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WEB 1.0 VERSUS WEB 2.0

A COMPARISON OF TWO STYLES IN WEB DESIGN

I. INTRODUCTION

When in 1966 the first network for sharing data was constructed there was probably little or no anticipation that it would be the corner stone of what we today call “The World Wide Web” (WWW). There were many intermediate steps that lead to the stage the WWW is in today, but there is notably one which cannot be overlooked.

In 1990 a British European Council for Nuclear Research (CERN) employee Tim Berners-Lee wrote a project proposal entitled *WorldWideWeb: Proposal for the HyperText Project*, which is what the internet of today is based on. (Lanxton, N., CNET UK – CRAVE - The Gadget Blog, 2008, p.2)

Since the time the use of WWW first became available to the masses until the current day there have been many changes: in the available technologies, in the function of the WWW itself, and finally in the appearance of web pages.

Although it is important to observe all these elements when analysing the WWW as an entity, I shall in this essay, focus mainly on the changes in characteristics of particular web design eras. I shall try to compare two distinctive styles of web design commonly known as Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 respectively. In addition, I shall also try to identify what changes in web design, brought on by the developments in technologies and changes in user involvement, we can expect in future.

2. FROM WEB 1.0 TO WEB 2.0

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According to (Shah, D., Davidi, I., Shapira, Y., Allen R., 2005.) “the World Wide Web started as a loose collection of links to documents for various universities and research centres. Today, the Web is a highly interactive medium for consuming content and conducting business. A fundamental evolution of the Web that has made this possible has been termed "Web 2.0." The technologies behind Web 2.0 provide a richer user experience and make use of information in unique ways. However, Web 2.0 is more than just technology, as it encompasses social interactions and a variety of business models. It is among the first concepts to combine technical, social, and business theories.”

When “Web 2.0” became a mainstream term for describing the new web, that is novelties either in technology, user involvement or web design, it was a logical step to replace the previously used “World Wide Web” with “Web 1.0”.

“The concept of "Web 2.0" began with a conference brainstorming session” in 2003 “between O'Reilly and MediaLive International. Dale Dougherty, web pioneer and O'Reilly VP, noted that far from having "crashed", the web was more important than ever, with exciting new applications and sites popping up with surprising regularity. What's more, the companies that had survived the collapse seemed to have some things in common. Could it be that the dot-com collapse” in late 2001 “marked some kind of turning point for the web, such that a call to action such as "Web 2.0" might make sense? We agreed that it did, and so the Web 2.0 Conference was born.” (O`Reilly, T., 2005, p.1)

What Tim O`Reilly is mentioning is a point in the history of the World Wide Web that can be described as a middle point. After the popularization of internet, there was an extraordinary emergence of online businesses looking for a “quick buck”. These businesses were commonly described as dot-coms.

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As they were ill-managed many went bankrupt. "The bursting of the dot-com bubble in the fall of 2001 marked a turning point for the web. Many people concluded that the web was overhyped, ..." (O'Reilly, T., 2005, p.1).

The dot-com era is also sometimes referred to as Web 1.5, as a sort of a transitional period.

3. FEATURES OF WEB 2.0 DESIGN

With the availability of new technologies web designers were quick to pick up on related changes and opportunities and soon web page designs reflected the new possibilities in presentation of information in the form of image and text. In this way, web design had shifted from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0. It is important to note that Web 2.0 is not a new set of design rules. This means that there is not a unique design feature that would determine a Web 2.0 page. However, we can find in Web 2.0 pages a set of characteristic design features that make these pages distinct from the Web 1.0 generation.

In the following pages I shall identify features that are synonymous with Web 2.0 design and compare these features with Web 1.0 design characteristics.

3.1 LAYOUT

Initially in Web 1.0 web pages were designed for smaller computer screens, which meant that the layout was either left aligned or liquid (full screen). Since there was a finite number of information which was not changing dynamically web design did not suffer. When wider computer screens came into popular use this kind of design was seen obsolete. If a design structure is of fixed size and the layout is left aligned when it is being displayed on a wide computer screen, you get an awkward empty space on the right. On the other hand, if the layout is full screen and liquid, the content stretches across the whole screen creating longer lines of text, which are hard to read. Sometimes on badly designed websites bigger spaces appear between graphic elements. To solve these issues designers started to use central layout. "Sites that sit straight front & center feel more simple, bold and honest." (Hunt, B., ScratchMedia, n.d.). With centred layout it is possible to specify the maximum width of the central box. When a users screen resolution is bigger, then the

space left and right of the box can be, and in Web 2.0 design, style usually is filled with background elements.

Within the layout it is also important to mention another feature which further divides the layout; columns. “A few years ago, 3-column sites were the norm, and 4-column sites weren't uncommon. Today, 2 is more common, and 3 is the mainstream maximum.” (Hunt, B., ScratchMedia, n.d.). Columns are useful to distinguish the main text from secondary information or even from navigation. Web 2.0 design style is based on “less is more” principle.

Finally, Web 2.0 design has done away with tables and frames as a means of positioning different contents. Styling and positioning of tables is very difficult and non-sustainable because each table has to be styled individually. Instead, Web 2.0 design uses divs (a type of a content holder element), which in combination with Cascade Style Sheets (CSS) provide pixel perfect positioning of different contents within the design. It also offers the option, where a single definition of style can be applied to numerous elements.

3.2 BACKGROUND AND COLOURS

When the first generation of web pages was put on the internet it was rather easy to find many pages with the same background colours. The simple reason for that is that most designers had a limited colour palette available to them. These colours can still be found in the default colour palette of Microsoft Paint. But with the advances in technology came the possibility for everyone to choose from a far larger number of colours and shades. So in order to be able to use stronger colours to emphasise important areas in the layout, designers reached for softer, pastel colour for the background. “Bright, strong colours draw the eye. Use them to divide the page into clear sections, and to highlight important elements.... If you're using strong colours to attract the eye, it only

works if there's lots of area that isn't strongly coloured. If everything is trying to attract the eye, then the eye just gets confused, and the site will feel confusing and chaotic." (Hunt, B., ScratchMedia, n.d.).

Some Web 1.0 styled web pages did not use colour for background. Instead they had pictures which were repeated on x and y axes. Some even had animated pictures, for example a very common background image was animated flames. Web 2.0 style replaces these features with gradient fills which complement pastel colours. In some instances designers also add soft illustrations to liven up the design. Sometimes also a big picture is put in instead, which resizes with screen resolution. When a picture is used, the elements on top are usually semi-transparent to create a glassy effect.

3.3 LOGOS AND HEADERS

Every web page has an element that defines it, shows the name of an organisation or a brand. Web pages from Web 1.0 generation were using logotypes (logos) in the form of either a word or a representative picture. In Web 2.0 design the logo has been somewhat transformed. What used to be a simple 2D-like picture is now a glossy 3D-like shape of a figure, an acronym or sometimes a whole word. The size of the logo has also increased.

Logo is usually found in the top left corner. This area is referred to as header. With Web 2.0 this area of the design is being emphasized more. "Of course, there's nothing new about this approach. It's a good idea, and has been used for ever. But it's being used more than ever now, and the distinction is often stronger." (Hunt, B., ScratchMedia, n.d.). In Web 2.0 the header is more than just a logo. Sometimes it is both a logo and a picture; other times different colours are used in order to clearly distinguish it from the rest of the page.

However the distinction is made, it usually also includes main navigation. On any site both the main branding and main navigation should be obvious, bold and clear. (Hunt, B., ScratchMedia, n.d.).

3.4 TYPOGRAPHY

“Lots of "2.0" web sites have big text, compared to older-style sites. ... Not only does big text stand out, but it's also more accessible to more people. That's not just people with visual impairments, but also people looking on LCD screens in sunlight, people sitting a little further from the screen, and people just skimming the page. If you think about it, that could be quite a lot of people!” (Hunt, B., ScratchMedia, n.d.). Web 1.0 web pages had long lines of text which was usually size 10 points. In combination with perhaps animated flames in the background the text was hardly readable. Typefaces that were used in Web 1.0 are still around today and because HTML is restricted to fonts installed on the reader's system, Web 2.0 does not feature exotic fonts for displaying raw text. Instead, size (even up to 14 points) and colour have been used to make visual impact.

3.5 OTHER ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

Web 2.0 design has introduced or rather revived some of the common graphic elements. “Most 2.0-style sites use subtle 3D effects, sparingly, to enhance the qualitative feel of the design. ... Realistic surface effects (like drop-shadows, gradients and reflections) help make a visual interface feel more real, solid and "finished". (Hunt, B., ScratchMedia, n.d.) In contrast, Web 1.0 style web pages were made of flat coloured, 2-D surfaces.

“Icons play an important role in Web 2.0 design. Today we use fewer, better icons that carry more meaning.” (Hunt, B., ScratchMedia, n.d.) In Web 1.0

designers tended to overuse icons, therefore making them less effective and the web page less clear. In Web 2.0 however, the use of icons has been reduced, often replacing them with clear text, and the icons used a larger and come in more variety.

3.6 THINGS THAT DO NOT EXIST IN WEB 2.0

Since Web 2.0 became the dominant design style, some features of Web 1.0 design did not survive. It is very rare to see hit counters or visitor counters on web pages nowadays. This measurement of visits has been replaced with Google analytics. Features that also did not make it are blinking text and MARQUEE (scrolling text). Both of them have been replaced by Flash animations. Other forgotten design features are: frames, animated 3D gif's (for example e-mail icon) and visible tables. There are also others such as "Best Viewed In", "Click Here to Enter", "Please sign my quest book". (Hyder, 2007)

3.7 WEB 1.0 OR WEB 2.0?

Now that I have pointed out the differences between the two styles of design it is necessary to question the use and appropriateness of either of them when contemplating a new web page. Because the definition of a web 2.0 web page is more than just Web 2.0 design features, can you state that a page is web 2.0 without considering the approach it takes? In other words, a web page that looks like a Web 2.0 page actually follows Web 1.0 approach. For example, a restaurant has a web page with the current menu. The restaurant would like the visitors to only view their menu, not comment on it or change it. The web page might have typical Web 2.0 design features, but it is a static web page, a trademark of Web 1.0. Alternatively, a web page might make use of Web 2.0 technologies but its design is representative of Web 1.0. This means that a

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designer should not be limited with typical characteristics of either generation but should choose whatever works best for a particular web page.

“The boundary between what counts as Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 isn't always clear. Some Web sites are very static but include a section for visitor comments. The site as a whole might follow the Web 1.0 approach, but the comments section is a Web 2.0 technique. Even Web experts disagree on how to classify Web pages, and some think that it's a mistake to even try labelling them at all.

There's no denying that some Web strategies are more effective than others. In the end, whether or not there's such a thing as Web 1.0 is a moot point. The important thing is to learn how to use the Web to its full potential.” (Strickland, J., n.d. p.3)

4. CONCLUSION

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As is described above, Web 2.0 is defined by a comprehensive set of changes in computer technology, user involvement and web design. New technologies were available which enabled developers to feed information to users in new formats, which were quicker, easier to handle and open to communities. This breakthrough led to a shift in user involvement. The main contributors of Web 1.0 pages were institutions, universities, organisations and similar; which meant that the information was displayed by one party and was meant to be seen or read by another. The reader could not contribute in any way to web page contents. Web 2.0 brought the reader to the forefront. The reader now became the creator and contributor of information with blogging, forums, social networks and sharing of knowledge, such as Wikipedia.

With this came a huge “shift in the state of mind.” (Budd, A., Clearleft Ltd, 2005. p.3) Individuals gathered into groups where they started to share personal information, images, music, etc. This new phenomenon became known as social networking and has now developed into what must be the biggest feature of Web 2.0. The biggest social network communities are undoubtedly Facebook, Myspace and Flickr.

With the growth of social networks and development of cheaper and faster (broadband) internet connection, allowing people to spend more time online, developers had the opportunity to offer something more to the user. And so web applications were born. Users were now able to read and write emails through web applications (Gmail), upload and modify images (Photoshop Express), listen to music (Grooveshark), watch videos and upload their own (YouTube), create and manage their calendars and appointments (Google Calendar) and many more. Web design was never far behind this evolution. Since Web 2.0 there has been much more attention to the way in which

information is presented. From static to dynamic content, from left aligned to centre aligned layout, web design needs to be and is adaptable to the content it supports. Limited colour palette, a distinct feature of early web design, has been replaced with softer, pastel colours which are more pleasing to the eye. Flashy, animated backgrounds have been replaced with gradients, soft illustrations and thematic pictures.

Navigation in Web 2.0 has become simpler, bolder, more visible and yet in-tune with other graphic elements on the page, such as bigger logos with 3d effect and larger text. These are all features describing Web 2.0 design. What about the future? What about Web 3.0?

Most experts agree and I have also pointed this out that Web 2.0 was in large a social change, although it has been supported by new developments in technology. Web 3.0 on the other hand, is bound to be a technological change. According to (Hyett, D. & Wattam, D., 2008) it is going to be about “Artificial Intelligence and personalisation”. (Bijl, F., 2008) states that “Web 3.0 – the semantic web – is about meaning of data. Web 3.0 creates a big collection of databases, which can be connected on demand. Agreements are made on the structure of data and the way data is described. ... Linking data is the power of Web 3.0.”

This begs the question: What is Web 3.0 design going to be like? (Strickland, M., 2007) poses the question: “Will the web look the same for me as it does for everyone else?” With the new wave of mobile devices using and browsing the internet, the initial design will have to be compatible across many different new platforms and resizable due to smaller screens. It will probably have to offer many alternatives both in design displayed as well as in content available, something BBC has started on their web page (bbc.co.uk), but much more sophisticated. This might be more work for the designer, but

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inevitably the Web 3.0 web page will be more interactive than its current web 2.0 predecessor. It might be even in virtual space.

Or it might not be that. Perhaps it is best to wait and see.

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APPENDIX: WEB 1.0 versus WEB 2.0

Web 1.0

DoubleClick



Ofoto



Akamai



mp3.com



Britannica Online



personal websites



evite



domain name speculation



page views



screen scraping



publishing



content management systems



directories (taxonomy)



stickiness



Web 2.0

Google AdSense

Flickr

BitTorrent

Napster

Wikipedia

blogging

upcoming.org and EVDB

search engine optimization

cost per click

web services

participation

wikis

tagging ("folksonomy")

syndication

(O'Reilly, T., 2005, p.1)

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