

## Web 2.0: What Is It Really?

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I've noticed a slightly funny but disturbing trend lately: all my clients want something called 'Web 2.0'.

Maybe you've noticed it, too. People aren't happy with a just site anymore. Now they want it sprinkled with magic fairy Web 2.0 pixie dust before they're happy.

Who can blame them? It's next to impossible to have a discussion about the Web these days without someone invoking Web 2.0. Popular media, blogs, trade pubs, and technology magazines: are all talking about a revolution we're supposedly in the midst of.

Unfortunately, nobody has any idea what it is.

Really. They don't. Poll your office and I'm sure you'll get more answers than you've got colleagues. Ask your clients to define it when they raise the topic. You'll get a lot of foot-shuffling, throat-clearing, and hemming and hawing. Ask your Web-savvy friends or resident experts. The savviest may be able to point you to the now-famous Tim O'Reilly definition, but I'll bet you an actual American dollar that nobody can really distill down what ol' Tim means.

I've tried this myself and know it to be true. My friend and colleague Claire Rusko-Berger attempted this experiment with her class of Web professionals and got the same result. Heck, you can see for yourself if you head on over to Digg or Google and try searching "Web 2.0 definitions." Try not to blow coffee out of your nose when you read the answers.

"But that's not fair!" you may be protesting. "Everyone knows what it is. It's about social networking, user-generated content, glowing drop-shadowed logos, blogs, AJAX, mashups, and tagging. It's the next revolution on the Web!"

Baloney.

The biggest mistake most of the tech press, Web 2.0 boosters, cyber pundits, and digital hipsters make is to confuse Web 2.0 products with the root changes that made them happen. Social networking, crowd-sourced content, blogs, and the like are the result of an ongoing mind shift that's been happening for the past couple of years. Web 2.0 is real, but it's not something you can define by tossing out examples or buzzwords. It's not something we can only know when we see it. Slate's Paul Boutin makes a good point when he declares, "The new Internet boom doesn't live up to its name." But he's right for the wrong reasons. Problem is, buzzwords are overshadowing the real, important changes going on.

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