INTERACTION GENERATION

Web 2.0 is all about interactivity – make sure you understand how it could be beneficial to your business.

WEB 2.0 is a trendy new IT term glossing the front page of business magazines. While I usually detest the use of jargon, web 2.0 is exciting, has intelligent business applications, and is a whole lot of fun.

Most of us have already had some involvement with web 2.0 websites. As far as definitions go, consider a web 2.0 website to be an interactive one. It encourages collaboration with its visitors, usually by allowing control of content. At a grassroots level, web 2.0 allows for everyday people to have more power on the internet by openly sharing their opinions and creative endeavours.

Social networking

These websites have changed the shape of how people use the internet through mass interactivity. Many users swear by these tools and believe they've helped them organise their life. Many businesses also believe they waste a lot of time, but that's another article altogether.

The two biggest social networking websites are facebook and MySpace. Essentially, both websites allow you to create a profile and then control the information that exists on these profiles. LinkedIn is a similar concept, but concentrates more heavily on the business community.

If you've never looked at facebook before, now is a good time to start as it has begun allowing businesses and organisations to have profiles. This can give outstanding exposure to your events, new product releases or other interesting developments happening in your organisation. Best of all, it's free.

Photo sharing

Now that most people own a digital camera, we wonder what to do with all those pictures we're taking! Picasa and Flickr try to address this problem.

Both websites allow you to manage and upload your digital photos and display them publicly or privately for others to view. There are great benefits here for sharing with family and close friends but for some selected businesses, there are marketing opportunities as well.

These photo tools are great for travellers researching holidays and you can bet there are people searching for 'Cairns', 'Great Barrier Reef' and 'Port Douglas' to see other people's holiday snaps.

If you have a business that can be showcased through great photography, consider uploading some of your best photos to further promote your products through this avenue.

Blogs

It seems even the smallest business has a blog these days. Essentially, a blog allows a business to add newsworthy snippets of information in a quick and easy to read format on a website.

For your customers, blogs provide a fantastic feature called a comment. This allows anyone to leave a message against your articles, ask questions or share experiences.

Many of these web 2.0 websites are large global ventures but there are plenty of small business applications too. The whole concept of web 2.0 surrounds giving your customers and website visitors more power through interactions. But to come up with great ideas on how your customers can interact with your products and services, you really need to stop being frightened of the internet and spend some time learning what other people are doing with it.

Some clever web 2.0 features I've seen:

Think Geek (thinkgeek.com) - Allows customers to add photos of themselves using the products they have listed for sale. Anyone who submits an action shot enjoys 10 per cent off their next purchase. Customers feel chuffed they got a photo on a website and of course, the company benefits from future sales generated through the discount.

Sydney Morning Herald (smh.com.au) - Encourages readers to leave comments on news articles to gauge public opinion on current affairs.

Taste (taste.com.au) – Website visitors post messages against recipes which provides fantastic feedback to future cooks on how to alter the recipe for new delicious versions. Its discussion forum also allows keen cooks to share ideas and is a wealth of information on family recipes and tips.

The benefits of allowing your visitors to interact with your product online are immense. Brand loyalty, customer satisfaction and viral marketing are within easy reach using web 2.0 concepts.

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