for us.

Enter Web 3.0.

The base of the next generation of Web applications will probably be in the Resource Description Framework ([RDF](#)). This is a means of providing data that is linked from multiple Web sites or databases. I think this is the type of approach being used for universal/blended search results. Knowing that one URL has various datasets related to it and unifying those data lead to

interesting ways of producing new mash-ups and combined applications.

Rest assured, HTML isn't going away anytime soon. And I love it for doing online banking and all kinds of other stuff it's good for. But I don't believe our industry's future will be based purely on helping to scoot a dumb crawler through our clients' Web sites. The voice of the end user is loud and dominant, and so much of our marketing is out of our hands.

The end user can take control. It's not just about getting clients into the top 10 blue links anymore. That worked when Google was the only game in town and nobody gave a hoot (let alone a tweet) about social networking sites.

The audiences we're marketing to are more evenly distributed around the Web, not just huddled around a search engine query box as they used to be. We must start thinking more about targeting that human audience in its various locations instead of simply laboring on behalf of a dumb bot.

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