

# Web 2.0 for the Travel Marketer and Consumer

## A white paper

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# Abstract

The recent explosion of social networking sites, consumer generated content and web applications that facilitate content and media syndication have significantly changed the way consumers use the Internet. Travel Marketers are left wondering how best to redeploy their marketing efforts to take advantage of the many new opportunities. They also want to know how, or if, they should deal with the threats these new media may pose to their existing business models. This report provides a framework with which to evaluate, leverage and measure the various new channels and techniques made available by the Web 2.0.

The report will cover:

- Social networks
- Reviews, Blogs, Forums and Message boards
- Media & Content Syndication
- Web 2.0 technologies such as Mashups and AJAX
- Measurement and ROI

## ***Introduction***

The travel industry was among the first to be transformed by the Internet. From email to websites, the Internet has become the first line of promotion and the preferred medium of transaction for booking travel. Over the last decade, travel marketers have become exceedingly adept at creating websites, and driving traffic to those sites, where visitors can find the travel information they're seeking and proceed to book a hotel room, reserve a car, or buy an airline ticket. This is the essence of what we now call "Web 1.0."

The new "Web 2.0," adds a social dimension, which will be a major focus of this paper. Often described as "social media," Web 2.0 consists of a collection of tools and applications that have brought consumers, individually and as virtual groups, into global word-of-mouth forces. When it comes to travel, word-of-mouth has always been powerful driver of business. We expect that this emerging virtual word-of-mouth will make the Web 2.0 another transformative force, the second wave of Internet resources that will change the dynamics of the travel industry as profoundly as did Web 1.0.

## ***Social Media and Web 2.0***

As with any "new" technology the concepts behind Web 2.0 have evolved over many years. The earliest precursors of blogging, for example, date back to 1971 when a handful of technologists shared their personal thoughts in public files posted on Unix servers.

The Web log (since shortened to "blog") got its name in December 1997 when Jorn Barge launched Robot Wisdom.com (<http://robotwisdom.com>). In the same year Dave Winer started Scripting News ([www.scriptingnews.com](http://www.scriptingnews.com)), which he claims to be the longest-running blog in existence, and Slashdot started its popular "News for Nerds" (<http://slashdot.org>).<sup>1</sup>

Blogging, and with it RSS news feeds, really took hold with the creation of blogging tools and services that made it easy for anyone, with an Internet connection and little or no technical skills, to become a blog author. Blogger, launched in 1999, was the first but nearly went out of business before catching on in 2002 and then selling to Google in 2003.<sup>2</sup> Also in 2003, WordPress, the open source blogware offered its first free download,<sup>3</sup> and Six Apart Ltd. launched its Typepad, which today is the largest paid blogging service in the world.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Declan McCullagh, "Blogs turn 10--who's the father?" C|Net News.com, March 20, 2007, [http://news.com.com/Blogs+turn+10-who's+the+father/2100-1025\\_3-6168681.html](http://news.com.com/Blogs+turn+10-who's+the+father/2100-1025_3-6168681.html).

<sup>2</sup> "The Story of Blogger," <http://www.blogger.com/about>.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Mullenweg, "WordPress Now Available," WordPress news release, May 27, 2003, <http://wordpress.org/development/2003/05/wordpress-now-available/>.

<sup>4</sup> "TypePad," Wikipedia, last updated February 16, 2007, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TypePad>.

With tools to automate the mysteries of RSS feeds<sup>5</sup>, and friendly user interfaces that required no more skill than typing a Word document, blogging became a new and powerful medium. For the first time, anyone could become a citizen journalist and publisher, with the potential of reaching a worldwide audience.

In addition, the blog exploited three technical features—RSS feeds/subscriptions, comments and trackbacks—that combined to create what has come to be known as the “blogosphere,” an echo chamber or instant buzz machine that can send sensational news around the globe before it’s even noticed by the mainstream media. This is the unique social aspect of blogging: the blogosphere can transform a single small voice into a very loud crowd, and it can do so almost instantly.

Of course blogging is just one of the social media that have been assembled from various Web 2.0 components. Online communities are emerging in multiple forms, offering new social experiences: *MySpace*, “a place for friends,”<sup>6</sup> *Facebook*, “a social utility that connects people with friends and others who work, study and live around them,”<sup>7</sup> *YouTube*, a way to “broadcast yourself,”<sup>8</sup> and *Wikipedia*, “the encyclopedia anyone can edit.”<sup>9</sup> These trailblazers have been followed by a number of travel focused social sites.

In "New Ways to Trade Travel Secrets Online" the Wall Street Journal’s Nick Timiraos describes how websites for travelers have adopted the MySpace model to connect users to locals and to travel insiders:

Reader reviews have been a staple of many travel Web sites for years. Now social networking is becoming one of the latest innovations in the online travel world, allowing people to correspond directly with locals or other travelers with similar tastes and interests to find the hidden gems of any destination. As with the popular pioneering

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<sup>5</sup> See "Commercial Applications of RSS in Travel Marketing" by Paolo Torchio on *This Week on the IAOC Blog*, March 31, 2005, <http://www.iaocblog.com/blog/Travel/archives/2005/3/31/495672.html>.

WhatIs.com offers a good overview and definition of RSS along with links to more technical information at [http://searchvb.techtarget.com/sDefinition/0,,sid8\\_gci813358,00.html](http://searchvb.techtarget.com/sDefinition/0,,sid8_gci813358,00.html). There's a good tutorial on using RSS at Press Feed, [http://www.press-feed.com/howitworks/rss\\_tutorial.php](http://www.press-feed.com/howitworks/rss_tutorial.php). Also see “RSS - A Primer for Publishers & Content Providers,” M. Moffat, published by EEVL, an Internet guide for engineering, mathematics and computing, August 20, 2003, [http://www.techxtra.ac.uk/rss\\_primer/](http://www.techxtra.ac.uk/rss_primer/).

<sup>6</sup> MySpace: <http://www.myspace.com/>. The site invites visitors to "Join for free, and view profiles, connect with others, blog, rank music.... Tell us about yourself, upload your pictures, and start adding friends to your network. Read through millions of profiles.... See pix, read blogs.... Invite your friends, and as they invite their friends your network will grow even larger!"

<sup>7</sup> FaceBook: <http://www.facebook.com/>. Originally developed for college students, but has since been made available to others. Users can join one or more networks, including high schools, employers, and geographic regions. As of February 2007, according to Wikipedia, the website had the largest number of registered users among college-focused sites with over 25 million members worldwide. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facebook>.

<sup>8</sup> YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/>. Users can upload, view, and share and rate video clips and see the average rating and number of times a video has been watched. The site includes professional and amateur content such as movie and TV clips, music videos, videoblogs and short original videos.

<sup>9</sup> Wikipedia: <http://www.wikipedia.org/>. Wikipedia is the biggest multilingual free-content encyclopedia on the Internet, with more than 7 million articles in 200 languages. It is written collaboratively by volunteers and most articles can be edited by anyone with access to the Internet.

social-networking sites like MySpace.com, members must register online and post personal profiles that include information varying from favorite travel destinations to musical tastes, which allow other users to judge the value of a given restaurant review by checking out the reviewer's interests. Users can also email members to get more-tailored travel advice.<sup>10</sup>

## ***Travel on the Social Web***

Fast on the heels of the broader social media developments, the travel industry evolved its own 2.0 Websites. Sites such as IgoUgo ([www.igougo.com](http://www.igougo.com)), TripAdvisor ([www.tripadvisor.com](http://www.tripadvisor.com)), TripConnect ([www.tripconnect.com](http://www.tripconnect.com)), and WikiTravel ([www.wikitravel.com](http://www.wikitravel.com)) are specifically designed for travel discussion forums and information exchange. The fact that the world's travelers are now communicating directly with each other and joining networks to share travel experiences, good, bad and entertaining was immediate cause for concern for travel management. The travel marketer was no longer in control of the brand reputation. Was the Internet 2.0 truly the disruptive, viral force many online experts were predicting?

Despite ominous-sounding warnings about the reliability of unknown, inexpert Internet information sources, the online consumers of the world embraced the technology readily. And similar to the Byzantine markets of the early tenth century; wherever consumers congregate, commercial opportunities exist. The challenge now for the travel marketer is how to effectively embrace the opportunities presented by this new community.

## **One-Way Content Distribution + E-Commerce = Web 1.0.**

To understand Web 2.0 one must clearly define Web 1.0. The Internet's first "killer app" was a simple email exchange network. This was soon followed by the web browser and the World Wide Web, a cheap, fast, global content publishing machine that allowed content to be displayed via the Internet. Then finally, with the addition of transactional applications, we reached Web 1.0.

All consumers could do was communicate one-to-one via email, browse content published one way and buy. For travel marketers, Web 1.0 was effective because the content that was viewed by consumers was provided by travel marketers. They had complete control over how and what information was displayed.

## **Web 1.0 + Consumer Generated Content + Rich Media + Mash-Ups = Web 2.0.**

Web 2.0 brought the ability for consumers to create content about any topic of interest to them (review, wiki, blog), and they could distribute it to an unlimited number of websites via syndication (RSS, Search Engines). Other like minded (or opposing minded!)

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<sup>10</sup> Nick Timiraos, "New Ways to Trade Travel Secrets Online: Sites for Travelers Adopt MySpace Model to Connect Users to Locals, Other Insiders," The Wall Street Journal, September 19, 2006, Page D1.

consumers could add to the discourse (review comments, wiki posts, blog comments), rate the value of the information (rate it, usefulness) and categorize it (tagging).

Bandwidth improvements, the proliferation of hand held media recording devices (camera phones, mp3 recorders, digital video recorders) and ever lower cost of storage allowed for uploading of Rich Media (picture sharing, podcasts<sup>11</sup> and vlogs<sup>12</sup>). The underlying technologies used to manage the content (RSS, AJAX<sup>13</sup>) allowed for creative combinations of information to create Mash-Ups resulting in new applications that combine commerce, one-way content with consumer generated content and media.

## ***Applications in Travel***

Why do anything? As with any evolving technology, why be an early adopter? One safe approach would be to employ a wait and see philosophy. There is no compelling data yet to clearly demonstrate the return on investment in developing a Web. 2.0 application or embracing its viral marketing opportunities. However, as outlined above, consumers are fully engaged and content is being generated about your brand, your destination, your business and even you. At minimum a clear strategy encompassing online reputation management should be part of every travel marketer's plan.

Consideration for measurement for Web 2.0 comes later in this white paper. Before discussing the various applications for Travel one would be remiss not to establish some objectives. What follows is a simple framework to evaluate the opportunities presented by Web 2.0. With these objectives one can then tactically evaluate the options to take advantage of each opportunity and evaluate from a cost benefit standpoint.

<b>OBJECTIVE</b>
Reputation Monitoring & Management
Brand Reinforcement
Brand Awareness
Customer Acquisition
Customer Engagement
Customer Service
Customer Profiling
<i>Fig 1: Opportunity Framework</i>

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<sup>11</sup> Podcast Alley offers definitions, a forum and a directory of podcasts at <http://www.podcastalley.com/>. Also see Yahoo (<http://podcasts.yahoo.com/>) and of course Apple's iTunes store at <http://www.apple.com/itunes/store/podcasts.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Vlogs are also known as video blogs, vodcasts, or video podcasts. See the Video Blogging Group wiki at <http://videoblogginggroup.pbwiki.com/>.

<sup>13</sup> AJAX stands for "Asynchronous JavaScript and XML." It enables creation of more responsive interactive web by exchanging small amounts of data so that the entire web page does not have to be reloaded when a user makes a change. This can increase the speed and improve the usability when interacting with a web page. See Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ajax\\_\(programming\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ajax_(programming)).

## Reputation Monitoring & Management

**The Blogosphere and now the Reviewsphere:** a court of public opinion has evolved where discussions about everything from your brand, destination, company and products are appearing, being read and being added to. Fortunately the same applies to your competition. Recently published surveys are showing more and more that this consumer generated content holds a larger influencing effect than your own marketing. The biggest question surrounding this area is credibility. Again, due to the nature of the medium and the inherent ability to add comments and rate the value of posts, the consumers themselves are validating the credibility of the content. This comes in the form of online comments on blogs and forums and value ratings, and overall reviewer scores on reviews.

**Traveler Reviews (71-75 of 89)**

Language: English first | Sort by: Date: Newest first

Traveler reviews (71-75 of 89) | [WRITE A REVIEW](#) | [POST PHOTOS](#)

**Traveler rating:** 1123456789 **5.0** [CHECK RATES!](#)

**Colorado Springs: The Broadmoor: "More, More, More of The Broadmoor!!!!!!"**  
*A TripAdvisor Member*, New Orleans, LA Jun 3, 2004

What a spectacular resort. This is truly a first class hotel with so many amenities that it is impossible to list them all. The staff is incredibly friendly and will definitely go out of their way to help you. We needed some swimwear and the shops were going to be closing in five minutes so the concierge called and had a courtesy shuttle brought around for us and then called the shop and asked them to stay open for us because we were on our way. The employees at the shop were extremely friendly and allowed us to shop without making us feel as though we were bothering them. We made our purchase and had a courtesy shuttle waiting to take us back to our room. Great experience. I highly recommend The Broadmoor.

[Save this review](#)

*This review is the subjective opinion of a TripAdvisor member and not of TripAdvisor LLC.*

[Compliment this member](#)

Helpful votes: 3/3. Did you find this review helpful? [Yes](#) [No](#)

Fig 2: Tripadvisor hotel review showing rating as well as ratings for the reviewer.

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**About This Blog**

**Monday, February 26, 2007**

**Pinehurst eats?**

I'm thinking about writing an article about new restaurants in the Pinehurst/Southern Pines area. Anyone have any suggestions?

Posted at 01:12 pm by [Greg Cox](#) in [Food for thought](#)  
 5 comments | [Permalink](#)

**Comments, Pingbacks:**

**Trackback address for this post:**  
[http://blogs.newsobserver.com/htsr/trackback.php?tb\\_id=8295](http://blogs.newsobserver.com/htsr/trackback.php?tb_id=8295)

**Comment from: sandy [Visitor]**

02/26/07 at 15:06  
 It is not a new restaurant but we ate recently at the 1895 Gille at the Holly hotel of the Pinehurst resort. It was wonderful and would not hesitate to go back again.

**Comment from: Tim D [Visitor]**

02/27/07 at 07:06  
 About 15 miles north of Pinehurst, on 15-501, is Bavarian Brathaus. It is on the left as you just get into Carthage, NC.

**Comment from: Ryan [Visitor]**

**Greg Cox** is the restaurant critic for *The News & Observer*. He was born in El Paso, Texas, and grew up in North Carolina on a diet of Southern fried chicken (the real thing, cooked up in a big, black cast iron skillet), fried okra, sweet sliced summer tomatoes and the best biscuits on the planet. He has cooked, catered, waited tables and dined in Europe, Canada, Mexico and much of the U.S. (especially the South, Southwest and Midwest).  
 Though not a graduate of a professional culinary institute, he has been a passionate student of the world's cuisines for more than three decades. He learned to make a croustille from Michel Pasquet, erstwhile owner of a Michelin two-star restaurant in Paris. He explored Moroccan cuisine with Paula Wolfert, long before couscous was cool. Jean Yueh, author of "The Great Taste of Chinese Cooking," taught him a few chop sticks tricks. Biscuits, of course, he learned from his mom.

Fig 3: Niche Blog showing threaded comments

Additionally, and probably more importantly, is the fact that the same relevance in the Search Engines applies to this new consumer generated content. The profile of the site in terms of visibility is strongly influenced by the relevance, level of visitation and quality of inbound links. If for example someone posts a review to a blog or review site, the likelihood that this will be read by many people is directly related to the profile of that site. The reading consumer is voting on the exposure a post will ultimately have. By regularly monitoring the major review, travel social network and Blog Search Engines one can obtain a pretty comprehensive idea of what is being said about you and your competitors. Leveraging the same RSS technology that allows consumers to be notified of a new post of their interest, the travel marketer can develop a series of RSS feeds from each site of relevance and even create custom RSS feed searches on the Web 2.0 Search Engines using specific search terms. These can be assembled on a customizable homepage or Feed Reader.

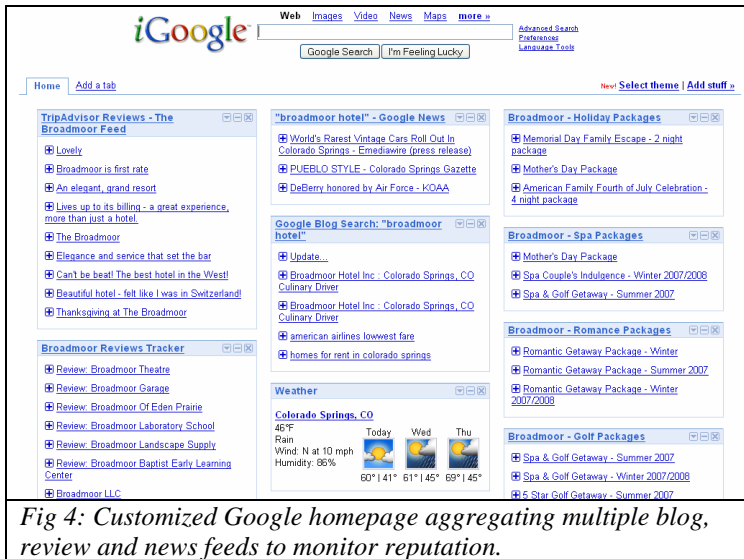


Fig 4: Customized Google homepage aggregating multiple blog, review and news feeds to monitor reputation.

Additionally commercial fee based monitoring applications and services are also now becoming available. These monitoring services function in much the same way as news clipping services. Many of these offerings include customizable notifications leveraging email in addition to the online consoles. One can configure these based on business rules established for each feed source.

The effective lifespan of a post is on a high profile Website is probably 3 to 5 days. After this time the post will probably be falling down the list due to the time stamp nature of most listings or a decline in relevance over time from a search perspective. However, in most cases the posts are not removed as they may be utilized to develop an overall rating as is the case with sites like Tripadvisor.

With this short window of opportunity for the content to be read, comes the same short window of opportunity to respond. A discussion of reputation management would not be complete without consideration for what to do in the case of a negative review or post. Many review sites allow for a “management response” or follow up with a response post. Trying to respond anonymously as another consumer with a counteracting positive experience is not going to work. Communicating that the issue has been resolved or the steps being taken to prevent this from happening again is all that is needed in an honest and open manner. In some cases there is truly nothing that can be done to make amends. In this case what may suffice is a simple apology and possibly a personal offer to allow for a future opportunity to meet expectations. A great example of this came from the CEO of Sun Microsystems replying to a bad review:

**“ I saw the entry written by Matt...all I can say is...I’m really sorry Matt. If there’s anything I can do to win a second chance, I’d like to know...”**

*Fig 5: Blog post responding to bad review*

## Brand Reinforcement, Brand Awareness & Customer Acquisition

With the Web 1.0 a marketer relied on someone finding a company's Website via Search Engines, a communication pushed directly to the consumer (email), or a Linkage Partnership developed between a third party Website and their own.. With Web 2.0 a myriad of new touch points are being constantly created by consumers Blogging, reviewing, making recommendations, creating trip itineraries, uploading photographs and other media. Additionally, many of the social community sites are beginning to profile like minded individuals and pushing relevant content to them. This is reinforcing their brand proposition as becoming reliable sources of customized relevant information.



Fig 6: Example of a trip planning feature on Yahoo travel that allows user to assemble details of an upcoming trip and view similar content of interest profiled by Yahoo

All of this content about your brand is predominantly:

- 1) generating a visit to your main Website via a hyperlink (Customer Acquisition)
- 2) making a consumer aware of your brand through the message another consumer generated (Brand Awareness)
- 3) further educating a consumer about your brand (Brand Reinforcement)

In addition to the obvious Website visitor generated, the link building benefits of having a highly relevant Website linking to your Website have wide reaching impact on your Organic Search Optimization program. Tactically, to ensure you are taking advantage of every opportunity the following should be considered:

Maintaining a profile listing for your brand on all relevant review and social community Websites. In many cases reviews, recommendations and posts need to be attached to a profile of the brand being posted about.



Fig 7: Hotel profile on travel review site Gusto.com

Generating interest in upcoming events and promotions. This can be achieved as simply as distributing Press Releases online to the various channels that have emerged to syndicate such content. This provides the highest possibility of a niche Blogger, reviewer or simply an interested consumer seeing your item and discussing it and beginning the content generation process. Additionally, the press release itself, if optimized correctly, will enter the content syndication network via the Search Engines.

Another approach to leverage the viral opportunities is to leverage the Blog community by either developing a relationship with niche Bloggers or providing them with information they will be willing to write about. In this way a discussion topic can be seeded to engage consumers as well as build awareness of the topic. Establishing oneself as a subject matter expert and beginning discussions is another option. The mechanism for this type of post can either be a third party Blog, forum, message board or wiki Website or the feature could be added to your own Website.

In the case of a proprietary blog or forum, consideration for both the size of the audience and the perceived relevance should be considerations. For a blog to be successful it would require frequent, relevant and valuable posts. This may not be an option for anyone other than the largest organizations who can dedicate this level of resource. One option would be to develop a Website feature that is still Blog or message board in nature but which is used to post a myriad of relevant information. In addition to the weblog style narrative, promotions, local events, brand updates, mentions in other publications and sites, posts authored by other writers (make sure you trackback and give credit) etc. could be published. In this case positioning the feature as an online journal is key. By adding RSS feed functionality to this feature a simple engagement opportunity has been created.

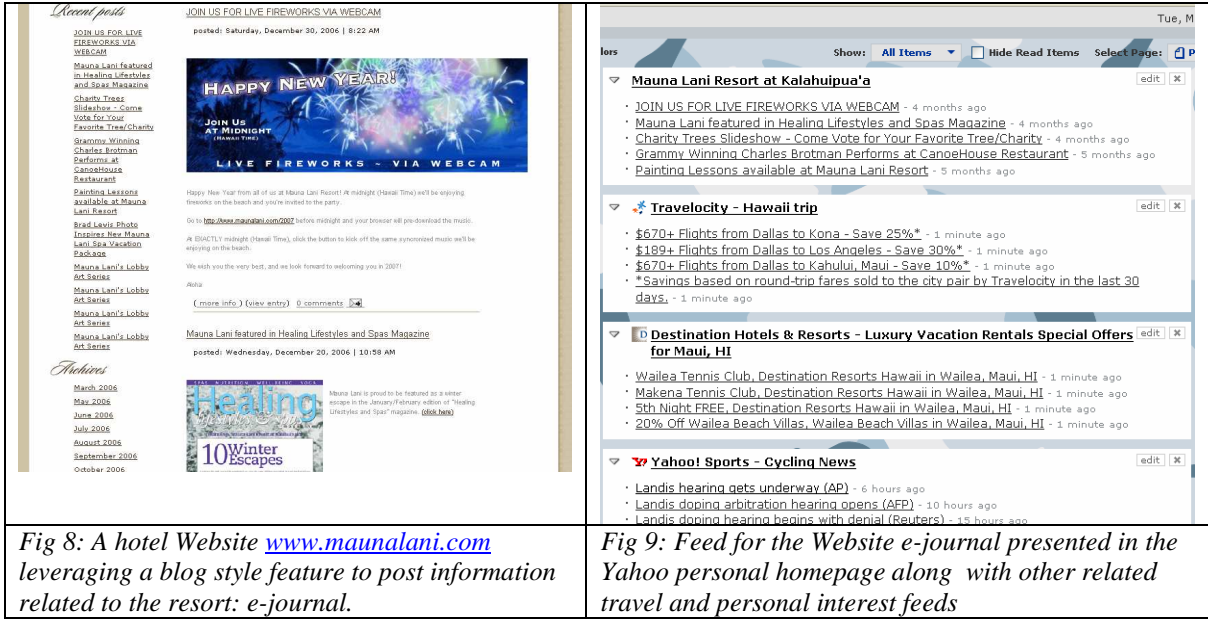


Fig 8: A hotel Website [www.maunalani.com](http://www.maunalani.com) leveraging a blog style feature to post information related to the resort: e-journal.

Fig 9: Feed for the Website e-journal presented in the Yahoo personal homepage along with other related travel and personal interest feeds

RSS Really Simple Syndication functionality, is a format used to syndicate news and news-like information updated on Websites. An RSS reader is required to consume the feed, creating a way for the marketer to communicate with consumers without them having to return to the Website. In essence, as illustrated above, the subscriber is notified of new content of interest, via their personal portal homepage (MyYahoo, Google homepage) or feed reader (Newsgator). The travel marketer can take advantage of this one-to-one opt in channel by simply RSS enabling sections of the Website such as the e-journal described above or content such as special offers and events. Additionally, opportunities are starting to emerge where third party content aggregators are creating customizable feeds

In addition to the subscription benefits, the Organic Search Ranking impact of rendering content in this format has been widely documented. Search Engines are ranking RSS feeds very highly, which if combined with your overall organic keyword strategy can greatly assist in ranking improvements.

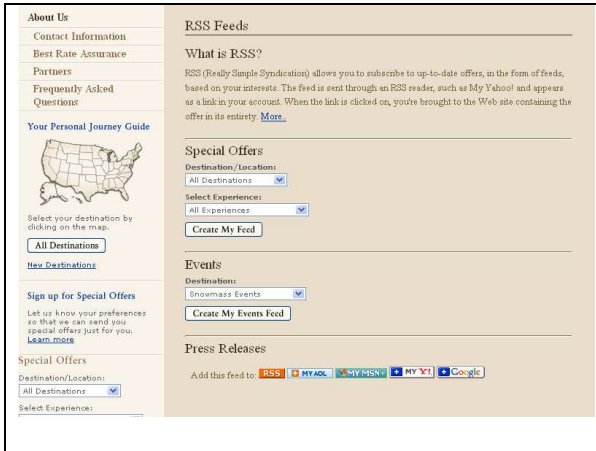


Fig 10: RSS feature on [www.destinationhotels.com](http://www.destinationhotels.com) allowing visitors to subscribe to special offers and events at over 30 destinations

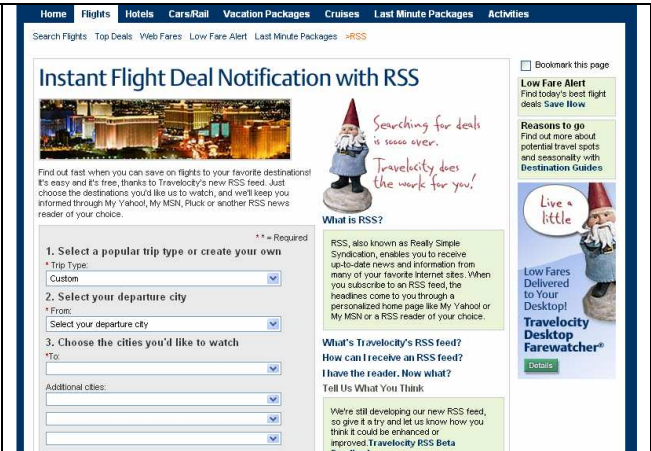


Fig 11: RSS feature on [www.travelocity.com](http://www.travelocity.com) allowing users to monitor airfare deals by city pairs

The final opportunity that has emerged on all the consumer generated content aggregating and networking sites is the ability to place contextual pay-per-click advertising on the sites. Many of the Websites now offer advertising programs or one can leverage media placement services. Most opportunities come with the ability to profile the potential viewer base by interest (the type of Website) and demographically.

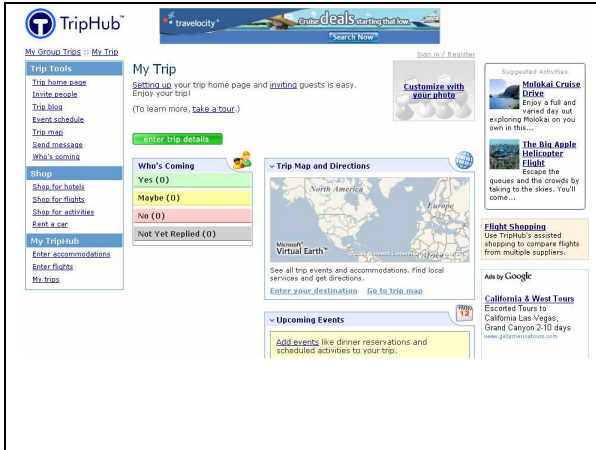


Fig 12: Travel planning site showing targeted advertising

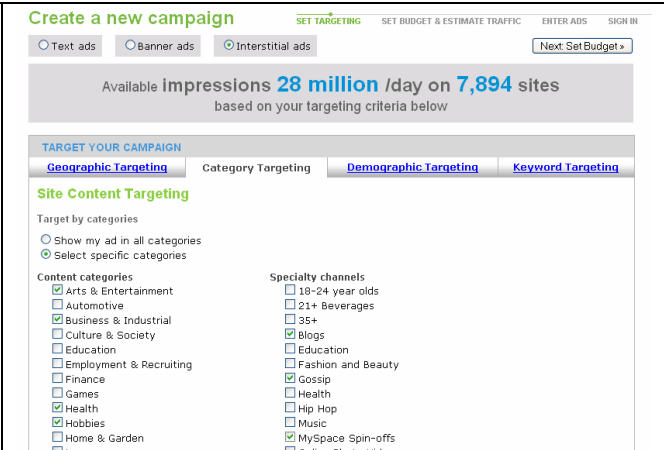


Fig 13: Service providing contextual targeted advertising placement on social network sites, blogs etc

## Customer Engagement, Service & Profiling

In addition to the consumer generated content, viral, social and network effects, Web 2.0 has also presented new online technology opportunities. The Web page can now be designed to provide a richer online application. Probably the greatest impact can be seen in the leveraged use of AJAX and flash technology to develop engaging online applications that combine, structure and present information without having to visit multiple pages or refresh pages. These programming languages were developed to take

advantage of data structured in XML format. These technologies can be leveraged to extend the customer service experience beyond the destination, enriching the planning experience. Examples include mash-ups (combining information from multiple Websites in one interface) to plot hotels and hotel content on a customizable map; resort amenities content presented on a calendar interface to facilitate the creation of customized itineraries that then can be morphed into actual reservations; series of 360deg images strung together with a mapping component to provide a rich destination discovery experience.

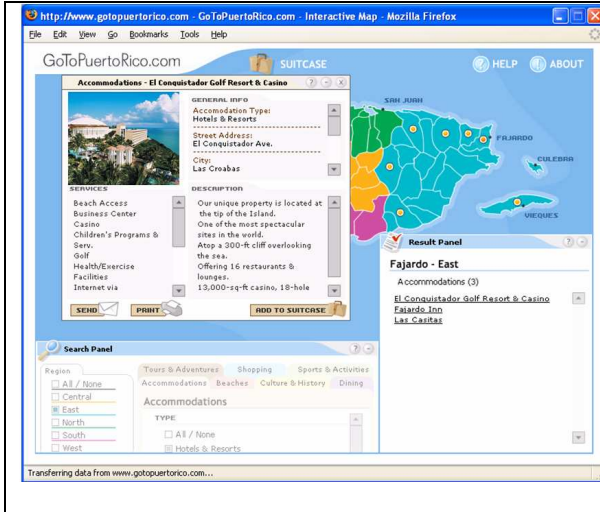


Fig 14: Flash map combining and presenting detailed lodging and activity information with an interface to create a travel itinerary

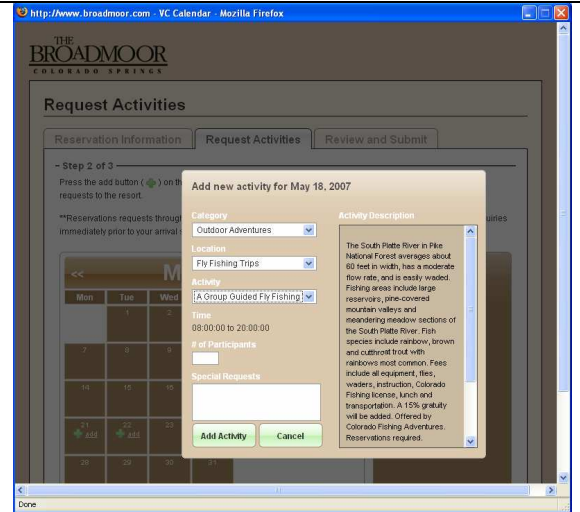


Fig 15: Single page AJAX planning tool combining local activity information with a calendar interface to create a detailed vacation itinerary reservation

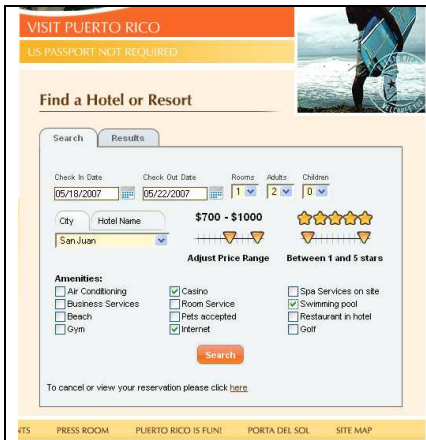


Fig 16: Hotel reservation engine developed with AJAX allowing one to shop hotels by rate, rating and amenity filters in one screen

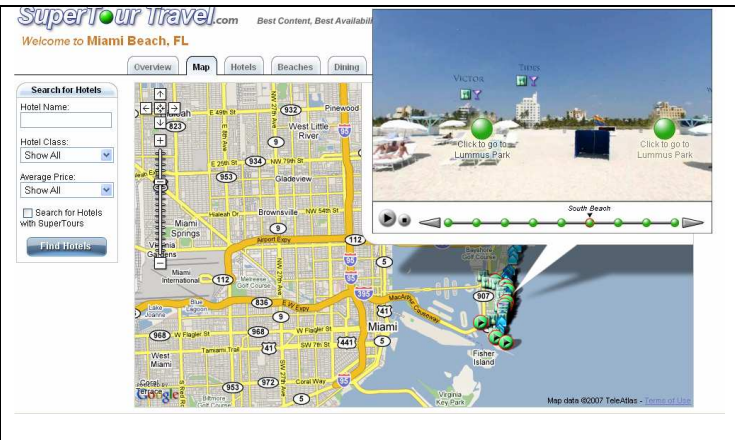


Fig 17: 360deg imagery sown together and combined with a mapping interface to provide a rich destination discovery experience

## Measurement & ROI

In the world of Web 1.0 marketing we have expounded at length on the measurability of every action taken. But in the new world of Web 2.0 what are the metrics and Key Performance Indicators? How does one calculate ROI on an investment in community instead of action? How does one measure the success of activities such as blogging or podcasting? How does one measure the reach of ones message in a viral network? What are the impacts of the new technologies being employed in developing these new applications? Traffic and page views, click-throughs, time spent on the Website and conversion ratios no longer quantify the activity on Web 2.0. Users are spending time reading, downloading, viewing and listening to content and media. The technology itself used to develop many Web 2.0 applications such as AJAX no longer require the page to refresh, depriving us of valuable log file statistics. Social relationships are being created dynamically and there has been a shift from “Call to Action” to ‘Interaction’.

The measure of this interaction with the Web 2.0 medium should be expressed as Engagement Metrics. Within this new metric various levels of engagement exist. At the lowest level a simple count of visitors interacting or consuming content: measured by means of simple techniques such as counting the number of users who click to "read more" on an expand and collapse window or on a short description of a post. Another similar level of engagement is to download a podcast or view a video. The next level of engagement would be a user who subscribes to a feed. The third or highest level of engagement would be that of a user contributing content either by posting to an existing thread, creating a new thread or submitting media such as an audio, video or image upload. Further, within this spectrum another valuable measurement can be overlaid on top of the tiers described by requiring the creation of a profile at any of the levels. Within this spectrum is the option to provide additional optional information such as demographics, location or interests can further indicate the level of engagement.

Below is a framework using simple star ratings to quantify levels of Engagement.

Level 1	Content/Media Consumer	*	Created Profile	add *	Provided Additional Profile Information	add *
Level 2	Feed Subscriber	**				
Level 3	Content Media Contributor	***				

Fig 18: Engagement level measurement framework

Referring back to the objectives detailed in the prior chapter, Engagement Metrics are well suited to measure all the items relating to Consumer Engagement, Interaction, Servicing and Profiling as well brand building. For measurement of Consumer Acquisition more traditional measurement of incoming link traffic can suffice. Also in the case of having leveraged Web 2.0 Websites to promote your company’s brand message in the form of paid placement, click through data is again important. However,

not to be overlooked is impression relevance information. In addition to the statistics provided to quantify the number of impressions and click-throughs on your ad, it is important to request relevance information. Relevance information should allow you to understand where your ad was displayed and in what context.

As described in the *Applications in Travel* section of this discussion, by having clarified objectives, these metrics can then be used to quantify the success of the efforts. Ultimately one should attempt to assign a monetary value to each level of Engagement if the overall objective is not a quantifiable conversion expressible in terms of a sale or transaction.

## **Consumers**

From a traveling consumer standpoint Web 2.0 has created a very high level of expectation. Consumers are looking for utilities that will facilitate researching and learning about their destinations of interest, reading the thoughts and recommendations of others that have been there, engaging with other like minded individuals and possibly soliciting their advice. At the same time these utilities must provide a simple reservation process with easy access to all other travel related components. The entire lifecycle of the trip should be facilitated from organizing and storing planning information, to communicating rich media with friends and family before, during and after the trip. And all this will be in addition to updated access to all of the necessary static information provided by your Website as a one way communication mechanism.

It has been said that to compete in the ever evolving world of online travel, industry players will have to be willing to reinvent themselves to keep up with the consumer, technology and the competition.

However, it would be short sighted to try or even assume that each and every travel supplier try to fulfill the expectation of the traveling Web 2.0 consumer. What should suffice is to continue to clearly define marketing objectives that include the challenges and opportunities presented by Web. 2.0.

## **Web 3.0: The Next New Thing**

In conclusion, no discussion of Web 2.0 would be complete without a mention of what Web 3.0 holds in the future for the travel industry.

Definitions of Web 3.0 are already beginning to be formulated. It would seem that the Web 3.0 will herald a new interpretation of our interests built on information being generated by the applications of the prior version. Travel 3.0 will involve harnessing this information and providing us with a new level of travel planning experience.

PC Magazine's Cade Metz offers four possible scenarios for what Web 3.0 will look like:

**The Semantic Web:** A Web where machines can read sites as easily as humans read them (almost). You ask your machine to check your schedule against the schedules of all the dentists and doctors within a 10-mile radius—and it obeys.

**The 3D Web:** A Web you can walk through. Without leaving your desk, you can go house hunting across town or take a tour of Europe. Or you can walk through a Second Life–style virtual world, surfing for data and interacting with others in 3D.

**The Media-Centric Web:** A Web where you can find media using other media—not just keywords. You supply, say, a photo of your favorite painting and your search engines turn up hundreds of similar paintings.

**The Pervasive Web:** A Web that's everywhere. On your PC. On your cell phone. On your clothes and jewelry. Spread throughout your home and office. Even your bedroom windows are online, checking the weather, so they know when to open and close.<sup>14</sup>

We expect that Travel 3.0 application will involve dynamically predicting and recommending a future travel experience based on our current and past online activity. Web users are generating valuable information as they research travel, read and generate content and reviews, associate with other travelers in social networks, react to travel marketing messages and do the same for the other non travel aspects of their lives. The future travel application will be aggregating this information, profiling users and making very specific recommendations. This may seem futuristic but is certainly within reach based on the technological changes taking place and the ease with which the consumer has adapted to Web 2.0.

In considering the future and Web 3.0, it is useful to look at the definition of Web 2.0 provided by O'Reilly Media, which is credited with giving it its name:

A set of economic, social and technology trends that collectively form the basis for the next generation of the Internet – a more mature, distinctive medium characterized by user participation, openness and network effects.<sup>15</sup>

The 3.0 version of the Web will be the summation of all this openness and participation. It will enable marketers to gather more detailed and frank information about consumers, their real needs and wants and unfiltered opinions. This information can then be used from a technological perspective by travel marketers to provide consumers with Websites and solutions that will provide their desired travel experiences in a more proactive and dynamic manner. The online travel planning experience of the future will provide an aggregation of content from multiple sources. This will be presented alongside a rich transactional interface that will be customized to meet the users specific preferences based on personal passed online activity and like-minded individuals.

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<sup>14</sup> "Web 3.0," Cade Metz, PC Magazine, March 14, 2007, [www.pcmag.com/article2/0,1895,2102852,00.asp](http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,1895,2102852,00.asp)

<sup>15</sup> John Musser with Tim O'Reilly, "Web 2.0 Principles and Best Practices," O'Reilly Media Inc., Fall 2006.

## ***Index of examples referenced***

- Fig 1: [www.esitemarketing.com](http://www.esitemarketing.com)  
Fig 2: [www.tripadvisor.com](http://www.tripadvisor.com)  
Fig 3: [www.newsobserver.com](http://www.newsobserver.com)  
Fig 4: [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)  
Fig 5: <http://blogs.sun.com/jonathan/>  
Fig 6: <http://travel.yahoo.com>  
Fig 7: [www.gusto.com](http://www.gusto.com)  
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