

WEB 2.0

Are you ready for learning with Web 2.0?



CERTPOINT White Paper 4: Are you ready for learning with Web 2.0?

How collaborative tools enable rapid, low administration learning – if done right.

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Executive Summary: 'Web 2.0' and Learning

The term Web 2.0 was coined in 2004 by Tim O'Reilly to contrast the 'push' mechanism then used by most internet applications with the collaborative way that the web seemed to be evolving, and continues to evolve today.

While there is no agreed definition of Web 2.0, the term is used to describe something very real – a shift in the use of the internet. Unlike Web 1.0, Web 2.0 is participative. The two classic contrasts usually made are between Britannica Online (produced centrally by experts – Web 1.0) and Wikipedia ('crowd sourced' from interested individuals globally, and so Web 2.0) and between personal websites (Web 1.0) and blogging (Web 2.0). For those in Learning and Development (L&D) one of the key differences is between content created and managed centrally by an L&D department and content created by and distributed between learners.

For some in L&D the idea that content can be created outside the training department is disturbing. For others, it is liberating, making the department more effective at little cost. Others still wonder what the fuss is about when most of the daily grind of their L&D department is still about designing and delivering courses, either online or in the classroom.

Whatever the reaction, L&D cannot afford to ignore Web 2.0 learning. It is happening right now in most organizations. Ignored, it will continue to flourish, but may be very ineffective – good information may be difficult to find, and poor practices inadvertently promoted. In particular, newer members of any organization, including Gen-Y employees, will naturally turn to Web 2.0 for learning, and will see any L&D department that does not embrace it as irrelevant at best.

The best way to use Web 2.0 learning is not to treat it as something to be added on the side of existing training, but to integrate it completely into the organization's current learning programs and systems.

This CERTPOINT Systems white paper explores how learning and development can benefit from Web 2.0 technologies, using the best of what is available and harnessing it to support effective learning in the workplace.

Does Web 2.0 matter for L&D?

Web 2.0 has been around long enough to show that it is not a fad. But does that mean that it deserves to be taken seriously in the workplace? Might it not be – like so much of the internet – fun, but something to be left at home?

The answer – certainly as far as learning is concerned – is a definite ‘No’. While a Web 2.0 approach will never replace everything the L&D Department does, it represents one part of the learning process that the department has never found easy to support and make the most of until now: informal learning. Informal learning most often occurs when people confront a problem and solve it together, often over a period of time, and frequently drawing on a range of resources including people and reference works. It is not centrally controlled, because the need for it is unpredictable. It cannot be aided by courses or in the classroom, because each problem is complex and different. Yet this informal, on-the-job learning is how most learning at work occurs, and until now the L&D department has had little to do with it.

The collaboration made possible by Web 2.0 technologies helps this sort of informal learning thrive, and enables the L&D department to be involved. The department can use these technologies to support informal learning and make it more effective, often at very low cost. The key is for the department to enable the right forms and quality of information to be created, and then to permit them to be spread widely throughout the organization and beyond.

This represents an additional role for the department, and a shift in focus: from content creator to content custodian. This might sit uncomfortably with the traditional training department. It might be tempting to stick to creating and running courses and to ignore Web 2.0. That would be a mistake. L&D cannot afford to ignore Web 2.0: it’s already here, and it’s already being widely used.

Any employee faced with a problem who also has access to the internet will turn to it to solve that problem. They will likely use instant messaging, blogs, wikis and social networks to get the information they need. Sometimes that information will be accurate; sometimes it will not, but whatever its quality, this is usually an employee’s first approach to problem solving. If the L&D department ignores this fact, it runs the risk not only of helping bad advice proliferate in their organization, but of being sidelined by actual employee practice and – ultimately – found wanting by management.

Web 2.0 puts the learner in control of the process of learning. This can only be a good thing, because strongly motivated learning is the most effective form. Yet this does not mean that the learning is out of control and the L&D Department out of the loop. On the contrary, the department can make that learning more effective by making the learning journey faster, easier and more effective. It can do this by:

- **Providing the right tools for Web 2.0 learning**
- **Ensuring good learning content is highlighted**
- **Making sure that content is widely distributed and easily found**
- **Opening communications channels, making expertise accessible**

Planning Web 2.0 learning in your workplace

Above all, Web 2.0 is not something that can be served alongside the rest of the organization's learning program, but unconnected to it. It is not an afterthought, a nice-to-have or a bolt-on. Web 2.0 tools present people with a natural way to learn. Ignore that and the L&D department not only ignores a powerful tool, it also allows itself to be ignored as irrelevant.

The solution: Web 2.0 learning must be integrated into current programs, systems and initiatives.

Where to begin?

The many Web 2.0 tools with a potential use for learning include:

- **Wikis – see below for more detail**
- **Blogs – see below for more detail**
- **Social networking tools such as Facebook**
- **Social bookmarking such as del.icio.us and Digg**
- **Microblogging tools such as Twitter**
- **Message/bulletin boards – there are innumerable examples**

With so many tools available, it may be tempting to begin immediately with all of them and see which ones work. That involves considerable reputational risk however: if you get it wrong the first time, it will be far more difficult to persuade people to participate a second time.

Instead, take a three stage approach:

1. **Use Web 2.0 as a consumer** - get involved immediately as a user on as many Web 2.0 tools as you can find. Blog, tweet, social network and contribute to wikis and message boards. This experience will tell you a great deal about which of the available tools would work in your organization.
2. **Set out your approach to Web 2.0 learning** - consider how Web 2.0 changes your role, the objections you are likely to encounter implementing it and how it can work with existing learning systems. See below for more on this.
3. **Begin with a single tool and a strong business case** - give yourself the best chance of success by choosing a single tool with a good business case supporting it.

Work with the organization

No learning technology can be successful when implemented purely for its own sake. Two things are essential before implementing your first Web 2.0 tool: establishing the value case for any new technology and ensuring learner and management participation.

To establish the value of using a new learning technology in your organization, find an existing initiative that could benefit from it. In contrast to 'background' training, which concentrates on building core competencies, such initiatives rely on focused knowledge and skills for an identified immediate need.

Initiatives likely to benefit from some learning support include:

- **Launching a new product or service**
- **Improving internal efficiencies**
- **Improving the value of working with partner organisations**

To learn more detail of how L&D could add value to these, see the CERTPOINT Systems white paper

"Five Steps to Making Learning a Success in 2009".

To build support for your learning initiative, you will need to know who are the key learners, influencers and groups are within your organization, and communicate regularly with them. For more on this, see the CERTPOINT Systems white paper Six Steps to Learner Engagement. Here are the six suggested steps:

1. **Confirm the business driver and your approach**
2. **Confirm the audience**
3. **Understand your stakeholders**
4. **Build a communications plan**
5. **Ensure feedback**
6. **Sustain engagement**

Choosing your first tool

After spending some time as a consumer of Web 2.0 learning technologies, you will know which tool will best fit the needs of your chosen organizational initiative.

A likely choice for a first tool will be a wiki, for the following reasons:

- **Wikis have several proven success stories in business (see below).**
- **The online process of editing a wiki is clearly understandable by learners and managers as an alternative to an existing process (using paper or e-mailed documents).**
- **Wikis produce shared documents, again this is something easily understood by managers and users.**
- **The documents produced using a wiki are almost always produced more cheaply than they could be by any other method.**
- **Unlike, for example, blogs, wikis are not usually seen as frivolous examples of the use of technology.**

Overcome objections to Web 2.0 in learning

Even if there is a clear business case for your tool, there are still two objections you are likely to face when instigating Web 2.0 for learning.

What if they get it wrong?

A common objection is that because Web 2.0 learning tools give some form of control to the learner, there is a risk that they will share inaccurate information. The answer to this is simple: they are already doing this. Over the water cooler, in informal conversations throughout the organization, inaccurate information is already being spread. Because Web 2.0 tools enable you to see what people are saying, they actually give you more control to correct misunderstandings and inaccurate information by bringing it out into the open.

Why aren't they working?

For many higher executives and managers, Web 2.0 is synonymous with Facebook, the ultimate symbol of internet frivolity. To them, the idea that people could use such tools to learn seems absurd. There are two counter arguments to this. The first is to point out the serious, professional and very successful use of such tools elsewhere (e.g. see Pfizer and Sun Microsystems above). The second is to be very limited in your initial use of the tool, and specific about the associated benefits. Confining it to meeting a particular need in a particular instance should prove your case. For example: use a wiki to create best-practice reference guides (reducing the cost of production) or use blogs to facilitate contact with hard-to-reach subject matter experts (enabling faster problem solving).

Why integration with L&D systems is essential

There are a great number of Web 2.0 tools and it is likely that many of these tools are already being used by some of your employees in their free time. This has one great benefit – it means that the induction training that you would otherwise have to carry out has been done for you.

The downside to this availability, however, is that it is tempting to try to create a Web 2.0 learning strategy for your organization by stitching together a patchwork of these free tools. It is possible, but it can be a great deal of work. Usually it means piecing together a solution where the pieces really don't quite integrate. This can be technically challenging, and it should not be the job of the L&D department to establish this technical infrastructure.

Your different Web 2.0 tools need to work not only with each other, they also need to work with your existing learning and development systems. After all, your existing L&D activity will continue – delivering online and classroom courses, providing reference materials and so on. You can get the most benefit from Web 2.0 if you integrate it with this ongoing activity. It makes little sense to separate Web 2.0 learning from the rest of the learning you are supporting, in the same way that you would not separate e-learning from classroom. Both are still methods of learning, separated only by a different delivery mechanism.

Ideally it should be possible for learners to create a wiki using the same system they use for registering for a course. It should be possible for them to comment on a course, and to blog about their learning, all in the same system where they conduct the rest of that learning.

CERTPOINTVLS 6.0 provides this at a deep level. It is a fully-integrated learning system in which Web 2.0 functionality is seamlessly interwoven with a powerful Learning Content Management System (LCMS) and a courseware delivery system. The Web 2.0 functionality in CERTPOINTVLS 6.0 includes fully integrated wikis and blogs, a smart mobile interface and user-generated content and comment.

By making it possible to carry out this Web 2.0 activity within the one system, CERTPOINTVLS does three things. Firstly, it massively reduces the amount of time required to set up an integrated Web 2.0 learning system. Second, it allows the L&D department to centrally administer and control the blogs and wikis, enabling you to know who is blogging about what, how wikis are progressing etc. Third, because it integrates Web 2.0 with your existing learning system, it allows your learners to get the most from your investment in learning, with easy, cross referencing of existing course materials.

Understand the new, wider role for L&D

The collaborative nature of Web 2.0 tools alters the role of the L&D department. The department can no longer be the single place where learning content is created or sourced, course schedules set and learning is controlled. Much of that work has to continue, but in addition, the L&D department must establish a role as a facilitator, moderator, curator and supporter for Web 2.0 learning:

- **Facilitator** - in the classroom a facilitator provides the environment to learn. The Web 2.0 facilitator takes a less obvious role, ensuring that the right tools are in place, with the right atmosphere and culture to enable successful learning.
- **Moderator** - the L&D department cannot become a bottleneck, approving every blog and wiki entry, but it can make smart use of alerts and other devices to reduce multiple entries, check sources are accurate, and act as the final court of appeal in disputes of fact or behaviour.
- **Curator** - because it is in central role, the L&D department can provide structure for wikis and systems for linking blogs that enable them to be used effectively by those searching for information, without restricting those creating it.
- **Supporter** - not all those using your systems will be comfortable with Web 2.0 learning. Others may use it in inappropriate ways – with a focus on the social rather than the professional, for instance. The L&D department must ensure that any Web 2.0 tools used for learning are established with the right culture and with the right support and encouragement so that all learners can make the most of them.

Two key Web 2.0 learning tools

While there is no agreed definition of Web 2.0, most definitions would include blogs and wikis.

Blogs

Blogs can be used in many different ways in learning. Often – especially in higher education – they are used explicitly to support reflective practice, with students encouraged to consider what they are learning, treating the blog as a sort of open diary. This draws on David Kolb's view of reflection in the learning process.

On a blog, however, others can comment on these reflections, and offer support, advice and resources. This makes the blog more of a discussion, extending the role of reflection – as suggested by John Cowan – to interaction with peers.

Blogs can be used in the workplace in this way, particularly by new starters and trainees, but generally they are less likely to be focused explicitly on learning, and more on practical, work-based issues. That does not necessarily reduce their learning impact. For example, a person may be an expert in a particular field and share the results of their experience and research in a blog. This then becomes a resource that others can draw on, link to and comment on. Often the comments on a workplace blog are very useful, sharing thoughts on how this practice can be adapted in other fields within the organization.

Blogs need not only be for experts, though. They are useful tools for anybody to share their current focus of work, and to ask for support.

While the main feature of blogs is their 'diary' component, that need not be the only part. Many bloggers treat their blog as a sort of online library where they can keep documents they frequently refer to, and links to useful information. Using a blog for this makes the information very easy to share with others in the organization.

In these four learning uses of blogs – for reflection, for sharing expertise, for seeking support, and to act as reference points – the L&D department can play a useful role not by interfering and acting as a sort of censor, but by:

- **Monitoring blog content and comments and suggesting useful resources (some of this monitoring can be done automatically, through the use of alerts).**
- **Compile FAQs pages if questions are commonly being asked – helping prevent the spread of bad practice, and reducing 'question churn' where the same question is repeatedly asked in different blogs over time.**
- **Ensuring blogging tools are widely available, and are compatible with other organizational learning systems**
- **Establishing good practice on the use of blogs for learning – for example, how to aggregate RSS feeds to bring favorite blogs onto a single page.**

Wikis

A wiki is a commonly-available online document or set of documents produced collaboratively, the most celebrated example being Wikipedia.

Blogs are often conversational, with entries produced in reaction to a particular issue at a particular time. This means that they are very current, but that useful materials with blogs can be buried as time passes and new entries are posted. Wikis, by contrast, are less conversational and act explicitly as reference points, with every reader allowed to contribute and edit the contents.

Although Wikipedia has been accused of containing inaccurate or frivolous entries, work-based wikis are far less prone to error. The reason: the writers are all usually known to each other, and are unwilling to make mistakes in public. The other side of this is that a well set-up wiki enables contributors to gain recognition within their organization for their expertise.

Many existing organizational wikis are vast pieces of work, containing libraries of information that are too large and all-encompassing to have been created in any other way but collaboratively. When pharmaceutical company Pfizer needed to create and spread information rapidly to assist its R&D team, it created a small wiki. This proved so effective that its use spread rapidly, Pfizerpedia is now an integral part of many employees' daily work.

Sun Microsystems' wiki also began small, as a 'skunk works' project to solve the particular need of a single department. Sun, though, discovering that its customers often had expertise to share, has extended the use of the system outside the organization – a classic example of 'crowd sourcing' information.

Wikis are excellent ways of gathering and sharing tacit knowledge across the organization and beyond. When thinking about using them for learning, the L&D department should consider:

- **Who else is involved? Although Wikis are implicitly all about learning, they are explicitly usually about a particular subject matter. Work with subject matter experts (SMEs) to allow them to shine and ensure their active participation and support.**
- **Consider creating support materials such as Pfizer's When Jo Meets Charlie slide show to help late adopters understand the simplicity and value of wikis.**
- **Working with SMEs to set up the wiki's structure.**
- **Monitoring entries regularly to prevent duplication, and check that sources are accurate.**
- **Ensuring your wiki tools are compatible with other organizational learning systems.**

Web 2.0 learning and mobile devices

Mobile devices are intimately linked to Web 2.0 applications and to this more informal way of learning. Mobile phones, like Web 2.0, are all about communicating and sharing. The practical effect of this is that learners increasingly are turning to their mobile devices – particularly to smart phones – to search for solutions to problems. Their first point of call is most likely to be the internet – either a web search or a social network.

This is where the L&D department should try to be smart and – where possible – provide mobile phone access to as much of the department’s online learning and Web 2.0 capability as possible. It is far easier to train people via the ways they are ready and willing to use than to ask them to change behavior and then to start learning.

Web 2.0 at work

Imagine a new Gen-Y employee joining an organisation. (Don Tapscott defines Generation-Y members as those born between 1977 and 1997.) How would they expect to learn? How might they learn in a modern organization with a well-integrated approach to learning, and how would it contrast with the experience in a traditional organization?

Stage	Traditional Learning	Learning Integrated with Web 2.0
Before arrival	Brochure to read.	New joiner browses wiki ‘new starter’ section. Guided e-Learning on boarding program. Mentors available on social network for questions.
First day	Series of classroom lectures.	Face-to-face address from key executive. Interactive e-Learning delivers and tests essentials. Joiners browse social networks to understand organizational culture and expertise.
First week	Employee required to read employee handbook. More classroom lectures.	e-Learning and testing on critical knowledge. Joiners read employee wiki handbook – key content is assessed using tests delivered on mobile phone. Podcasts provide background company knowledge. Joiners encouraged to interact with others on the company social networking. Joiners encouraged to begin a reflective blog, shared with their company mentor.
First month	Classroom courses on company essentials – e.g. use of systems. Assignment to different departments, arriving as a new face each time.	Interactive e-Learning courses provide essential knowledge of company systems and processes, which is assessed in context. Joiners are assigned to different departments, arriving after having made contact first online and introduced themselves over the social network.

In an economy where finding and recruiting the most talented people for your organisation is essential, which of these two environments will give them the best first impression of the company, get them up to productivity faster, and ensure their long term commitment better?

Web 2.0 learning and the extended enterprise

The internet does not stop at company borders. Neither does web 2.0, and neither does learning. As Sun Microsystems has found, Web 2.0 is a tremendous approach not only for learning, but also for getting closer to your clients, and understanding them better.

CERTPOINT Systems has long championed the idea of learning across the extended enterprise, learning that reaches to partners and clients. Now, with Web 2.0, the impact of this extended training reach has grown. The informal instant access of Web 2.0 ensures that you are in real contact with your clients and partners all the time, understanding ways in which you can help them succeed better.

About CERTPOINT Systems Inc

CERTPOINT Systems provides an all-in-one software suite to manage talent, deliver knowledge, and track business results. Global leaders like Toyota, Honda, and Black & Decker use CERTPOINT's technology to arm their employees and partners with the knowledge they need to win and retain customers. Founded in 1996, CERTPOINT Systems is used by more than 1,000 businesses in over 40 countries and languages to deliver knowledge beyond the organization deep into sales and service channels.

CERTPOINTVLS™ is a global learning technology solution that puts talent and knowledge to work throughout the organization and extended enterprise to increase and measure performance on the job for stronger business results. The suite integrates Learning Management (LMS), Content Management, Competency Management and Web 2.0 Collaboration into a seamless learning system for creating, managing, delivering and tracking all online learning activities.

The CERTPOINT 2009 White Paper Series

CERTPOINT Systems' 2009 white paper series is entitled The Effective L&D Manager, and aims to spread good practice in three areas:

- **The business impact of L&D**
- **Reaching learners**
- **Collaborative learning**

Publication will be spread over the year. To download the white papers, and to register for news of upcoming white papers, visit www.certpointsystems.com

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