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411 Waverley Oaks Road
Building 3, Suite 319
Waltham, MA 02452
www.syberworks.com
1-888-642-7078

Web 3.0, Schmeb 3.0

By Stuart Campbell, Director of Software Development for SyberWorks, Inc.

Sometime…oh, around 2004…you probably started hearing buzz about *"Web 2.0…The next generation of the Internet."* The term was coined by O'Reilly Media. And though everyone you ask gives you a different definition of the way Web 2.0 should look and feel, perhaps the best definition can be found in the company's own archives, here: O'Reilly Publishing's Original Web 2.0 Description

And O'Reilly continues to call Web 2.0 a "transformative force." But have *you* felt it yet? You may just have.

O'Reilly's early definition differentiated Web 2.0 from Web 1.0 (the old "cloud") in that:

Private content-management systems would be replaced by editable public Wikis.

Personal web sites would give way to dynamic communal blogs.

Publishing would take a back seat to participation.

Web content would become more configurable.

New services would make it easier for people to connect interactively.

Financial speculation on domain names (to lock down *good* URLs) would become less prevalent than search-engine optimization (to help people find sites and content regardless of its URL).

Companies even advertised that their products and services were "Web 2.0-ready," subtly implying that Web 2.0 was some sort of official specification, which it wasn't. Some even speculated that the Web 2.0 Internet would become a 3D *virtual world* like Second Life (SL). And the fact that IBM and Microsoft were big SL backers did blow some wind into that sail.

In reality, O'Reilly's Web-2.0 description has been materializing all around us, unnoticed by most for what it was. The above bullets sound mighty familiar, don't they? Wikis and blogs are everywhere now. We increasingly *friend* and track each other in sites like FaceBook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. And through them, our small, personal,
"e-Villages" are merging into global meshes.

Most of us in the e-Learning world live and work online, like tropical fish in an aquarium. And the water in which we've been swimming all along has picked up Web 2.0 colors even as we breathe it in.

And Now Comes "Web 3.0"

Many people are now describing the "next" Web 3.0 Internet as a "personal assistant" that:

- Learns our habits and interests by watching past activities, and automatically focuses information delivered to us. (Can you say "Cookies"?)

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- Maintains web-based personal browsing histories, which any site can access for customizing what individuals see.

- Allows different sites and services to be combined (just as Google Maps, MapQuest, and site-visitation counters are added to many Web sites today).

- Uses the Internet itself as an operating system (*a-la* "Cloud" applications that run directly across the web, rather than being installed on our PCs). This too is happening already.

- Replaces keyword searches with intelligent content sifting and delivery, based on interpreting the context of conversationally typed requests. For example, you'll be able to type "*Where's the nearest store that still has a paperback copy of Dan Brown's latest book...for under $10?"*...and get a concise answer. (By "Web 4.0," some say, this will give way to full artificially-intelligent interfaces.)

And once again, Second Life is being held out as a possible model for the look and feel of this "next" Internet (which is also being called "Web 3D"). I won't hold my breath on that, though! If I go to IBM's, Microsoft's, and Amazon's web sites (all long-time SL partners), their Web interfaces are still glaringly 2D. I can't click www.amazon.com and find myself walking through a 3D virtual store, able to browse shelves, pick up books, scan their pages, carry purchases to a virtual check-out station, and enter payment and shipping data by swiping a secure virtual ID card. Not today, anyway.

But several companies *are* working on experimental 3D *browsers*. For more information about that, just Google phrases like "3D browser", "Google 3D browser", "Google SketchUp", Firefox 3D Browser", and "AT&T 3D browser". From what I've seen, they all look like 2D interfaces with slickly layered 3D effects… not like truly immersive, 3D, information environments.

Some have even claimed that Web 3.0 may need to run on its own separate network and use its own new protocols…implying that it will be easier to build the next Internet from scratch. I personally know how hard it is to release just *one* new version of a single software product. I know how tough it is to keep it both *forward* compatible with future plans and *backward* compatible with existing users. So I don't for one minute believe that an entirely new Web 3.0 network will one day "replace" our familiar Internet.

More likely, Web 3.0 will sneak up on us bit by bit…in the night…just as Web 2.0 did (and is still doing).

About the Author

Stuart Campbell is Director of Software Development for SyberWorks, Inc., a privately-held supplier of e-Learning software and training. A native of the United Kingdom, he had previously served as a Principle Software Engineer, Senior Consultant, Senior Software Engineer, and Development Specialist for companies such as Brooks Automation Inc., Digital Equipment, and Honeywell Control Systems. His areas of expertise include Visual Studio.NET, C#, VB.NET, VB6, VBScript, XML, COBOL, WindowsXP, Windows2000, WindowsNT, VAX/VMS, UNIX, Oracle, SQLServer, Oracle Rdb, Oracle DBMS, and Agile Modeling Methodology.

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