

Web 2.0 Challenge Argument—Jeff De Cagna

- Web 2.0 is, arguably, the most significant and far-reaching innovation opportunity associations have ever had because its premise connects directly to the heart of fundamental ideas that animate our organizations: building communities around personal and/or professional identities, supporting active engagement and collaboration around ideas and issues that matter, creating and sharing meaningful learning and knowledge and igniting a spirit of activism and advocacy. Web 2.0 is redefining all of these concepts and, in turn, we have a responsibility to redefine the way our organizations think about and act on them.

- The opportunities for innovation in our organizations are not limited to products and services. Associations create experiences, develop processes and practices, create technologies, operate on the basis of business models and pursue strategies. All of these areas of work, and more, are open to innovation in some manner by adopting Web 2.0 mindsets and using the tools to create a low-cost, high-impact technology platform to support the work of innovation.

- Let's talk about five of the core themes that drive Web 2.0 and look at how adopting those mindsets can help your associations innovate.

+Harnessing Collective Intelligence—Web 2.0 is about users creating their own value. If associations can engage more people, we can create more value, assuming that those people are collaborating in a way that allows us to tap into the collective intelligence of group.

Example: Rethink conferences and meetings as knowledge networks and engage as many participants as possible in creating new knowledge around the subject matter. Get people collaborating and sharing, keep the process simple, i.e., let them choose how they want to engage, and make it easy for them to contribute by using multiple technologies, including e-mail, blogs, wikis and so forth.

+Innovation in Assembly—Web 2.0 is about making it easier for users to access content and information and put it together in new ways to create new value. If associations can open up their knowledge bases and trust a wide variety of collaborators, we can offer members and customers access to new products, services and experiences, which may lead to the emergence of new business models.

Example: Rethink the way we organize and share information and knowledge resources. Expand the availability of such resources, offer them in a variety of formats (or encourage the creation of new formats by your members) and make them available in smaller chunks. If you work for an association that is grappling with the challenge of open access, leveraging your knowledge content in this way may create new business models, such as “simplify, synthesize and syndicate.”

+Rich User Experiences—Web 2.0 is about combining the best of online and offline experiences. If associations can seamlessly integrate knowledge sharing, collaboration and relationship-building in virtual space with activities in occur in physical space, we can enrich those experiences for everyone.

Example: Rethink the meaning of experience as something that occurs in a single place at a defined point in time or in only one dimension. If you want to facilitate the formation of networks and communities, it isn't enough to set up an online space and wait for people to show up. The social architecture of offline participation must be visible and robust within the technology architecture as well in order to build trust and the willingness to collaborate. Simplicity is a strategic advantage, i.e., the easier it is for your members to participate in ways that make sense to them, the more likely they are to sustain their involvement.

+Perpetual Beta—Web 2.0 is about the on-going evolution of applications with the direct involvement of users in improving and innovating them. If associations can adopt more a perpetual beta mindset, and remain open to on-going innovation, our organizations will be more successful.

Example: Instead of conducting endless surveys and focus groups, use social media tools to create and support prototypes, service tests and other experiments, and let your member interact with them directly. Incorporate feedback and allow those initial probes evolve into on-going beta tests that are innovated through use.

+Leveraging the Long Tail—Web 2.0 is about the ability to deliver (and for users to find) value in very small niches inexpensively through new technology. If associations leverage the forces of the Long Tail and allow members to connect and collaborate where they are, we can innovate in an entirely new way.

Example: Decentralize activities that create value for members and get members directly involved with them. In forming communities, for example, let your members determine the kinds of groups they want to form, even if those groups start out very small. Create a context in which many small conversations can flourish and, in the aggregate, create considerable value for the whole organization.