

## Faithfulness Is Not Static

**H**aving breakfast and surfing a bit during the week, the news that I read comes from the Web. Only on weekends do I go and buy the paper versions, as they are more pleasant to read on the couch or in bed. This weekend, I suddenly wondered while buttering the first croissant: Why is MySpace successful when Friendster was not?

Just a quick reminder for those who have already forgotten: initially Friendster was considered the archetype of a community environment, even though it merely reintroduced an idea created much earlier by Xanga (see <http://www.xanga.com>), which has offered blogging, photo, and networking services since 1998. Yet, on the Web you don't necessarily have to invent something to make it big, and so in 2002 Friendster started its community services and managed to become the most influential social networking service of them all by 2004. In fact, it was so successful that it seemed to imprint its name on a class of services—the Kleenex of community networking. By 2007, however, Friendster has wasted away, long being replaced by the new heir, MySpace (founded in 2003 and sold for \$580 million to Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation in 2005).

### Hop, hop, and away

One of the reasons why MySpace took over was because Friendster's business strategists blocked the development of the site and instead, poured money into planning new businesses their young customers should use. As a result, Friendster imposed stricter rules on its virtual

playground while its users just wanted to continue creating their music fan profiles. Consequentially, the pubescent consumers decided to virtually meet at MySpace. Friendster then rapidly turned into a dilapidated, lame hangout.

The second generation of Web users—most likely their successors, too—are flighty and for them the concept of brand loyalty is something from the Middle Ages. I suspect that the younger generation (and face it, this is the group we finally research for, too), will also leave MySpace sooner rather than later.

Why? MySpace already announced that it will use filtering software to identify copyright-protected material and then remove it from their site, including the user, if he or she attracts attention too often during this clean out. Moreover, why on earth should a current 12-year-old find something thrilling in 2012 that's hip for teens in 2007? What are five years, the long-term-thinking researcher might ask?

Well, that's a decade in fashion and a century on the Web. I would not be astonished if we see the decline of MySpace and the rise of something different, say a combination of Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/>) and stickam (<http://www.stickam.com/>), where stickam is the latest and coolest thing with one big chat room connecting millions of teenagers via cameras and microphones.

A similar drain can be observed at YouTube, a site obviously closer to the heart of our research community. YouTube was created in 2005. During the summer of 2006, it was one of the fastest-growing sites on the Web, ranked as the fifth most popular Web site on Alexa (see [http://www.alexa.com/data/details/traffic\\_details?&range=max&size=large&compare\\_sites=myspace.com&y=r&url=youtube.com#top](http://www.alexa.com/data/details/traffic_details?&range=max&size=large&compare_sites=myspace.com&y=r&url=youtube.com#top)). According to a Nielsen netrating survey (see [http://www.nielsen-netratings.com/pr/pr\\_060721\\_2.pdf](http://www.nielsen-netratings.com/pr/pr_060721_2.pdf)), the site had almost 20 million visitors each month at that time, where around 44 percent were female, 56 percent male, and the 12-to-17-year-old age group was domi-

### Editor's Note

After six years, this is the last Media Impact column I am responsible for. It's about how media content impacts everybody, including our community. Thanks a lot to all those who helped in writing and editing over the years—your work is tremendously appreciated. Many thanks also to those who have read my column—your patience cannot be estimated. Finally, best wishes to the new editors, Utz Westermann and Bill Grosky—enjoy as I did.

—Frank Nack

nant. In October 2006, Google bought YouTube for \$1.65 billion in stock.

That YouTube was also a copy of existing services for sharing videos of bizarre, obscene, or funny content, such as Guba has done since 1998 (see <http://www.guba.com/>), has caused its success no harm. The difference of YouTube was to establish a living community among those users that loved to intellectually let their hair down as well as those who wished to produce artistic content.

YouTube is not hyped for its technology, which doesn't provide anything new, but rather for the distribution of content, where YouTube let its clientele act as they please, without enforcing editorial decisions or odds and ends such as copyright. YouTube's strategy—that the responsibility for the content lies at the side of the uploader, as was once applied by various peer-to-peer (P2P) sharing services (such as Napster)—paid off.

### **Orderliness means all joking aside**

Now that the new owner swims in money, the party is over. Parasitic dissuasion lawyers will appeal against the use of copyright material in mash-ups, parodies, and malapropisms. In fact, they already do, as the latest case between Viacom and Google over “massive intentional copyright infringement from YouTube” nicely demonstrates—and we are talking here about a case for over 1 billion dollars (see <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/17592285>). More results become visible through invisibility, as YouTube is forced, like MySpace, to clean up with filter software to remove copyright-protected material—and thousands of videos are gone already, such as those from *Comedy Central: South Park*, the *Daily Show*, and Steve Colbert. Even though deals are already inked that let YouTube show professional music videos, this will only partially solve the problem, as this is not the type of content that made the site interesting.

Additionally, pressure is rising to generate profit. Therefore, it isn't astonishing to hear that YouTube announced it will expand its services by going mobile, as the delivery of daffing videos on mobile phones promises to be a business.

Even more interesting is the announcement of Chad Hurley during the World Economic Forum at Davos that YouTube will consider paying customers who provide content they created themselves that receives a lot of attention. This is another copy attack, as competitors such as Revver (see <http://one.revver.com/revver>) or Metacafe (see <http://www.metacafe.com/>) already follow that strategy quite successfully. In fact,

Metacafe's reward system is an essential part of its environment.

So, there is more commercialization of the Web video sector and the competition is huge. Not only do Google, Yahoo, Revver, Metacafe, and a legion of other video-sharing services try to get their share (such as <http://eyespot.com/>, <http://grouper.com/>, and <http://www.videoegg.com/>), but mainstream content providers are showing their interest, such as Disney and Warner. Additionally, the latest universal TV project from Zennström and Friis named *Joost* (see <http://www.joost.com/>) demonstrates what can be achieved with P2P technology (millions of exquisitely networked PCs fortified with traditional video servers establish “interactive TV”). All of that only becomes interesting on an economic level once the broadcasters, film production companies, P2P service providers, and everybody else realize that they can extend their pay services by refinancing their sites through advertising (which will not take them very long). What then will happen to the user-generated content sites that seem to have the monopoly for that sort of income?

The community, on whose creativity a lot of that hype was built, doesn't care at all about these problems and will do what it always did. Like a caravan, it will push along once the fun part vanishes to try finding a site that suits its members better.

### **There is nothing new under the sun**

While buttering the second croissant, I started to wonder where all this contemplation might lead to, and I am afraid the patient reader does, too. Wait! I have two points that I derived from my previous musings.

First, the development of the Web as a major source for media generation, distribution, and consumption in the realm of 2.0 is largely unpredictable. It's hard to keep the online community tuned, as there are no brands and no receipts (though we thought that about films, too, but now there's a company that claims to have found the formula for the perfect film—see <http://www.epagogix.com>).

Moreover, the Web community boosts its own type of creativity. For example, would any of us multimedia researchers have come up with such a brilliant idea as the lens-free camera (see [http://www.blinksandbuttons.net/buttons\\_en.html](http://www.blinksandbuttons.net/buttons_en.html))? This is a camera that, using a mobile communication device, takes photos created by someone who pressed a button somewhere else at the same time.

Figure 1. Snap shots of Dick Bulterman, the innovator, live at <http://www.computer.org/multimedia>.



Second, Web 2.0 is to some extent a retro-movement as the blogs, digs, wikis, Flickr, YouTubes, and MySpaces only illuminate attributes and characteristics of the Internet—namely its communicative and interactive potentials, which were already established in Web 1.0. Do you remember the Well (see <http://www.well.com/>), the pioneering online community for engaging conversation and intelligent debate established in 1985, or Bianca's Smut Shack (<http://www.bianca.com/shack/>), an online community service based on a house metaphor that opened in 1994 (which hasn't been maintained since 2003)? Both sites were under the first 500 Web pages ever and were celebrated at their time because they lived from participation only (in Web 2.0 language this means user-generated content).

Yes, technology has improved but the services remain the same with hardly any innovation (see also the Vision and Views column in this issue). The main novelty of Web 2.0 seems to be that today the community and commercialization interact instead of segregate.

These are two simple points but they lead to a conclusion worth thinking about. It seems to me

that our research community shouldn't try and aim for the killer application. Instead, we should listen carefully to what Web 2.0 is telling us—it's the content, stupid! Interesting, interactive, novel content—content that can cope on all levels with the intrinsic attributes of the Web: communication, interaction, and experience. As the content will change, so will the ways people interact with it, and the border between production and consumption will blur. Take Dick Bulterman's video (see Figure 1) as a teaser of what's to come.

### A proposal

Swallowing the last few bites, here's my proposal to the community: Let's develop an interactive multimedia workbench for the multimedia researcher. The workbench I see would allow me to submit an article like the one you just read as an interactive document, where the video, for example, behaves as such and isn't represented as an image surrogate.

This article or parts of it can then be reused, as suggested by Bulterman in his video statement, with additional information as part of a different discourse (say, Bulterman uses sections to support a friend with materials for his lecture). In fact, we could add any sort of communication act (an idea, vision, statement, counterstatement, suggestion, advice, and so on) in any form of media, resulting in a dynamic environment that instantly permits a parallel comparison of a train of thought with the full actual media data. Thus, the workbench is an argumentative engine (manually or automatically generated) in continuation of D.C. Engelbart's framework for augmenting human intellect<sup>1</sup> except that it isn't applied to the syntax of processes, as Engelbart did, but to the understanding and handling of knowledge expressed explicitly and implicitly in digital media resources. This isn't really Web 2.0 and it's also not the Semantic Web—let's call it the Discourse Web (a new term now and then never did any harm and at least it sounds more innovative than Web 3.0).

The workbench is a living space in which the community can instantly present itself and its scientific discourse but also offer new members, students, or simply those who are interested in the field the chance to explore what has been done, what's cutting edge, and what's imagined as the future—and the machine merely supports this investigation in an adaptive manner. In that way—and here I disagree with Ramesh Jain (see <http://www.sigmm.org/discussion/views/mm-jain.pdf>)—such a workbench for multimedia

research would be more effective than any multimedia book as it not only tells what multimedia is but also how it works, by whom it's driven (in particular, which ideas and research strands drive each other crazy). The workbench does so instantly and always at the height of knowledge.

The workbench system would need to keep track of the contextualization of media items—that is, their discourse role, the involved process, the intention behind them, as well as their temporal validity (not everything we say now will be true in 10 years' time), which is a representation problem. Most of the issues we would face with this workbench would be an interface problem: How do we present the information in various levels of detail so that the user can easily navigate and manipulate the data, and how can we achieve most relations being set right in a more automatic and less manual fashion? (I can hear the comments like, How should the system know what I intend to do? Well, sometimes it wouldn't and then you would have to tell it, but I'm sure that every researcher can explain their current state of reflection, can we not?)

Lynda Hardman<sup>2</sup> described an important step toward a solution for this problem in the canonical process model for media production that she initiated. How the user can retrieve information in that mess appropriate for the current task at hand, whether it's consumption or production or a mix of both, is a process description and again an interface problem (the canonical model can help here, too). Each is challenging but if we address those challenges for the domain and the needs of a community we know so well, I am convinced that we can enlighten the world out there and set a trend.

The most fascinating aspect of this endeavor of creating a new standard infrastructure for a multimedia researcher is, however, that it will clearly tell us a lot about how we actually work and consequently will change the way in which we work. It's interesting to see how we research on interactive, collaborative, and expressive aspects of multimedia, yet we still communicate our research mainly with the tools of Gutenberg.

The fact that paper articles do not favor the audiovisual material we analyze makes our descriptions rather cumbersome. Yet, obviously we like it this way as on a large scale we do not make use of even a simple offer such as the ACM Multimedia Conference's video figures, which accompany a regular or short paper submission to serve as an illustration. Why? Is it not time to make such a video compulsory? Worse, we spend a lot of time

for our publications on organizational and repetitive overhead in the form of an introduction, related-work section, and conclusion, with only a tiny part devoted to the new idea and its evaluation.

The workbench could alter our work in a way that we add the idea and its implementation into the network and make use of already established relations to place it in context. Sounds like "death of the document" after the postmodern "death of the author"—you bet! Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida would be proud of us (more seriously, see also the ideas by Anita de Waard, who expressed similar ideas to change the way research in chemistry should be published<sup>3</sup>). Yes, we would have to change the review process, but we would have more time to think about the real novel aspect of research, as over time we would know the network or those parts that are interesting for us. My hypothesis is that at the end, we'll finally be doing again what we are actually paid for, providing ideas and solutions—and as a nice side effect in the media most suitable for communication purposes.

### The end

Sure, the workbench would change the way our work is evaluated by our institutions, it changes the way we teach, the way we research, the way we communicate—so what? Being faithful to good research doesn't mean that we have to be faithful to outdated knowledge distribution.

The new video blog that emerges at *IEEE Multi-Media* can be the starting point for something like this workbench. Those who would like to help, please get in touch, and those who would like to contribute, please feel free to do so. It's a humble start, but who knows. All that's left to be done is to wipe away the crumbs and start working. **MM**

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