

# Web 2.0 Basics



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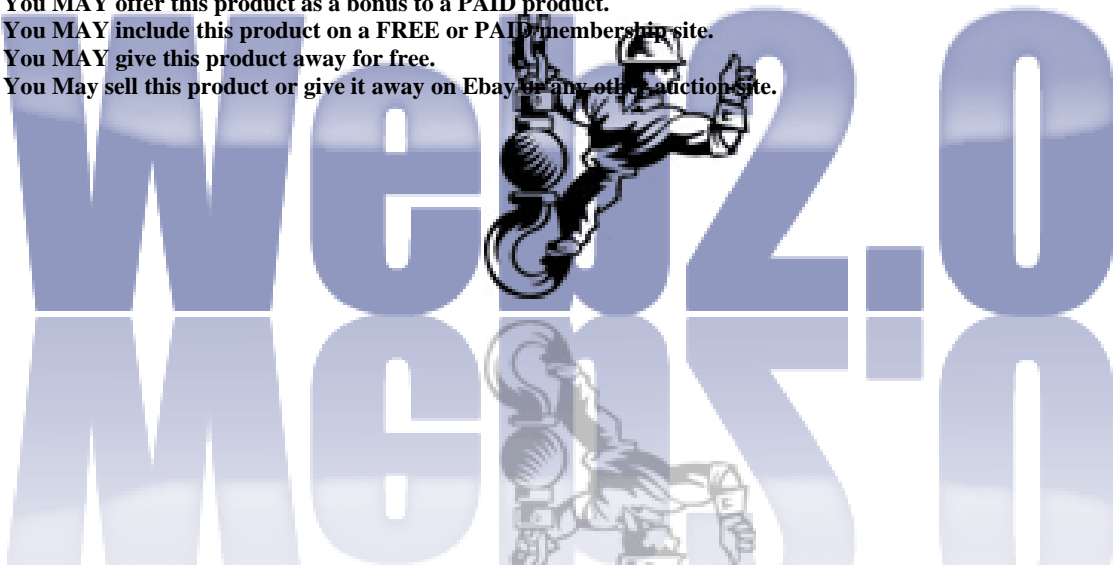
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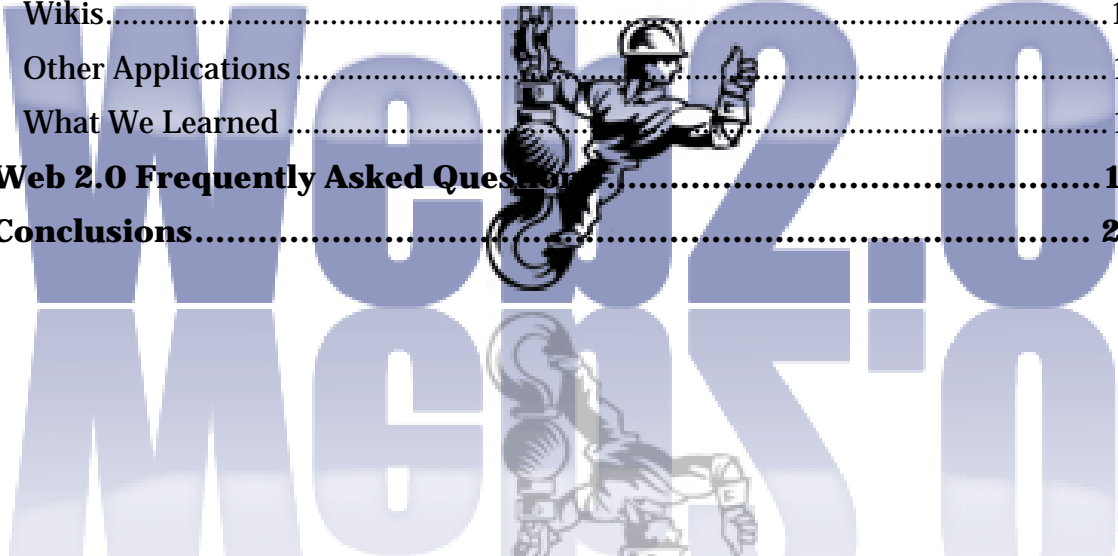
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# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction Web 2.0</b> .....	<b>5</b>
What IS It? .....	6
<b>Web 2.0 Websites</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Web 2.0 and Business .....	10
What We Learned .....	11
<b>Web 2.0 Sites</b> .....	<b>12</b>
Social Bookmarking Sites .....	12
Weblogs .....	13
Folksonomies .....	15
Wikis.....	16
Other Applications .....	17
What We Learned .....	17
<b>Web 2.0 Frequently Asked Questions</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>Conclusions</b> .....	<b>23</b>



## **Introduction Web 2.0**

The wave of the future is here... and it is Web 2.0. If you haven't heard already, out with the old and in with the new. Well, sort of...

In "times of old" people relied on the Internet as a one-way tool for communicating with others. Most business entrepreneurs will set up a website, then offer their opinions, advice, and more to anyone willing to listen, pay attention, or chime in.

That has all changed. Now people are relying on a relatively old concept to change the way they do business on the Web. Instead of using the Internet as a one-way tool for communicating, people are now realizing the Web's potential for creating an interactive, dynamic environment. In this environment, individuals, consumers, and businesses can collaborate and communicate in new and simpler ways.

**First popularized in 2004 and coined by O'Reilly Media, Web 2.0 is the "next generation" Web...**

When we think of the term "next generation", we automatically think of something new and innovative. The way we use the Web is new, but the technology supporting what people do with the Web has existed for decades.

While 2.0 isn't exactly new, the next generation user or modern web users are using the technology supporting it in new ways. Long gone are the days of old where reading information on the Web was much like reading a book. Today people use the web for various purposes, including sharing information with others and to collaborate and communicate with others. To understand this, you must understand 2.0.

## **What IS It?**

Web 2.0 is a broad term describing many different kinds of websites, websites that provide a platform where end-users have control over the content of sites. Web 2.0 includes social networking sites, wikis, sites like Squidoo.com and MySpace.com, folksonomies, Blogs, RSS Feeds, and other sites that emphasize collaboration and sharing among users.

Web 2.0 isn't a NEW Internet, but a new way of communicating using the World Wide Web. It focuses on building communities where people come together to share their ideas, passions and interests. Some people have used collaborative and community-based sites since the dawn of the Web. Only recently have people other than consumers begun realizing the true potential of collaborative networking.

The "old" way of doing things focused on individual users creating applications from which they presented visitors information. For example, a person sat at their computer, created a website, and provided information to visitors. They sold product to visitors. They allowed feedback, usually in the form of a one-way email communication, web form, or other application. Web 2.0 encourages an approach to the Web where people form communities and collaborate to provide information on the Web. Instead of one person sitting at the end of a computer terminal, there are multiple people at many terminals all capable of accessing the same information, like a list of your favorites you bookmark on the Web.

Consider for example, Wikipedia.org. This is an ideal example of how the Web is transforming. This modern-day encyclopedia of information is a collection of insights and information gathered from people across the world. There is no one "editor" or author, rather people share and collaborate to create a resource that includes insights from all walks of life. The technology supporting this site allows users to collaborate and edit information using some formal and informal guidelines. The community works to approve or disprove new information, but overall, just about anyone can place information on the site.

To understand Web 2.0, it will help to explore some of the common sites and terms used in conjunction with this new web platform. In the next section, we will spend some time exploring the different sites that make up Web 2.0, and how you can use them to your benefit.



## **Web 2.0 Websites**

Web 2.0 websites are not built using the traditional computer “platform” even though many people refer to the technology supporting Web 2.0 as a platform in its own right. Web 2.0 sites are noted by their ability to enhance and promote open communication among users. They operate in a much more decentralized manner than traditional sites do.

To get a better idea of how Web 2.0 works, let’s use the analogy of a corporation. Typically, in a traditional hierarchical corporation, information is passed from the top down. You have the CEO of the company, who may pass information to the controller, who may pass information to accounting managers, who may pass information to line workers. If the company were operating like Web 2.0, everyone would disseminate information horizontally, through shared systems, meaning the person on the bottom of the chain of command would have instant access to the same information the person at the top of the organization might.

One marked difference distinguishing Web 2.0 from the web of old is the philosophy that supports it. Web 2.0 encourages freedom of use, and sharing among all users. It supports the disintegration of hierarchical models of use, and instead promotes a horizontal or collaborative approach to knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing is, after all, a collective effort that includes the information and expertise of multiple members within an organization, community, or other forum.

### **Web 2.0 Key Features**

Most sites, regardless of their platform, share key features if they are 2.0 sites. Here are some of the key features and benefits associated with this new wave in technology.

1. Web 2.0 encourages greater collaboration among webmasters and visitors, so that interactive communities are created on the Web.
2. Web 2.0 approaches the Web as a platform for building conversation and communities.
3. The “new” Web focuses more on social networking and sharing through various means including through blogs, wikis, and more.
4. The philosophy behind Web 2.0 is one that promotes an “architecture of participation” where all visitors and users have the opportunity to contribute to a site’s development and progress.
5. The Web no longer serves as an entity in itself, but rather as a platform individuals can use to connect with others.

Whether sharing photographs, personal journals, or data, Web 2.0 allows users to create communities from scratch, using many promising new technologies. Some examples of Web 2.0 sites include: Craigslist, Skype, del.icio.us, Technorati, Squidoo, Flickr, and more. We will talk more about some of these sites later.

Now that you have a better idea of “what” Web 2.0 is, let’s look at some of the different platforms used by users. Remember, not all Web 2.0 sites are alike.

## **Web 2.0 and Business**

Web 2.0 is not popular among consumers only. Businesses are now realizing the potential benefits Web 2.0 has to offer. While many consumers think of popular applications like MySpace when they ponder Web 2.0, many fail to connect this technology with its potential for business.

Corporations can reduce much of the expense associated with installing and configuring essential software and applications on individual computers when they take advantage of Web 2.0. Rather than have an IT manager set up, configure, and maintain a company's applications and software on corporate servers, a company can now access a vendor's server to acquire the information they need for their company.

Companies can now also share information and collaborate with one another in new and interesting ways. This will require business managers to start thinking more horizontally, moving away from a hierarchical model of communicating to one where knowledge is shared freely among employees, suppliers, vendors, and even competitors.

Some company's are even encouraging their customers to take advantage of social networks to help them advertise. GM, for example, allowed consumers to create commercials for some of their popular vehicles a while back. While many of these left much room for improvement, such integration allows for greater innovation and shared interest among key agents – consumers.

A company can also help businesses make working more practical and simpler. Rather than have individuals use stand-alone systems only, company's can now encourage the joint use of software and computers among multiple users. Data can easily be shared from one person to next, meetings can be held online, and problem solving can take place from a much broader perspective.

As with anything, there are drawbacks to using this technology, even in the world of business. Business entrepreneurs have to ensure they fully understand the implications and utility of using Web 2.0 before they adopt the technology. Many must also realize that this technology has existed for some time, but offers an interactive approach to marketing and everyday business operations. A company should examine how they can integrate Web 2.0 into daily operations while still hedging risks.

### **What We Learned**

Web 2.0 is a community-based platform or network, one encouraging shared participation and community effort. Web applications common to this new platform include both Web and non-web applications (like instant messaging). Using this new platform, end-users throughout the globe can share data, information, photographs, personal interests, and more.

More and more businesses are also realizing the potential benefits of using a collaborative application and software such as that provided through Web 2.0 technologies. The entire way we do business is changing. Now that your interest is peaking, let us look at some of these applications, and the technology supporting Web 2.0.

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## **Web 2.0 Sites**

How do you know if you have landed on a Web 2.0 platform? Chances are, if you are asked to contribute to the content or body of knowledge contained on the site, you've hit the lottery. Most sites are those that encourage visitors to add their insights to a page, whether through ongoing commentary, through editing, or by any other means available.

Web 2.0 sites differ in their mission and purpose from traditional web pages. Some provide users the opportunity to share personal biographies, pictures, and journals. Examples include sites like MySpace.com. This fast and growing site is popular among the young and old. Even celebrities use the site to post pictures, update their fans, and promote their latest shows or movies.

One of the advantages of Web 2.0 is users use it to express their opinions or passions, but also passively promote their products or services in the process. Here are some other common site characteristics of this new trend.

### **Social Bookmarking Sites**

Social bookmarking sites are sites that allow Internet users to classify and share their Internet bookmarks or favorites with others. They are similar to social networking sites, where users share content, personal photographs, and other information. Social networking and social bookmarking sites alike both work to promote a community-type look and feel.

While the intent of social networking sites is more to create communities of like-minded people, social bookmarking sites concentrate more on increasing the popularity of common Internet bookmarks or favorites. You can tell the whole world what your passions are, and increase the page rank to your favorite sites, by placing tags on them and listing them in social bookmarking networks.

Social networks are nothing new, they have existed for decades on the Internet. Only recently however, have people taken a keen interest in their potential,

especially from a marketing perspective. Think about it; you put bookmarks to all your blogs, sites, and lists in a public forum. Others can link to your sites and click through to visit your sites through the social networking site you list with. You increase knowledge and awareness of your sites and also get free advertising and targeted traffic.

If the quality of information you provide is worthwhile, chances are you benefit tremendously from this new technology.

There is little difference between the two technologies; many use them as one in the same. If you do plan to use social networking or bookmarking sites to publicize your content, just be sure you do it in a non-threatening, non-confrontational, and legitimate manner. No one likes a spammer, and you can spam social sites.

Remember, people join these sites and post information because they want quality links and information from real people. If you use the sites as a general “bulletin board” or classified ad, you diminish the value and might even get booted off.

In fact, one of the more commonly cited “drawbacks” of these sites is they do not rely on a standard set of tagging or keywords, so people can often set up unclear tags or fill the site with misspelled tags in the name of driving more traffic to their sites. Many sites are more likely to corrode as people use them more as a page rank boosting or search engine tool than to provide valuable information. Don't book the same site repeatedly or you will get into trouble.

## **Weblogs**

You've probably heard the term “blog.” This is short for web log or weblog. This is a site that allows users to create journal or diary-like entries in a chronological way. Users often post blogs or short entries and articles on information they are

passionate about or have an interest in. Still others focus on providing content about news, entertainment or political commentary.

Many use these as online journals and diaries to communicate the latest and greatest events with their friends. Most bloggers now include photos and other graphic elements in their web pages, along with basic text. You can even use MP3 or videos to enhance the quality of content provided in blogs.

Most bloggers allow visitors to post feedback or comments about their blog entries, so in some ways web logs serve as a mini community or forum. Popular blogs may receive hundreds of visitors every month. There are search engines whose sole purpose involves tracking blogs and related sites, including Technorati.com for example.

One of the reasons web logs are popular for marketing is they allow users to provide content that is updated frequently. You can post daily, weekly, or monthly. The more frequently you post information to blogs, the more likely you are to maintain your page ranking.

Like social bookmarking sites, blogs are not anything new, but are now gaining more attention and popularity among individuals, communities, and online entrepreneurs and marketers. People are using them in many ways, even politically, to announce their passions, beliefs, purpose, or to pitch their products and services while providing visitors with valuable content and information.

Like social networking sites, blogs are targets for spammers, who frequently post spam and links to junk sites in the comments section of blogs, so most webmasters will have to monitor this to avoid clogging their blog with unnecessary spam.

Everyone these days, from celebrities again to political commentators use blogs to deliver information and news to people throughout the globe. There are private

and public blogs, blogs focusing on entertainment, those focusing on politics, the media, and people. Even corporations are starting their own blog campaigns to encourage people to investigate their company.

Of course, as with anything there are problems with blogs and potential concerns. For example, many people do not realize the consequences of posting potentially negative or defamatory information on their blogs. Yes, free speech is important. But bloggers beware; there are many instances where bloggers have been cited for liability or defamation. Make sure if you communicate, you do so wisely and with good intent.

### **Folksonomies**

An interesting name for an interesting concept, these are sites that allow users to categorize and classify information on the Web, including websites or pages, photographs, and other information in links. Users can classify information using tags, or special labels containing brief information about each categorized piece of information.

An example of a popular “folksonomy” site is Flickr, where users can classify and organize and share photographs. Yet another is del.icio.us that allows users to tag and classify information ranging from web pages to links to blogs and more. As with anything, once information is tagged and categorized, it becomes more easily and readily available to the public. Think of tagging as a unique way of creating navigation bars, bars that reside throughout the Web or that are easily accessed through multiple portals on the Web, rather than through a single web page.

Tagged sites are more likely to be picked up by search engines, though some people will refer to popular folksonomy sites to find information they are looking for rather than rely on popular search engines including Google.

There are some disadvantages of using categorical sites as these. For one, the tagging “system” isn’t really well defined. Because there are no exact rules or regulations defining how tags should be implemented or inserted, many are inserted inconsistently. This can make navigating these sites a bit tricky.

However, if used wisely, folksonomy sites and tagged pages are an excellent way to provide information to the public in an easily navigable format. As with anything, entrepreneurs and other small business owners can use these sites to help promote their products, services or link, to their web pages or affiliate marketing sites on the Web.

### **Wikis**

Another example of Web 2.0 in full force is the wiki. These are websites that allow individuals to add, edit, and even remove content. Many act like an encyclopedia, like Wikipedia.org, where users can add content creating a global online dictionary or encyclopedia of sorts.

The problem with such sites is the information provided in the sites may not always be accurate. Remember, anyone can log into the site and edit, remove, or add information, so most “wikis” need some form of monitoring.

This usually comes in the form of community collaboration, where a group or wiki community work together to make sure any and all users are engaging in reasonable and acceptable practices when adding information.

As a benefit, these sites may include more information than traditional strict “book” type or “knowledge based” learning centers. Most of these sites work on the premise that communities will band together to provide honest and positive information, rather than work in a malicious or malevolent way.

Wikis are less of a tool for self-promotion than some other common Web 2.0 interfaces like social bookmarking sites and blogs. Their primary foundation is a

content based site and community of people gathered together to learn and grow. Many are globally based.

To find information in a wiki, one can often rely on an internal search engine that will look for data using key search terms; much like one might look for information on Google or any other mainstream Web application.

### **Other Applications**

Of course, there are many other types of Web applications that qualify as Web 2.0 interfaces or platforms for users. Consider for example, YouTube, which allows users from all walks of life to create streamlined video clips to the world at large.

Once again, this site is one that commoners and celebrities alike have attached to. Users can post any type of video clip, the size using a simple web cam. Many provide parodies of political figures and celebrities, while others do nothing more than film ordinary events. Not surprisingly however, YouTube and sites like it are among the fastest growing on the Web, because face it... people like to see other people in action.

### **What We Learned**

There are many types of sites one can categorize as part of the growing Web 2.0 base. These sites are user-friendly sites that promote socialization, collaboration, and community building. These sites are also frequently used as a platform for small businesses and entrepreneurs to introduce their products and services to the public without blatantly advertising them.

Many Web 2.0 sites, including social bookmarking sites, have existed for centuries. They are only now gaining popularity as people begin to realize the potential for boosting business and page ranks. These sites are also places for individuals who just want an opportunity to communicate with a global community. Of critical importance in the future will be finding ways to help keep these sites “spam” free and user friendly. As with any technology, Web 2.0 has its

criticisms, including the likelihood that the sites will become corrupted by malicious individuals whose sole purpose for posting is “spamming.”

Now that you have a better handle on what Web 2.0 is and how people use it, let’s review some frequently asked questions.



## **Web 2.0 Frequently Asked Questions**

Now that you know a little more about Web 2.0 and how you can benefit, let's explore some less commonly understood questions surrounding this incredible technology.

### **Q. What is the Semantic Web?**

**A.** Semantic technologies often promote Web 2.0 sites. The Semantic Web enables users to create files explaining relationships between data sets. This technology allows for greater data integration and helps users classify and categorize information. Many also use the term “digital library” to identify these types of sites and this technology. It is the platform from which social bookmarking and other taxonomy type or categorical sites are created from.

### **Q. What is tagging?**

**A.** Tagging is a way users can classify or organize and categorize data, and is common on many sites including social bookmarking sites and folksonomies. How it works is users attach tags to data items like web pages, their blog entries or even photographs they want classified and categorized. Tagging is not the same as the Semantic system, which allows users to categorize information using unique identifiers rather than common tags. Relationships in a Semantic environment are more specific than in a tagging environment. For example, when one tags a blog page, they may tag it with terms like, “internet marketing” or “summer picnic” whereas when one classifies information semantically, they will tag the information using a unique identifier. If someone classifies a web blog entry for example, they may identify it using the blog author's name, the date of creation and the source of content used to create the blog entry.

**Q. I still do not fully understand Web 2.0. Can you expand?**

**A.** Web 2.0 is a client-sided application, meaning end-users, people sitting at their computer, can categorize, tag and store data on the Web and share it with others. For example, let's say you bookmark 3 of your favorite sites. Usually, when you visit another computer, your bookmarks will not show up when you log in. When you use Web 2.0 technologies however, you bookmark your favorite sites to public forums, so you can access them from anywhere. At the same time, anyone else can access your favorites from any computer anywhere in the world. Some call this "intelligent" sharing of data. It is certainly a new way to classify and navigate information provided on the Web.

**Q. How can I learn more about this exciting new technology?**

**A.** The best way to learn more about Web 2.0 is to visit sites that use this technology. Keep in mind the technology itself isn't "new" it has existed for some time. People are finding new and interesting ways however, to use this technology to their benefit. How can you take advantage of 2.0? Here are some places to check out:

- Squidoo.com
- YouTube.com
- MySpace.com
- Del.icio.us
- Technorati.com
- Digg.com
- Flickr.com
- Blogger.com

You can also Google the term "Web 2.0" and see what comes up to learn more and to access more sites using this technology.

**Q. How do I use a weblog? Isn't it dangerous?**

**A.** To use a blog or web log, all you have to do is set up an account. Anyone can set up a blog these days. Most people uses blogs as online journals or commentaries. You can share photographs of family members; you can share personal insights about political subjects or subjects you feel passionate about. The danger comes when someone uses blogs in a slanderous or malicious way. You should note that there may be some repercussions to posting your opinions on the Web. In some countries, people have been arrested for information they placed on a private blog. You should also know that when you post information to the Web, you are placing your personal information for the entire world to see. So if you do not want something public, do not post it on a blog, or keep your blog private.

Many people, including media moguls, use blogs to deliver news information on the Web in a consistent and timely fashion. As more and more people turn to the Web for information and advice, it makes sense to put information on the Web for others to access. People can comment on your Blog entries if you set up your blog in a way that allows them to do so, but this isn't always a necessity. Some people prefer others do not comment on their blog, because this may result in spamming.

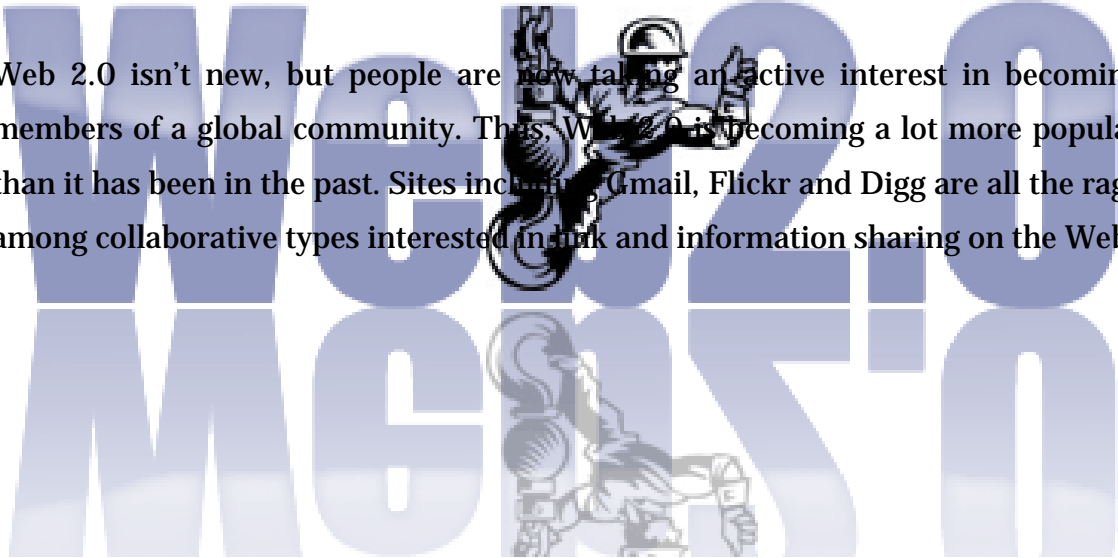
**Q. What is RSS?**

**A.** This is another technology rapidly gaining popularity. RSS technology, or "Really Simple Syndication" is a tool anyone can use to tell the world at large about new blog entries or web entries. What you do is set up your site content using RSS tools or content aggregators. What happens is any time you post new information to your page, that information is fed to people that are linked to your feed.

**Q. If Web 2.0 isn't new, who cares?**

**A.** Web 2.0 isn't new, but people are finding new and innovative ways to use it. If strategic, you can use Web 2.0 to market your products and services and promote your business or site to millions of people around the world. You do have to do this in a politically correct and decent way. Many applications allow readers to interact with the Web pages they browse. These applications are all part of Web 2.0 technology, and include SOAP, XML, JAVASCRIPT and AJAX. These interesting technologies allow you to interact with a web page that is live in much the same way you would interact with a page from your own computer, a page you created.

Web 2.0 isn't new, but people are now taking an active interest in becoming members of a global community. Thus, Web 2.0 is becoming a lot more popular than it has been in the past. Sites including Gmail, Flickr and Digg are all the rage among collaborative types interested in link and information sharing on the Web.



## **Conclusions**

Web 2.0 is a popular term used to describe an old system but a new way of thinking about and using the Internet. If you are an entrepreneur or business owner, you will find 2.0 is a great tool for promoting your business and establishing your credibility on the Web.

If you are someone interested in sharing information and forming collective communities on the Internet, you will also find 2.0 technology something new, exciting, and innovative to explore.

No matter your intent or purpose, it's worth a little time and effort. So take your time and explore 2.0 for all it is worth. Have fun, and share!



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