

Tech Biz : People

Tim O'Reilly: Web 2.0 Is About Controlling Data

Dylan Tweney 04.13.07



Tim O'Reilly addresses the crowd at ETech in March 2007. Photo: Scott Beale/Laughing Squid

It's not too late to get on the "web 2.0" bandwagon, says publishing magnate Tim O'Reilly, who coined the term. And if you're wondering what it takes to build a web 2.0 startup, O'Reilly has just the conference for you -- the [Web 2.0 Expo](#). O'Reilly Media and CMP are co-hosting the conference, which runs April 15 to 18 at the Moscone Center in San Francisco. Organizers expect between 7,000 and 10,000 people to check out the conference's 120 exhibitors and seven educational tracks, covering topics from the elementary (web 2.0 fundamentals) to the complex and critical (web operations). O'Reilly describes it as a "how-to conference for web 2.0 developers."

O'Reilly has been on many bloggers' lips during the past two weeks. The buzz at his recently-concluded ETech conference was about Kathy Sierra's [abrupt cancellation](#) of her speaking appearance there. Sierra cited anonymous death threats and harassment on her own blog's Comments section, as well as on two blogs created by *Cluetrain* author Chris Locke. In the ensuing debate, O'Reilly brokered a meeting between Sierra and Locke, and made a call for a "bloggers' code of conduct." He even proposed badges that bloggers could put on their sites to indicate whether they moderated comments heavily or not at all.

We spoke with O'Reilly this week to find out what's in store at the show, the current state of the much-hyped "web 2.0" terminology and his current thoughts on civility in the blogosphere.

Wired News: Can you tell us what's exciting about web 2.0 and what we can expect from the conference?

Tim O'Reilly: One of the big changes at the heart of web 2.0 is the shift from the creation of software artifacts, which is what the PC revolution was about, to the creation of software services. These are services that ultimately, if they are successful, will require competencies of operation, of scale, and the like.

I remember talking to people about this three or four years ago, and they (wanted to know) how many people need to scale services to the size of Google? Well, there are now hundreds of services as big as Google was back then. Increasingly, with services like [Amazon S3](#) (Simple Storage Service) and [EC2](#) (Elastic Compute Cloud), we're starting to see the emergence of operations as a platform, as well as an internal competency. Amazon's been a real pioneer there.

WN: Are there any trends among the companies exhibiting at Web 2.0 Expo, the kinds of services and technologies being shown?

O'Reilly: Well, obviously this is a market with a lot of froth in it already. I have to say there are a lot of me-too products and companies. Yet another social network, of the 15th flavor -- that's common in every new technology revolution. There are imitators who have marginal improvements. One of the companies that's going live on Monday is [Spock](#), which is a people-search engine. It's really, really impressive. It's thinking about whether there are other classes of data to which search hasn't really been applied.

That goes back to a major theme of web 2.0 that people haven't yet tweaked to. It's really about data and who owns and controls, or gives the best access to, a class of data. Amazon is now the definitive source for data about whole sets of products -- fungible consumer products. eBay is the authoritative source for the secondary market of those products. Google is the authority for information about facts, but they're relatively undifferentiated. Why did Google, for example, recently decide to offer free 411 service? I haven't talked to people at Google, but it's pretty clear to me why. It's because of speech recognition. It has nothing to do with 411 service, it has to do with getting a database of voices, so they don't have to license speech technology from Nuance or someone else. They want their own data stream.

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