



From Blogs to Wikis: What Web 2.0 Can Add to the Translator's Tool Kit

By Yves Avérous

If you believe all the hype, you would think that there is a brand new Internet out there: a “2.0” version of the good ol’ thing. The truth is, this infamous Web 2.0 we hear so much about is not a revolution. It is a natural evolution, the glorious promise of the turn of the century progressively coming to fruition in both expected and unexpected forms. As in the Internet bubble days, many of the new companies at the heart of the current trend will eventually perish or be purchased, while some may redefine the landscape yet again, as Google did only a few years ago.

Looking back on this young Internet history, I cannot help but reminisce about the Minitel. Long before the Internet had reached a large audience, French phone subscribers were offered little terminals to replace their phone books. The Minitel let the

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French enter the cyber highway in droves before anybody else, with an economic model where the user was bearing all the cost by paying for sophisticated services by the minute.

Even with that first online experience under my belt, I still could not have imagined, unlike some technoratis of the 1990s, that the Web would become a platform. Among the first visionaries, Bill Gates perceived the threat to his PC-based empire, and

geared Microsoft up to catch up, and squash, Netscape, which had an almost complete hold on the browser market in the early days. When basic Web content was displayed in poorly laid out pages at 28kbps, it did not look like this medium would soon be challenging the snappy ASCII (American Standard Code for Information Interchange) services of the Minitel (do you remember those graphics made of monospace ➡

characters?), such as checking the latest news, viewing movie schedules, and ordering train tickets. This was 1995, when the first surfers were still dreaming of the largest library on Earth, safe from mercantilism. Ah, those were the days!

Web 2.0: How Users are Now also Actors and Doers

Times have changed and the Web has grown to the point of making any BBS (bulletin board system) terminal look like a relic of an ancient past. In

Web 2.0. It should be noted that this gallery of goodies was not built in one day, but rests on an assortment of communication blocks. Let's review them quickly.

From E-mail to Wiki: The Tools of Information on the Internet

From the get-go, one application on the Internet was the no-brainer "killer application": e-mail. Bulletin boards had been around for a while (remember The WELL?), but e-mail proved to be as simple as physical

forming this most useful tool into a nuisance to the point of threatening the very medium.

Today, the amount of bandwidth clogged by random messages trying to hook unsuspecting recipients is phenomenal. Web 2.0 may bring a solution by offering safe messaging inside the gated communities of online social networking. This is ironic, considering that most of us strayed away long ago from such communities as CompuServe and AOL as soon as the Web developed its muscles. Could this be a kick back to the future?

Personal e-mail, widened at times to the size of a selected chat room, adds to the quality of immediacy, and is especially optimal when it is brief. Its cell phone cousin, SMS (short message service), can even push brevity to the extremes.

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just a decade, even as HTML (HyperText Markup Language) has remained the basic language of our webpages, a whole new range of coding languages has developed to help serve up instantly customized data assembled from multiple vast databases all around the world, and to present it in the most elegant and practical ways. Thanks to these new technologies, not only do we get quick answers to our questions through a whole series of new services that are also quickly becoming new institutions, we can also help contribute to those answers. Volunteer contributors to forums, or better yet, Wikis—and notably, *Wikipedia*—have blurred the lines between publishers and mere readers. Web surfers are now actors and doers, creating a "wisdom of the crowds" for the benefit of all. Welcome to the universe of

mail, but faster. All would have stayed perfectly lovely had it not been for spam. Who knows, message systems from some of the newfangled Web 2.0 services may well dethrone e-mail some day, so stay tuned. Before we get there, however, let's explore the varied solutions offered at this point.

1. E-mail and Chat: Personal in Various Sizes: From the sweet note to the formal letter, e-mail covers a large array of uses and has found a very widespread adhesion, which has been facilitated by software applications combining all the functions that help users manage their day-to-day duties, such as calendars, address books, and more. While e-mail is more often a "one-to-one" or "one-to-few" communication medium, it can extend its reach ad nauseam when combined with the mail merge function, trans-

2. Mailing Lists, the Boon of Personalized Marketing and Group Communications: With the mailing list, the "one-to-many" medium has found a civilized way to express itself. The mailing list is particularly useful for organizations, notably commercial, that are trying to reach reliable potential members or customers without spamming. A mailing list not only requires a voluntary subscription, but when it belongs to a "group," the users have the ability to manage how they collect the list's messages.

3. Forums, Pioneer Messaging at the Forefront of Social Networking: The forums and the Web-based mailing lists of online groups offer a "many-to-many" type of content of short to moderate length. Forums are particularly useful for support groups where members' questions, answers, statements, and reactions create a knowledge base, effectively generating a

history that can be searched over time.

The three classic communication media discussed above, which are themselves extrapolations of the early BBSs and chat rooms, provide a backbone for developing Web 2.0 creations. Social networking and collaborative sites often bring many of these modes under the same interface to adapt users' communication needs to their circumstances. For example, were you to share a draft proposition made on Google Docs with colleagues, you could choose to invite them by e-mail, or chat directly with them from the document page site you create.

Blog: One Person's Word to the World

Early enthusiasts made blogs very popular, but most people underestimate their usefulness. A blog is a website where entries are written in chronological order and commonly displayed in reverse chronological order. Many blogs provide commentary or news on a particular subject; others function as more personal online diaries. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, webpages, and other media related to its topic. The ability for readers to leave comments in an interactive format is an important part of many blogs.

Blogs provide a way to add one new article after another, and to index entries for easy access and fast search results. Contrary to popular belief, blogs do not have to be used to rant and rave in front of the entire Web. In fact, very respectable companies, from Apple to General Motors, use blogs for support or marketing.

As an example, the Northern California Translators Association (NCTA), an ATA chapter, uses the blog infrastructure to store the articles

published in its journal, *Translorial*. The blog version of NCTA's publication includes a large number of past articles, as well as the current crop (the latter are password-protected to keep the new material exclusive to the group's members). Blogs such as www.translorial.com progressively build rich sources of information for translators and interpreters, and it may be useful to include these sites in your bookmarks for further research, or better yet, add them to a feed reader of

information or advice to share, but your content is not so formal and detailed that you feel the need to add it to *Wikipedia*, use a blog! The world will thank you—silently most of the time, but sometimes in the form of comments at the end of your articles.

Wiki is "Many-to-All," Moderate to Long

A Wiki is a type of computer software that allows users to create, edit, and link webpages easily. Wikis are

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your choice to have content sent to you automatically. Professional blogs often include a "blog roll," which is a list of kindred places on the Web that you may want to visit.

Another interesting fact about blogs is their popularity with search engines. If you maintain a specialized blog where you regularly post new content, chances are the various search engines will give your blog a high rating. The reason is that blogs are easy to populate. Activity brings visitors, and activity and visitors combined give your blog a higher ranking on the search engines. It is as simple as that. To illustrate this point, if you search for "Wordfast and Office on the Mac" on Google, at the time of writing this article, the blog I maintain for TransMUG, a Mac user group for translators, comes up first out of nearly 1.2 million results.

If you have useful professional

often used to create collaborative websites and to power community websites, and are increasingly being installed by businesses to provide affordable and effective Intranets or for knowledge management. Wikis now enable employees to contribute knowledge to the company Intranets, which can then be accessed at any time by newcomers to a department or by people from other branches of the company interacting with that department.

Wikis tend to be more formal than blogs. Blogs are linear, so you post one article after the next, and they open in different pages that are generated on demand. Wikis, on the other hand, grow as the content grows. As contributors add new sections, little by little, pages to those sections enrich all the branches of the site.

Wikis are finally growing in popularity, mostly thanks to software that is getting somewhat easier to deal ➡

with. You will not find the ease of use of Wordpress.com or Blogger yet (described below) in the Wiki solutions available at this point, but an organization may invite you to participate in their own Wiki, as NCTA did with their members during ATA's conference in San Francisco. In the case of NCTA's Wiki site, www.ata07.insf.net, the idea was to collect experiences of local translators and interpreters in the Bay Area to share with ATA conference attendees. This effort demonstrated to unfamiliar users mostly accustomed to *Wikipedia* that a Wiki does not always have to be formal.

Customizable Portals: The Precursors of Web 2.0

A portal is a site that functions as a point of access to information on the Internet. A pioneer in this domain, My Yahoo! is the first site to offer easy, flexible, and complex customization. Not long after the site had been striking agreements to provide content from big media firms, it started opening its modules to RSS (really simple syndication) feeds, allowing users to bring anyone they could find along the side of the information superhighway to the party. Similarly, social networking sites today, such as Facebook, are also opening up by adding third party "applications" that a user can elect to run on their personal pages.

Creating a Blog

Unless you enjoy creating your own websites and are familiar with, or not intimidated by, tools such as Dreamweaver, Nvu (free), iWeb, and Rapidweaver on the Mac, you may want to consider a hosted "turnkey" solution for your blog. The following services allow you to hit the road with your stories immediately after creating an account and entering a few settings.

Blogger

www.blogger.com

A startup acquired by Google, Blogger is one of the first web-based blog applications, along with TypePad, to make blogging easy and fun. Getting started is as simple as opening yet another online account (or using your Gmail log in, in this particular case). With a straightforward interface and a free hosting solution, Blogger's Blogspot gets you going in a flash.

Wordpress/TypePad

Wordpress.org

TypePad.com

For the supporters of the open source movement, Wordpress is the champion. You can either install their PHP (personal home page) extensions from Wordpress.org on your server (most hosts offer the module right in their website hosting package), or use Wordpress.com, the Wordpress community's free hosting offering. Open source in this case means more templates and better styles for your blog(s). As an example, TransMUG.com is hosted by Wordpress.com, while Translorial.com uses the Wordpress extensions (providing more freedom with customization) on a private Web server. If you prefer a corporate provider with great customer support, the good people of Six Apart (www.sixapart.com) also have both a hosted (TypePad.com) and an installed solution (Movable Type).

Microsoft Live Writer

windowslivewriter.spaces.live.com

If you prefer to keep your writing on your computer and sync it with your blog, local applications exist that connect with the blog extensions to give you untethered control. While blogs made with applications like Blogger and Wordpress are generally

completed directly online, local applications, like Microsoft Live Writer on the PC or MarsEdit on the Mac, establish a seamless connection that allows you to control multiple sites from one single interface.

Reading Blogs

If you have a tendency to succumb to addiction, using a feed reader may be hazardous to your health, and may siphon off your precious free time. Still, if you would like to cut down on the time you spend every day checking multiple websites for the latest news relevant to you (or pack more of those in the same space), you may save yourself a lot of time and effort with a feed reader (also called news reader).

Some of those reader applications reside by themselves, like NetNews Wire or FeedDemon on your machine, or inside your Web browser or your mail application. A search for RSS on shareware aggregator websites like Download.com or MacUpdate.com will yield a long list of applications from which to choose. User ratings and the number of downloads are good predictors of which solution to pick. In the meantime, let's review those you can use right from your browser without having to install anything, while benefiting from extra bells and whistles not included in standard browsers or their plug-ins.

Google Reader

www.reader.google.com

My favorite one among all the web-based readers is the Google Reader. It has enough speed and features to satisfy your basic needs, including folders to organize your feeds and the ability to highlight (with a star) the articles you want to read later, keep or use for a project, or share. Google Reader keeps with the

Suggested links for more information:

Apple iWeb

<http://www.apple.com/dotmac/iweb.html>

RSS Explained

www.ata-divisions.org/LTD/?p=65

RSS and Blogging

Avérous, Yves. *RSS and Blogging: Maturing Technologies to Gather and Produce Information* (presentation at 2006 ATA Annual Conference)

<http://tinyurl.com/2sq8va>

Microsoft LiveWriter Review

<http://paulstamatiou.com/2006/08/14/review-windows-live-writer-beta/>

Blog Help

Wordpress.com: http://codex.wordpress.org/Main_Page

Blog Tutorial

<http://www.blogbasics.com>

less is more philosophy, offering a limited but essential—and working—set of features.

My Yahoo!

My.yahoo.com

The original feed reader is holding strong in the current competitive environment. Second to Google in attracting new members, it is still the 50-million-user gorilla of news readers. Its advantage is the ability to bring feeds to the level of classic sources of information. A drawback is its tendency to mix a fast and flexible medium in a heavy portal layout. The redesigned interface, still in beta at the time this article went to press, catches up with the times and makes customization a breeze.

MyMSN/Live

www.live.com/?add

The sheer weight of the Microsoft empire always guarantees large numbers of subscribers, but the service is far from being on par with the compe-

tition. It is shocking to compare their site to any of the contenders on this page and Newsgator.

Bloglines

www.bloglines.com

An Ask.com property that was among the first to add bells and whistles to their pages, Bloglines tries to do a lot around the concept of the blog. In my mind, this dilutes the interest of offering feed management. Your feeds, your RSS destinations, are the sources of information you care about. Bloglines offers you many digressions that I find distracting. The service fits the expectation of a large audience, though.

NetVibes

www.netvibes.com

A newer kid on the block, Netvibes is growing fast on the very premise of Web 2.0. It offers a sophisticated customized command center of your Internet life, gathering the information you want and displaying it in one window.

Newsgator

www.newsgator.com

Displaying the most elegant interface of the bunch, and mimicking the features of the stand-alone applications for Mac and PC offered by its parent company, the Newsgator Web reader offers the most functionalities, but you will have to pay for the luxury, and, frankly, Google Reader offers most of it for free. Still, it is worth a try.

Collaborative Tools

Google Applications

While Microsoft did a pretty good job of sizing up the threat coming from Netscape, they did not really measure the potential impact of a small site with one empty field and one search button: Google. Google is the platform. Little by little, it is assembling one piece of a vast puzzle after another. Some of these pieces remind us of traditional solutions, like Google Docs ➡

(docs.google.com) emulating Microsoft Office, while others, like Google Maps, with its recent customization options and application programming interfaces (APIs), which allow developers to branch their services on the maps, are completely new. Developed around Writely, the online word processor they acquired, the office suite offered online by Google is a great collaborative tool. I use Google Docs regularly, notably for NCTA's journal, *Translorial*, and the tool is fantastic for sharing the documents that carry information the team needs to access and update. Using it as your word processor, though, can be tedious when your connection is not very fast, and its inter-Office compatibility is still limited.

ThinkFree

www.thinkfree.com

They call themselves "The best online office on Earth." This collaborative site offers the most sophisticated interface that any Web-based productivity suite is able to offer at this time. If it were not for the juggernaut reach of Google Apps, ThinkFree might well be THE online productivity solution people are using. The reason ThinkFree may have missed the mark is that it might be trying to do too much too soon with a heavy and sophisticated Java interface. Depending on your configuration, ThinkFree is not that responsive, and you may encounter a lot of graphic errors in the interface.

Buzzword

www.buzzword.com

Another startup gobbled up by a big group, Buzzword is one of the latest entries in the online word processor field. Flash-based, the site offers a stunning interface and the smoothest interaction, history, and comments. It recently added a word

count function that may make it the best tool around—experience will tell. And this is only the beginning of what it has to offer. Buzzword was acquired recently by, not surprisingly, Adobe.

MySpace and Facebook

www.myspace.com

www.facebook.com

What if you were to throw everything but the kitchen sink at your website? This is pretty much what MySpace and Facebook are attempting to do, and the big players are already shaking in their boots. Not to be left hanging, Rupert Murdoch, of the News Corporation media empire (Fox, etc.), snatched MySpace early on, while Microsoft recently paid \$240 million to lock in a seat at the Facebook table, which is now estimated to be worth \$15 billion.

Facebook brings the concept of MySpace, which has been embraced by teenagers, to the adult crowd (albeit mostly a still young crowd). The participatory site allows you to keep in touch with your friends and social contacts. In the meantime, a well-established service like LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com), with a stronghold on the professional networking world, is not playing dead, but Facebook has the potential to invade that territory eventually, too. On Facebook, your own personalized homepage lets you know what all your friends are up to, from the serious "Yves is writing an article" to the inane "John invites you to become a Zombie." It also brings together your "networks" (your university, for example) and groups, and keeps you informed of important events and what the group is sharing or reading. (Why not an ATA division, or chapter, as a Facebook group or network.) Add to all this the ability to search out contacts and send messages, choose the

people who can contact you in a spammer-free space and access all your feeds, and you obtain a service that could very well help our community rebuild the old Compuserve FLEFO translator community cherished by our seasoned colleagues, but this time with spanking new 21st century attributes.

And Then?

When considering the latest Web 2.0 services, one could dream of a community not unlike ProZ, but a community that relies on the latest advances to be truly interactive and modern. This vision can become a reality if we work for it. In the meantime, Web 2.0 is already preparing version 3. Now that the once-derided dreams of the Internet bubble are becoming a reality thanks to the wide adoption of broadband and the implementation of database-driven networks, what are our visionaries dreaming of next? In a recent edition of the San Francisco public radio station morning show, Forum (www.kqed.org/epArchive/R710180900)—a podcast you can subscribe to in your feed reader from the link www.kqed.org/pod/forum—one participant was describing a Web that will remember where your quest for information has brought you, gauge your level of understanding of the issue you are researching, and help you reach your goals based on that sharp evaluation. This presents a perspective where scary becomes scarier, and exciting exhilarating.

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