This is the year of web 2.0

By Jarred Cinman

During 2007, South Africa started experiencing the Web as the rest of the world does. It was the year when bandwidth became broadly available and its cost dropped to (relatively) affordable levels. 2008 is the year when large numbers of South Africans will start using the Internet in life-altering ways. Consider that there are 780 000 broadband users in South Africa, and 550 000 South Africans are members of Facebook.

Social media, social networking and Web 2.0 are basically different ways of referring to the same phenomenon: the Web as more than just information sharing, as a collaborative, interactive environment which extends relationships we have with one another, and where we can have them.

Already, many South Africans have quietly slipped into a new way of working where they make use of these Web 2.0 applications. They interact with each other, build photo albums, find and make friends, source their news, their music and much of their information via the Web. And they typically do it using new tools.

Web 2.0 applications include Google’s Gmail, Docs, Picasa, Earth, Reader, Notes and more; Flickr, Picasa’s big competitor in aggregating and sharing pictures; Skype, and its Google competitor, Gtalk, and the mobile alternative, Fring; Wordpress, the most popular of the blogging applications; del.icio.us, the social bookmarks manager; Technorati, the blog search engine; YouTube, many people’s alternative to traditional TV; and many, many more.

Locally we have our own spread of interesting startup Web 2.0 applications: Amatomu, our own blog search engine; Zoopy allows for sharing of all kinds of multimedia content; Blueworld is a full-blown social network.

What is intriguing to note is how rapidly these applications are appearing, and how rapidly they are absorbed into people’s daily life.

What were niche applications soon become indispensable.

Important development

Web 2.0, through smart programming techniques, allows users to run complex applications across the Internet, in some cases as if they were standard PC-based applications (compare Microsoft Word and Google Docs).

This is a major evolution: for the first decade of its existence, the Internet was largely used for serving pages of static content: it was, to a great extent, an informational repository.

Because of the surge of adoption of the Internet locally in the last two years – especially the last 12 months - South Africa is entering Web 2.0 before it has fully embraced the first iteration of the Web, and the new opportunity is far more exciting than the previous one. It is intuitive to the average person, which helps explain its popularity.

And the most popular use is to extend social activities: sharing content, linking up with others, collaborating.

This is of great importance to, among many others, marketers.

Because all participation in social networks is voluntary, marketers can be sure they are reaching clearly identifiable groups of people who are congregating by choice.

A few areas where marketers can apply their minds: investigating areas such as Facebook’s Marketplace; revenue generation and advertising via Google and Facebook; using services such as deli.cio.us, Technorati, Amatomu, Afri-gator and news.google.com to see what people might be saying about your clients in a blog, or to keep track of any published information.

As we head into 2008, the challenge for marketers only just getting a handle on the ‘old’ Web as an advertising medium just got bigger. With close to a million switched-on, broadband users, immersed in a flurry of new dynamic Web 2.0 sites and applications, there is a revolution going on that cannot be ignored.

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Better broadband is driving the trend. Marketers have to engage

Lesson: