

Before you can decide if some of the new web based technologies including Web 2.0 are just fads or if they represent an underlying need that should be filled, you must understand what Web 2.0 and these technologies represent. According to Tim O'Reilly, "Web 2.0 is the business revolution in the computer industry caused by the move to the Internet as platform, and an attempt to understand the rules for success on that new platform" (2006). These technologies do not represent a technical standard or specification, but how the developer or user chooses leverage the Internet to fulfill a need. These needs can vary greatly as do the solutions to fulfill them.

Successful web based technologies provide validation to the idea that Web 2.0 and new web technologies represent an underlying need that should be filled. Many of these successful technologies do share a number of trends to explain why they were successful and validate this idea. The first trend of successful technologies is due to the two-way interaction by the user. The user becomes both the consumer of information but also the provider of information. The second trend of successful technologies is through the leveraging of the web as a platform. The author uses the example of a Google Map inside of a travel website allowing the user to see exactly where they were going. Greater interaction between different content providers creates a more seamless and interactive environment. The third trend of successful technologies revolves around the use of micro-content that can be used to form new content (Carliner & Shank, 2008). One example of micro-formats, a blog post is syndicated using an RSS feed (Really Simple Syndication) creating new content where readers of the blog will find out about the

Brenda Harlow
ED P 697 – Final Exam

new post. At the same time, the feed is read by a service, such as Technorati, who indexes the blog post information into its search index and creates new content on its site. A user on the Techorati site finds the post and then posts a response on their blog site while providing a trackback link to the original blog site creating another piece of content in response to the original blog post.

In terms of the technologies discussed in the text; blogs, wikis, social bookmarking, collaborative writing, voice over IP, podcasting, and instant messaging, these are all examples of successful technologies. These tools are not fads, they are tools that fulfill a need. Blogs provide an outlet for content experts to express their views and thoughts on a subject, while their readers provide feedback. Their ease of use and cost effectiveness make them one of the fastest growing methods of posting content to the web. Wikis and collaborative writing tools are similar in that they allow a person to write in a collaborative environment. Both of these tools can be used successfully in collaborative learning projects. Social bookmarking tools allows for the speedy evaluation of resources based on the number of bookmarks made. In learning groups it is also useful for the organization of important links used by a group. Voice over IP is an Internet based telephone service and is successful through its low cost and ease of use. This technology is now evolving to include virtual classrooms where groups of individuals from can attend a presentation from anywhere they can get Internet service. Podcasting is a methodology for the publishing of audio and video to the web. In learning, podcasts can be used to provide course content as well as becoming part of an assignment or exercise. Lastly instant messaging is real time communication between two or more

Brenda Harlow
ED P 697 – Final Exam

individuals. Some may believe that instant messaging is the domain of the young, but it is not. Instant messaging is used in corporate environments as a way to communicate internally. For example, while working at CSULB, I and other webmasters frequently used instant message to seek advice or assistance.

In considering if these new tools are just fads or if they represent an underlying need that should be filled, I believe that it depends on the tool, how it is used, and by whom it is used. Properly setup, designed, and utilized web technologies, such as blogs and wikis can bring immense value to learning. These tools can provide rich environments for collaboration, communication, and learning. The foundation set by the tools provides valuable methods to which knowledge is gathered and learning achieved. The speed and efficiency of these tools provide a more useful way of knowledge management than earlier attempts to manage knowledge. This does not mean that all new web technologies including Web 2.0 does not have its fad technologies and technologies that have not determined their place in on the web and in learning. As with any industry, whither it be learning or technology, the bubble will burst on fad technologies and they will fad into history. The strong successful web technologies will remain to fill an underlying need within learning.

As the Internet moves forward, the future of educational technology and the role of the educational technologist will need to continue to adapt as new tools and methods are created. As technologies improve, e-learning is becoming more and more a integrated part of our life. Carliner and Shank see e-learning as becoming

Brenda Harlow
ED P 697 – Final Exam

another choice when deciding how to present content (2008). It will become part of the “standard repertoire of all learning groups and most learning professionals” (Carliner & Shank, 2008). The future of educational technology in terms of e-learning is bright, however as more content experts take on the role of instructional designer, the role of the educational technologist needs to shift.

Content experts know their information better than any educational technologist could hope to. As a part of the process in creating e-learning materials, this is their greatest strength. Where the difficulty comes in for developing e-learning materials is that content experts may not make for good educational technologist. This is where our role shifts more towards that of a guide and less than that of a production designer. We need to guide content experts in the reasons why learning is important and provide them with the tools they need to succeed (2008, p. 516). We need to instruct them on the most effective way of delivering their information. Anyone can start using a technological tool to deliver information, its how it's the content is delivered that truly makes a difference in learning.

Unfortunately as tools make it easier for anyone to create content, it also means a trend toward creating less expensive and less well thought out learning materials may also develop. As educational technologist this has the potential to place us on the sideline, in a more limited role such as that of production support at the end of the development process. As an educational technologist, we need to advocate for our inclusion in the full process of creation and delivery of learning materials. People see the tool as an effective delivery method, when they really may

Brenda Harlow
ED P 697 – Final Exam

not know if it is effective or not. This is where our unique knowledge of learning and instructional design becomes valuable. We must advocate for the use of this unique knowledge as a part of the instructional design process. In the future, we must place ourselves in between the information technologist who holds the technology and the content experts who hold the information. Our place is in between where we can integrate our knowledge of learning in with the technology and information in order to produce learning materials that have a high impact on the learners. If we do not, I see a bleak future for educational technologist

There are several approaches and tools in e-learning that I see have the potential to grow. The first approach or strategy I see as having the potential to grow is leveraging the social nature of people to draw them into using e-learning tools. I have personally experienced online only courses, hybrid courses, and in-class only courses. As a student who is not comfortable speaking in class, I felt I received the best learning experience from the courses that drew students into using e-learning tools to as a part of class communication. Perhaps this stemmed from the lack of feeling the pressure of being in class with your peers. Either way, as an approach I felt it helped my classmates and I grow as learners by taking the psychological pressure off. People naturally want to be social, sometimes it takes a different approach from the traditional classroom setting to make it happen.

A specific tool that I see has great potential to grow is the Wiki. A wiki can be used in many different ways in learning and knowledge management. For instance, at my business, we are considering swapping out a frequently asked question page

Brenda Harlow
ED P 697 – Final Exam

for a wiki. The frequently asked question site is a static site. This means questions and answers only get added if we add them. A wiki would allow the users of the system greater control in adding information to the system and allow more efficient management of the information. They would not have to wait for us to add a new tip or question. In terms of a learning environment such as a school, wikis have great potential to be used for collaborative group projects.

The new technologies of today and tomorrow have great potential to either become the next big fulfillment of a need, or yesterdays forgotten fad. Successful technologies including Web 2.0 can easily fall into either category. It is up to the educational technologist and how they guide the content and domain experts that help determine if it is to become a success or a fad. The role educational technologists take when deciding the approach, strategy and tools can make those decisions whither or grow. Understanding the basics of the content, the context of the needed learning, and tools involved provide a greater chance the selections will have the potential to grow.

Brenda Harlow
ED P 697 – Final Exam

References

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