

LibraryCrunch

Bringing You A "Library 2.0" Perspective, by Michael Casey

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Building Community Intelligence at Yahoo

Take a look inside the web's premier social networking company – no, not Google or Amazon, or even Facebook, but good old Yahoo. James Fallows, [writing in the New York Times](#), went to the Yahoo campus and spoke with their top social networking people about the future of Yahoo.

Fallows came away with a very vivid picture of what the web will look like in the next few years – something many have been referring to as Web 2.0, and I have been trying to plug into library service offerings. Discussing the evolution of web search, Fallows writes:

"You can look at the evolution of search as a play in three acts," said Jeff Weiner, the senior vice president for search and marketing. "The first is the 'public' Web, where if different people type the same query they'll all get the same results." The second, he said, was purely personal search - finding a file or photo, usually on your own machine

The third is the one that we are very interested in," Mr. Weiner said. This is "social" or "community" searching, in which each attempt to find the right restaurant listing, medical advice site, vacation tip or other bit of information takes advantage of other people's successes and failures in locating the same information."

The idea that human judgment can improve a search engine's automatic findings is hardly new. From the dawn of the Web's history - that is, over the last 15 years - companies have invented tools to help users assess the quality and relevance of information, often by relying on others' opinions. Examples include Amazon's user reviews, eBay's feedback ratings and "trusted networks" created on many sites.

What is different is Yahoo's systematic plan to build "community intelligence" into nearly all aspects of its operation - and in turn, to entice users to spend more and more of their time on Yahoo sites, where they can see Yahoo ads.

That last line is enticing: building community intelligence into all aspects of the operation. Obviously, for a company the size of Yahoo, the idea of community is large – very, very large, in fact. But in this size comes strength – “with hundreds of millions of users, there is critical mass to create social networks that cover most locations and interests.”

[Caterina Fake](#), one of the original [Flickr](#) founders ([I love Flickr](#)), ends the article with my favorite quote:

*"You can think about the way people will interact, as you sit in the usability lab, but until you put it in front of very large numbers of real people, you don't really know," Ms. Fake said. "So you have to release products early and often, **like perpetual beta.**"*

Perpetual beta. I love it.

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