

Review of the Year 2008 and Trends Watch—Part 1

by **Paula J. Hane**

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The recession dominates our thoughts, of course ...

It's hard not to be discouraged when we see the belt-tightening going on across all sectors in reaction to the tough economic conditions—cost cutting, layoffs, closures, loss of advertising, scaled back growth plans, etc. ... But we're a tough and resilient lot. Things are bound to improve. And, as one of my more optimistic-minded colleagues pointed out, the tough times forced his company to re-examine how it was doing things and to implement some cost-cutting changes that should have been made earlier.

It was painful to watch Yahoo!'s slide this past year—this company that once was highly esteemed for its brand, directory, and site traffic and was a real force on the internet. The company went through terribly tough times this year with the on-again-off-again attempted acquisition by Microsoft; it then saw its stock price tank and most of its top managers leave. Then, its ad deal with Google fell apart when Google bailed out facing antitrust pressures. TechCrunch, calling Yahoo! "poor, alone, and sad," says the company was burdened by a "CEO that still can't clearly state the core goals." As of this writing, the company still had not named a new CEO to replace Jerry Yang.

Technology played a huge role in the 2008 elections, marking a permanent change in how politicians use technology. Barack Obama maintained an impressive presence on the net, clearly using social networks to his advantage. Since the win, he has been posting weekly addresses on YouTube.

Over the past year or so, by far the most-read article posted on the infotoday.com site was the Spotlight on "Political Fact-Check Web Sites," (<http://newsbreaks.infotoday.com/nbReader.asp?ArticleId=39759>), followed by "Tech Tools for Voters," (<http://newsbreaks.infotoday.com/nbReader.asp?ArticleId=40328>). These obviously met an information need during this year of campaign rhetoric. (See also the in-depth series of articles in Searcher by Laura Gordon Murnane, *The 51st State: the State of Online*.)

Other popular topics covered in our NewsBreaks included the following:

- Google Book Search news (lots of it)
- New vertical search engines and social search tools (we'll see how many survive and thrive)
- Health resources (including services from Microsoft and Google)
- EPA closing then reopening its libraries
- Cloud computing (applications and data storage in the "cloud"—the internet)
- New options for news (Silobreaker, new mobile news services, News Hounds, enhancements to Google news, Yahoo! Buzz, etc.)
- Free legal resources (such as Public.Resource.Org, AltLaw.org, Public Library of Law, etc.)
- "Openness" (open access, open education, open source, open standards, etc.)

Also popular among readers was last year's "Review of the Year 2007 and Trends Watch," (<http://newsbreaks.infotoday.com/nbReader.asp?ArticleId=40635>). The web article that drew the most response in readers' comments was on "Research Sharing Gets New Tools and Goes Trendy," (<http://newsbreaks.infotoday.com/nbReader.asp?ArticleId=50584>)—very appropriate for the topic. My monthly NewsBreak Update column in *Information Today* also provided regular news highlights and analysis of trends.

Despite the financial meltdown, there were several key company acquisitions in our industry this year. ProQuest acquired the venerable Dialog search service from the scientific division of Thomson Reuters. We're still waiting to see what ProQuest does with it. ProQuest also purchased federated search provider WebFeat and will merge it with its Serials Solutions unit. Dow Jones acquired Generate and immediately integrated its offerings into the Dow Jones Business & Relationship Intelligence products. And, at the end of the year, Gale acquired the HighBeam research service (www.highbeam.com) and Encyclopedia.com in a move designed to connect with end users.

Ongoing Legislative Issues

The U.S. Congress will reportedly push for Net Neutrality legislation in 2009. While the FCC has addressed what it had seen as Net Neutrality violations on a case-by-case basis, many feel a new legislation would provide needed assurance of equal treatment by the broadband providers. In December, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that Google had intentions of abandoning Net Neutrality and creating a fast lane for its own content by brokering deals with ISPs. In a blog post, Google disputed these allegations.

Last fall, a bill strongly supported by libraries, The Shawn Bentley Orphan Works Bill of 2008, was passed in the Senate. But the House version had significant differences, and the matter remained unresolved. Congress is expected to take this bill up again in the new session. *Library Journal* reports: "If passed, the bill would reduce liability for those who make use of copyrighted works provided they make, and document, a reasonably diligent effort to find the owner. Libraries want the bill because it could enable large-scale digitization efforts. Publishers, meanwhile, have also embraced the bill."

Be sure to follow the Legal Issues column in *Information Today*. Law librarian and lawyer George Pike does a superb job discussing hot topics such as anti-spam, downloading, copyright, data breaches, and more—and in a very

readable way.

Important Trends of 2008

In 2008, we saw increasing interest in and adoption of Enterprise 2.0 technologies. Over the last year, AIIM (www.aiim.org) analyzed the evolution of the workplace, and it summarized the findings in a document called the "AIIM Worker Model." This document describes the evolutionary phases organizations go through from "Islands of Me"—focused on individual productivity—to "Extended We"—focused on enterprise collaboration and innovation using Enterprise 2.0 technologies. (AIIM is using this document as part of a new series of training programs it offers.) Most importantly, AIIM's research shows that the workplace is in fact changing—organizations are increasingly implementing Enterprise Web 2.0 technologies such as wikis, blogs, RSS, and social networking to improve collaboration and innovation.

A recent Forrester Research study (www.forrester.com) looked at the trends for Enterprise 2.0 technologies—with some very interesting findings! Forrester predicts the following Web 2.0 collaboration technologies will continue to experience growth:

- Social networks will transform the nature of work. Social networks provide context to content. Cultural resistance exists, but Forrester believes this will eventually break, allowing workers to connect with like-minded colleagues and enabling a collaboration channel that previously didn't exist in the enterprise.
- Wikis help transform collaboration. One of the most promising Web 2.0 technologies for the enterprise, users report success with wiki endeavors, particularly when sponsored by business leaders and connected to business processes, and the market shows signs of strong growth.
- Blogging is not going away—but it does not capture or hold the attention of an enterprise audience. Social networks will breathe new life into internal blogs by providing more context to blogged content, but Forrester found that blogging alone does not capture the attention of an enterprise audience.
- RSS is underappreciated in the enterprise. This ubiquitous technology provides a mechanism to get content to people where they need it rather than expecting people to find it.

Forrester says the following Web 2.0 technologies have large and resilient ecosystems and can last for several years or even decades, but, over time, the markets will become highly consolidated, customer numbers will flatten, and revenues will level off or decline:

- Podcasting is on the decline. Users tell Forrester that podcasts in the context of enterprise productivity and collaboration are neither very engaging nor immersive, and the vendor landscape is shrinking.
- Forums are underused. While forums will continue on as a fundamental enabling technology for collaboration, the marketplace is flat, and forums will become part of larger community-focused packages.

Companies are beginning to use social networking and community building as cheap marketing tools—watch for an article on this in the January issue of *EContent*.

Enterprise search is becoming less mystifying, less "black box" in its approach, according to a recent report from CMS Watch (www.cmswatch.com), "The Search & Information Access Report 2009." The analysts reviewed enterprise search customers and evaluated 20 solutions. Some key trends emerged. In addition to more openness about the technology behind search, CMS Watch found a renewed focus on ease of setup and maintenance and more out-of-the-box functionality.

There was a flurry of activity this year in semantic technologies and applications, all designed to lead users to better, more contextual content. Companies in the news include SemantiNet's headup, SemantiFind, Quintura, hokia, Cognition Technologies, Twine, AdaptiveBlue, Spock, Talis, and Perfect Market (which acquired MediaRiver). For an interesting discussion, check out Ron Miller's article, "Semantic Search Takes Root in the Enterprise," in the *Enterprise Search Sourcebook* (www.enterprisesearchcenter.com/Newsletters/ESNewsletter.aspx?NewsletterID=1132#1).

More people had their heads in the clouds this year—in cloud computing, that is. Erik Arnold calls this a "post-software world." He says, "What is important is that every major player in the industry has embraced the concept of developing and providing applications in the cloud."

We saw a trend toward greater availability of open data and platforms—using APIs and open data standards. Examples include Yahoo! BOSS, Yahoo! SearchMonkey, Google's Android mobile OS, and Google's Open Social. Facebook, MySpace, and Google all introduced tools to let their users manage their online identities and connect their social networking with the wider web.

Twitter became a big deal this year. Some applications sound very useful, such as a fire department using the service to post incidents. I'm sure I'll hear from readers, but I personally find it irritating. Just 140 characters doesn't do it for what I want or need to know. 'Nuff said.

Some techies say that 2008 was the year of the iPhone. I think it's more important for what it represents going forward—easy to use mobile internet devices and apps.

Google pulled the plug at the end of the year on its Lively browser-based virtual world, which just launched in July. It looks to me as if the popularity of virtual worlds is waning. What do you think?

The use of widgets was popular this year in helping content distributors get their content out there to other sites—in context. The New York Times.com recently launched a beta of its Times Widget feature, which uses the Gigya widget service. Shore Communications analyst John Blossom says this is an example of the way "publishers can use widget distribution technologies to open doors both to referral links and to advertising partners that can add value to their

brands in a far more cost-effective way than traditional business development efforts."

Meanwhile, the newspaper industry and print publishers in general struggled to cope with a changing environment and tough economic conditions. Several publications moved to online-only publishing, including *The Christian Science Monitor*, *PC Magazine*, and *Crain's Financial Week*. In December, Tribune Co., the Sam Zell-owned newspaper chain, filed for bankruptcy protection. The New York Times Co. was scrambling to handle plummeting advertising and said it was "exploring financing alternatives." Many print pubs simply shrank in size. Others should take note and pick up the pace of their transition to online models.

My next posting on Jan. 8 will feature the trends I'll be watching in 2009 and a wrap-up of some of the more intriguing coverage from other commentators and analysts.

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Posted By Ian Palmer

1/15/2009 12:25:28 PM

Other important trends were mobile computing/connectivity and virtual workforces.

Posted By vinu shankar

1/5/2009 11:47:14 PM

I agree. Finally, people are giving [up] attaching importance to these virtual worlds. We have a beautiful real world and don't need these virtuals.

Posted By Sigmund Leominster

1/5/2009 12:48:50 PM

I don't think the closure of Google's Lively environment is evidence that interest in virtual worlds is diminishing, rather that Lively wasn't really set up to be sustainable. Other virtual worlds are being added to the roster, especially as people begin to leverage the OpenSim platform to create their own. And even though residents of Linden Lab's Second Life platform continue to berate the company management and strategy, it is still in business and is likely to continue.

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