

To Tweet or Not to Tweet – That is the Question

As we move more and more into the new millennium managers are identifying opportunities and challenges in the new technologies of the Internet. As Kevin Kelly has reminded us recently the internet has been with us for only 5,000 days: not a long time. And at least some of the early promises of the giddy days of the dot com era a decade and more ago are now coming to reality in the working world.

Thomas Kuhn (1962) pointed out that scientific revolutions do not take place in a steady, predictable manner; rather they are often two steps forward, then one step back - and sometimes sideways. And Michael Porter (2001) speaks of the need to recognise how new technologies, working methods, etc. frequently displace, rather than replace, those that have gone before them. People did not throw away radios when televisions appeared; nor did people shoot all their horses when vans, lorries and motorcars arrived.

The aim of this article is:

- To create a structured catalogue of some current and emerging internet and Web 2.0 tools
- To identify, with some supporting commentary, significant features of these web based tools and techniques (some that are well established, some that are emerging strongly and some that are still to be fully embraced), providing a simple but robust instrument for considering what might be required to make appropriate and effective use Web 2.0 technologies in your own work
- To challenge you, as a modern manager, with what you personally may need to do to increase your knowledge and understanding of these resources, develop appropriate skills in their use and apply them in practice in your own work.

Not every item will be relevant for the needs of every individual; each can select those of value to their own needs. Lincoln (2009) has recently provided a succinct (and non-technical) compendium of social media and Web 2.0 tools.

Three appendices are included:

- Appendix 1: A catalogue of some emerging technologies that may have potential for the work off the modern manager
- Appendix 2, based on a presentation made at BESIG Poznan in November 2009, gives some brief commentary and sign-posting for those wishing to find out more about the tools mentioned. (*YouTube*, etc. provides information and guidance on some of them, including some user tutorials.)
- Appendix 3, based on a presentation made at TESOL France in November 2009, gives some examples of resources for business and management that are available under a Creative Commons licence; they demonstrate Web 2.0 in action.

Context

Technology has been improving. Netbooks continue to make internet access more easily available as prices fall and wireless connections improve; broadband, processor speeds and digital storage continue to make access easier. Apple's iPad and similar tablet devices promise to change and enhance the user experience.

Much has been changing in the way people use online resources, the Web and the internet, especially as we move from static web pages to online interactivity and social networking:

- Tamara Eriksson (2009) has reported on the challenges facing managers of Generation Y.
- Richard Susskind (2010) has examined the impact of such resources on the work of lawyers and predicts significant changes in both what they offer and how they work.

The approach presented has been developed over a decade and more, helping managers in a wide range of different organisations to make better-informed decisions about the internet's value for their work. Such managers have worked in:

- Small, medium and large organisations
- Public, private and voluntary sectors
- Local, medium and multinational organisations
- Long established, start-ups and dotcom businesses.

Some brief examples of each are provided in the supporting commentary.

For each item there is an opportunity to consider:

- Do I know (enough about) what it is?
- Have I used it?
- Can I see a need or opportunity to do use it, or use it better, in my working environment?

Then you may need to identify how you can best acquire such knowledge, skills, etc. And you may need to consider how you can manage the changes in working practices in your own work, the work of your team, etc.

By the end of this process you should be more confident in the use of a broader range of web based instruments and be able to use them with more accuracy and fluency.

Process

Managers who have used this instrument report that no one person is likely to use more than a few small parts of it at any one time. In practice, individuals go through a series of simple stages:

- *Awareness*: Hearing about something on the radio, on television or from some formal or informal contact; and perhaps hearing about it several times from several different sources.
- *Investigating*: Spending time, alone or with a knowledgeable other person, working with the instrument or technique and exploring its potential.
- *Deciding*: Making a better informed decision to test the resource, tool or technique and setting up a pilot project (which may involve a certain amount of risk taking)
- *Implementing*: Assuming the project is successful, extending and embedding the tool or resource more widely in the team or organisation
- *Evaluating and reflecting*: After a reasonable period, carrying out a review of the benefits and any problems that have been encountered, with some suggestions for corrective action.

Conclusion

Perhaps inevitably, such an instrument has a shelf life. Some elements currently included were not there a year or two ago. Consider how quickly Facebook has emerged:

In January 2004, Mark Zuckerberg had a real-life version of a common nightmare. He was facing his first round of exams at Harvard and he hadn't studied or read anything the professor had assigned for a first-year art history course called Rome of Augustus. Zuckerberg hadn't even gone to class during the first term. He was too busy creating a cool computer program called Facebook that would help students get to know one another and share information. Now a few days before the exam, Zuckerberg was, in his words, "just completely screwed."

But he had an idea, straight out of twenty-first-century computer science. He created a Web site and put pictures from the course on it, with a little discussion beside each picture. Maybe the other students could help out by filling in the blanks. Within 24 hours, Zuckerberg's classmates helped out alright, with notes so cogent that everyone, Zuckerberg included, passed the test with flying colors. And according to Zuckerberg, the professor didn't see it as cheating. Instead, he was "really pleased" to see the students collaborate in such a creative fashion.

After acing his art history test, Zuckerberg returned to his school project, Facebook, which has since become one of the most ubiquitous social networking sites in the world; on it, friends and acquaintances keep up with each other's news. (Tapscott, 2009)

And doubtless others will appear on the scene in the months and years to come. There will also be significant challenges in getting some, at least, of these to produce income streams and make money; that is another large and challenging topic.

But the basic approach can continue to be used: any manager, as part of their own continuing professional development, has a responsibility to be aware of new ways of managing themselves and their team, identifying ways of managing more effectively and adopting new working practices which can add value to their contribution.

References and further reading

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Appendix 2 – Commentary and additional resources

Tool or resource	Commentary
email	An essential tool for every manager? (My barber, with a staff of 5+, does not use it and swears he never will ...)
World Wide Web	As Kevin Kelly reminds us on a recent TED, the internet has been with us for 5,000 days; say, a decade and a half. And he wonders: what do the next 5,000 days contain?
Texting	Having been much used by teenagers in the early years of the new millennium, it is increasingly used by more mature folk for quick communication with colleagues. David Crystal (Crystal, 2009) has recently given thought to the language and linguistic implications of this communication medium.
Google	Do you know about Scholar Google, Google images - and much more? www.google.com
Blogging	Originally conceived as an online diary, it has both active and passive features; we can read blogs composed by other people and, if we so wish, write our own blogs. www.blogger.com
Podcasts	Major broadcasting organisations such as the BBC now make a lot of their content available online after it has been broadcast on the radio. We can also produce our own podcasts. It needs a certain enthusiasm and tone of voice to make this work in practice.
Wikis	Students can make effective use of a wiki for the collaborative writing up group projects. www.pbwiki.com
Skype	Much used, to good effect, to reduce costs on an international project and to optimise communication and contact. www.skype.com
YouTube	Online video at www.youtube.com A few other providers of potential interest and value include VIMEO and VideoJug
Spotify	Free, for advertising supported version; legal music (classical, pop, whatever) online for your choice of listening pleasure www.spotify.com
Facebook	Devised by Mark Zuckerberg to help him get better grades in his first semester exam in art history at Harvard. As of January 2010 Zuckerberg is the youngest self-made businessman worth more than a billion dollars. www.facebook.com
Twitter	140 characters (= about 20 words) to provide your followers with news of your thoughts and doings ... www.twitter.com
LinkedIn	The 'business' version for online collaboration and networking www.linkedin.com
Moodle	An example of open source software for teaching and training, now used in 50,000 schools, colleges and universities round the world (including the Open University) www.moodle.org
Second Life	This has been much discussed as a medium for delivery of teaching and training. Used by Reuters, the Swedish Embassy, etc. www.secondlife.com
Ning	A simple resource for the development of online communication and collaboration. www.ning.com
Pechu kucha	20 <i>PowerPoint</i> slides, mainly images, each for 20 seconds = 6 minutes 40 seconds. The idea, originated by a firm of architects in Japan, provides a succinct format for situation reports on work in progress. www.pechukucha.org
Flickr	Free photo storage and distribution, with a premium site for those who want additional storage and features. www.flickr.com
Picasa	Free photo editing and manipulation, with a premium site for industrial users www.picasa.com
Amazon	Amazon has emerged as a leading online retailer in the last 10 years. As well as books and music a growing range of electronics, clothes, etc. is offered. www.amazon.com
eBay	eBay is a popular auction site, much used for recreational purposes. www.ebay.co.uk
iTunes	iTunes has emerged as a leading provider of music for download to mp3 players. In addition is a useful source of audio and video podcasts (including a growing number in the iTunes University). www.itunes.com
iPhone applications	iPhone applications are increasingly popular as no-cost and low-cost tools to add new features for handheld devices. Categories include news, games, utilities of various sorts. www.itunes.com
CommonCraft	CommonCraft provides useful short introductions to some Web 2.0 tools; worth checking regularly when you encounter a new tool or technique. www.commoncraft.com

Appendix 3 – Some resources that make use of Web 2.0

Give each item TWO scores: A NUMBER for relevance (4 = most relevant) ; A LETTER for what you already know or understand about each item. This should help you to identify those that are likely to be most useful to you and worth exploring further.	Relevance to me				Knowledge and understanding			
	0	1	2	3	a	b	c	d
12Manage www.12manage.com								
Baruch College: Financial statements www.baruch.cuny.edu/tutorials/statements								
Be My Interviewer www.jobsite.co.uk/bemyinterviewer								
Bized www.bized.ac.uk								
Bized www.bized.co.uk								
Business Balls www.businessballs.com								
CAROL www.carol.co.uk								
Cases – Business2000 www.business2000.ie								
Cases – The Times 100 www.times100.co.uk								
Chartered Institute of Marketing www.cim.com								
Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development www.cipd.co.uk								
Creative Commons www.creativecommons.org								
Don Clark's Big Dog http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/leader/leader.html								
Financial Times www.ft.com								
Google Scholar http://scholar.google.com								
Harvard - Michael Porter on 5 forces www.youtube.com/watch?v=mYF2_FBCvXw								
Harvard - Tamara Erickson on Generation Y www.youtube.com/watch?v=rDAdaupMno								
Institute of Chartered Accountants www.icaew.com								
Intute www.intute.ac.uk/business								
iTunes University								
Key Note: Marketing reports www.keynote.co.uk								
Marketing Teacher www.marketingteacher.co.uk								
MBA Gym www.mbagym.com								
MFTROU www.mftrou.com								
Mindtools www.mindtools.com								
MIT Open courseware								
Net MBA www.netmba.com								
Nobel prizes site www.nobelprize.org								
Open University - http://labspace.open.ac.uk								
Open University - http://openlearn.open.ac.uk								
OU Study Skills www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy								
RSA www.thersa.org								
Skool.ie www.skool.ie								
SurveyMonkey www.surveymonkey.com								
TED www.ted.com								
The Economist www.economist.com								
Tutor2u www.tutor2u.net								
YouTube EDU www.youtube.com/edu								

