Chapter 16


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ABSTRACT

One aspect of writing in government, business, and academia that always has been collaborative is the document review process. In this process, all persons with a stake in the final writing product are invited to help shape the piece in terms of content, style, or structure. Their review work has primarily been both serial and parallel. However, problems and perils of document review can strike at any stage in the review process: from the reviewer not knowing how to give useful comments to the writer not knowing how to interpret and use comments constructively. In today’s Web 2.0 world, what once was a more closed and controlled collaboration review process becomes open and organic because digital and online information is accessible to intended and unintended audiences alike for commenting, ranking, and reviewing. Response to this new openness in review has been mixed among and within institutions. And yet, the momentum for open and even unsolicited reviews is not only impossible to stop but also difficult to manage. While computer-mediated communication (CMC) and content management system (CMS) tools have automated the writing process, the review process has lagged in terms of being efficiently collaborative. This chapter explores collaborative review in a user-empowered Web 2.0 world, including how CMC tools can facilitate the review process. Finally, this chapter exemplifies Principles 1, 2, and 4 that ground this book.

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INTRODUCTION

In a wired world of nearly instantaneous access and communication, consumers no longer suffer in silence; they post their frustrations online for everyone from the company to current and potential customers to read. On May 18, 2009, for example, a customer of American Airlines was frustrated with his poor online experience at AA.com and decided to redesign the website to be more user-friendly and efficient. This dissatisfied customer, Dustin Curtis, was a user interface designer by trade and kept a weblog, or blog. He posted his revised design and commentary about his frustration with the AA.com website on his blog as an open letter to American Airlines with a link to his redesign. Figure 1 features his blog with portions of the redesign (Curtis, May 18, 2009).

His post led to an e-mail exchange between a UX architect from the AA.com official design team and himself, which he then posted in part to the blog (Curtis, May 22, 2009). Curtis wrote that he was shocked to learn that AA.com not only had a UX architect, but that judging from the UX architect’s other work, he was good. The UX architect’s response expressed his own frustration with the design and provided an explanation of how a collaborative writing project can go bad.

Curtis posted Mr. “X”’s full e-mail on his blog with permission from the writer provided that the writer’s name and some other information were withheld. Mr. X explained that the problem with the design of AA.com “lies less in our competency (or lack thereof, as you pointed out in your post) and more with the culture and processes employed here at American Airlines” (Curtis, May 22, 2009).

Figure 1. Screenshot of Dustin Curtis’s May 18, 2009 blog post with the open letter to American Airlines showing his redesign next to the current AA.com web site
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