MEMEX

A brief history of collective intelligence and interactive social media.

David Carroll
Professor of Media Design

Panel Discussion, “When Your Brand is Being Blogged!”

November 13, 2007
Extending Your Brand To Employees Conference
Who really invented the Web?
Who really invented the idea of the Web?
Dr. Vannevar Bush
1890 - 1974

- Patron Saint of American Science during WWII
- Member of the Manhattan Project (Director of OSRD)
- Published “As We May Think” for the *Atlantic Monthly* and *Life* magazine in 1945 (written in 1936) his essay proposing the Memex
- This article is available online. Just Google it.
  http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/194507/bush
Dr. Vannevar Bush

- **Memex**: a microfilm-based “device in which an individual stores all his books, records, and communications, and which is mechanized so that it may be consulted with exceeding speed and flexibility.”

- “Wholly new forms of encyclopedias will appear, ready-made with a mesh of associative trails running through them, ready to be dropped into the memex and there amplified.”
Memex

Special desk contains a microfilm viewer and recorder, as well as multiple screens and input devices.
Memex: Trails

- Dual screens are used to record “trails” onto microfilm

- A “trail” connects articles together like a “link”

- Information + Human’s Trail = Knowledge
Memex in use is shown here. On one transparent screen the operator of the future writes notes and commentary dealing with reference material which is projected on the screen at left. Insertion of the proper code symbols at the bottom of right-hand screen will tie the new item to the earlier one after notes are photographed on supermicrofilm (LIFE 19(11), p. 124).

This reader associates an article about bow and arrow weapons with a design drawing.
‘Store all your books, records, and communications, all consulted with exceeding speed and flexibility.’
‘New forms of encyclopedias will appear, ready-made with a mesh of associative trails running through them, ready to be dropped into the memex’
Using a Memex

Memex owners can trade their “trails” to build and exchange human knowledge.
Accessories for your Memex
A scientist of the future records experiments with a tiny camera fitted with universal-focus lens. The small square in the eyeglass at the left sights the object (LIFE 19(11), p. 112).

**Accessorize your Memex**

- Our “third” eye?
- More than a “browser history”
- Webcam pointing in the other direction!
Did Dr. Bush invent the Web in 1936?

- The *Memex* was never built, only imagined.

- Are “trails” really the same as “links”?

- Are “articles” really the same as websites?

- Are Memex “comments” like blogs?
If the Memex was available today, we would like it.
The legacy of the Memex exemplifies how collective intelligence, associative libraries, and user generated content is essential to the human condition, our destiny as a creative species. It is not exclusively the result of “computers” or “the web” or any particular technology, in fact.
Web 2.0 Jargon

Seeking some rigor and clarity in an ugly convolution of the English language.
Blog

- Derived from “weblog”
- Typically a daily diary
- Blog software emphasizes ease of publishing and its essential format:
  - Title
  - Thumbnail image
  - Blurb
  - Link
Blog

- Popular blogs in the US are topical, focused or thematic

- User comments stream follow posting, often vividly reveals user audience

- Blog syndication (RSS) maximizes reach

- Semantic structure compliments search engine page ranking algorithms (SEO)
Influential Blogs

- **Consumerist** and the Gawker Network
  - Consumer Advocacy as Entertainment
  - Broke AOL CSR story, by publishing audio transcripts, helping topple the ISP giant
  - Covered iPhone mania, 300 page AT&T bills, the iPology and other company responses to customer outrage
Influential Blogs

- **BoingBoing**
  The triumph of miscellany

  - Brand critical cool hunters
    shape a crucial trend culture

  - Anti-copyright, anti-DRM,
    anti-censorship, pro-privacy

  - Creativity, social activism,
    culture feeding
Blogs & Democracy

“...blogs create the sense of a virtual public meeting, but one in which we don’t all hope to be there at the same time and in which conversations are not necessarily linked. The best of the blog entries are relatively short; they point directly to words used by others, criticizing with or adding to them. They are arguably the most important form of unchoreographed public discourse that we have.”

- Lessig (41)
wiki

› Derives from Hawaiian for “quick”

› A website anyone can edit.

› Users police pages by reviewing revision histories.

› Touted as an example of “crowd-sourcing” and self-managed information systems.

› Quality is based on an emergent elite user group.
Wikipedia

- Perhaps the most famous wiki, the ultimate user-generated encyclopedia.

- Virgil Griffith’s Wikipedia Scanner
  - Monitoring corporations editing entries of interest by cross-referencing IP address to company network identity
  - Diebold, Amgen, Pfizer, Wal-Mart, ExxonMobil, Fox News, New York Times, etc.
Social Networks

- Online communities that promote user connections
- MySpace, Facebook, Linked-In, Friendster, flickr, more to come...
- Prestige through quantified personal associations
- Easy to self-publish personal information and enjoy the immediate gratification that it’s being noticed.
Social Bookmarking

- Online repositories of link sharing, categorization through tagging, and ranking systems.

- digg, del.icio.us (Yahoo!), reddit, StumbleUpon, Newsvine (MSNBC), others.

- Can generate significant traffic and buzz.

  - The “Digg Effect” when servers crash due to traffic surges by top user ranked entries (dugg)
Message Boards

‣ AKA Forums, Threads, etc.

‣ Perhaps the oldest form of participatory content, message boards have been around since before the Internet and Web.

‣ Often the raw source of chatter that leads to blog postings and social bookmarking.

‣ Format mediated by message forum software.

TWoP Forums

Welcome back; your last visit was: Today @ 1:36 am

Current TWoP Shows

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forum</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Replies</th>
<th>Last Update</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>77,291</td>
<td>Yesterday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 Rock</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>6,973</td>
<td>Today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Amazing Race</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>204,396</td>
<td>Today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Idol</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>348,576</td>
<td>Today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>America's Next Top Model</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>176,538</td>
<td>Today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bachelor</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14,698</td>
<td>Today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battlestar Galactica</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>63,499</td>
<td>Today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Brother</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>73,017</td>
<td>Today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Love</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>13,246</td>
<td>Oct 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Biggest Loser</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4,443</td>
<td>Yesterday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brothers and Sisters</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>11,187</td>
<td>Today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuck</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2,547</td>
<td>Today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dancing With The Stars</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>36,461</td>
<td>Today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desperate Housewives</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>50,722</td>
<td>Today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dexter</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>4,232</td>
<td>Today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dirty Sexy Money</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>11,431</td>
<td>Today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dexter</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1,121</td>
<td>Today</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The symbiotic relationship between blogs, wikis, social networks, social bookmarking and message boards — all forming the modern MEMEX.
MEMEX — The modern social media ecology

Adapted from Tim O'Reilly's "Meme Map" at his Web 2.0 Conference via Business Week, Oct 21 2005 via http://www.theregister.co.uk/2005/10/21/web_two_point_nought_poll/
Conclusions and Analysis

- Companies should develop reasonable policies regarding how employees (and potential hires) use web communication tools:
  - blogs
  - wiki
  - social networks
  - social bookmarks
  - message boards

- Users should adapt their responsibilities of expression vs. privacy, realms of public vs. private
MEMEX

The end. Thank you.

David Carroll
Assistant Professor of Media Design
212 229 8908 x4092
carrolld@newschool.edu
http://mercurious.com

PARSONS THE NEW SCHOOL FOR DESIGN