

Web 2.0-- Progress or Regress?

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Abstract

In this article, the pros, cons, growth rates, and qualities of Web 2.0 sites are discussed. The usage, viral content, characteristics and growth of websites like MySpace and Secondlife are presented and analyzed. Four different levels of Web 2.0 are explained. It is noted that the focus of the article are Level 3 applications- those that can only be accessed online- and when they are, the web server grows because the users add their own information. Different types of Web 2.0 sites like folksonomies and wikis are studied with examples cited for each.

The objective of this research is to determine if Web 2.0 is helping the World Wide Web advance. Researching the growth rate and efficiency of Web 2.0 sites will help us determine if Web 2.0 is helping the World Wide Web to expand. The result would be additional content on a particular web server, and therefore more users coming to the site. As more users visit the site, more content is added to the server, and so goes the cycle.

Web 2.0 is essential to study, especially at this point in time, because an increasingly large number of people of the younger generation are getting addicted to the sites. It is important to know the pros and cons as well as get the full view of the top Web 2.0 sites. Overall, the key difference between Web 2.0 and the original WWW is that Web 2.0 allows users to contribute so that the information of the site grows and changes.

Introduction

Heart racing. Fingers strumming. Eyes straining. Did I get any new posts on my wall? Was I tagged in any cool pictures? Did I get any friend requests? More than 30 million users everyday sit at their computer, waiting to log on to Facebook, a popular Web 2.0 site, thinking these things. The excitement, the hype, of Web 2.0, what is it all about? The real question is: what **is** Web 2.0?

The phrase "Web 2.0" is defined as the second generation of the Internet in which society interactions take place. In Web 2.0, users get the chance to experience aspects of a community in which they can communicate with others around the world through different technologies such as typing, posting pictures and videos, web blogging, and others. Sometimes thought of as an improved version of the World Wide Web, Web 2.0 was first termed by Tim O'Reilly in 2003. ¹ O'Reilly explained that the aftermath of the dot-com crash of 2000 could have been some kind of reviving point for the Web. He thus began work on the first Web 2.0 conference, held in 2004. ²

O'Reilly defined four levels of applications of Web 2.0. Level 0 applications can work online or offline. Examples of such applications include Google Maps and MapQuest. Level 1 applications can also be accessed offline, but demonstrate better features online. For example, iTunes can play one's own music without internet connection, but online, it allows one to purchase music as well. O'Reilly would probably classify an application such as Flickr into a Level 2 application. Level 2 applications are similar to Level 1 applications, gaining certain advantages online. Level 3 applications are the essence of Web 2.0 in that they can only be accessed online, and every time a level 3 site is used, the information on its web server grows. Examples of such applications include eBay, Craigslist, Skype, and AdSense.

The key difference between Web 2.0 and Web 1.0 (the original WWW) is that Web 2.0 allows users to contribute so that the information of the site grows and changes, and vice versa (people keep contributing because information keeps growing and changing). Xanga is a good example of Web 2.0- it is a website that people use primarily for blogging. A blog is an entry on a website about a specific subject, and it is often used as a personal diary entry³. A blog can contain text, pictures and links. Some blogs even contain videos and music. Xanga has about 4 million users, and each time a user adds content to his/her blog, he/she helps in developing the site's content.

How do Web 2.0 sites become popular? Most social networking sites become popular when a small group of people start using it excessively and convince their friends or colleagues to start using the website as well. As the site becomes more and more popular, automatically more people join, and most of the time it's just because they have heard of it or their friends are part of that site. Since its opening in 2003, every year MySpace has been steadily increasing its number of visitors. In 2004, it had less than 3 million users, and by January 2005, about 5 million. But by the end of 2006, MySpace had almost **60 million** users. This sharp increase was due to just that – its popularity made it more popular. This is important because it shows another ongoing cycle in the world of web.

Web 2.0 allows one to not only buy and read items, but also to sell and post. One such example is eBay. As users add items to the site to sell, they are steadily increasing the content on the site's server.

Characteristics:

Web 2.0 applications demonstrate similar characteristics.

For instance, most Web 2.0 applications are built on an easy-to-use program called Ajax, which stands for *Asynchronous JavaScript and XML*. Ajax uses JavaScript as its programming language. This program is known for having the ability to create interfaces that are extremely modern and interactive. Ajax and other such technologies also allow users to change one part of the browser, and let the change show up without having to refresh the entire page.

All Web 2.0 applications are all also thought of as platforms, or environments on top of which their own users can build applications. This means that users can now use applications wholly through a browser. Want a real life example? Toyota builds a base that is a metal sheet with many parts connected to it, including the parts of the exhaust system. This is called a chassis. The chassis is like the frame, or platform, of a car. When Toyota wants a Camry, it can put the Camry’s shell on top of a Toyota chassis. When it wants a minivan, it may place a minivan shell on top of the same chassis. These shells are like applications, easily built on top of a platform. Similarly unique web applications can be programmed on platforms. Web 2.0, if applied to automotive, would allow each user, or a community of users, to customize cars to their needs, much like Web 2.0 applications.

Platforms and other applications can be combined to create a “mash up,” a very useful program. Why don’t we take a look at the creative applications that have been built on top of Google Maps. The New York Times Real Estate Website has mashed up one of its applications with Google Maps in order to show the major construction in the city. Often, taking two good web applications and pounding them together provides an even more helpful program, just like this one.



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The following are the descriptions of some important platforms of today; they demonstrate the different genres of Web 2.0 sites that are most commonly used.

Platforms:

Some common Web 2.0 platforms available today are listed in the table below.

Web 2.0 site	Description	Type
Club Penguin	An online game mostly used by children. The users may go around to different areas of the virtual world,	Social networking and gaming

	play games, and converse with other "penguins".	
Craigslist	An online network that allows members to post any sort of advertisements for free.	Advertisement
Facebook	A popular social networking site that also allows photo and video sharing.	Photo content, Social networking
Flickr	A common example of early Web 2.0, Flickr allows its users to post and store photos.	Photo content, Social networking
Kazaa	Owned by Sharman Networks, used to exchange music files over the internet.	MP3 Content
LimeWire	A free music sharing site started by the same owners of Skype.	MP3 content
LinkedIn	Each member has their own profile which their "connections" can see. The connections are their business friends with whom they can chat online and find information about. Job searching is often done on this site.	Business networking
MySpace	A popular networking site owned by Fox. The site allows users to have their own personalized page that displays their friends, videos, favorite music, etc.	Social networking
Napster	Similar to Kazaa, can be used to download pictures, files, and most importantly, music.	MP3 content
Secondlife	An online 3-d world that users can control.	Social networking, gaming
Skype	An online global telephone network. The voice and video capabilities over the web through this site are free.	Social networking
YouTube	A website primarily used for posting and sharing videos. It has recently been bought by Google.	Video content
World of Warcraft (WoW)	A popular online game – requiring immediate payment – in which the players choose an avatar and guide it through a virtual world. Users earn money as well as gain experience as	Gaming

they play against each other.



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Above is a screenshot of a chat room on Club Penguin.

Although these sites have been classified into their separate kinds, it is important to understand that each one in the same category is also very different. For example, Skype, Club Penguin, MySpace, and Secondlife are all used for social networking, but in their unique ways. Skype is basically like an online telephone that allows a person to contact another anywhere in the world. It operates on a peer-to-peer model and most of its features are without cost. In Club Penguin kids can choose what color penguin they want to be, and with parental permission, move around a town and into different chat rooms. In a chat room, the penguins can waddle around, talk, go to stores, play games, and even buy items like clothes with the money they earn.

Secondlife is a downloadable virtual world in which users can make their own avatars and do almost anything that they could do in the real world: talk to other people, have business interactions, play and buy items with currency called "Linden dollars." MySpace is quite different from the other three in that it is more personal, and downloads aren't required. Users have their own page onto which they can submit videos and pictures, as well as write information about themselves. They can send messages to their friends and post bulletins or news.

LinkedIn is a business networking site in which the goal is to make a list of connections. Normally, the connections are people that they know or want to get to know for professional purposes. LinkedIn can also help the networkers to find jobs, possibly through their own connections.

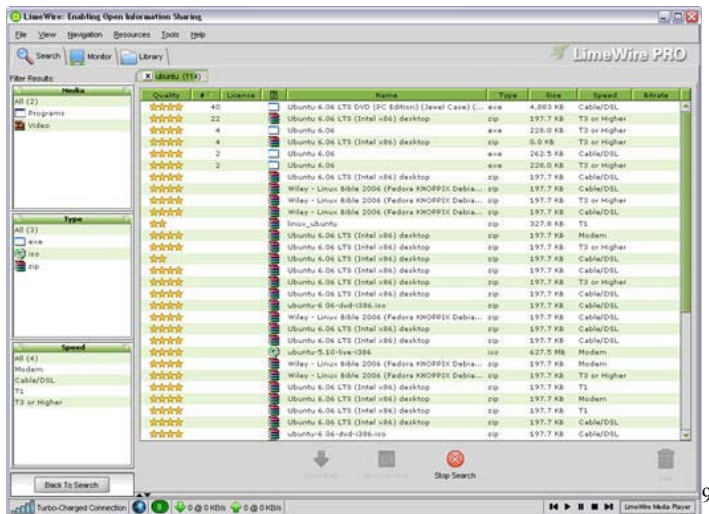
Craigslist is used for people to put up advertisements for anything ranging from a used blanket to a house for sale. The ad pricing is the following: \$75 for the Bay Area and \$25 for most other cities.⁶

Facebook is among the more popular social networking sites today. Facebook is a Level 3 site that is becoming increasingly popular each day. It revolves around high-school-age or older users creating accounts on which they can post their personal pictures. The users may search for and request to make friends with people they know. These friends can view the profile of the user, which includes their pictures, and also post on their wall. Users have their own profile picture, which helps others recognize them. Every time a user signs on, he or she may post on the walls of their "Facebook friends", helping the site to expand.

As said before, the most important part of Facebook is its ability to allow users to post personal pictures. Facebook has brought picture linking to a whole new level: when users put their pictures on their webpage, they can "tag" their Facebook friends in the picture. To do this a user simply clicks on the face of their friend in the picture, clicks "tag", and types in the name of their friend on the site. The friend will be informed that they have been tagged in that picture and can click on it to see.

Users may not realize it, but tagging is essentially a simple way of creating a link. Let's say I went to my friend's birthday party, and took along my camera. I took lots of pictures and when I got home, I put them all on Facebook. I tagged the people I knew, but many of them were friends of the birthday girl's, and I wasn't friends with them on Facebook, so I couldn't tag them. Once the birthday girl gets the message saying she was tagged by me in some pictures, she can take a look at them and request me to tag some of her other friends who were in the photo. As her friends see that she's tagged them, they may look at the pictures and find that the birthday girl forgot to tag another one of their friends, so they request to tag that person. This may go on and spread exponentially. It's spread is very much like a virus, thus called the viral effect.⁷

Kazaa, Napster, and LimeWire are music sharing websites. Many years ago Napster was sued for allowing music to be shared for free. Napster was shut down immediately thereafter because of the lawsuit.⁸ It recently opened again with Napster 2.0, and is now advertised as "fast, safe and legal." Now one must pay a small fee of \$9.95 per month. Kazaa also had a similar lawsuit, and subsequently became legal after the recording industry. LimeWire is free to users, and like some other previous P2P sites, content is uploaded by users for sharing.



World of Warcraft is a popular online game in which the user controls an avatar and its characteristics such as race and class. The point is to get through all seventy levels by performing quests, fighting monsters, and completing other such achievements. To play, one must purchase a software program, costing about twenty dollars, and must pay about 15 dollars a month. ¹⁰

YouTube, possibly the most well known video sharing website, is extremely easy to use and it is free for everybody. To post videos, one must get an account, but to watch videos, users don't even need an account. To watch videos, a user can type in a search name, and thousands of results are likely to show up. Just click one!

One different Web 2.0 application is a wiki. A dictatorship is to a democracy as a Web 1.0 site is to a wiki. A dictatorship is a rule by a single person; a Web 1.0 site is run and changed by one person (or company) as well. A democracy includes all the citizens to help vote and change the laws of the society; a wiki can be edited by any members of that particular web community. However, unlike a real democracy which elects a president, a wiki site elects no leader.

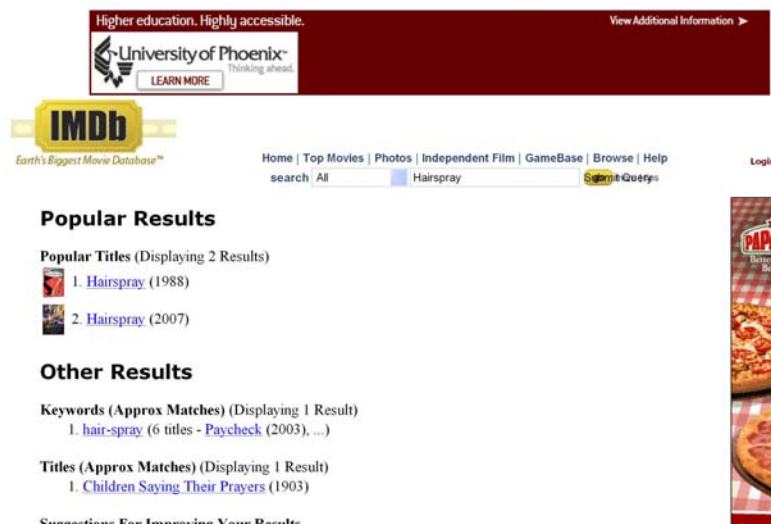
A wiki is essentially a site that absorbs information rapidly through its users, who first become members to add information. The users can create their own web pages on this site and continue to put (what we hope to be is) true information. Unlike other Web 2.0 applications such as Facebook, members may alter the content with any of the web pages on a wiki, not just their own. Often, web pages on a wiki have a common topic.

An example, IMDB - The International Movie Database - is a wiki that is all about the television media. It contains the name of almost every movie star, movie, and television show from the past, present and future. Each star, movie and show has its own page that lists the general information about it and often has pictures that the users post. So, why would a visitor to IMDB put the effort to write about things in the movie industry? Many just want to spread the word. Others want to be heard, want to show off their knowledge.

Since there is no official person that can verify the accuracy of information added by a visitor to IMDB, information on it may or may not be accurate. This results in a perception that wikis are unreliable – which is a major weakness of the use of wikis by serious writers and reporters.

In spite of its weaknesses, wikis also have their advantages: they are extremely simple to use and they allow a user to find information easily. Wikis also typically do not require people to cite them, which can be helpful to the users who need a small bit of information or a quick confirmation. Some other advantages - information changes fast, and anyone can update a wiki as soon as there is new information on the topic. For example, Wikipedia contains information about almost every well-known person, place and thing. As soon as someone discovers a new fact about that person, place, or thing they can add it to the wiki themselves. This way, news travels faster and more intelligence is gained.


Type in the movie's name (Hairspray):



Click on the movie link to see the facts and who is acting in it:

more

Photos (see all 150 photos)



Overview

Director: Adam Shankman

Writers (WGA): Leslie Dixon (screenplay)
John Waters (1988 screenplay)
[more](#)

Release Date: 20 July 2007 (USA) [more](#) [view trailer](#)

Genre: Comedy / Drama / Musical [more](#)

Tagline: Get ready for something big July 20th! [more](#)

Plot Outline: Pleasantly plump teenager Tracy Turnblad teaches 1962 Baltimore a thing or two about integration after landing a spot on a local TV dance show. [more](#)

Plot Synopsis: [View full synopsis. \(warning! may contain spoilers\)](#)



Plot Keywords: Remake / Love At First Sight / Teen / Mother Daughter Relationship / Dance [more](#)

Awards: 1 nomination [more](#)

User Comments: The Ultimate Feel Good Film! [more](#)

US Showtimes: [register to personalize](#)

Cast (Cast overview, first billed only)

 John Travolta ...  Edna Turnblad

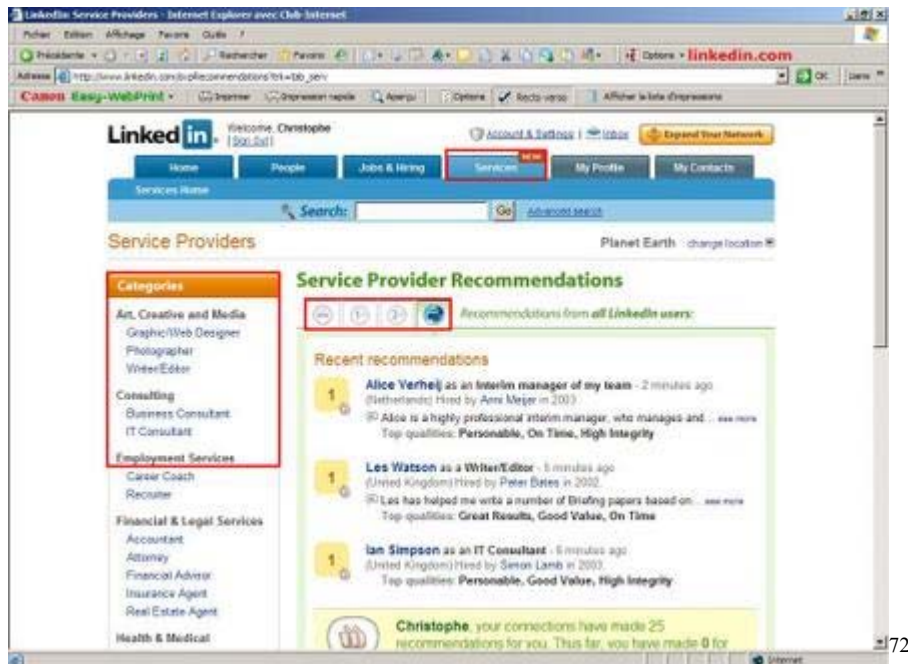
Another type of Web 2.0 is a folksonomy. A folksonomy is used to store web content using labels called tags. A tag is a word that is used to associate with some information. For example, Del.icio.us, a social bookmarking website, allows users to tag information, videos, blogs, etc that they find on the site, and can access these tags anytime from any computer. One can also share these tagged links with their friends and see the sites that others have bookmarked thereby feeding the viral growth of Web 2.0.

Comparing the Platforms:

The following table discusses some of the important factors of common Web 2.0 platforms.

Website	Primary Users	Usage	Year it began	Viral Content	# of registered users	number of unique monthly visitors (June '07)	Change in the number of unique visitors in the last year	Percent increase of number of unique visitors in the last year	approximate of how much its worth
Club Penguin	Younger Children	Entertainment	2005 ¹¹		12 mil ¹²	2.5 mil ¹³	+ 2 mil ¹⁴	+ 270 ¹⁵	700 mil ¹⁶
Craigslist	Adults	Profit?	1995 ¹⁷	Unique Items	10 mil? ¹⁸	20 mil ¹⁹	+ 9 mil ²⁰	+65 ²¹	
Facebook	Students	Staying in touch	2004 ²²	Photos	30 mil ²³	20 mil ²⁴	+ 13 mil ²⁵	+ 113 ²⁶	900 mil
Flickr	College students	Staying in touch	2004 ²⁷	Photos		17 mil ²⁸	+ 15 mil ²⁹	+177 ³⁰	

		and adults								
Kazaa	All ages	Entertainment	2000 ³¹	Music		300 thou ³²	- 400 thou ³³	- 50 ³⁴		70 mil?
LimeWire	All ages	Entertainment		Music		6 mil ³⁵	+ 1.2 mil ³⁶	+ 29 ³⁷		
LinkedIn	Working adults	Business -- staying in touch	2003 ³⁸	Business contacts and links	12 mil ³⁹	1 mil ⁴⁰	+ 1.2 mil ⁴¹	+ 500 ⁴²		250 mil?
MySpace	Students	Entertainment and staying in touch	2003 ⁴³	Photos, contacts	About 150 mil ⁴⁴	50 mil ⁴⁵	+ 17 mil ⁴⁶	+ 30 ⁴⁷		4 bil?
Napster	Students and adults	Entertainment	1999 (original site) ⁴⁸	Music		1.5 mil ⁴⁹	- 1.3 mil ⁵⁰	- 45 ⁵¹		
Secondlife	Adults	Entertainment	2003 ⁵²	Virtual money	8.5 mil ⁵³	220 thou ⁵⁴	+ 140 thou ⁵⁵	+150 ⁵⁶		
Skype	Adults	Staying in touch	2003 ⁵⁷	Skype I.D.	9 mil ⁵⁸	800 thou ⁵⁹	- 100 thou ⁶⁰	- 16 ⁶¹		1 bil ⁶²
YouTube	Teenage students	Entertainment	2005 ⁶³	Videos		43 mil ⁶⁴	+ 33 mil ⁶⁵	+ 200 ⁶⁶		Almost a bil?
World of Warcraft	Students	Entertainment	2004 ⁶⁷	Online weapons	9 mil ⁶⁸	900 thou ⁶⁹	+ 300 thou ⁷⁰	+ 47 ⁷¹		



Analyzing the results from the above table, the sites that have had phenomenal growth throughout the last year are Club Penguin, Flickr, Secondlife, Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn. Looking at the percentages, people would automatically assume that LinkedIn has been the most popular site of the year. And although it has been quite popular, it doesn't have nearly as many users as, for example, MySpace. This could be because LinkedIn primarily appeals to **adults** who are looking to either network or find a job, whereas MySpace is looking to entertain a younger crowd which spends more time online.

Club Penguin, quite a recent startup, appeals hugely to kids, and although it requires eventual payment, a thirty day free trial is encouraged. Supposedly many of the kids get hooked on to its fun games and chatting, and eventually get their parents to pay for the fun. YouTube has also had fantastic growth, and has become one of the most popular video content sites in America. Secondlife has done well, but Club Penguin seems to have a better growth rate. This is because Club Penguin is very closely monitored as opposed to Secondlife, which has no restrictions on what can be done and thus has little control over its residents activities.

Facebook has already doubled its user base in the last year, but has a long way to catch up with MySpace. The sites that have done reasonably well this year are World of Warcraft, MySpace, and Craigslist. WoW is only steadily increasing its number of users because it is a pay-to-play site, but unfortunately costs real money to play. Craigslist is a mature site. Most fresh sites get more attention and consequently rapid membership growth. Because Craigslist has been around for over ten years it doesn't have as sharp a growth as the others. And everybody's favorite: MySpace. Although MySpace hasn't been around too long, it's already had its huge growth in 2004-2006. The sites whose growth is slower are Kazaa, Skype, and Napster.

Pros and Cons

Web 2.0 has several benefits, which have been discussed throughout the article. It also has some disadvantages. Users enter content, in many cases, private and personal content onto Web 2.0 sites. This information is stored on the site server. What if such information was sold to a third party?

And what about the security on these sites? Can the websites be hacked into? These are key questions to think about before including personal information on a web site.

It is very important that society play a more active role in keeping the Web 2.0 communities safer and cleaner. Just as people in a democracy are required to help a society by obeying the laws and keeping structure, the citizens of a Web 2.0 community must cooperate to keep their environment clean by policies, rules, laws, and vigilance. The website developers also have a responsibility to help keep their site safe.

The advantages and disadvantages of Web 2.0 are listed in the table below.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - fast spread of information - Who wants to use money and pick up a phone when they can just press a couple of keys? it is easier to keep in touch with friends - easy to look up facts and one can find almost anything they are looking for - communities come together - entertainment and having fun - Buying and selling items has become so much easier (no more garage sales!) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Could be a fast spread of false information - Privacy issues—there really aren't defined rights of Web 2.0 so it is difficult to tell people where they should draw the line - Beware of hackers for they often lead to identity theft - Receiving too many advertisements - Personal information keeps getting sold and keeps getting passed on to more companies. - Kidnappers (a bit extreme), but possible.

Note

The author has had some hands-on experience with Web 2.0 and weighed the personal pros and cons. The author, who is an active user of Facebook, has found known people and added them to the Facebook "Friends" list. It was only after having Facebook for a while that the author understood why everyone loves Web 2.0 websites. It is so much fun to communicate with people one knows, and even when one doesn't see them for months on end, one feels like they've been meeting them everyday. Flipping through friends' pictures online is also entertaining, seeing them and how they act in front of the camera. And who doesn't like getting all worked up about their own profile picture? It is just *so* important to go through all of your own pictures to find the perfect one to stand as your profile picture, the one everyone can see without even clicking on your profile.

Essentially Facebook, and all of these sites, provides entertainment. They give one the chance to get closer to friends as well as get to know other people. But there were some problems that occurred for the author. Having an account on such a website can be distracting. When there is work to do one might end up sitting on the computer for hours, playing around on Facebook. Overall, though, *the author* has had a good experience with Web 2.0 websites, and hopefully as they clear up the problem of selling personal information, more people will get comfortable with these new online communities, and join one themselves.

Summary and Conclusion

This paper discusses how Web 2.0 is helping the World Wide Web to develop and expand rapidly. The fast spread of information and the new formation of online communities have caused the World Wide Web to expand its horizons. All answers and information can now be found with a click of a button thanks to wikis. LinkedIn, YouTube, Flickr, Facebook, and Club Penguin all seem to be gaining users' interest and use. According to the current research, it would appear that websites with viral content like

video, links, and pictures are expanding much quicker than those like Skype, which spreads identification, and Napster, which spreads music. Web 2.0 has brought in the age of social networking and the viral effect, the fast spread of information by links. Every minute, the Web is expanding and reaching greater heights because of Web 2.0.

In conclusion, is there a clear answer for whether Web 2.0 is progress or regress? Having ways of communicating with peers and colleagues as well as buy and sell things on the web is progress because it is something we could not do ten years ago. Another example of progress is when an adult is able to locate an old classmate or a friend or colleague they had not been in touch with for a long time. Staying in touch with existing friends is also easy. Finally, information can now spread to the corners of the world electronically very quickly. However, along with this progress are things that are setting us back, like viruses (which can also reach the corners of the world), as well as unsavory characters. Progress can continue to be maintained if the source of this regress can be controlled both by the users of the community as well as the developers.

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