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## Web 2.0 proving to be much more than just a cute slogan

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By Simon Hendery

When Trade Me development manager Rowan Simpson took the stage at Microsoft's Tech Ed developers conference in Auckland last week he brought with him an artefact from his company's past.

The grey box sharing the limelight was Trade Me's first server, which company founder Sam Morgan "took a bit of a punt" buying in 1999, maxing out his credit card to do so.

The gamble obviously paid off. Trade Me now dominates local web traffic and has made Morgan a multi-millionaire.

But despite having just passed another milestone - a billion pages generated last month - the company continues to look anxiously over its shoulder, Simpson says.

"For us at Trade Me today we spend a lot more time worrying about the small guys than the big guys," he told the Tech Ed crowd.

"Big corporates will do what they do but what really keeps us up at night and scares us is a couple of guys in a skanky flat with a laptop building the next great application."

Increasingly, those new killer applications are linked to a rather nebulous concept called Web 2.0.

Asked for his take on Web 2.0, Stephan Spencer, founder of web marketing company Netconcepts, agrees it is "a fairly amorphous term". It can encompass a number of concepts including social media, blogging, RSS feeds, wikis and social networking communities like MySpace.com.

"It's an evolution of the web to a point where it's more participatory," Spencer says.

"It's more about engaging the visitor in a dialogue and providing different ways for them to interact with the site. That could be in the ways they navigate it and the kinds of functionalities the site offers."

Matt Pickering, business development manager for web development company Lupo, says increased online collaboration and changes to the way people are able to share information online have been aided by improvements to the technology used to build websites.

"It's a whole mind shift, it's an exciting time to be in the game," he says.

To capitalise on the Web 2.0 trend, Lupo has been focused this year on re-engineering its own suite of applications which it uses as the building blocks for client websites.

Pickering says that has made it easier for the company to take advantage of the new site-building technologies that allow easier inclusion of external data feeds into existing sites.

"That is going to position us very well going forward as a provider of development services and it is just amazing what is possible," he says.

"Incorporating mapping into a shipping database - you can find your addresses, click a button and it automatically finds the correct freight rates against externally hosted databases and it's all driven by the user."

RSS - an increasingly popular way of delivering news and selected website content to users - is a key element of Web 2.0 and Pickering says it will take off with the upcoming launch of Microsoft's new RSS-enabled Office software suite.

"That's probably one of the biggest things I see around the corner. RSS is becoming such a well understood mechanism for distributing information across the board, so to incorporate it into something that almost everybody touches across their day, that's a huge step forward."

Microsoft is also pushing its increased involvement in developing collaborative web tools.

Scott Guthrie, the general manager of Microsoft's developer division, was a keynote speaker at the Tech Ed event, which attracted an audience of 2200.

Guthrie told the Herald Microsoft anticipated an explosion of information-sharing on the web, which would improve business productivity.

"The better the ability to analyse information and sift through it, the quicker [businesses] can respond to trends, the faster they can collaborate and communicate with other people, and the quicker they can alter how their business works," he says.

"The web fundamentally impacts all three of those in pretty significant ways and, over the next two or three years, you're going to see more and more information go on the web."

Spencer agrees that web users and developers are going through a "mindset change".

"People get it now that the web is no longer a passive publishing vehicle, it's a participatory medium," he says.

As a way of "eating our own dog food" when it came to selling the significance of the shift to a more interactive web, Netconcepts this month relaunched its own website to embrace Web 2.0 concepts such as RSS and blogging.

Rather than remaining a traditional, static "corporate brochure", netconcepts.com has been re-engineered on a blogging platform, meaning visitors can post comments related to any page on the site.

The move makes the site more visible to search engines but Spencer says it also adds credibility because visitors see honest comments from previous visitors.

Gerry McGovern, an author and consultant on website content, wrote in his weekly "New Thinking" newsletter last month: "It has rarely made sense for a business to advertise its weaknesses. Until the web, that is."

He cites several examples of companies selling goods and services through websites which include warts-and-all consumer reviews.

"Honesty is selling on the web. Honest websites are not better because they are morally superior but because they are more believable and trustworthy."

### **What is web 2.0?**

"Proponents of the Web 2.0 concept say that it differs from early web development (retrospectively labelled Web 1.0) in that it moves away from static websites, the use of search engines, and surfing from one website to the next, towards a more dynamic and interactive world wide web. Others argue that the original and fundamental concepts of the WWW are not actually being superseded."

- from collaborative online encyclopaedia [Wikipedia](#), itself an example of the Web 2.0 phenomenon.