Building a Web 2.0-Friendly Culture

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BUILDING A WEB 2.0-FRIENDLY CORPORATE CULTURE

By Anne Pauker Kreitzberg, President, Cognetics Corporation

Web 2.0 is dramatically impacting the way companies are doing business. Not only how they market their products and services or process information. It's also having a profound impact on the *workplace*. Technology changes how work is done. Web 2.0 changes the way relationships are forged online. To be successful on the web, you need to have a web 2.0-friendly corporate culture – a culture that embraces innovation, transparency, collaboration, open communication and user-generated content. This is often an uncomfortable fit for organizations.

If you personally aren't using web 2.0 tools like wikis, blogs, media repositories, social networks, and virtual reality or discussion forums, chances are you will soon. If you associate sites like Facebook, Twitter or YouTube with your kids, you may be struggling to understand their application in the business context.

Organizations - large and small, for profit and nonprofit, universities and government -are asking the same questions you are:

- How can we use these technologies to be to increase revenue?
- How can we engage prospects, customers and employees?
- How can we use them to recruit, develop and retain talent?
- How can we protect our brand and reputation online?

Web 2.0 raises questions and controversy.

WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT WEB 2.0?

In 2004, Tim O'Reilly, the founder of O'Reilly Media (www.oreilly.com), used the term web 2.0 to describe the significant shift in how software developers and users were using the web. One of the characteristics of web 2.0 web sites is that people go there to *do* something – as contrasted with web 1.0 "brochureware" sites that people came to primarily for information or perform rudimentary e-commerce transactions.

In an astonishing four years, the web has grown almost beyond comprehension. Google's search engine indexed 1 trillion unique web pages and 500 billion unique web pages. Every day, 900,000 are updated. The sheer scale of the web is too big to ignore. It also makes it hard to get noticed.

Unlike in the past when it took months or years to implement new software, today you can download, set up and use powerful applications without the intervention of a technology expert. You can create your own website, manage huge databases, and stream rich media. Many web applications are free – at least to test drive. You don't have to be tied to your office (or even have an office) to access any of it.

Small companies can now compete seriously against larger ones. Teams can function more effectively. Virtual conference rooms mean you don't have to be face to face to feel as though you are. Virtual tradeshows dramatically reduce the expense of exhibiting. Blogs, webinars and podcasts give you a platform for sharing your expertise and ideas. Discussion forums directly connect you with customers so that you can listen to what they think. Videos are great for demonstrating products, so customers can choose the one that's right for them.

WEB 2.0: THE RELATIONSHIP WEB

Its interactive capability distinguishes web 2.0. It can used to attract, create, build and deepen *relationships* with people: internally with employees, and externally with customers, partners, investors or prospective employees and customers. Web 1.0 sites enabled only one-way communication rather than the multi-directional communication necessary to build meaningful relationships. Web 2.0 strategies are needed for both external and internal audiences.

Marketers jumped in and became early adopters of web 2.0. They recognized the huge potential for attracting prospects and deepening relationships with customers. They could reach a mass audience, target niche markets, personalize messages and create great customer experiences, cost-effectively, in a way they couldn't do before.

HR departments can do the same to educate people about it's like to work for your company. Companies, like Ernst & Young, have career pages on social networks to attract and engage candidates, deepen relationships with employees and encourage alum to keep in touch. Increasingly, the same web 2.0 tools used with external audiences are being used internally to foster collaboration, interact with senior management, as well as to develop and retain talent.

WEB 2.0 AND CORPORATE CULTURE

People expect to be able to participate in a conversation when they come to a website - not to be limited to being on the receiving end of companies wish to share. They can generate content and voice opinions. They have limitless, instant access to experts and information. They expect websites to be user-centric.

This applies to prospects, customers, investors and partners. It also applies to your employees. Most companies are just not ready for it. They are accustomed to doing the telling, discouraging access across silos, protecting information. It's hard to be customer-centric, employee-centric, shareholder-centric, etc. And yet, that is exactly what success in a web culture takes.

Your industry, strategy, priorities, regulatory requirements, size and existing culture, affect how important each of these are and how they should be addressed in your company.

WEB 2.0 IS NOT AN EASY FIT

Web 2.0 is about transparency, user centricity, user control, crossing boundaries, speed, access and sharing of information and experimentation – not strengths we typically associate with organizations, especially large ones. Managers have not had to address the issues that arise. They have little precedent to turn to.

Leaders raise a host of legitimate concerns, such as:
- How will we protect confidentiality and intellectual property?

- What is the best way to avoid public relations disasters that damage our reputation?
- Will uniformity in corporate-wide systems go by the wayside?
- How can we coordinate resources, leverage knowledge and integrate web efforts?

Figure 1 depicts some of the challenges organizations face when developing a web 2.0 strategy.

Figure 1

Addressing each of these challenges is a necessary step in building a web 2.0-friendly culture.

WHAT IS A WEB 2.0-FRIENDLY CULTURE?

A web 2.0-friendly culture is a work environment that enables an organization to successfully adapt to, use and thrive in a world in which a full-range of web-based technologies and tools are the norm.

The transformation to a web 2.0 world will not come easily. Over the years companies have adopted to significant technological advancements, such as the introduction of the telephone or the personal computer. More recently, disparate initiatives addressing changing workforce demographics led to strategic efforts, integrated with the business strategy, to create the corporate culture required to embrace diversity and leverage it to achieve superior business results. The same level of leadership is sorely needed to smooth the transition to a web-enabled business world.

Five Ways to Get Started with Web 2.0

1. Set up Google or Yahoo! alerts to receive emails when you, your competitors or your industry are mentioned on the web.

2. Regularly visit blogs and discussion forums to learn what's important to your customers and your employees. You can find blogs on Google, Yahoo! or www.technorati.com.

3. Use RSS to subscribe to blogs or online magazines so that you have the most up to date content.

4. Set up a page on a social network (like LinkedIn, Plaxo or Facebook) to get comfortable posting content online.

5. Learn web community etiquette by following discussions.

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO FOSTER A
WEB 2.0-FRIENDLY CULTURE

Leaders, managers and employees are not accustomed to communicating in the new web environment. A multi-generation workforce, each with its own work style, motivation and communication differences makes this more complicated. The gaps between

> *The best way to learn about web 2.0 is to experiment.*

them will close as time goes by and web 2.0 tools become part of the daily work flow.

Managers and staff would benefit from education about these technologies and how to use them most effectively to communicate and collaborate. They want to know how to write a blog post, use a wiki or use collaboration software productively, whether they work in the same building, telecommute or are part of a virtual, global, cross-functional team.

Web 2.0 is not a spectator sport; the best way to learn about it is to explore and experiment. Organizations can't embrace web 2.0 technology unless its people develop an understanding of how it works and basic proficiency with it. As with other corporate initiatives, managers and leaders need to "walk the walk and talk the talk."

### 1: LEARN ABOUT WEB 2.0 TO UNDERSTAND IT IN THE CONTEXT OF *YOUR* BUSINESS

Web competency is a baseline requirement for being in touch with the modern world. Yet, those who didn't grow up with the Internet don't have a clear understanding

of what it is, really. You don't have to be a technology expert. But you do need to understand how web 2.0 works and how you can apply it to your business.

While Gen Y grew up with the web, employees of all age groups are becoming comfortable with it. Mid-career employees are better than their less experienced counterparts at seeing the business value to web applications.

2: FOCUS ON HOW TO USE THE WEB TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

As in the physical world, online relationships form when there is an emotional connection that occurs over a series of positive encounters. A speed date might lead to coffee, which leads to lunch, and so forth. After each encounter, we decide whether or not to further the relationship. Our expectations of the relationship change as it matures.
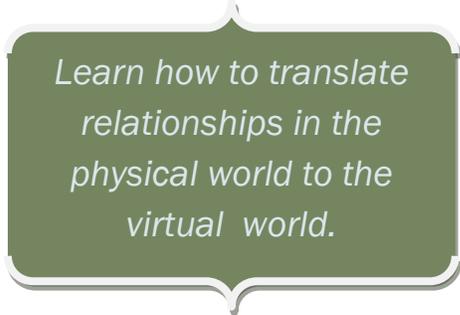
Learn how to translate relationships in the physical world to the virtual world.

It's the same thing on a website. To engage and foster repeat visitors, your goal is to design a site that will provide them with a series of positive encounters each time they come back – whether it's the first time or the fiftieth time. Look at sites you go to with that perspective in mind. What are they doing to get your attention, keep you coming back, and turn you into a loyal customer? How do their customers use web tools to create buzz for them?

3: UNDERSTAND HOW INFLUENCE IS DEVELOPED THROUGH ONLINE COMMUNITIES

It's common to see the word "community" on the web. Communities form and sustain themselves in different ways. Communities thrive using web tools because they facilitate collaboration. It's natural to think about communities of interest, for example, people who find each other because they share a hobby or special interest.

Figure 2 identifies some of the dimensions associated with online communities: the type of (or purpose for) community; how it is created; who can be a member; and who is sponsoring it. These dimensions affect how the community is set up and managed as well as how relationships within the community are built.
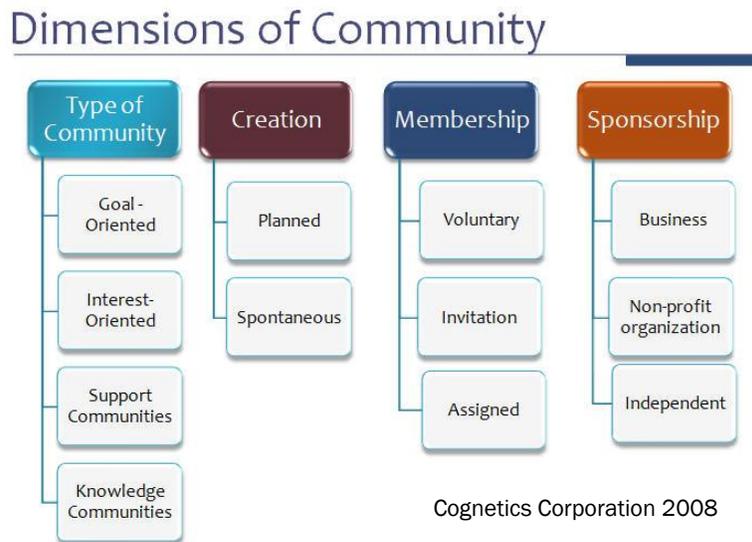

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Figure 2

We seldom think of our employees as being a community, but they do. Analysts who might never meet in person form online communities (on public sites like Facebook

or on internally sponsored company sites) to help one another solve problems or share experiences. Communities typically use discussion boards to start conversation threads.

Things to look for to learn about a community site include:

- Who has influence within the community?
- Why do the other members of the community listen?
- When something critical is posted, how long does the conversation go?
- How does a discussion thread?
- How does the discussion spread to other sites?

4: COVER YOUR ASSETS

There are legitimate concerns that make organizations skittish about web 2.0, especially those in highly regulated industries like financial services, healthcare or pharmaceuticals. Your attorney will be concerned about protecting intellectual property, confidential information and trade secrets and electronic records.

Companies need to have and communicate their policies on appropriate web behavior.

Security of data (for example, customer lists or financial information) and safety of systems themselves are concerns that existed long before web 2.0. Now that data can be shared or stored over the web, there is added concern, especially if it isn't behind the company firewall.

 It's not always obvious to employees that they are inappropriately discussing or disclosing these assets. Count on applicants to check out the company through their

social network or on YouTube. Employees can be surprisingly blunt on a blog or discussion forum about what it's really like to work at your company.

What's your policy on employee blogs, or appropriate cyber behavior?

In a web world, you need to anticipate and think through how to handle negative comments, from the public or your employees. They're bound to come up. Set the ground rules for appropriate online behavior, balancing the need to protect the company and still encourage collaboration and innovation.

5: BE A CHAMPION

Web 2.0 is having a dramatic effect on how people work, communicate and collaborate. Companies that lag or don't adapt won't be able to continue to attract, develop and retain a highly skilled, talented workforce. Innovation will take greater effort. Problem-solving and decision-making will take longer. It will be hard for them to compete globally.

Take the lead by making it clear that taking the steps to create a web 2.0-friendly culture is important to the sustainability of the organization. Evolve toward an integrated web strategy that balances the needs of the business, technology constraints and capabilities, and internal and external user communities.

CONCLUSION

Leaders who recognize web 2.0 as a sea change will make a significant and substantial difference in their organization's competitive advantage. With a cross functional team from business units, IT, legal, compliance, marketing and communications, you can assess the organization's readiness and begin the change process.

The transition requires strong support by leadership, competency in developing relationships on the web, policies to both protect company assets and ensure appropriate employee behavior, and training so that everyone understands web technologies and how to use them in the context of the company and their role.

THE AUTHOR

Anne Pauker Kreitzberg is the president of Cognetics, experts in the user experience and organizational effectiveness. Prior to joining Cognetics Anne held executive HR positions in both the public and private sectors and in consultancy. She teaches courses in Human Resource Management and Business Policy at The Wharton School and authors the blog www.leadersintheknow.info. Anne and her husband, Dr. Charles Kreitzberg (who founded Cognetics in 1982), are developing a course for the American Management Association called, Making Sense of Web 2.0: Leveraging Social Media in Your Organization, launching in early 2009. In addition to writing, they also conduct webinars and seminars on web 2.0 strategy, user experience and designing web applications and communities.

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