



Trends In The Web 2.0 Space, To Watch Out For In 2008

Where is Web 2.0 headed in 2008? Let's take a look at the international and Indian trends this year, and try to make a forecast.

2007 has been a great year for the Web. On the one hand, there has been an upswing in the number of Web 2.0 start-ups globally, while on the other hand, popular Web 2.0 start-ups like Facebook, jaiku, feedburner and others have been acquired or invested in by the giants of the Web like Microsoft and Google.

Closer home in India, the trends have been similar, though still in a nascent stage, as social networking became a buzzword with Orkut. That led to start-ups like Minglebox (which obtained funding from Sequoia Capital), BigAdda (backed by Reliance), Desimartini (recently acquired by HTMedia), and many others. Though launches occurred at a lower frequency than in the US, India has seen over 150 Web 2.0 start-ups launched during this year (according to internal research at WATConsult) in different spaces from social networking, social bookmarking and blogging, to media sharing, local search, etc.

Let's take a look at some of the...

Key international trends in 2007

Open APIs: The Web as a Platform:

Facebook revolutionised the concept of Web applications by opening its API (application programming interface) and introducing a developer platform that allows developers to create applications for Facebook. By doing so, it leveraged the wisdom of the crowds, a concept well explained in the book 'The Long Tail' by Chris Andersen. Now everyone could have a unique Facebook profile by just adding

applications of their choice. Facebook's opening of its API led to Google launching 'OpenSocial' with Web 2.0 players like MySpace, Engage, Friendster, hi5, Hyves, Imeem, LinkedIn, Ning, Oracle, Orkut, Plaxo, Salesforce, Six Apart, Tianji, Viadeo, and XING.

The widgetisation of the Web: In the US, there's been a huge surge in the use of widgets that can be embedded in your page or blog, or even used through your desktop. Yahoo!, Google, Facebook, Netvibes, and Wordpress added widgets capability; services like SpringWidgets and WidgetBox let you create your own widgets, and Widgipedia is an online repository of widgets. This phenomenon has become one of the most defining characteristics of Web 2.0, because it facilitates deconstruction of the Web into small, single-purpose applications called widgets or gadgets, which can be created, distributed, and publicised by the average non-technical user.

The personalisation of the Web: From its inception, the objective of the Web was to reach out to a mass audience, so the portal model worked well - the most popular news, photos, blogs or videos made it to the home page. Though this model still continues for the likes of Yahoo!, MSN, and AOL, there is certainly a shift towards mass customisation through personalised start pages. Netvibes, a sort of leader in this space, has evangelised the concept of personalised pages. Yahoo!'s My Yahoo! and Google's iGoogle are others that got on to the personalisation bandwagon. Even social networks with the Open API such as OpenSocial, are aiming at providing more and more personalised features to users.

The Web is the new desktop—unlimited storage leading to unlimited opportunities: One very important trend that has characterised the Web 2.0 upsurge is ‘storage as a service’, pioneered by Amazon S3, which provides storage for applications the world over, on a pay-as-you-go basis. This has greatly facilitated cheaper storage for rich media sharing. Besides, office applications as well as the entire OS are going online. So whether it is Google Docs and Spreadsheets, the Zoho office suite, or the recently-launched Live-Documents by Sabeer Bhatia, all of these are hinting at the Web turning into the new desktop. Add unlimited storage capability, and you have a Web desktop with unlimited opportunities!

Key trends in India in 2007

The social networking phenomenon: Indians have taken to social networking in a big way. Whether it was Orkut earlier, or the increasingly popular Facebook now, the Indian scene has seen tons of social networks being launched - Minglebox, BigAdda, Yaari, Yo4ya, Desimartini, Goyaar, HumSubka, Ibibo Cafe, etc. There are close to 40 Indian social networking sites that are currently trying to give Orkut and Facebook a run for their money.

The blogging phenomenon: Along with social networking, blogging has taken off as well. Though it is still in an early stage in India, lots of professionals, start-up entrepreneurs and even companies are looking to, or have already taken to, the blogging phenomenon. Even teens who want to make money have started looking at blogging as a source of revenue. Indian companies like Ibibo (which uses what seems like a flawed model in paying money for blogging), have done well to evangelise blogging as a money-making opportunity. Pro bloggers like Amit Agarwal (labnol.org) have also done their bit to popularise blogging.

The media-sharing phenomenon: Indians have taken to sharing pictures on blogs and social networks like Flickr, and sharing videos on YouTube. There is also Rediff Ishare, launched this year, which allows pictures, music, and videos to be shared.

Future trends—2008 and beyond

Corporate blogging: Corporate blogging is getting pretty big in the US, with companies like Sun, IBM, Dell, and many others running their corporate blogs. In India, however, this trend has yet to really enter boom time. In 2008, I see many companies in India launching their own corporate blogs to leverage and participate in the ongoing conversations that are taking place in the online world. This would be an initiative

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by these companies to “talk to” their target audience, rather than “talking at” their customers, which is how conventional one-way communication channels like advertising, work. Instead, corporate blogging enables participation and one-to-one and one-to-many conversations centered around the company, products, and more.

Niche social networking: There are many generic social networking sites, but the next step in their evolution is to become more focused—either in terms of geography, gender, interest, or age group. Niche social networking that connects people with a singular common need or association is the next wave—both in India, and abroad.


Employee communities: Soon companies will realise that banning their employees from accessing social networks and blogs is not a solution.

Some of them have arrived at that realisation already, and many will in the future move towards setting up their own employee communities, in order to tap the vast potential of their employees’ contacts, and the potential returns to the business.

Virtual worlds: Who do you wanna be today? Virtual worlds, popularised in 2007 by Second Life, will continue to buzz throughout 2008. I also believe that given the conservative social nature of Indian society, virtual worlds will be a big rage among young Indians who want to express different facets of their personality.

Enterprise 2.0: Companies in India, and even abroad, are still to exploit the collaborative edge that Web 2.0 applications bring to team-work and project management. Though

internationally there have been applications like salesforce for CRM, and Basecamp for project management, it still has to become a mainstream trend among corporations, both abroad and in India.

Mobile 2.0: The mobile phone is one Internet-enabled device that has more reach than any other device in India, and is sure to drive Internet penetration further. Currently used for Bollywood downloads, cricket, and stock market info, the mobile can lend itself to social networking as well. Facebook already has a very good social networking presence on the mobile. Going forward, I see more and more Web 2.0 applications being especially designed for mobiles, rather than being ported to it. 

Rajiv Dingra

Founder, WatConsult
WatConsult is India’s first and only Web 2.0 strategy consulting firm that consults clients on how to deploy/use/work with Web 2.0 platforms.