

Hot topic

Customer-controlled marketing

Verbatim:

A recent Zoomerang survey concluded that 79% of marketers were entirely unfamiliar with the phrase 'Web 2.0.'

GET CLUED IN

MYSTERY OF 'WEB 2.0' CONCEPT SOLVED

Marketers must be on the cutting edge, clued in to the latest hot-button topics facing the industry. But sometimes the jargon can get a little ahead of a clear understanding of how these concepts actually relate to day-to-day marketing and our business plans. One of the phrases bandied about with increasing frequency lately is "Web 2.0," a round-up phrase that is generally accepted to refer to the Web technologies that encourage the collaboration and open sharing of information. Products of Web 2.0 include Weblogs (blogs), social networking sites, video sharing sites, podcasts, wikis and vlogs (video-based blogs), among others. A recent Zoomerang survey conducted with 400 marketing professionals concluded that 79% of marketers were entirely unfamiliar with the phrase "Web 2.0." So let's review the basics of Web 2.0 strategies:

—Allison Enright, Staff Writer



RSS

To really understand a lot of Web 2.0 technologies, you have to understand a primary distribution method called **RSS—Really Simple Syndication**. RSS is a way for people to receive information from blogs, news sites and podcasts at self-selected intervals (such as hourly, daily, weekly). RSS eliminates the need to visit sites individually and instead sends the information right to wherever you want it—to your desktop, Web browser or mobile device. The key to RSS's growing popularity is that it exemplifies the consumer's ability to time-shift and get information when and how they want it.

Podcasts (see facing page) also use RSS as their primary method of distribution. Once you sign up to receive a podcast via RSS, each time a new podcast audio or video episode is posted (or when you ask to receive it), the data file is automatically sent to your Web feed aggregator, a software program

where online feeds are categorized and managed. Easy-to-use aggregators and RSS readers can be found at such sites as newsgator.com and bloglines.com, and on popular search portals such as Google and Yahoo!. If you have a personalized page with any of the big search engines (like My Yahoo! or Google homepage) where you have selected to receive news headlines, movie times, weather or the like, you are likely already subscribing to RSS feeds, perhaps without realizing it.

Web sites offering RSS usually feature the logo (shown above) or a phrase such as "subscribe to feed."



For marketers: RSS can help improve your lines of communication. Offering an RSS feed of your latest company news, press releases or conference calls will allow interested consumers to get that information whenever you release it—they don't have to track it down because you've already pushed it to them.

WEBLOGS, VIDEOLOGS

Fresh Facts:

- ★ About 8% of Fortune 500 companies have active company blogs written by employees, including category leaders **The Boeing Co.** (authored by its VP of marketing), **Ford Motor Co.** and **Hewlett Packard.**
- ★ 50 million blogs were tracked by Technorati, a search engine for blogs, in July 2006; the number of blogs has doubled every six months over the last three years.

If **BLOGS** are the granddaddy of Web 2.0, **VLOGS** are the punked-out grandchildren. Blogs are Web sites where blog authors can pontificate about subjects of interest to them and host a commentary space for reader responses. Interaction between authors and readers is key, and blogs often link to other blogs with similar topics of conversation to generate community. Traditional blogs rely on text and images; vlogs, however, are blogs taken to digital video form. They are light on text and have media files embedded on the page. Vlogs in their truest form

(sans most text) are few in the business world right now, but a hybrid of traditional text/image blogs with embedded videos within posts are getting easier to find.

For marketers:

Incorporating blogging into your marketing plan adds another line of communication between company and client, and the insights of

clients or customers can lead to new ideas and improved services. Ed Brill, a business executive at IBM, has written a personal blog about his work and life at the company since 2002. "I found that the one-to-one community interactions became incredibly powerful for decision-making in my own job—I can point to deals that happened because of discussion on my Weblog," he says. Brill's blog gets about 25,000 hits a day, including visitors who come directly to his site and via RSS subscribers.



PODCASTS

The word "PODCAST" is a *portmanteau* of the words "iPod" and "broadcast," and refers to media files that can be transferred from the Internet to a desktop or portable device, such as an iPod or mp3

PODCAST WAS NAMED THE "WORD OF THE YEAR" BY THE NEW OXFORD AMERICAN DICTIONARY IN 2005.

utes in length to a half an hour or more. The release of the video-enabled iPod in 2005 helped create the market for video podcasts

Podcast users search for podcasts by keyword or category and can track down programs that directly interest them, so either producing your own podcast, or sponsoring or advertising with one that already fits the demographic you seek, can be a new outlet.

New York-based Emarketer Inc. estimates the active podcast audience in the United States (downloading an average of one or more feeds per week) in 2006 was 3 million; it projects that number to grow to 15 million by 2010.



iTunes

player; to be played at the user's convenience. Podcasts, which are frequently audio files but are also coming to include video files, really emerged in the public in 2003 and have been adopted by all sorts of groups who have a message to send, including businesses. Podcasters, the people who produce podcasts, usually use RSS to transmit their programs, which typically run anywhere from a few min-

(aka videocasts), which deliver a combination of digital video and audio like a television broadcast to portable players.

For marketers: The way podcasts can be tailored for niche audiences holds great appeal for marketers looking to provide that added, custom touch-point with consumers.

THOUSANDS OF PODCASTS ARE LISTED IN DIRECTORIES ON ITUNES AND PODCAST ALLEY.COM



SOCIAL NETWORKING/SHARING SITES

The evolution of Web 2.0 includes the development of **SOCIAL NETWORKING**

SITES (MySpace.com, Facebook and LinkedIn), video- and photo-sharing sites

(including YouTube and Flickr), and collaborative wiki platforms and products

(such as Wikipedia and Internet browser Mozilla Firefox). The common thread among all these strategies gets at the heart of what Web 2.0 defines—interaction, sharing and community building.

Fast Facts ★ 7 billion video streams were downloaded by 110 million U.S. consumers in August 2006; the average user viewed 63 streams, according to comScore Networks Inc.

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- Catherine Eck (Western USA), (312) 542-9103. E-mail: ceck@ama.org



For marketers: Getting in on the conversations that are happening online is becoming essential if a brand wants to be perceived as relevant and buzzworthy. Marketers are generating their own buzz by creating fun product profiles on sites like MySpace and by posting videos on video-sharing sites like YouTube.com that are viewed by thousands on the site—and then sent on to millions more virally. A video forwarded by a trusted friend instantly adds validity to a marketer's message—something that is becoming harder to get as consumer's lose trust in marketing's push messages. According to Forrester Research, consumers trust each other and the recommendations of other consumers far more than they trust nearly all mass-media messaging. ■



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