

# The Laity Bytes Back?

**The impact of Web 2.0  
on UK professions**

A White Paper  
September 2008

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# Foreword >> Professional services and the technologies collectively known as **Web 2.0** might seem at first glance to make for the uneasiest of bedfellows.

>>> On the one hand sit the professions with their centuries of accumulated practice and precedent, authenticated specialist knowledge and meritocratic barriers to entry; on the other, stands a set of technologies designed to unshackle information, share data and foster new social linkages – all of which is driven by its end users.

While the established professions are, albeit grudgingly at times, trusted by the public as a reliable, if costly, way of managing the innumerable threats and challenges that life throws in our way, Web 2.0 would seem to offer exciting possibilities: less heavily intermediated, more ‘democratic’ and cheaper – if not yet wholly proven – ways of spreading expertise and tackling the multiple challenges of society, business and health.

Perhaps the most important common property of the professions and Web 2.0 is the ‘social’ element. Both the professions and Web 2.0 are, of course, the creatures of society and both wholly depend on it. Yet it is at the societal level of the ‘community of interest’ that both the professions and Web 2.0 have so much to offer one another, the older paradigm enriching the younger, and vice versa.

In this White Paper, Spada, a consultancy dedicated to furthering understanding of individual professional firms and bodies, has sought to explore some of the major factors – for good and ill, internal and external – which confront the professions as they begin to absorb and exploit the new technologies.

London / New York, July 2008



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# Introduction >> **The consumer world led the charge. The corporate world has a leg in the race. Politicians are even lining up to join in. But where are the professions?**

>>> Web 2.0 is an umbrella term for the participatory web – collaborative, user-generated content like blogs, wikis, social networking and mashups which are quickly replacing static web sites. Increasingly, Web 2.0 is being touted as the next big thing – and not only amongst the IT crowds. Business leaders are blogging<sup>1</sup>, MPs have Facebook profiles<sup>2</sup>, and traditional media is rolling out new, interactive platforms to engage readers online<sup>3</sup>. Though no ‘hard data’ has been collected to measure professionals’ unique perceptions and uses of Web 2.0, the sector’s relative absence from the field not to mention their traditional conservatism suggests that they may view these innovations with caution.

George Bernard Shaw famously stated that “all professions are conspiracies against the laity.” The exponential growth of Web 2.0 and user-generated content (UGC) may flip this aphorism on its head. People now trust ‘people like me’ as much or more than professional expertise (Edelman 2008). Web 2.0 technologies “replace the authoritative heft of traditional institutions with the surging wisdom of crowds” (Madden and Fox 2006).

Web 2.0 is too often discussed in impenetrable jargon, peppered with dramatic overtures about the way these technologies will change the way we live and work. As a company that stakes its business and its reputation on communication, Spada recognises that the rise of the participatory web means that changes are afoot – for us and for our clients in professional services. However we also recognise that Web 2.0 is part of a natural evolution

in the way we communicate and collaborate. Initially, most mediums eg phone, fax and Internet were viewed with the same knee-jerk scepticism.

As leaders in their fields and in society professionals should be at the forefront of these trends, participating in the debate and helping to shape emerging platforms. This White Paper aims to help professionals make informed decisions about how to move forward with Web 2.0. It provides an intellectual framework for understanding Web 2.0 as a concept, the challenges and risks it poses, and its potential value as a tool for the professions. What can Web 2.0 do for the professions, and what might they do for it?

**“all professions are conspiracies against the laity”**

George Bernard Shaw

<sup>1</sup> One recent example saw delegates at the 2008 Davos World Economic Forum, such as Gordon Brown, Howard Davies and Stephen Roach blogging their personal views on the FT.com’s “Davos delegates’ blog.”

<sup>2</sup> The BBC reports that 13% of Labour, 12% of Conservative, and 40% of Liberal Democrat MPs have Facebook profiles (“Lib Dems ‘biggest Facebook users’ 2007”).

<sup>3</sup> *The Telegraph’s* “My Telegraph” enables visitors to start a blog, participate in debates and bookmark articles. *The Financial Times* is rolling out a new media blog imminently (Fenton 2008).

# What is Web 2.0? **Beyond the buzzword**

**“a spirit of collaboration and open sharing online”**

>>> Web 2.0 is a difficult term to define, even for web experts (Madden and Fox 2006; O'Reilly 2005, amongst others). Associated with nebulous concepts like 'the web as platform' and 'online markets in conversations,' Web 2.0 often creates more confusion than clarity. The term was coined in 2004 by web pioneer Dale Dougherty but only really popularised by Tim O'Reilly of O'Reilly Media and MediaLive International (see in particular O'Reilly 2005). Simply put, it was meant to provide a useful umbrella for all forms of the new 'participatory web'.

More than defining the applications, Web 2.0 is meant to convey a spirit of collaboration and open sharing online. Whereas 'Web 1.0' is associated with the 'static' applications of email, online journals and newspapers, personal web sites, and Britannica online, Web 2.0 is dynamic and interactive, associated with social networking, blogs, and wikis. The transition between Web 1.0 to 2.0 can be viewed as the transition from a medium where technology drives culture change, to a medium that allows culture change to drive technology (Chestney 2008).

Web 2.0 is not a new, separate Internet. It is web-based medium driven by what is by now a familiar trend: the shift in power from trust in 'institutional' authority to trust in one's peers. The rise of Web 2.0 is part of a broader trend of changing values: the declining deference to authority that has marked all post-industrial societies since the Second World War (Inglehart and Baker 2000).

In practical use, Web 2.0 has come to be identified with a number of online activities and applications, but the lines where Web 1.0 ends and Web 2.0 begins are often blurred.

What's more, increasingly technologies are combining features of various Web 2.0 technologies (sometimes called 'mashups'), making it difficult to distinguish, for example, blog from wiki in certain cases. The continual evolution of technology means that the definition of Web 2.0 is fluid and subject to change.

Currently, some of the most often referenced Web 2.0 technologies are blogs (considered the first Web 2.0 tool), social networking, wikis, podcasts, RSS feeds, social bookmarking, SEO, tagging/folksonomy (the common folks' taxonomy), widgets and mashups (see table pp.8, "Web 2.0 Applications Explained").

The most recent survey data finds that usage is increasing rapidly – and most likely, the statistics cannot keep up (Pew/Internet 2008; Forrester 2007). For example, the exponential rise of Facebook usage in the UK has consistently outstripped data availability. Facebook grew from 500,000 in October 2006 to 3.5 million in May 2007, to more than 8 million active Facebook users in the UK today, though the site saw it's first drop in UK users in recent months ("Facebook 'sees decline in users'" 2008). The table "Web 2.0 applications explained" presents a visual overview of current Web 2.0 tools, rates of use, definitions and examples.

**“Facebook grew from 500,000 in October 2006 to 3.5 million in May 2007, to more than 8 million active Facebook users in the UK today”**

# Web 2.0 applications explained\*

Tool	Rate of use	Definition	Example
<b>Blog</b>	50% read 19% publish (Forrester 2007)	Short for "web log," a site that allows an individual or group to share a running log of events/insights and receive comments.	Boing Boing, LiveJournal.com, RollOnFriday.com
<b>Social networking</b>	39% (Forrester 2007)	Creating and verifying online social networks through platforms which enable various ways for users to interact eg chat, messaging, video, discussion groups.	Facebook, MySpace, Bebo, Lotus Connections software
<b>Wikis</b>	36% (Pew 03-07)	A website that allows visitors to add, remove, edit and change content.	Wikipedia, Social Text software
<b>Podcasts</b>	12% (Pew 08-06)	An audio or video recording which can be downloaded and played later, and is often sent to subscribers via RSS.	Start the Week with Andrew Marr, BBC – Today programme
<b>RSS feeds</b>		"Really Simple Syndication," an RSS feed allows users to subscribe to web pages and be notified every time content changes, rather than visiting each site individually. Availability is symbolised by orange and white broadcast icon.	FeedReader, NewsGator and Google Reader are aggregators
<b>Social bookmarking</b>		Users rate web pages, articles, podcasts, video etc and 'vote' for that item.	Digg, StumbleUpon
<b>SEO</b>		Search Engine Optimisation, process that drives more traffic to a site via targeted keywords.	Most SEOs target higher ranking in Google
<b>Tagging / folksonomy</b>	28% (Pew 12-06)	Similar to social bookmarking, tagging or folksonomy is the process of creating and managing tags to annotate and categorise content.	Del.icio.us, Flickr, Facebook photos
<b>Widgets</b>		Also called 'gadgets,' small, functional applications nestled in other websites.	A search engine on a blog, polls for site visitors, YouTube videos
<b>Mashups</b>		Applications that collect data from multiple sources and present it as a single useful tool.	Google maps added to Gumtree.com to map property sites

# Current knowledge and usage levels

>>> Current levels of understanding and usage of Web 2.0 are generally low across the board, though certain groups stand out as 'early adopters.' The most recent data suggest that knowledge levels and rates of use are increasing quickly amongst adults in the general public (Pew/Internet 2008) and corporate executives (KPMG 2007; Parity 2007; Forrester 2007; McKinsey 2007; ChangeWave Research 2007).

## The natives

Young people are 'the natives' of Web 2.0, and have the highest rates of use (Pew/Internet 2008). Whilst 41% of youths (US online consumers aged 12-21 years old) visit a social networking site daily, and over 60% weekly, only 20% of adults do so monthly (Forrester 2006). Similarly, the most distinguishing characteristic of bloggers is their youth, with more than half (54%) under the age of 30 (Pew/Internet 2006).

Other groups that stand out as early adopters of Web 2.0 technologies are advertisers, journalists and politicians. Advertising revenue spent online is expected to grow by more than 30% in 2008 to £3.4 billion in the UK alone (worldwide figures for 2007 approached £12 billion). By 2009 Internet advertising is projected to exceed television advertising in the UK ("Burgeoning online..." 2008). Nearly 70% of journalists follow at least one blog regularly, and 37% receive at least one regular RSS feed (TEKgroup International 2007). Finally, politicians in the UK, US and Europe have discovered the benefits of Web 2.0

**"the most distinguishing characteristic of bloggers is their youth, with 54% under the age of 30"**

\* Data from Pew Internet & American Life Project measures the percentage of internet users who have ever done this activity. Data from Forrester American Technographics® Consumer Technology Online Survey (Q1) measures the percentage of US adults who do the following things online (see References). Rate of use is left blank when sufficient data does not exist.

technologies in getting their messages out and engaging with voters. They have also discovered the pitfalls. David Cameron's first video blog clip – in which he is shown cleaning up his kitchen after breakfast and explaining how he wants to “clean up” British politics – was widely panned (Capell 2006).

## Corporates

Corporate executives are increasingly reporting Web 2.0 use within their organisations, but their interest is moderated by concerns about security, relevance and measurement. A survey conducted by Parity and Bournemouth University found that 32% of corporate respondents currently use Web 2.0 within their organisations (Parity 2007). Similarly, a survey of executives worldwide by McKinsey found that more than three quarters of executives plan to maintain or increase their investments in Web 2.0 technologies. Respondents were using Web 2.0 technologies to communicate to customers (70%) and to encourage collaboration inside the company (75%) (McKinsey 2007). Finally, KPMG, along with the Economist Intelligence Unit, surveyed corporate executives across a range of industries and found that the majority agreed that Web 2.0 has the potential to foster innovation (75%), share knowledge (86%) and encourage more efficient working (69%) (KPMG 2007).

More than half of the corporate respondents to the KPMG survey felt that protecting and securing sensitive information is the chief barrier to adoption (Ibid. 2007). Interest is also moderated by perceived cultural barriers and the problems of measuring the value of these tools in

the traditional return on investment (ROI) formula (McKinsey 2007, Parity 2007). A ‘best practice’ for measuring the success of Web 2.0 tools has not yet emerged (McKinsey 2007), or indeed for measuring the number of visitors to sites in general (see eg “How Many Site Hits? Depends Who’s Counting” *New York Times*, 22 October 2007 and “Web 2.0: Do the numbers add up?” *The Times Online*, 3 March 2008).

While the corporate market has been less receptive to Web 2.0 technologies than the consumer marketplace, experts in the field believe that ‘Enterprise 2.0’ will make it big in the workplace in 2008 (Forrester 2008, amongst others). Enterprise 2.0 refers to those platforms that companies can buy or build in order to make visible the practices and outputs of their knowledge workers (McAfee 2006). As lead report author Oliver Young states, “CIOs will concede that they cannot quell passionate employees’ use of consumer-oriented Web 2.0 tools” (Ibid. 2008).

## Professionals

While we currently lack the data to quantify professionals’ particular Web 2.0 knowledge levels, the sector’s noticeable absence from the scene speaks for itself. Still, the lack of sector-specific information about Web 2.0 awareness and usage is a significant gap in the research and one worth addressing. There is reason to suspect that professional services firms’ levels of knowledge and usage are very different from those of professionals themselves, particularly younger generations.

# Five challenges for professional use

## “professionals compose a large proportion of UK bloggers”

At least one survey seems to contradict the general consensus that professionals are not clued in to Web 2.0, and do not use these technologies often. The 2006 Pew/Internet report on blogging, “Bloggers: A portrait of the Internet’s new storytellers,” found that 38% of American bloggers surveyed were knowledge-based professional workers, compared to 13% of all American adults. The same survey finds that most bloggers use a pseudonym (55%) and blog to express themselves creatively (52%) and share personal opinions (50%), rather than, say, to talk about politics and Government (11%) or make money (7%) (Ibid.).

If we believe that the types of people who blog in the US are similar to the types of people who blog in the UK, then professionals compose a large proportion of UK bloggers. However if bloggers do not use their own name or blog about the firm, employers and colleagues may be unaware that new mediums of communication are prevalent, and might be used for professional as well as personal use. The next section of this paper discusses potential reasons for the professions’ hesitancy to embrace Web 2.0.

>>> Web 2.0 poses certain challenges for the professions compared to other occupational sectors or the general public. Though many definitions of “profession” exist,<sup>4</sup> for the sake of this paper we mean knowledge-based occupations organised as representative and regulatory bodies with a longstanding duty to the public interest eg lawyers, accountants and engineers (sometimes called the “liberal professions”).

This section analyses five fundamental challenges for professional use of Web 2.0:

- > **Hyperlinks subvert hierarchy**
- > **Changing values: a shift in trust**
- > **Cultural barriers to adoption**
- > **The security threat**
- > **Time wasting**

## Hyperlinks subvert hierarchy

The services that professionals offer are fundamentally different from goods that are sold by a manufacturer, merchant or retailer because they are intangible and the purchaser has to take them on trust. One of the defining characteristics of a profession is what is known in economic terms as “information asymmetry.” Information asymmetry refers to the disparity between the information held by the service provider, gained through strong educational background and qualifications, versus the information held by the consumer (Black 2002). The Internet revolution threatens the information asymmetry that has always been a key feature of the relationship between professionals and clients (Demos 2006).

<sup>4</sup> For one of the most carefully considered definitions of “profession” in Britain today see Lord Benson’s 1992 criteria for professional bodies recorded in Hansard (Lords) 8 July, 1206-1207.

## “hyperlinks subvert hierarchy”

*The Cluetrain Manifesto*, a call to action for businesses to humanise their communications in the new, online marketplace, states that “hyperlinks subvert hierarchy” (Ibid., Thesis 7, Ibid. 1999). By this the authors mean that Internet users find ways to skirt traditional ranking systems.

An obvious example of this is the rise of the ‘Google bomb.’ Google was once thought to be immune from search engine optimisation (SEO), tactics used to artificially improve a site’s ranking in web searches. Yet users soon found a way to exploit Google’s algorithms, and the growth of the “Google bomb” quickly followed. A Google bomb works through the collaboration of online journals and blogs. If a few hundred blogs host the same link and describe it the same way, then Google believes that the page referred to is a good resource on that subject. Google bombs can be used for marketing and to raise awareness of social and political issues (type in “who is a failure?” and Google returns George W. Bush).

The Internet also subverts hierarchy in the deeper sense by providing users with links to instant information – information that previously may have been predominantly in the realm of the professions. An example of this is the growth of online medical self-diagnosis – sites such as WebMD that allow visitors to plug in their symptoms and receive a computer-generated diagnosis. Statistics show that most Internet users search for medical information online (80%, from Pew/Internet 2006). Some doctors complain that these sites are not trustworthy, and that patients coming in armed with inexpert information make their job more difficult.

Rather than viewing the Internet as a threat or potential replacement for the medical profession, some doctors welcome online medical information as a support mechanism. A study by the *British Medical Journal* suggests that the Internet search engine Google can help accurately determine a medical diagnosis nearly 60% of the time (Tang and Ng 2006). In this view doctors are not in danger of becoming obsolete from the availability of more information; in fact, it is more likely to improve the profession as a whole. If patients use online medical advice wisely, doctors will be able to spend more time developing specialised skills and talent. Arguably, low skill tasks can be commoditised, leaving professionals to focus on the tasks that require their complex knowledge and technical training.

## Changing values: a shift in trust

New technologies are not the sole mechanism subverting hierarchy in modern times. Post-industrial values are characterised by declining deference to authority. Like other institutions such as politics and religion, the professions have suffered an inevitable decay in public perceptions due to changing values.

Opinion polls in the UK, US and EU show that although public perceptions vary from profession to profession, trust is declining across the professions as a whole (Gallup 2007; Ipsos MORI 2006; The Harris Poll 2005; Eurostat 2001). At the same time, trust in “people like me” is increasing. Across the globe, all age groups surveyed by Edelman’s Trust Barometer 2008 rely on people like themselves as much as authenticated experts for

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## “Participatory web brings communications back to the viral spread of information”

information they trust. Trust in a “person like me” is 58% whilst trust in financial or industry analysts, academics, and doctors or healthcare specialists is 57%, 56%, and 55%, respectively (Ibid.).

The transition from an industrial society to a knowledge society has brought about an unprecedented level of wealth, meaning that people can move beyond thinking about survival to thinking about their subjective well-being. Values have shifted from an emphasis on physical and economic well-being to individual freedom and self-expression (amongst others). This new focus on subjective well-being is combined with unparalleled availability of information due to the exponential growth of technology in the past quarter century (Inglehart and Baker 2000). Consequently, even as professionals grow in political, economic and social significance, the public are able to put their claims of status and expertise to ever-greater scrutiny. The age of broadcasting may become an historical aberration as the participatory web brings communications back to the viral spread of information – albeit on a much larger scale than the ways in which rumors spread before the printed word.

### Cultural barriers to adoption

Professions have traditionally held quite conservative attitudes about business innovation. Some studies of Web 2.0 have claimed that organisations are reluctant to embrace the open information movement and give outsiders access to the inner workings of the business because it goes against the cultural norms of the company (see, for example, KPMG 2007). Traditional ‘command and

control’ structures have no place in the new participatory web. Conversely, firms do not want any part of a world where consumers dictate the products and crises cannot be managed.

The extent to which these ‘cultural barriers’ exist is difficult to measure, but at least some experts in the field believe that this explanation is an outdated myth. Companies’ ‘institutional cultures and norms’ is a very broad categorisation, and may be impossible to measure. How many employees use blogs, wikis, and social bookmarks every day, unbeknownst to the organisation? Workers who know the value of these innovations in their personal and consumer use of the Internet are beginning to expect the same capabilities from their workplace software (“Consumer and business apps begin to blur...” 2008).

### The security threat

Companies frequently cite the need to protect and control highly sensitive information as a barrier to adopting Web 2.0 technologies (KPMG 2007; Parity 2007; ChangeWave Research 2007 amongst others). How real is the security threat, and how worried should professions be?

The Department for Trade and Industry’s (DTI) 2006 “Information security breaches survey” found that 17% of UK businesses overall had reported incidences of web misuse. Larger companies are more likely to have incidents involving staff misuse, with 52% reporting misuse. Most of the misuse involved accessing inappropriate websites (41%), though excessive web surfing was also a significant problem (36%). Consequences for businesses were primarily time wasting (see next section). Only 10% of

“17% of UK businesses reported incidences of web misuse”

**“The same functions that make Web 2.0 so valuable in the workplace also herald increased vulnerabilities”**

reported misuse caused business disruption or direct cash costs.

To prevent information and security breaches the DTI recommends that companies:

- > **have a clear policy on acceptable Internet usage**
- > **communicate this policy to staff**
- > **scan incoming and outgoing email**
- > **implement software to monitor Internet usage and block inappropriate sites**

Most of the security threats that affect Web 2.0 are not new, but reflect existing issues with browser design and web architecture. A September 2007 Forrester survey found that enterprises have significant concerns about the potential of Web 2.0 to distribute malware and leak data from the organisation. A director of technical training for an antivirus vendor says of Web 2.0: “what makes it more dangerous is collaboration. There’s so much data being exposed these days.” (“Web 2.0: Unsafe at any Speed?” 2008). The same functions that make Web 2.0 so valuable in the workplace – namely better collaboration, communication and innovation amongst employees and between organisations – also herald increased vulnerabilities – namely the influx of too much information (spam) and privacy concerns.

Privacy concerns are not unwarranted given the sheer amount of personal data on Web 2.0 platforms, not to mention the UK Government’s track record for losing personal information. How vulnerable is, for example, Facebook’s 60 million users’ information: their interests, email, phone numbers, addresses, friends etc.? The

consequences of information falling into the wrong hands may be devastating. In November 2007 Yahoo agreed to compensate prisoners’ families for turning over information – from personal emails to anonymous message board posts – to the Chinese government, resulting in the jailing of political dissidents. Large scale security risks might also apply to sensitive company information. Research by Clearswift found that 14% of HR professionals have had to discipline employees for confidential data leakage, and an additional 7% had to discipline employees for posting inappropriate content on social media websites, blogs and wikis (Ibid. 2007).

Despite the real risks posed by participatory technologies, experts in the field believe that the security threats are small. Most of the hype may be attributed to knee-jerk reactions to a new, unknown medium. Previously, IT managers and CIOs resisted incorporating Web 2.0 technologies, often citing the security threat as a principal deterrent. Many experts now believe that this is an antiquated view. IT managers are increasingly ‘on board’ to implementing Web 2.0 and adding them to priority lists for 2008 (Forrester 2008). CIOs are conceding that they cannot suppress employees’ use of Web 2.0 and are instead mitigating the risk by employing enterprise-class tools in the workplace (Ibid.).

## **Time wasting**

Most professional firms bill by the hour. Excessive use of Facebook, MySpace and the like has inspired widespread fear that ‘Web 2.0’ means frivolous time wasting – and bad news for the firm’s bottom line. Policies to restrict or

**“Despite the risks... experts in the field believe that the security threats are small”**

# What can Web 2.0 do for the professions?

## “Trends seem to be converging towards a ‘managed access’ approach”

ban participatory sites like Facebook have been rolled out at various professional service firms (see pp. 30 for Allen & Ovary’s experience). According to research by MessageLabs, a UK-based security vendor, 20% of organisations block social networking and dating sites (Ibid. 2008); research from Clearswift finds that as much as half of all business block social networking sites (Ibid. 2007). Trends seem to be converging towards a ‘managed access’ approach, whereby the organisation allows use of social networking sites only during specified hours (eg outside official office hours and at lunch) or in communal areas. Equally, more firms are taking a ‘libertarian’ approach and allowing full access, on the grounds that blocking such technology implies a lack of trust and misses the big picture about Web 2.0’s potential value<sup>6</sup>. As one security analyst explains, “It’s more of a management issue than a technology issue” (Ibid.).

There is a risk that by focusing on potential business threats, organisations miss important cues about the ways in which social networking – on both Internet and company Intranet – can lead to tangible business benefits. Many people use sites like Facebook to keep up with ‘latent ties,’ allowing professional people to keep in touch with more former clients, colleagues, associates and other contacts than ever before. Social networking within large firms on company Intranet has also been proven an effective means of quick, easy communication – a time saving mechanism.

Though professions face real challenges, technology does not move backward. The rapid growth rates of Web 2.0 suggest that it is here to stay. How can professionals begin to use new technologies in valuable ways?

>>> Web 2.0 has the potential to add enormous value to professional services. The professions may subscribe to new technologies in the first instance as a means of appealing to new generations of clients and talented recruits. Yet a long-term view also suggests that the proactive use of Web 2.0 in integral aspects of day to day work practices has the capability to evolve a more efficient and productive services offering. This section gives an overview of three of the most successful Web 2.0 platforms for the enterprise today – blogs, wikis and social networking – including their principal features, key benefits for professional people and professional service firms, and models of best practice.

## Internal v External

Web 2.0 technologies have the capacity to function in different ways depending upon whether the workplace uses platforms to target connections inside versus outside the workplace. Web 2.0’s potential impact on company Intranets may be just as important as Web 2.0’s impact on the public Internet (McAfee 2006). A 2007 survey of corporate respondents conducted by ChangeWave Research found that the top two reasons for using Web 2.0 are internally related:

- > **To improve internal employee communication and collaboration**
- > **To increase internal efficiency and productivity**

However, those respondents who plan to incorporate Web 2.0 in the future are looking more to external reasons – to improve external customer service and support, and to increase external brand awareness/loyalty (Ibid. 2007).

<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to note that attitudes toward access to sites like Facebook at work are not split down generational lines, as one might expect. Many young people prefer to have access blocked at work because they view these sites as a distraction, just as many more experienced workers insist upon access because of the long hours they work (Clearswift 2007).

**“today’s bloggers are thought to be a highly influential group in society”**

There is no ‘one size fits all’ solution to whether companies should focus their efforts on getting to know and use Web 2.0 inside or outside the firm. Much of this is common sense – social networking on the Internet is likely to be a better tactic for recruitment than to manage sensitive client relations. Many companies choose to implement Web 2.0 on a gradual basis, testing out individual applications carefully inside the firm before going public and growing platforms ‘organically’ so that users can help create the best model (McKinsey 2007; McAfee 2006).

## **Blogs**

### **Key benefits**

- > Communications**
- > Information dissemination**
- > Building the brand**

A blog (“web log”) is a site that allows an individual or a group to share a running log of events/insights and receive comments. Blogs are the Web 2.0 equivalents of Web 1.0’s personal websites (O’Reilly 2005). A growing percentage of Internet users blog themselves (19% compared to just 5% three years ago), and 50% of Internet users read blogs (Forrester 2007). Moreover, today’s bloggers are thought to be a highly influential group in society (Forrester 2004; Pew /Internet 2006). By engaging with bloggers, professional people can tap into what Ipsos MORI calls ‘socio-political influencers’<sup>6</sup> and what William Gladwell termed ‘connectors,’ ‘mavens,’ and ‘salesmen’ in *The Tipping Point*<sup>7</sup>. These are people who have the power to create buzz and make change. We live in a knowledge economy, and professionals are at the forefront of the knowledge

<sup>6</sup> These people are outgoing, highly networked, well-informed, and activist. See “Socio Political Influencers: Who They Are and Why They Matter” by Robert Duffy and Anna Pierce. Ipsos MORI, June 2007.

<sup>7</sup> These are ‘one of the few’ exceptional people who can communicate and create buzz. In the 80/20 rule, they are the 20% who set the trends and the pace for change for 80% (Gladwell 2000).

trade. As people in the know increasingly choose to spread knowledge via the blogosphere, it follows that professionals should engage them in this space. The blogosphere has powerful, highly visible effects online. Search engines use ‘link structure,’ the number of other pages that link to a website, to help predict useful pages in searches. Bloggers, as prolific and timely linkers, thus have disproportionate representation in search engine results.

Traditionally blogs are created by one author or sometimes a group. They are much easier to write and update than HTML pages for the average user (The Gilbane Report 2005). Content consists of dated entries arranged in reverse chronological order, interspersed with pictures, links, and a ‘blogroll’ of recommended blogs on the side. This is just one method of using a blog. Blogging does not require a standard formula or have to look a certain way. After all, the blog is simply a tool.

### **Blog features**

- > Add content chronologically and permanently**
- > Manage links to and from other web sites**
- > Syndicate and distribute content (eg via RSS)**

### **Examples of internal blog use**

- > Company message board – at its simplest, a blog keeps everyone informed whilst cutting down on email traffic**
- > Project collaboration – information and progress updates accessible in one place by all team members**
- > Document management – organise and archive a repository of critical information**

**“the blog has attracted a lot of positive coverage and new work to the firm”**

Kevin Calder, blogger  
Mills & Reeve 'Naked Law'

#### Examples of external blog use

- > **Information dissemination – content is king in professional services, and blogging is a prime medium for adding to the value of the content available, while also positioning the firm as a thought leader**
- > **Knowledge sharing across geographic boundaries – ideas sharing and conversation that can span continents, and change the way that professional people think about major issues**
- > **Presenting a human face to clients – by giving clients an inside view of the workings of the company the firm seems more personable, which can improve its image and brand**

#### Best practice – Naked Law; IPKat

- > [http://nakedlaw.typepad.com/naked\\_law/](http://nakedlaw.typepad.com/naked_law/)
- > <http://ipkitten.blogspot.com/>

Law blogs, or 'blawgs,' have been highly influential in legal circles already, and have the potential to gain much more power as the phenomenon continues to rise in popularity. Originally very much the preserve of individual lawyers or legal commentators, many blawgs are gaining currency as authoritative sources of legal information. Niche blawgs that track a particular area of the law may be followed more regularly within the profession than the more general, eg law student blogs. Whilst the average reader may not have time to read a multitude of blawgs, he or she will take the time to receive information useful to his or her practice (blawger Tom Mighell, speaking at ABA round table 2005).

By publishing regularly updated content in a particular area of practice, lawyers or law firms can become known as a 'go-to' source in that niche area. Other practitioners might refer work because they read the blawg and view the author(s) as a trusted authority. Clients and potential clients respond to the high quality of information made available online, as well as the more personable approach blogging forces lawyers (and bloggers in general) to take.

Mills & Reeve's 'Naked Law,' [http://nakedlaw.typepad.com/naked\\_law/](http://nakedlaw.typepad.com/naked_law/), written by technology lawyers about the latest legal and regulatory developments relating to information and communication technology, e-commerce, and privacy, stands as an example of best practice. The first blog in the UK written by a law firm, it remains one of the most well respected today. Partner Kevin Calder comments, "When we first started the blog, we were feeling our way, but since then it has attracted a lot of positive press coverage and new work to the firm. The real challenge is keeping the content up to date and fresh."

As a whole, however, Mills & Reeve are one of the few exceptions to the rule. The most successful niche blawgs to date have been initiated and maintained by individuals, rather firms. Within the UK market, IP Kat may be considered a model of best practice as a niche blawg in the IP field. IP Kat covers copyright, patent, trademark and privacy/confidentiality issues from a mainly UK and European perspective. It is a group blog, with a 5 person team of lawyers contributing (6 if you count Tufty the cat). As with all blogs it is difficult to measure perceptions, but IP Kat and Naked Law seem to be read by the great and the good of the legal world. Taking IP Kat as an example,

over 1500 subscribe to the blog's RSS feed. Technorati lists IP Kat's 'authority' as 134, meaning that 134 other blogs link to the website. The larger the amount of links on Technorati, the higher the blog's 'authority' ranking. IP Kat's authority ranking puts it at 46,742 of the 112 million blogs Technorati tracks in terms of popularity. By some empirical measures then, and certainly by word of mouth, the authors of IP Kat have used the blawg to establish themselves as authoritative legal professionals within their field in the UK market.

## Wikis

### Key benefits

- > **Knowledge sharing**
- > **Collaborative drafting**
- > **Project management**
- > **Reducing email**

Wikis are platforms that allow visitors to add, remove, edit and change content. Blogs enable people to author individually, and wikis enable group authorship. Blogs are cumulative – posts and responses accumulate over time – whilst wikis are iterative – people edit content continuously.

The most famous example of a wiki by far is Wikipedia. Some argue that Wikipedia is no longer a good example of a wiki in terms of the technology of the software and potential for internal corporate use. Others use Wikipedia as proof positive that group authorship can lead to convergent, high-quality content (McAfee 2006). Whilst quality control is certain to be an issue in a platform entirely open to the public, the level of discourse is, in

fact, surprisingly good. Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales explains, "The wiki model is different because it gives you an incentive when you're writing. If you write something that annoys other people, it's just going to be deleted. So if you really want your writing to survive, you really have to be cooperative and helpful." (quotation from "Extreme Blogging," *Forbes*, 13 December 2004).

For the sake of professional use, the best uses of wiki are likely to be contained in certain communities eg the company Intranet, collaboration with clients, or industry-specific platforms (collective Intranets) such as Legal OnRamp. On Internet wikis like Wikipedia nothing distinguishes professional from non-professional. By restricting the members who can wiki, any platform can become authoritative and trustworthy.

### Wiki features

- > **Add, delete and alter content to an online document or discussion**
- > **Make it easy to add new pages and create links**
- > **Incorporate light content management features such as lists of changed pages and author tracking**
- > **Syndicate and distribute new content (eg via RSS)**

### Examples of wiki use

- > **Project collaboration and management – like blogs, wikis provide an ideal platform for collaboration across time and space. At its simplest, a wiki would enable collaborative drafting and editing in one place, cutting back on sending documents back and forth via email**

**“if you really want your writing to survive, you really have to be cooperative and helpful”**

Jimmy Wales, Wikipedia Founder

- > **Knowledge sharing – currently much information flows via email. Wikis can be syndicated with RSS feeds so that relevant content goes directly to the user, saving time and ensuring that only subscribers receive content**
- > **Harnessing collective intelligence – the most exciting uses of wikis in the professions are designed to harness whole knowledge systems, the best minds and sources, and make them accessible and searchable online**

**Best practice: Dresdner Kleinwort Wasserstein (DrKW)**

Surprisingly, London based investment bank Dresdner Kleinwort Wasserstein has the largest corporate wiki in use. The wiki was set up in autumn 2005, along with communication technologies including blogs, wikis and messaging software. Then CIO of the firm, JP Rangaswami, said the tangible benefits of the wiki “have been seen in the way people do business, and that have a direct effect on productivity” (“Through the Grapevine,” *Computing Business* 18 May 2006).

The problems with Dresdner’s previous communications systems centred on the limitations of standard applications as a ‘many-to-many’ tool. Email works well as a one-to-one means of communication, but attempts at one-to-many end up with multiple conversations going on at one time, in an environment where trust and security are essential. Instant messaging allows users to connect but not to collaborate. Wikis allow many-to-many collaboration and communications (Ibid.).

The Dresdner wiki made a difference as soon as users started hosting meeting agendas on the new platform. The agenda was always up to date and people were more likely to make changes and voice opinions. According to Rangaswami, “The wiki counters what you might call the ‘conference room questions’ problem, where people have important ideas, information and questions to contribute but do not want to be seen to do so directly” (Ibid.). The wiki also reduced email. According to Dresdner’s measurement, when a wiki is set up to serve a certain project, email volume related to that project drops 75%. The wiki was a small change in the way people worked, but it allowed them to collaborate and communicate better, and thus made a real difference to internal efficiency and productivity.

**“The wiki was a small change in the way people worked, but it allowed them to collaborate and communicate better, and thus made a real difference to internal efficiency and productivity”**

## Social networking

### Key benefits

- > **Communications**
- > **Networking within various communities**
- > **Recruitment; HR**

Social networking is the process of creating and verifying online social networks through platforms which enable various ways for users to interact, eg chat, messaging, video, discussion groups. The most popular sites in the UK are Facebook, MySpace and Bebo (all three appearing in the top 10 most visited websites in the UK during November 2007) (Experian 2008). Though these sites are referred to as social ‘networking,’ which emphasises striking up a new relationship, in fact the primary purpose of most is to articulate and make visible existing networks

## “Social networking platforms connect employees in large and international firms ”

(boyd and Ellison 2007). Communications are primarily between people of users' extended social networks, and frequently between 'latent ties' (Ibid.).

Professions are likely to have encountered social networking sites in the IT department, where the question of whether or not to ban these sites at work has attracted a significant amount of controversy (see eg “Staff complaints force red-faced A&O into Facebook U-turn” *Legal Week*, 5 May 2007). Though initially reactions to the use of these sites prompted many firms to block access, more and more firms are allowing usage. In the case of Allen & Overy, the IT director emailed the entire London office explaining, “Given that there has been a strong reaction to the blocking and that Facebook is used by many people for networking – for business purposes as well as social – we are going to open up access to the site again” (Ibid.).

Social networking platforms have the potential to add value both to professional Intranets, connecting employees particularly in large and international firms, and on the Internet for broader networking. Forrester predicts that businesses will be more willing to buy social networking platforms in 2008: “Suite offerings that include social networking like Awareness Software, Jive Software and IBM's Lotus Connections offering stand to benefit greatly from the attention” (lead author Young, Ibid. 2008).

### Social networking features

- > **Allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system**
- > **Articulate a list of other users with a shared connection**

- > **View and connect with this list within the platform**
- > **Publicly display connections within approved networks**
- > **Enhance profile by adding visual, multimedia and other content**

### Examples of internal use

- > **A forum for social groups within the company – provide a platform for building and strengthening ties within the corporate community**
- > **Social networking visualisation and analysis – clarify key experts on given topics, how users are connected, spot key connections and communication gaps**

### Examples of external use

- > **Recruitment – reach out to students and potential recruits on their own terms**
- > **Projecting the brand – presence in progressive forums lends credibility amongst users**
- > **Networking – a new medium for the traditional relationship building, not replacing but supplementing other forms of interaction**

### Best practice: BT MyPages

BT's adoption of an internal social networking platform, along with wikis and blogs, successfully addressed the demands of its workforce and added value to the way the firm communicates. Whilst most firms were dealing with how to handle the problem of employees “wasting time” on Internet social networking sites like Facebook, BT adopted a libertarian view making sure that employees could

“Whilst most firms were dealing with how to handle the problem of employees ‘wasting time’ on Internet social networking sites like Facebook, BT adopted a libertarian view making sure that employees could access them”

# The way forward: what the professions can do for Web 2.0

access them. Richard Dennison, BT's Internal Programme Manager, explains, "Why? Because we see social media tools as a huge opportunity to transform the way our employees interact with each other, with 'the company,' and with our customers, suppliers and partners" ("BT Web 2.0 adoption case study," BT blog 2007).

The social networking tool BT used was called "MyPages." It provided every BT employee with a page on the Intranet in which they could connect with other people through a 'friend' function, create web pages and wikis, share photos, set up file stores and wiki calendars, and create blogs. The impact on the corporate environment was varied. Internal communications consultants had to learn to relinquish control of messages which were community edited. Thinking of communications as a conversation rather than a managed activity changes the job role.

Information consumption behaviours on the Intranet also changed. BT implemented a combination of tagging, where authors attach searchable key words to content, and RSS, which sends new content from subscribed channels directly to the user. Employees received only the social media content that they could benefit from, preventing information overload.

Finally, the value of social networking from the recruitment point of view should not be overlooked. As Generation Y enters the workforce, they will expect this technology to help them interact and manage their time. Companies, and company culture, will be judged based upon the extent to which they adopt these tools.

>>> "...new technologies are significant because they can potentially knit together an enterprise and facilitate knowledge work in ways that were simply not possible previously." – Andrew McAfee, Harvard Business School

The value of using Web 2.0 technologies for communications, project management and collaboration is becoming more and more evident. But how should companies move forward with integrating Web 2.0 technologies, and where should they start? In this section we posit some ideas as to how professional services firms might devise a workable strategy and implement platforms that achieve their unique objectives.

## Advice for implementation

There is no magic formula for successfully implementing Web 2.0 in the professional workplace. However, some simple, tried and tested guidelines can help companies start using Web 2.0 technologies productively.

The best way to learn about Web 2.0 is to start using it. A good way to start is by downloading an RSS feed reader, which allows users to subscribe to web pages and blogs and be notified every time content changes, rather than visiting each site individually. There are many free feed readers to choose from:

- > **Feedreader, [www.feedreader.com](http://www.feedreader.com), is a simple and easy to use PC-based aggregator**
- > **NetNewsWire is a good Mac-based option [www.newsgator.com](http://www.newsgator.com)**
- > **GoogleReader allows you to access your feeds online, from anywhere, [www.google.com/reader](http://www.google.com/reader)**

**"The best way to learn about Web 2.0 is to start using it"**

**“People are more likely to participate if they are given a starting point that they can react to and modify”**

Next, figure out which communities you want to connect with, subscribe to their feeds, and start getting involved in the conversation. Focus on where you and your firm can add value, start small, and build gradually. Ultimately the various participatory platforms all attempt to offer the best way of communicating and collaborating online. Different applications are suited to different business and company objectives.

When adopting new technologies – be it a public blog or wikis on the company Intranet – keep in mind that employees will not start using new technologies automatically. Levels of use depend to a great extent on decisions made and actions taken by managers. Web 2.0 technologies appear to spread more quickly when users are given some initial structure. People are more likely to participate if they are given a starting point that they can react to and modify (eg post the first entry of your company blog yourself, and ask for comments), rather than a blank workspace (McAfee 2006).

An informal rollout of your new participatory technology is encouraged. Successful users often talk about the way in which these technologies started at a company's grassroots level (McKinsey 2007). Many teams publicise new wikis, blogs and other new technologies unceremoniously, preferring to wait for the first adopters to generate content which will draw people in: “We wanted people to come to these tools because there was something of interest already there, not because they were told to” (Myrto Lazopoulou, Head of User-Centered Design, Dresdner). This way, the platforms are given time to improve gradually depending upon the needs of the users.

## **If you want to start with a blog...**

Many businesses are reluctant to engage in the blogosphere for fear of negative comments and criticism. Yet results from a survey undertaken by Cymfony research indicate that negative experiences are the exception rather than the rule when companies enter the blogosphere. Of the 42% of companies who said a blog post had impacted their company, over 90% said that the impact was positive (Cymfony 2008). Three-quarters of respondents indicated that blogs had achieved their initial goals, citing increased media coverage, web site traffic and sale leads. So how does one actually go about entering the fray?

Blogging software is free and (perhaps surprisingly) user friendly. WordPress.com allows anyone to make their own blog, publish stories, edit and add countless applications for increased functionality. First time bloggers do not need to know HTML code or other complicated IT systems – they just need to have an email address and a name. Your organisation may opt to let one or many employees blog, or hire a blog editor whose specific role is to write and edit content (eg on firm and industry-wide issues) for the blog.

In order to build a high-traffic blog, it is critical to build relationships by commenting and delivering information to other blogs. The most influential blogs have the largest communities linking to them and the widest networks – they are “hubs.” RSS feeds (for examples see above) are a great way to follow different conversations whilst managing time (they come to you). Start engaging with the communities you want to be a part of by responding to posts and comments. When determining what to blog

**“First time bloggers do not need to know html code or other complicated IT systems – they just need to have an email address and a name”**

**“Getting on board in the early stages will result in greater prestige and status for those firms who implement Web 2.0 successfully”**

about, think about where you can add value and only blog when you really have something to say. This might be once every day or once every week.

The blogosphere is different from the mainstream media – it is no longer a one-way conversation. People expect dialogue rather than a speech. Simon Jenkins spoke to the House of Lords on this topic recently and referred to the blogosphere as a ‘pub atmosphere.’ By this Jenkins is referring to tone: think about delivering messages on a blog the same way that people interact in a village pub with various groups and inter-connected communities. It is important to sound human, not like a press release. High quality content (which is RSS-enabled, so that readers do not have to go to the site) combined with frequent postings and engagement with the right communities of bloggers are the tried and tested methods likely to gain a blog steady readership.

### **Why act now?**

Web 2.0 technologies will help professionals communicate and collaborate better. Ultimately, the reason that firms should adopt these innovations now is threefold:

- > to maintain the competitive advantage in providing services that clients want**
- > to build levels of knowledge and expertise**
- > to attract and keep the highest quality talent**

Getting on board in the early stages will result in greater prestige and status for those firms who implement Web 2.0 successfully. Social media technologies are easy to explore, highly cost-effective and pose few risks when

paired with proper security infrastructure – which is generally in place already. In an age of declining trust in the professions, Web 2.0 offers a new medium for professionals to enhance service offerings and build reputations.

But the value of being an early adopter goes beyond trouncing perceptions that the professions are outdated. Web 2.0 platforms have the potential to improve professional knowledge bases and the quality of information available. The most exciting initiatives in this field have seen the creation of constantly updated medical databases, with relevant information sent directly to doctors via RSS as it is posted (Giustini 2006). Web 2.0 is about knowledge development and delivery, in real time. It is about capturing information which may be unstructured or anecdotal, and previously may have been lost. It is about disseminating information through targeted channels and collaborating across time and space.

In the Introduction of this paper, we pointed out that Web 2.0 has the power to give the laity an unprecedented advantage over professionals, disturbing the traditional ‘conspiracy’ of professional ‘closure’ or monopoly. New participatory technologies allow information to be more widely accessible than ever before, subverting the information asymmetry at the heart of professional structures. The counterpoint to this claim – and our house view – is the possibility that Web 2.0 will actually serve to increase the centrality of the professions’ public and business role still further.

## “The new salons have moved online”

There are two ways in which the professions may harness Web 2.0 platforms to increase their standing. The first, and more suspect of the two, recognises that the supposed ‘democratisation of the web’ is actually more of an oligarchy. Big business interests already own much of the Web 2.0 space; notably, News Corp. CEO Rupert Murdoch has invested significantly, buying up MySpace amongst others (“Murdoch 2.0” Forbes.com 2007). According to research undertaken by the Palo Alto Research Center, one percent of Wikipedia users are responsible for about half of the site’s edits. A select few are also running the show at Digg, a social bookmarking hub in which the top 100 ‘Diggers’ submitted 44% of the site’s top stories in 2007 (“Wisdom of the Chaperones” Wilson 2008). Knowledge-based professionals could become the elite group of influencers in this new medium.

The second way in which Web 2.0 may be used as a platform for growing the professions hearkens back to the heyday of salon culture, when people gathered together to share conversation, literature, art, and ideas. The new salons have moved online. Sometimes conversations take place in “walled gardens,” where only a select few are invited to participate (see eg Legal OnRamp). Sometimes the conversations are held in open forums where the most useful and interesting knowledge is collectively filtered by tagging (see eg Digg and StumbleUpon). The challenge for professional services is to become a part of navigating these new platforms so that the right, information comes to the right people – far more quickly, and incorporating a broader knowledge base than ever before.

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## About Spada Research

Spada Research is the research arm of Spada, a public relations consultancy specialising in professional services. Spada Research aims to further knowledge of the professions, real estate, wealth management and the media by contributing to critical debates in the sector.

We offer a bespoke, start to finish research service, from strategic planning to implementation and analysis. Working alongside our experienced PR team, we also ensure that research findings receive due media attention.

If you are interested in commissioning research to raise your own organisation's profile or wish to position your firm as a leader in its field, contact us on:

**T +44(0)20 7269 1430**

Even better, join in the conversation and share your thoughts on the White Paper and other professional services industry issues on our blog at:

**[www.spada.co.uk/swordplay](http://www.spada.co.uk/swordplay)**

