

Web 2.0 requires a 2.0 strategy.

The Virtual Works CEO, Jonathan Hall, pinpoints some of the key strategic considerations that modern marketers and communicators must navigate to succeed in a networked and interactive Web 2.0 world.

Web 2.0, a more connective, more searchable, more intuitive, and more interactive version of its Web 1.0 predecessor is being hailed by many as a marketers silver bullet. The prospect of directly reaching and conversing with millions of digitally connected customers appears to be a communicator's utopia.

In principal, Web 2.0 has introduced little new. People have always preferred the personal touch and the security of a community since time began. [Communities are groups of people who choose to associate through any form of common interest location or purpose .]

But what the latest generation of internet and mobile networking tools *have* done is to enable humans to congregate and interact with many others far more easily, more efficiently and faster than ever before. It's these next generation on-line networking and media technologies that are driving a strong return to the age-old community and conversation concepts espoused by the Web 2.0.

Because there are few barriers to joining a virtual community and many benefits, niche business communities are forming rapidly. But technology is also helping to splinter and morph communities into smaller and more tightly focused interest groups – making it harder and harder for marketers to identify and engage micro community molecules.

Why bother? Marketers will increasingly be compelled to concern themselves with the community networking trend because it is impacting the balance of strategic power significantly – increasingly shifting it away from brands.

Power is shifting to the front ends of value chains for a number of reasons: Firstly because communities are demonstrating that they trust the opinions and information of their members more than advertising messages and showing that they rely more and more on the experiences of others to influence their purchasing decisions rather than brand reputations.

Secondly, information and communication technology gives customers access to far more choice than before -and the ability to share the options they find with their community [and the matrix of communities to which members belong] at the click of a mouse.

Thirdly, because customers now equipped with the power to talk want to be listened to. Increasingly customers want to collaborate with suppliers to find solutions to their challenges and savvy organizations are stealing a competitive edge by indulging them!

And finally communities now have the power of no-cost broadcast media. Previously the exclusive domain of big spending brands, now the little guy can use free digital media to spread positive and negative messages about experiences across dynamic networks – making or breaking reputations where a cause takes hold and compelling the Goliaths to take note.

Web 2.0 dynamics beg the modern marketer to solve a few key challenges: How to identify ever mutating communities and member molecules – and how to engage them sufficiently well to establish and nurture a preferred relationship with your products and services.

The short answer is: not easily. The first paradigm shift that marketers must make is this: In the Web 2.0 world with a plethora of search, syndication and social networking tools at the disposal of the customer, communities and community members will find and value who they choose. It's no longer about finding. Now it's about being found. Brands can apply some proven Marketing 2.0 techniques to thrive in this inverted, complex and networked world.

- 1. *Get micro relevant:*** Discern the essence that binds each community together and engineer a unique value proposition for each community.
- 2. *Get ranked and rated:*** You won't find the communities. Someone in them will find you and share your existence if you're worth something to them. To make sure your value proposition is discovered by a community, do what you need to ensure search engines find it. [SEO your site, link like crazy, blog away and tag everything!]

- 3. Get reputable and real:** Web 2.0 marketers are rapidly learning that message weary and wary communities' value transparency and truth above all else and resist 1.0 marketing hype. Respond to publicly communicated customer dissatisfaction quickly, transparently and honestly.
- 4. Get responsive:** Inviting people to converse and not pitching up the conversation for it is fatal in an interactive world. Putting in smart systems to collaborate with customers is one thing. But making certain that resources respond is as, if not more, important. Prepare to respond to communities with agility and flexibility. If you do, there's a good chance it will impact your reputation. If you don't it certainly will!

No matter how you define it, Web 2.0, social networking and social media is no fad. It's big, sustainable and gaining momentum and ill prepared businesses may pay a high price for complacency. And the internationally recognised thought leaders agree. In 2007, Forrester Research forecast that social media would impact almost every role, in every company, in all parts of the world. The McKinsey Group predicted that digital-media-enabled collaboration with communities would become one of the most impactful of the 8 technology trends they identified. The Gartner Group also fingered Web 2.0 as a powerful transformative commercial force. We believe that organisations that learn to engage their communities effectively will benefit from the commitment that communities give – well into the future.