# Web 2.0 taking over business communications

Podcasts, blogs, wikis, vlogs, viral videos and twitters — each of their definitions and purposes used to be a mystery to me. I knew what a blog was, I would read wikis and I had a basic understanding of podcasts. But it wasn't until a recent social media conference in Las Vegas that I realized how quickly internal and external communications are revolving around Web 2.0.

Essentially, Web 2.0 is the industry term used to describe the trend of using the Web to share information in an interactive way. It's an individual's creative playland, and it's quickly taking over business communications.

Steve Crescenzo, a consultant, writer, podcaster and owner of Crescenzo Communications, said at the conference, "The great thing about social media is that anyone can do it. The bad thing about social media is that anyone can do it."

After only a half-day workshop, I could have run to an electronics store and spent a mere $200 to get the tools I needed to be a Web celebrity. During the workshop, I learned how to edit a podcast using free software available on the Internet, so all I needed was a topic to talk about.

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Economic diversity

Herein lies the double-edged sword. It's fairly inexpensive to get started with most social media, and since it doesn't take experience to figure this stuff out, there's a lot of wiggle room on the quality scale.

The thing is — people love the low-budget "feel" of social media. It seems more unedited, unscripted and real — even if it isn't.

After the conference, I returned to my day job at PNNL with a social media fire burning within me. My enthusiasm earned me a new project to help create and produce a podcast series. The series, called "So What?," is on a learning curve, just like me. And its accompanying blog is too.

But the great thing is that we jumped in with both feet, just like Crescenzo advised. He encouraged conference attendees to get something out on the Web; it didn't have to be perfect the first time. And trust me, it won't be. But it does get better every time you do it.

Here are a few tips for creating podcasts and blogs:

❯ Get someone with personality to be the voice of the podcast. Podcasts should be entertaining, like radio shows.

❯ Never "ghost blog" for someone. Whether it's a manager or CEO, they need to blog by themselves.

❯ Use plain English; don't "leverage your assets, grab the low-hanging fruit or maximize anything." It's easy to slide into "corporate speak," but please resist the urge.

Now, let's move on to other forms of social media I mentioned earlier.

A wiki is a collection of Web pages that allows a user to change its content. Wikipedia is the best known example. Wikipedia is an encyclopedia written by people who access it, which is one reason it frequently isn't trusted as a resource. It's kind of like me asking my cubicle-mate what a "snarflask" is and she responds with whatever comes to mind. For business purposes, wikis can be used for project collaboration.

A vlog is a blog done with video. In my opinion, the beauty of doing a vlog is that you can post it to YouTube where it could become a viral video, meaning it becomes wildly popular and is spread through the Internet, e-mail or other information-sharing forums. And if your intent with the vlog is to market something and it gets viewed by hundreds of thousands of people, I think you can call use of this social medium a success.

The last one I'd like to define is a twitter, a form of social networking — that is, staying in touch with people in real-time — with snippets of questions and information. "Tweets" (I know, this is getting cute) can be only up to 140 characters in length.

So, why tweet? I don't know. Try it and then e-mail me about your experience. And if you want to tweet for the first time, consider visiting twitter.com to get started.

In a nutshell, business owners, I encourage you to learn more about social media. It could be a fun and inexpensive way to build your business.

If you're interested in reading the blog or listening to the podcast I've worked on, visit https://blog.pnl.gov/so_what.

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