

The Web: Reaching an inflection point

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Is the Web becoming "disruptive" once again? That is, is it vigorously stirring things up as it did when it first came on the commercial scene back in the mid-90s? Experts tell UPI's The Web that the second generation of the Web, the so-called Web 2.0, is indeed doing just that.

"The Web 2.0 is not about hype like the 'Bubble 1.0,'" said Robb Hecht, a new media marketing strategist for IMC Strategies. "But, rather, a true growth in the utilitarian value of the Internet."

There are a number of examples of this trend. Online sites like bbc.co.uk and The New York Times online are integrating podcasting and blogging into their news pages. "They are moving toward a user-generated model," said Hecht. "Things have changed and traditional media properties are listening -- and evolving -- to the new interactive needs of online users."

Projects like those are building momentum for the second wave, and a possible stock market Bubble 2.0. The Internet is at an "inflection point," a spokesman for Computer Sciences Corp., based in El Segundo, Calif., tells The Web, "where public infrastructure is starting to accelerate. Many trends are converging to amplify the effect."

For example, now, after years of incremental growth, billions of dollars are starting to be poured into online advertising -- a significant share of the \$600 billion spent overall on advertising is now moving to the Web. "One percent of that money funds more than 250,000 servers at Google," the spokesman for CSC said.

The more servers there are, the more capacity the Internet has for search -- and the greater the capacity for search, the more people rely upon the Web as an information, entertainment and lifestyle source.

"Advertisers are reaching out to younger demographics on the Internet via social networking sites, like MySpace.com, because MySpace has 70 million users now," said Hecht, who has worked with major brands like E*Trade. "Another example (driving revenue) is mashups, which are low-tech content aggregators, from disparate publishers."

There is also increased use of the Internet in China, though search-engine purveyor Google was recently taken to task for enabling censorship of Web searching in China by The Weekly Standard, a leading opinion journal, which was critical of the firm's moral values.

Chief information officers and other IT personnel are starting to view Internet security as vital to the health of their organizations, as a consequence of this growth. They want to stop viruses, hackers and other phishing expeditions.

A new development this week, being marketed to these corporate IT departments, is a so-called sender index, a database that contains information on the "reputation" of more than 60 million Internet Protocol addresses. Knowing the reputation of a network from which spam originates will help IT departments filter it more effectively -- and let users go on using the Internet for work or play more effectively.

"Reputation systems are an important weapon in the armory of any industrial strength anti-spam solution," said Mark Harris, director of SophosLabs, a security developer based in Abingdon, England. One firm, Mountain View, Calif.-based Habeas Inc., has developed a "reputation engine" that automatically tests all e-mail coming into a corporate network.

All of this marketing and technology activity on the second generation of the Web has not been matched, as of yet, by new share offerings for new Internet firms on Wall Street. "For the Web 2.0, there has not been a lot of IPO activity," said Hecht. Most of the new investments are for WiFi and wireless projects these days. But maybe that is good, experts speculate. "It is the consumers who are benefiting from the Web 2.0 movement," said Hecht.

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