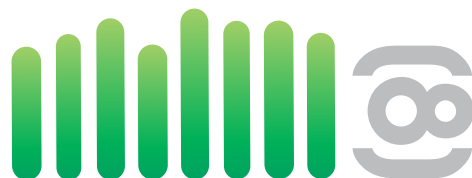


Web 2.0

A Social Phenomenon

Key to understanding Web 2.0 trends in relation to growing social causes.



Brand strategy. Conscious messaging. Intelligent design.



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To many, the phenomenon known as Web 2.0 is as abstract as a Miro painting. His paintings make perfect sense if you understand each of the elements, language, social implications and context. Surprisingly those exact elements identify the key to understanding how Web 2.0 and the nature of social causes have grown in unison.

The common goal behind all social causes is to raise awareness or consciousness surrounding a particular issue, motivating thought and taking action. In order to be effective, it requires committed people with incredible focus and an interested audience. In the past, these movements burned an incredible amount of time simply reaching out, trying to spark interest, educate and usually exhausting resources preventing asking for the support required to further the cause.

In the past many grassroots efforts were reduced to door-to-door strategies, calling people at home or soliciting outside sympathetic storefronts. Results do vary, but more often than not, an eye roll or an apology was the response rather than a smile or handing over cold-hard cash. For the larger, better-funded social causes, the vehicle became traditional media, fighting for the attention of the would be philanthropists among a saturated sea of competing messaging. Reality was, most of these efforts invade inconveniently upon a persons day and going in for the “ask” is less effective without the common interest. It can be hit or miss, really.

How has the gap been bridged? Web 2.0, of course.

Web 2.0, the second generation of web interactivity includes the rise of social networking, collaboration tools, enhanced connectivity, content creation platforms and a vehicle for mass distribution. People have been able to form communities unlike never before, giving strength to the old saying “untied we stand”.

Every day, I log into three or more different websites whose main purpose is bringing like-minded individuals together. Far from being simple communication tools, the online social platforms allow users to create public personas that express likes, dislikes, goals, ideals and values with the intent to connect with others with similar perspectives. Requiring no introduction, the top social networking destinations defined the manner in which we interact with each other online today. MySpace, LiveJournal, Tribe.net, and Facebook are among the more addictive Web 2.0 locations, providing individuals and organizations alike the opportunity to correspond with one another through forums and discussions groups on any topic



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imaginable. Perhaps the most powerful tool on any one of these sites is the search field. With just a few keystrokes one is instantly connected with countless PEOPLE who together form communities of like-minded individuals, share interests from everything from microbrews to machinima, from synchronized swimming to saving the world. These connections are as real and meaningful as if they were in real life.

Thanks to Web 2.0, virtual is real.

People have been coming together to make a change in response to social causes and to create movements surrounding issues throughout history. Today, coming together no longer takes place exclusively in the three dimensional or “real” world. Virtual communities are just as real with real tools and applications to support any cause.

Take the wildly successful example of Kiva, which was founded in order to facilitate peer-to-peer connections between investors and entrepreneurs. Kiva was built as an open platform to allow anyone with \$25 to invest in a small business in a developing country. Partnering with microfinance institutions in developing countries, Kiva managed to lower microfinancing as a whole, creating more transparency, thus greater interest. People helping people regardless of their geographical location.

Let's think bigger, now. Really big. How about UNICEF? Many years ago, their first website comprised of a series of pictures, testimonials alongside a mailing address of where to send donations. Reflective of the early web, a passive experience, to say the least. Now the UNICEF site fully integrates Web 2.0 strategies through interactive games, videos testimonials and features plus the ability to engage with others across the planet on various topical issues. Fully integrated social networking and built in accountability is what makes their current site such a success. Granted, present on every page is the ability to choose your method of contribution, but that's not all you see. You see the faces of others who are doing their part. You see familiar names and not so familiar stories. You see the accumulated results and how people just like you have made a difference. These strategies make a difference in the countless other success stories pertaining to social causes, both large and small.

The Web 2.0 trend has changed the face of giving and has created new rules



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effecting all social change from the largest not-for-profit organization to the solitary person with a vision, benefiting both philanthropists and the beneficiaries alike. This is the golden ticket for social entrepreneurs, politicians and grass roots activists. Voice is empowerment. Empowered people create movements. Social movements cause change.

Social movements are happening now, both online and off, strengthened through the language of Web 2.0. This is the context within a new paradigm of interaction and the implications are borderless. However, like an abstract painting, one does not have to truly understand it in order to appreciate it and receive genuine benefits simply from its presence.