

## CAN PR 2.0 BE EXPLAINED?

**Assoc. Prof. Dr. Diana Popova**  
*Burgas Free University*

***Abstract:** The paper addresses the issue of PR 2.0 and how it is related to Web 2.0. Analyzed are the factors which have brought about the changes in traditional PR. Focused are the new expectations of businesses and their clients regarding interaction via social media. The main thrust of the paper is the new power of bonding a traditional profession with the latest developments in communication channels.*

***Key words:** PR 2.0, Web 2.0, social media, communication*

### **Why is an explanation of PR 2.0 needed?**

It is probably too late to explain PR 2.0 now that we are allegedly heading for PR 3.0. Or, maybe, it is not because a lot of people, even those involved with PR, are not yet clear about what these numbers stand for. Are we witnessing another technological fad or is there a real need for differentiating between PR 1.0, PR 2.0, PR 3.0 and whatever numbers may follow? Some believe that the number after PR is there to demonstrate that the industry has reached a new summit which will eventually be surpassed by new ones; others infuse it with different meanings.

There is currently a debate about whether or not there is or there will be a PR 3.0 in the foreseeable future. And while Brian Solis states firmly: “And let me point out, that there will not be a 3.0 or any other rev numbers, unless there is another tremendous evolution, fusion, or breakthrough in the practice, science, and art of communications.” [9], we should not dismiss completely the possibility of another leap forward of both the Web and PR. But all in good time. While it is beneficial to be ahead of one’s time, one should not try to jump over periods of time that are legitimately needed for the evolution not only of technology, but also of people’s mindset, and the development of the market.

The strongest criticism of the rushed announcement of the arrival of PR 3.0 comes from Solis and rightfully so as he is THE expert in PR 2.0. He disowns the arguments that supporters of PR 3.0 quote, saying that an increased revenue and growth of the industry cannot mark “an entirely new era of PR”. He calls such an attempt “laughable, sensationalist” and “off the mark” [10].

Even though Solis who introduced the term PR 2.0 disagrees, it is generally accepted that PR 2.0 is derived from Web 2.0 and this necessitates defining the latter before dealing with the former. With the Web 2.0 social development of the internet new methods for practicing PR have emerged. They are part and parcel of the file sharing culture that prevails in cyberspace and require a new understanding of the opportunities open to the PR practitioners. Alongside that, there is a need for an awareness of the new responsibilities of those using the PR 2.0 tools to reach much changed audiences.

The present interest in social media demonstrated by people from literally each and every field including PR does not mean that they should abandon everything dating from before Web 2.0 to focus on social media. There is still a large percentage of the population which does not use these social tools. However, there is no denying the fact that the world is going in the direction of ‘webberizing’ all that can be done on and via the web.

### **Web 2.0 – just another label or a fundamental difference?**

In 2004 O’Reilly Media and CMP organized a conference to demonstrate and explain the innovations behind the upsurge of the Web. During a brainstorming session Dale Dougherty used the term “Web 2.0” which immediately became the name of the conference and sooner than expected – the new name of the Web.

So Web 2.0 is the not so recent development of the internet which now encompasses social networks, blogs and wikis. These new features of the World Wide Web have brought about considerable changes to the way people are now using the world’s newest communication channel. “Web 2.0 is much more than just pasting a new user interface onto an old application. It’s a way of thinking, a new perspective on the entire business of software – from concept through delivery, from marketing through support.” [6]

People like Darcy DiNucci, Kingsley Idehen, Eric Knorr, and John Robb have contributed to the understanding of Web 2.0 with a number of publications. Robb has written: "What is Web 2.0? It is a system that breaks with the old model of centralized Web sites and moves the power of the Web/Internet to the desktop." [4]

The Web has entered a new era in which the power of network effects is unleashing unforeseen opportunities (as well as threats). One great contribution to the interactions of mankind has been the advent of new social outlets for communication. People today have unprecedented freedom to engage in conversation which is an empowerment in itself despite the criticism of opponents to virtual contacts. In a way Web 2.0 has democratized communications.

### **What PR 2.0 is not**

When a notion is understood or interpreted in a number of ways it is often defined by what it is not. This is the case with PR 2.0.

Brian Solis first coined the phrase PR 2.0 way back in the 1990’s. But for a long time it remained unnoticed. “It’s been an uphill battle since we (a hybrid breed of PR and web marketers) first started using the term in 1995/6 as a way of analyzing how the Web and multimedia was redefining PR and marketing communications, while also building the toolkit to reinvent how companies communicate with influencers and directly with people.” Solis thinks that very few specialists fully understand the basis of the evolution of Web 1.0 into Web 2.0, what it means, and last but not least, the technology that makes everything 2.0 work. The guru of PR 2.0 says: “PR 2.0 was not at all inspired by Web 2.0. It is, however, influenced by it – just as it was by Web 1.0, search engine marketing (SEM) and social media.” [8]

At the mention of PR 2.0 most people think of Social Media. “But, PR 2.0 isn’t Social Media. And Social Media isn’t Web 2.0. These are also distinct movements that can complement and inspire each other.” Solis vehemently defends the idea that not only PR 2.0 and Web 2.0 are not the same thing but “PR 2.0 “is not a derivative of Web 2.0” [8]

The reason why PR 2.0 is always associated with these new Internet phenomena is that it uses the tools that they use to talk with its audiences in a new manner, totally different from that of traditional media and the face to face communication at special PR events. The context is different in that it is mediated by software designed for easy, quick, large-scale, and self-ruled communication.

Having said all that, there remains a very legitimate question to answer – “Are we talking about a different profession?” Well, PR 2.0 is not a new profession. It is still based on the same principles and has the same goals as traditional PR – create a positive image of people, brands or companies, get good publicity for its clients and thus keep them happy, predict the future and be ready with an agenda, to name but the most obvious. It is the same “old” profession but it requires some ‘added value’ – new skills and competencies to carry out these activities successfully on the Web. There are hopes attached to the new prospects for the development of this profession, namely that PR 2.0 will elevate the reputation of a job with faded glory. The number of businesses who would say they do not need a PR department or person because they have a computer savvy who can communicate with their publics is increasing. PR specialists get pushed aside by those comfortable using the software and tools of communication on the Web. Hence the need to rediscover and reestablish the profession.

#### **What PR 2.0 actually is**

At the dawn of social networking (when Solis first used the term PR 2.0), the forums that were launched were not as many and as easy to use as they are today. People could access the websites of businesses but not many businesses had their own websites. E-mail contacts, great as they were in comparison with the traditional communication channels, provided only a fraction of the options for exchanging information that Web 2.0 offers its users.

Until Web 2.0 surfaced, PR communication was always strictly controlled and supervised. PR professionals used to speak mainly through an influencer – the media. Even though the influencers are still being used, the new technological and software development of the global internet platform has created the best conditions for a direct to the publics approach through social media. The PR tools – press releases, articles and events have proved less effective than before the advent of Web 2.0 because the audiences and their preferred channels of information have changed. What is more, at the time of only the traditional PR tools, the direct influence and measurable results for the businesses were not really tangible.

Deirdre Breakenridge calls PR 2.0 “the convergence of Public Relations and the Internet with potential to change how communications professionals reach customers and online communities with social media strategies” [11]. She claims that PR practitioners

can no longer rely entirely on their traditional “influencer” – the media. It is true that the best route for PR today is to go to its online audiences as they are their own media, i.e. they have learned and are getting better at being their own media. They practice “do-it-yourself” journalism and create content whenever they post information and comments on the web.

Today’s PR 2.0 tools – blogs, e-mails, search engines, social media, etc., offer not only a great way to reach the clients but also a better way to measure the effect produced on the clients by gauging the business results. The businesses just cannot waste the opportunity to use the new PR. People of all ages and professions post text and video, read and write blogs, tag written sources, join online discussion groups, have profiles on professional social networks. Social media should be looked at as a maturing business tool in the hands of PR 2.0 with all the advantages of online advertising, publicizing, and marketing campaigns.

PR 2.0 allows people to establish connections, meet people who can become their friends, business partners, promoters, or sellers. Social media does not need to become the main or only communication channel but it has become ONE of the main channels of connecting with others. Given that printed media has been on the wane for a few years now (*France-Soir* and *La Tribune* – France, *Eleftherotypia* – Greece, *Público* – Spain, etc. have stopped printing), it can no longer be the reliable influencer of a decade ago.

We talk about PR 2.0 not because PR has gone beyond digital progress, but because it has gone outside its traditional channels and onto Web 2.0 and is experiencing a new period of evolution as many other professions. The PR of the 21<sup>st</sup> century cannot continue to focus only on communicating TO TRADITIONAL media. It should focus more on communicating THROUGH SOCIAL media. Future PR practitioners need to be initiated in the vast opportunities open to them in cyber space. This, among other benefits, can boost the respect they get from clients and audiences whose set of expectations has increased and become more sophisticated.

Social Media and Web 2.0 are an exceptional opportunity to improve PR, restore its position as the promoter that every individual and business would like to employ and, in general, help it join the bandwagon of digital upsurge. The daily routines of how people look for and find information have changed. More and more there is a shift away from printed media to digital media in general and in particular to Internet. Whichever business wants to stay in business, it has to go on the Web or, as previously said, ‘webberize’ if not all its activities, at least most of them.

The directness of contact with the audiences via social media saves the PR sector all the resources it uses under conventional circumstances – too many staff, a lot of money, and time. The exposure that a company, brand, or event gets surpasses traditional expectations and raises a sustainable awareness among audiences.

### Conclusion

When networking on social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, MySpace, Google Plus+, DeviantArt, etc.) people can become powerful through their numbers. Communities, states and the world have already witnessed this fact many times. Businesses and institutions have realized the potential behind this power and the PR industry has to follow suit. However, it does not suffice to just join the social networks and watch. The publics demand active participation both on a business and on a personal level. PR should step in and make this happen in the most effective way benefiting all parties involved, acknowledging the power that Internet users have and changing alongside the changes that the Web is undergoing.

Here is how Solis and Breakenridge have explained PR 2.0: “PR 2.0 starts with a different mindset and approach, neither of which is rooted in broadcast marketing or generic messaging. It’s all about humanising and personalising stories specifically for the people we want to reach.” [7] It is essential to point out that for the time being the efforts should go in the direction of helping professionals and clients figure out how to use the potential of the integrated PR and Web 2.0, how to make the most of it without getting lost in the maze of yet another development (PR 3.0) which has not even fully amalgamated.

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