Collaboration, Community, and Connectedness:
Social Media & Web 2.0 Basics

Social media refers to tools used for the sharing and collaborative creation of information by individuals and communities. More specifically, social media describes online communication tools and applications sharing some important characteristics:

- Collaboration -- social media encourages audience contribution and interaction. Instead of a one-way transmission of information, social media tools typically encourage and support feedback, comments, and sharing of information.
- Community -- social media provides an infrastructure for interaction among existing communities and the formation and interaction of primarily or exclusively web-based communities around common interests or goals.
- Connectedness -- social media helps connect people and information in one place.

Web 2.0, often discussed in the same breath as social media, is a term that is used to define the evolution of the World Wide Web. While there isn't a hard and fast line between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0, Web 1.0 can be understood to represent a "web as information" model and Web 2.0 to represent a "web as participation" model of web activity. This second generation of the web is characterized by the user's creation and interaction with content. Users participate and collaborate through virtual communities and social media tools which facilitate easy sharing of information and ideas among users. Therefore user experiences are richer and the web is able to harness the power of crowds and result in a greater collective intelligence.

This does not mean that the web itself has changed in terms of its technical specifications, but rather that both software developers and end users are using the web in new ways. You don't need to upgrade your internet browser; if you're online you're already set up to experience social media and Web 2.0!

Social media and Web 2.0 tools and technologies can be used to the great benefit of schools and organizations involved in service-learning. Social media tools can be used to:

- publish and disseminate information widely, quickly, and inexpensively
- market your program and share your service-learning success stories
- facilitate collaboration
- build community
- network and create partnerships
- customize and create new tools

Social media and Web 2.0 services and applications include:

Blogs
RSS Feeds
Wikis
Podcasts/Vodcasts
Mashups
Microblogging
Tagging/Folksonomies/Social Bookmarking
Social Networking
Web-based desktop application/document tools

These tools make it easier for individuals and organizations to reach new audiences, increase visibility, and build community. In addition to reaching out, organizations can use these tools to reach inward and better communicate internally and collaborate effectively. Social media and Web 2.0 tools are especially useful for reaching younger and disparate audiences and because so many of them allow for publication and communication at little to no cost, they can have excellent cost-benefit for organizations trying to stretch their dollar to do the greatest good.

Resources

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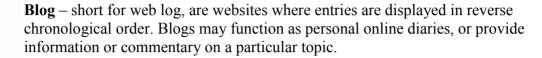
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Social Media and Web 2.0 Glossary

Blog – short for web log, are websites where entries are displayed in reverse chronological order. Blogs may function as personal online diaries, or provide information or commentary on a particular topic.

Folksonomy – a way of classifying and categorizing information on the web through collaborative means from the online community. This is also referred to as 'tagging', 'social tagging' or 'social indexing'. Folksonomies became popular on the web with social software applications such as the photo sharing site Flickr and the social bookmarking site Del.icio.us.

Mashup – a mashup is a web application that combines data from two or more sources into a single tool. There are many examples of mashups that use Google Maps and combine data from another source to create a single geographical representation of that data.

Podcast – stemming from the term 'broadcast', a podcast is a digital media file that is distributed over the internet and listened to on a portable media player (like an iPod) or on a personal computer.

RSS – RSS (Really Simple Syndication or Rich Site Summary) is a web feed which contains a summary of content from a website or the full text. RSS allows people to automatically keep up with updates of their preferred websites without having to regularly check them manually.

Semantic Web – an evolving extension of the World Wide Web in which content can be expressed not only through natural language, but also in a format that can be read and used by software agents allowing for an integration and combination of data from diverse sources.

Social Bookmarking – a method for users to store, organize, and search bookmarks of webpages on the Internet, as opposed to on their browser. These bookmarks are usually public but can be kept private or shared only with specific individuals or groups. One of the most popular social bookmarking sites is Del.icio.us.

Social Software – a wide range of web-based software applications which allow users to interact and share information with other users. Examples include Myspace, YouTube, and E-bay.

Social Media – a broad term referring to the various activities that integrate technology, social interaction, and the construction of sound, words, and images. In contrast to traditional media, consumers of social media are able to contribute and interact with media in meaningful ways and use it a creative tool for public knowledge and action.

Social Networking Site – a website that provides an online virtual community for people with similar interests or social groups. Members usually create a personal profile with biographical information and can communicate with each other online. These sites allow for users to contact friends of other members and as such expand their own network/ community.

Tag – a keyword or term assigned to a piece of information (such as a website, a blog entry, an image, a video clip), which describes the item and allows for the item to be classified, categorized, and searched.

Vodcast/Video Podcast – a term used for the online delivery of video or video clips. Vodcasts can be downloaded to play on a portable media player, or streamed from a website. One such popular site is YouTube.

Web 2.0 – Web 2.0 is a term that is used to define the evolution of the World Wide Web. This second generation of the web is characterized by the user's creation and interaction with content.

Widget – ready-made code that can be inserted into a web page. Widgets add dynamic functionality to a page, like link counters and banners. Widgets are also called modules, snippets, and plug-ins.

Wiki – a wiki is a webpage or set of webpages that allows any user given access, to easily create, edit, and link content. They generally have a history function which allows one to see previous versions of edited pages. Because of these functions and their ease of use wikis are used as collaborative tools and can facilitate group work and harness collective intelligence. One of the most well-know wikis is Wikipedia.