

By Leeanna Kohn, Client Services – 28 February 2007

Sticky, Not Stuck

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Sticky, Not Stuck:

GETTING TO GRIPS WITH THE NEW WEB TOOLS

Every week seems to spawn a clever new piece of communications terminology. If you weren't born with a computer in your cot, the plethora of new jargon can seem a little daunting. So, in the first of a series of BrrandNew articles, I'll aim do a little de-mystifying and suggest ways to successfully utilise the new media.

We are supposedly in a new era of Web 2.0. This does not mean that the worldwide web platform as we knew it, has been upgraded to ensure compatibility with the recently-launched Windows Vista software. Or even that it has been upgraded.

Web 2.0 refers to the next generation of online use – the applications which enable me, the consumer, to 'interact' with the website. The causes of this are two-fold.

Firstly, there are several technical manifestations whose popularity has exponentially increased over the past few years. These include:

- Ajax—a combination of several technologies enriching my experience by allowing interaction, as on Flickr.com where I can upload and share photos
- Real Simple Syndication (RSS) is a family of web feed formats used to publish frequently updated digital content, as used by nzherald.co.nz or blogs
- Blogging - a regularly updated online journal in both text and video format (aka vlogs), as on MySpace.com
- Podcasts - a downloadable audio or video (aka vodcasts) file, made famous by Apple and suitable for playing on portable media players

A growing demand for authenticity, coupled with these new capabilities of Web 2.0 has enabled me, the consumer, to generate and distribute content online for free and in exploiting word-of-mouth properties, I can make it available for the viewing pleasure of any other internet user.

This has been commonly termed "user-generated content" but by no means encompasses all the processes and implications of this social phenomenon. Others have coined it "authentic media". Yet another descriptor is "social media".

This social media is being treated by the younger generation as the newest 'hang-out'. Look at MySpace. Boasting more than 154 million users, it has become one of the most popular English language, social networking websites worldwide¹. Here, I can develop and update my

own profile, in words, with colours, my own images, favourite music and movie files. I can see which of my friends are logged in, talk to them via instant messaging, blogs, bulletins or internal email and see if they have received my messages. I can view other people's pages, meet new people and make new friends. To one extreme, rapper, singer, model, blogger and actress, Tila Tequila's page has been viewed over 50 million times, and she has over 1.5 million friends online². The beauty of MySpace? The content is developed by its viewers. And with close to US\$25m in advertising revenue per month, it must be doing something right³.

Everyone seems to be getting on the social media bandwagon. And it's not just me and my friends. Brands are cashing in on this phenomenon as well.

The humanisation of brands is being exploited on MySpace. The success is not necessarily due to their amount of money, but the credibility of their interaction with us, the consumers. In the realisation that this is a two-way medium, the MySpace community provides a platform where your brand becomes part of the conversation. Chances are, we're already talking about your brand...loving it...loathing it...even developing unappreciated caricatures (and let's not mention defacing it).

So how can you harness this technology without eroding the sacred trust that comes with the power of our personal recommendations? We all know the adverse impact of not responding to trends can have on your consumer acquisition and retention.

In this world of free reign, your fragile credibility is under constant scrutiny. For the strong-willed, you as a brand can utilise our communities to drive buying decisions and form positive product opinions. You can also gain our honest opinion on your products or services (without paying the earth for it) which can determine your marketing and / or sales strategies for your product or service, or upcoming launches.

And how does one go about this, you ask? There are three steps you need to consider before you travel down this path:

- In this space, what will you mean to us? What representation of your brand can we incorporate into our identities? Or will you create a cool place for us to hang out with like-minded friends? Or will you provide an inside piece of information that makes us 'cool' with our friends?

- Find a community which fits with your brand and engage it. (Believe me, its easier to utilise existing resources such as MySpace which has considerable pulling power to encourage us to visit and stay)
- It's about interaction. This is not just a presentation of your information. It's a discussion point. And it's a whole new thing to create a community around this. We expect you as the brand to not only talk to us, but also to demonstrate your credibility with inside, practical knowledge. Think about how you're going to create this level of participation

This is the first of a number of articles on Web 2.0 and it's capabilities. Subsequent BrrandNew issues will contain further articles, highlighting new technologies, outlining their features and discussing their merits and pitfalls.

1 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MySpace>

2 Time Magazine, Caplan et al., "Tila Tequila, The Madonna of MySpace", December 2006, p32

3 www.mediaweek.com, Mike Sheilds, "MySpace Monthly Ad Revenue Nears \$25mil.", February 8, 2007