

# MIGRATING

to a Web 2.0 World

Creating a powerful interactive  
business platform



Tom Beach



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Creating a Powerful Interactive Business Platform

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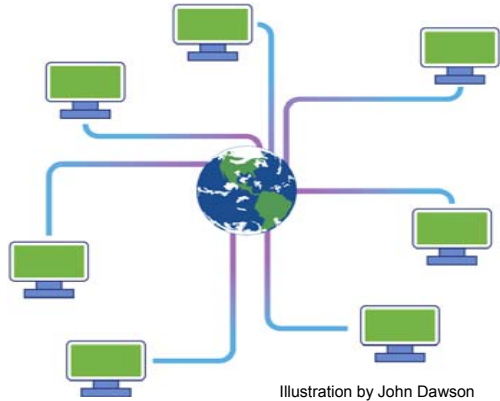
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## Introduction

The term “Web 2.0” was first used by Tim O’Reilly\*. As he described it, “Web 2.0 is the business revolution in the computer industry caused by the move to the Internet as a platform, and an attempt to understand the rules for success on the new platform.” Web 2.0 is the evolution of your web site into a powerful interactive business platform by creating a strong web presence. We interact with many business owners who are in various stages of Internet usage. Some have a simple, glorified brochure-type websites, while others have already adopted many of the interactive tools available today to take advantage of the new Internet.

In order to succeed in this “Web 2.0” world business owners must gain a better understanding of two major web trends: *content proliferation* and *social media* (networking). We’ll explain these two major trends and discuss how our personal experience can help you capitalize on both content proliferation and networking. Lastly, you’ll give some action steps to help you capitalize on these trends and grow your business.

\* You can find Tim O’Reilly at ([www.radar.oreilly.com](http://www.radar.oreilly.com))

## Riding the Technology Wave

By early 2007, the pace of new technologies for video production and web applications seemed to be on the verge of exploding. Technological advances in solid state drives affected cameras and computers; the proliferation of video on the web (Youtube, itunes); more powerful software made editing video and constructing more complex websites with built in content management systems easier; and new tools on the web for PR and marketing, social networking and viral marketing came online. Thanks to these breakthroughs, our business became busier than ever. We soon realized that we had to offer some of our services in a different way, causing us to re-evaluate how we could integrate all these new technologies to best benefit our clients. Finally, towards the fourth quarter of 2007, everything seemed to come together, giving us new ideas about how we could integrate these emerging technologies into a viable Internet strategy for businesses, including our own.



## What is the Internet -- *really*?



## The Internet = Information Abundance

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The first breakthrough we had in late 2007 shifted our view of what the Internet really is and how it affects consumers' and companies' interactions with each other. Simply put, for the consumer, the web is nothing more than a mind-boggling source of information available anytime to anyone that has access to that source via a computer. The challenge for the consumer is to find the information they need, quickly and easily. For businesses, the Internet is a place to put your information. The challenge for business owners is to make your information easy to find by consumers that might need and want your products or services.

Taking this viewpoint of *information accessibility*, we see that the web has changed our society in the sense that we no longer live in a time of information scarcity. Rather, we now live in an age of information abundance – of information inundation. There has never been a time when so much information has been so easily available to so many people. On the flip side, it's never been easier to produce and publish information –accurate or not.

Looking at the web as an infinite source of abundant information, we realize that how we business owners market ourselves and our information—via website content—needs to change. The question now is how to market ourselves in an age of information abundance.\*

\* For a more detailed discussion of this topic, read [The Long Tail](#) by Chris Anderson.

## Where is the Internet going?

### The Internet and the power of content proliferation and social networking

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The Internet has unleashed two important trends: content proliferation and social networking. These trends will continue to grow and develop for the foreseeable future—which means that, in order for you to become a trusted authority in your prospective business, you must create more significant, meaty, *valuable* content on the web that's easy for both your prospective customers and existing clients to find. The kinds of content we're talking about includes but is not limited to: free downloads such as white papers, e-books; press releases, blogs, posted comments to blog entries, detailed product information, and so on.

Businesses must also take advantage of the social networking aspects of the Internet. Why should a business develop its social network? Because every piece of online content: product updates, company news, white papers, etc., that you put on your website and via links to social networking sites will make your website and its related content more portable; in other words, you'll exponentially multiply your web presence by linking to as many other websites as possible.

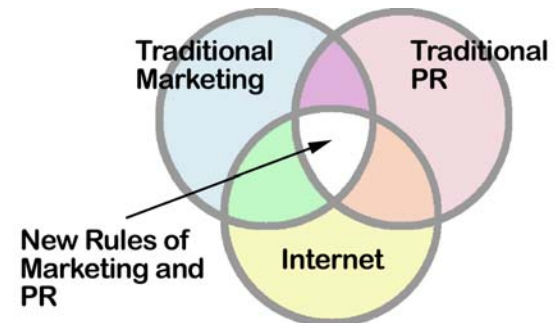
Over the next year or so, we expect to see more social networking sites such as Youtube, MySpace and Facebook address niche markets. Specific demographics will appear out of these networking sites, dominating their respective groups – making your targeted content more powerful and even more

effective at reaching your prospects and clients. Your PR machine will also kick into gear as the people that can write about and publicize your company and its unique products and services will have more ways to find you—and for you to find them.

### Marketing and Public Relations will merge, further stretching and blurring websites' boundaries

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The disciplines of marketing and PR will merge and become indistinguishable from each other.\* As marketing and PR become more intertwined, businesses will need to build a more solid web presence – the old informational website as online company brochure just won't cut it anymore. In order to appeal to the growing number of savvy web users, companies to become successful (or to continue being successful), must produce and publish compelling information on the web. This content needs to be interactive and expansive, pushing past the static informational websites that we've lived with for the past ten years.



\* For a great discussion of this topic, read [The New Rules of Marketing and PR](#) by David Meerman Scott.

It's all about creating lots of good content - and getting it out over as many distribution channels as possible



## Case Study of the Long Tail in practice: GymSmarts.com

While TRB Designs has a busy and growing video production and Internet consulting business, we also spend about half of our time running GymSmarts.com, a full e-commerce site that caters to amateur and professional gymnasts and that serves as a training resource for their coaches. As a former Olympic gymnast –I was a member of the United States men's gymnastics team and competed in the 1976 Montreal Games–I have extensive first-hand knowledge about what it takes to train and compete at the international level.

In the early 2000s, when we first established TRB Designs, we were busy producing videos for businesses when one of my former coaches asked if we could video and produce gymnastic instructional training videos for coaches. It was one of those classic “why didn't we think of that?” moments: it never occurred to us to produce videos about something about which we had in depth knowledge and passion.

Before GymSmarts, the market for gymnastic training videos barely existed. It was almost impossible to find decent training videos for gymnastic coaches. The videos that were out there were targeted to a more general market and didn't really teach a coach how to teach specific skills or techniques. We came across an Internet forum that summed up the pre-GymSmarts world: “What is it with gymnastic coaches? Are they trying to keep all their information secret?”

GymSmarts.com is successful because the site makes it easy for

gymnasts to find information about the sport and convenient for coaches to find and buy DVDs to help them perfect their craft. We were amazed at how quickly the site became a self-sustaining phenomenon (and a consistent source of income for us). We now sell and ship gymnastic DVDs all over the world. GymSmarts has become a highly respected and recognized brand throughout the world's gymnastic community. We feel really good about making quality products that help coaches become more knowledgeable and gymnasts improve their technique. Best of all, we get to give hardworking coaches, the unsung heroes of the sport, the credit they deserve. GymSmarts sends royalty checks from the DVDs we sell to the coaches who spend most of their lives in the gym developing their athletes.

GymSmarts publishes at least two DVDs a month. Because of the amount of DVDs we produce, it didn't take long for the site to become cluttered-looking and hard for users to navigate, making the DVDs hard to find (and buy) on the site. Realizing that our site needed to be updated, we surveyed both current and potential users about how we could improve the site.

Our customers gave us great suggestions, from improving the DVD cover designs to providing biographical information about the coaches featured in the DVDs. After all, most of the general public recognizes the athletes, but not the coaches. Most Baby Boomers and Generation Xers know about Olga Korbut, the darling of the 1972 Munich Olympics. But do you know who her coach was?\*

We incorporated our customers' feedback and completely redesigned the website in May of 2006 with the best technology available at that time. We improved the navigation to include a

breakdown of product type so users could go directly to DVDs specific to the different types of gymnasts and events, added a limited search capabilities, and more complete biographies of all the coaches. We also built an opt-in only email list to send product updates and news to customers by request.

\* Renald Knysh

## The more you produce, the more you sell

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When you market your business the right way on the web, you can sell as much as you produce. We discovered firsthand through GymSmarts.com that the more DVDs we put on the site, the more we sold. Even more amazing to us is that everything we put online sells! To date, we haven't published anything that hasn't sold. We keep things simple: produce high quality material and make it easy for consumers to find and purchase our products. To date, we have produced DVDs for 24 coaches and more than 100 gymnastic instructional products, and are working on material for many more.

We now have coaches and people in the gymnastics community coming to us to help market them, their ideas and their products. Our own experience with GymSmarts.com proved to us that the more information you produce, if you make it easy to find online by enriching and expanding upon your website's content and via social networking and other links, you will sell products as fast as you post them on your site.



## Is there really such a thing as too much content?

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We get feedback from many people, including more traditional web designers, PR companies and marketing companies that too much content makes the website look “messy” or “cluttered.” This is a typical response from someone trained in traditional marketing and PR and who doesn’t understand the current nature of the web. Most people use the Internet to research information. A great looking site will get someone to investigate your site; valuable content increases your site’s “stickiness” – good content is the glue that keeps visitors on your site and gets them to keep coming back again and again.

## Content is King

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Search engines love content (as long as it’s relevant) and links. Typically the more relevant the content is on your website, the more your natural search engine rankings will rise.\* Search engine optimization is a very large and complicated topic and beyond the scope of this booklet. Simply put, natural search engine ranking is the order or rank in which your website appears on a search engine results list (such as Google, Yahoo and MSN) when someone searches for keywords related to your product or services. As a result of your placement on the search engine’s ranking list, more people will find your site, find it helpful, and refer people to the information on it with word-of-mouth (or “word of mouse”) referrals and links.

After all, search engines don’t rank sites by their aesthetic qualities or by artistic merit of a site’s design or appearance. And while site layout and design is very important—especially when it comes to users’ ability to navigate and find information on your site—on the web, content is king and should not be sacrificed for the sake of layout appearance or design. Of course, there is much more to search engine optimization (SEO), but making content the priority is a great place to start and an extremely important concept to understand.

\* For a more in depth discussion of the merits of paid vs. natural search, you might want to Google the two terms, or visit: <http://www.toprankblog.com/2006/09/organic-versus-paid-search-results/>



## Navigation and Organization

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Adding lots of content on to a site does present unique challenges to website design. That's what makes organization and navigation of a site extremely important. It's irritating to be on a website that doesn't let you find the information you need. The story of how Apple designed the first iPod comes to mind. Apple CEO Steve Jobs insisted that anyone should be able to get to any song on the player in just three clicks of its iconic wheel. A great site should be organized and designed in the same simple and elegant way.

## Create growth by addressing the needs of your customers via content development and site structure

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In the pre-Internet world, I worked as a branch manager and vice president for a large stock brokerage firm. We created several programs to help educate customers about the basics of investing and how they could make educated decisions about what to do with their money.

The brokerage firm trained us to take a needs-based sales approach with our clients, in which we matched products and investment strategies to best meet our clients' investment goals and personalities. Our bonuses depended on our customer service scores. The company tracked these service scores for both the branches and individual employees very carefully, constantly surveying clients for feedback on various investment concerns. The firm listened closely to what their clients wanted, devoting an entire department to customer suggestions. New products were often developed as a result of customers' suggestions and needs.

All this listening to the customers paid off: in the twelve years I was there, the company grew from 1,000 to 22,000 employees. Net income grew from \$7.4 million to \$348.5 million and revenue grew from \$392 million to \$2.7 billion from 1988 to 1998.

The most successful companies work hard to build relationships with their customers and to satisfy their needs. It was true then, and it's still true today—the Internet hasn't changed that, and never will. But the Internet has made it easier to collect

information and be more responsive to about your clients' needs. It can also make it faster and easier for you to design products and services to meet your clients' needs.

Once you have all this information about your customers' different needs, you can group your customers into different segments and design different areas of your site to address each group. For example, GymSmarts.com focuses on several customer segments, including men's and women's gymnastics, recreational and rhythmic gymnastics, trampoline and sports psychology, to name just a few.

A great way to start to organize your site is to create a navigational structure based on relevant content. A good example of this is our main business site, [www.trbdesigns.com](http://www.trbdesigns.com). As our business grew we were getting asked more about the internet and web marketing. As a result we have the site organized around four distinct customer needs: video production, web marketing strategies, web site development and publishing. The New York Public Library's website (<http://www.nypl.org/>) is another example of a site that is organized on the home page around four different groups of customers, including a section dedicated to library patrons that want to donate money – a crucial feature for non-profit sites.

## Who *really* owns your website and your presence on the internet?



## Putting needs-based selling into practice on the web

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In today's world of consumer participation and control, your customers own your web presence. If you take the time to listen to them, your customers will tell you everything you need to know about what their needs are, including the types of products and services they might buy. While your company controls most of the information and organization of your site, you should designate someone at your company to be your site manager, making the updating and organization of your company site their most important priority.

## Your website is the face of your company.

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Your company needs to have an effective system in place to update and upload information about your company quickly and efficiently. If these systems aren't responsive, your customers won't feel like they are being listened to and your site will quickly become irrelevant.

## Your website *is* your marketing and PR department

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Many business owners tell us that they'd like to update their websites but can't afford to do so. This just tells us that they don't understand what a valuable role their website plays as part of their overall PR and marketing plan. Take a moment to think about how much your company spends on traditional methods of advertising, including print ads, press releases, bill boards, TV and radio—chances are it's a significant amount. However, since most people first discover and experience your company through your website, you need to make your website a key element of your overall marketing plan.

For example, once you write a press release, have your web administrator check it to make sure it contains content-rich key words that define your business, words (and relevant links) that will brand you and optimize the piece once you put it online. Since you should put all press releases on your website, the text needs to be examined and altered for search engine optimization. In order for you and your company to understand and leverage the power of the web, you must find the money and resources to develop a site that is responsive to your customers' needs and that accelerates your company's marketing efforts.

## One last comment on content and structure: Building your site for long term scalability

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A well designed site needs to have the capacity to grow and adapt to both changes in the market and within your company. In order to do this, you need to address the site's underlying structure; a very technical area which we won't discuss here in too much detail. However, it's worth mentioning that the technology for the underlying website structure has changed dramatically over the last couple of years. Just make sure that your site is written with one of the newer content management systems (CMS). This will make it easier for your company to manage information on the site, grow, and adapt to new web marketing strategies.



Photograph by Jimmie, Jackie, Tom & Asha



## Social Media and Networking – the Future of Business

## Social Networking

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We've talked about the power of content proliferation on the web as a major Internet trend. The second major trend on the web is social networking, an area of the web that will grow and change radically over the next few years. Most of us would agree that the best way to grow our businesses is by word-of-mouth referrals. Social networking helps your company develop a valuable and intricate network for word-of-mouth referrals on the web.

So what exactly are blogs, online forums, and social networks? Web strategist Jeremiah Owyang (<http://www.web-strategist.com/blog/>) describes a forum as a social mixer, a blog a keynote speaker, and a social network is like sitting at a conference luncheon topic table. Similar to our discussion about content, we will not discuss specific social networking tools here, but will instead explore what this trend means and why it is important to your business. For now, it's enough that you know that your company must participate in these and other areas in order to thrive in the future.

## Web presence is more than just a website

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Your potential web presence is much more than your businesses website. When we consult with clients about their websites, we look at developing their total exposure on the web. This can be as simple or complex as your resources allow. In general, SEO (search engine optimization), while important, is makes up only one piece of a company's effective website strategy. You need to build your site to accommodate and integrate with the appropriate social networks. There are many tools and techniques to make this happen; the three we described earlier are: placing videos on large social networking sites, i.e. Youtube, participating in user groups on large networking sites, i.e. FaceBook, and blogging. If your company is not being talked about in forums, blogs, and social networking sites, you limit your web presence and makes your site much more difficult to find.



## Portability

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Portability, the art of making the content on your site easily accessible or portable to and from other websites, is one of the key strategies that you must address when developing your website. Portability is also more than structuring your site so it is easily navigated from a cell phone, although this may be a viable concern for your company.

For example, our company TRB Designs produces a significant amount of video for the web as part of companies' overall online content. We also recommend ways companies can create maximum possible exposure for their videos. We might place your video on various video websites (i.e. YouTube, Flickr), appropriate to the company's marketing plan. We can make your video easy for others in the digital world to embed on their sites. By embedding your video with RSS (Really Simple Syndication), people can also subscribe to your videos. All these elements make a portion of your site portable and expand your company's web presence.

*Just a quick note about this example:* We have read several stories about people using a site like YouTube.com for their videos and give all the credit to their increased sale to putting video there. In fact we get many requests to help companies do this. However, simply having posting your videos on a big site doesn't guarantee that your products will sell—there is more to it than that. Viral Marketing, like SEO, is always a gamble, so be wary of anyone who claims they can do make your company or product go viral—which is why large social networking should be just one part of your integrated web marketing strategy.

## Conclusions

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Online consumers are demanding a more responsive, needs-based sales process. Thanks to the Internet, Generation Yers (who grew up in this digital world), Generation Xers and Baby Boomers alike are savvier consumers, participating, researching, discussing and reviewing products and services more than ever before. As business owners with a growing online presence, it is our responsibility to pay attention to what consumers say and make sure that we address their needs. Businesses need to provide consumers with the online content they are looking for, making it as easy as possible for them to find pertinent information, whether it is on your website, or some portion of your site that is portable and located elsewhere on the web, including blogs and social networking sites. When you look at all these different trends and combine them into an integrated marketing strategy, you'll find that each piece contributes to your business's success. When implementing the multitude of tools available today, they must be relevant to your goals and your overall marketing strategy.



## Next steps

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How can you grow your business by getting the most out of these trends?

- ◆ First, if you haven't defined your long term business goals, take some time now to write them down. After all, it's hard to get to where you want to go if you don't know where that is.
- ◆ Second, in order to get the most current information about your market, set-up a reader at: <http://www.blogpond.com.au/2008/01/09/how-to-set-up-google-reader/> and subscribe to blogs relevant to your business.
- ◆ Third, make comments on blogs that you respect, most blog posts have a comment section at the end of the post. To learn more about blogging etiquette see: [http://www.rohitbhargava.typepad.com/weblog/2006/10/introducing\\_the.html](http://www.rohitbhargava.typepad.com/weblog/2006/10/introducing_the.html). The bloggers will appreciate the input.
- ◆ Fourth, sign up on a large social networking site such as Facebook or MySpace. There are numerous groups interested and involved in the same things that you and your business are.

Finally, if you are ready to take the next step to grow your business, we are here to help you, so please contact us. Either way, we'd appreciate the feedback and the opportunity to hear from other business owners and digital immigrants like ourselves.



## About Tom Beach

Co-principle of TRB Design, Inc., a video production and web strategy company. As a video production company we have produced hundreds of videos for retail sales and for web distribution. As a web strategist we have developed or consulted on web marketing strategies for many companies. The goals of our strategies take the most appropriate web tools and technologies to help companies and individuals reach their objectives and integrate effectively with their communities and users.

We also own and operate [gymsmarts.com](http://gymsmarts.com), a commercial website serving gymnastic coaches around the world. Through this website we are the largest producer and distributor of gymnastic training videos and information in the world. This site gives us the unique hands experience of operating a commercial site. We can tell you what has and hasn't worked for us.

Charles Schwab & Company Inc., Vice President and Branch Manager. The goal of the branch was to expand the marketing area around the branch and grow the customer base. To accomplish this goal we created several programs to help educate customers to learn about investing and how they could best make educated decisions about their finances. Through the branch and its support staff we managed in excess of 7,000 clients.

International Gymnast: As a national team member I represented the United States of America in international competitions around the world, from duel competitions to the Olympic Games.

Follow my Digital Migration Blog at [trbdesigns.com/blog](http://trbdesigns.com/blog)