



Collaboration, Community, and Connectedness: Social Media & Web 2.0 Basics

Source: National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, April 2008

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Social media refers to tools used for the sharing and collaborative creation of information by individuals and communities. More specifically, social media describes online communication tools and applications sharing some important characteristics:

- Collaboration -- social media encourages audience contribution and interaction. Instead of a one-way transmission of information, social media tools typically encourage and support feedback, comments, and sharing of information.
- Community -- social media provides an infrastructure for interaction among existing communities and the formation and interaction of primarily or exclusively web-based communities around common interests or goals.
- Connectedness -- social media helps connect people and information in one place.

Web 2.0, often discussed in the same breath as social media, is a term that is used to define the evolution of the World Wide Web. While there isn't a hard and fast line between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0, Web 1.0 can be understood to represent a "web as information" model and Web 2.0 to represent a "web as participation" model of web activity. This second generation of the web is characterized by the user's creation and interaction with content. Users participate and collaborate through virtual communities and social media tools which facilitate easy sharing of information and ideas among users. Therefore user experiences are richer and the web is able to harness the power of crowds and result in a greater collective intelligence.

This does not mean that the web itself has changed in terms of its technical specifications, but rather that both software developers and end users are using the web in new ways. You don't need to upgrade your internet browser; if you're online you're already set up to experience social media and Web 2.0!

Social media and Web 2.0 tools and technologies can be used to the great benefit of schools and organizations involved in service-learning. Social media tools can be used to:

- publish and disseminate information widely, quickly, and inexpensively
- market your program and share your service-learning success stories
- facilitate collaboration
- build community
- network and create partnerships
- customize and create new tools

Social media and Web 2.0 services and applications include:

- Blogs
- RSS Feeds
- Wikis
- Podcasts/Vodcasts
- Mashups
- Microblogging
- Tagging/Folksonomies/Social Bookmarking
- Social Networking
- Web-based desktop application/document tools

These tools make it easier for individuals and organizations to reach new audiences, increase visibility, and build community. In addition to reaching out, organizations can use these tools to reach inward and better communicate internally and collaborate effectively. Social media and Web 2.0 tools are especially useful for reaching younger and disparate audiences and because so many of them allow for publication and communication at little to no cost, they can have excellent cost-benefit for organizations trying to stretch their dollar to do the greatest good.

Resources

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Center for Social Media
www.centerforsocialmedia.org

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www.techsoup.org/toolkits/web2/

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