Foreword

The ability to communicate with anyone anywhere has never been easier than it is today. This is not to say that there are still no boundaries in the world of communications; however, these boundaries are falling fast. The Internet has definitely been a conduit in allowing people to communicate. As the Internet matures, new tools and technologies have evolved earning the label of Web 2.0. The ability for groups of people to truly collaborate is being facilitated by many of the new tools that Web 2.0 has brought to average Internet users. No longer must you be a technology guru to exploit the ability to easily collaborate with others on the Web. This collaboration is occurring in the social, business, and educational environments, and the boundaries between these communities are continuing to be blurred. But, what exactly is Web 2.0 and how does Web 2.0 affect our ability to communicate both in our professional lives and our personal lives?

To see the changes in our communication habits, most of us need to look no further than our own homes. All I need to do is watch my sons communicate to realize that personal communication is no longer bounded by the telephone or the pen and paper. Averaging over 3,500 text messages a month, I am boggled that my 18-year-old son can possibly have time to do anything else. His communication is augmented with the many IM (instant message) conversations he conducts daily. At this time, he uses little e-mail other than for correspondence with vendors and potential colleges. My 20-year-old son recently decided to spend his spring semester volunteering. He used the Web to learn about different volunteer organizations. He subscribed to RSS (really simple syndication) feeds from several organizations to keep abreast of opportunities. Once he decided on volunteering in Costa Rica, he found several blogs to read about other volunteers' experiences in Costa Rica. Off he went. To keep in touch with my son, I simply log on to Facebook and quickly get an update on his volunteer endeavors with the leatherback turtles in Playa Buena Vista. I can view a video on YouTube that shows him learning to surf in his spare time. I quickly read messages left by his friends and know that he is having a good time. Since I am his mother, I do not leave a message on Facebook, but quickly type him an e-mail. He learned in college that many older people use e-mail for communications. He does not have Internet access where he is staying, so the next time he hikes the 4 km to town, he will call home using Skype (much cheaper than the regular phone line). Web 2.0 communication tools are allowing people to keep in touch like never before.

These same Web 2.0 technologies that have changed our personal communications are influencing how businesses communicate internally as well as externally. Methods for gathering and sharing information are having major impacts on businesses' interactions with employees, customers, and vendors. Communication is occurring globally. Organizational structures are changing. Although greater communication is often thought of as a positive influence on organizations, there are new negative consequences that businesses must address. Businesses that do not understand how to capitalize on the use of Web 2.0 tools will definitely find themselves left behind.

Ignorance is not bliss.

This book provides a great foundational structure to learn about Web 2.0 and its influences and impacts on individuals and businesses, making us less ignorant in the world of Web 2.0. The first section of this book introduces social software and Web 2.0. Clear definitions of the many new terms that have exploded around Web 2.0 are introduced. The author provides the reader with the opportunity to explore how communication is changing.

In the second section, understanding how businesses are capitalizing on Web 2.0 is explained. There are case studies that ground the concepts of Web 2.0. Specifically, the interactions of customers with businesses are explored. Special consideration is given to new marketing methods.

In the third section, the legal and security aspects associated with Web 2.0 are explored. Positive and negative impacts associated with Web 2.0 are considered. The issues of privacy, security, and fraud are requiring individuals and businesses to battle new negative consequences. Legislative bodies around the world have been unable to keep up with the changing issues that have arisen with these new technologies. As Internet users, we have questions about not only the use of Web 2.0 products, but our legal obligations associated with the use of these products. Users and businesses must be proactive in protecting data and wisely using Web 2.0 tools.

The fourth section takes the reader into the virtual world. The divide between the physical and virtual worlds continues to blur. Understanding the opportunities in the virtual world is introduced. Businesses are becoming players in the virtual world and individuals need to know how and when to interact. Although the virtual worlds are still in their infancy, much time and expense are being put into this environment.

Finally, the last chapter concludes with exploring how Web 2.0 is influencing education. Clearly, there are many educational areas where Web 2.0 is having an immediate impact. Furthermore, the impact will only continue to expand as education continues to evolve with Web 2.0. Social networking is providing the opportunity to extend knowledge throughout the globe.

The strategic impact of Web 2.0 is only beginning to be understood. Fortunately, the authors in this book provide the reader with a great introduction into the world of Web 2.0. This book is a must-read to learn more about Web 2.0 and the influences on our personal and professional lives.

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