

# Web 2.0: The New Tools for Democratic Conversations – A snapshot of Initiatives in Government

Information Victoria, Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, August 2009.

## Introduction

This paper provides an overview of developments in the use of interactive online communications described as Web 2.0 and when applied in government, better known as Government 2.0.

The term Web 2.0 takes in the new and emerging digitally enabled, interactive communications, pushing organisations, including governments, to reconsider the way they do things.

The challenge in this process is expressed by a member of the Australian Federal Government's *Taskforce on Government 2.0*, as follows:

*Web 2.0 enables and accelerates the transition to a more connected world in which open, user-centred and self-organising networks create value, including public value. That's the Web 2.0 proposition with which...people ...around the world are experimenting to see ... what kinds of value they can get from these new ways of organizing.*

*As governments and the public sector start to do the same, they will encounter the same challenge, which is that these new tools don't just change structures and processes, they change behaviour as well.*

*In order to thrive in this kind of world – connected, contingent, collaborative – you have to adopt a set of behaviours that are similarly open, interactive and engaged. The conclusion is simple, but demanding – no change without culture shift.*

*This is the big challenge ...for governments to make the most of this new way of working and these **new tools for democratic conversation**. If they want to use them to improve the design of public services, to empower citizens to use information to create new services themselves or to harness more powerful combinations of knowledge for better policy, then they have to embrace the consequent shift of culture and behaviour too.*

*We've spent time defining what it is that constitutes the requisite behaviour from a public servant, including things like impartiality, balance, fairness and the absence of partisan political advocacy.*

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*The problem, though, is that these definitions were shaped in a world fundamentally different to the one which 'government 2.0' is ushering in, including especially the speed with which issues emerge and change, the level of transparency about government activity and the complexity of the ideas and inputs now clamouring ... to be influential.*

*Somehow we have to find a way for public servants to be able to engage with this world on terms that are both satisfying and safe. Assuming that the twin extremes of prohibition and unfettered licence are unlikely to work, we have to set about finding some new territory somewhere along that spectrum that is fit for purpose'. Source: Gov.2.0 Taskforce Blog, [Online Engagement, by Martin Stewart – Weeks, 27 July 2009](#).*

Governments need to consider implementing Web 2.0 technologies as a way of becoming relevant to their citizens. This is especially compelling in recognition of the view that Western democracies are experiencing what has been termed a 'democratic deficit' with a declining trust in governments and an accompanying retreat from civic engagement. (1)

If the retreat from civic engagement is based on the perception by citizens that outside of the election cycle, they have no real voice with which to influence government decision-making, then, in a digital era, government has new, digitally enabled tools to more readily hear that voice.

Today's digital revolution has, and is continuing to create, new ways for the further empowerment of citizens. The Government 2.0 proposition, involves a significant cultural shift towards an active recognition of this and a willingness in government to encourage novel forms of engagement, partnership and collaboration.

This paper provides an overview of a selection of Web 2.0/Government 2.0 activities within Australia and internationally and suggests possible further opportunities, all within the overarching context of using these tools to further strengthen public value.

## **Definitions**

Web 2.0 is the term given to describe the transition from static html web pages to a more dynamic web that invites communication and a more open sharing of information.

It's the second generation web that implies a conversation or interaction with users that encourages collaboration. Essentially, it's the Two Way Web or Conversational Web and it describes online behaviours that are fluid and dynamic with a focus on both the individual and the online social networks to which they may belong.

Web 2.0 is also sometimes described as:

- New Media,
- Social or Digital Media
- Consumer Generated Media

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Common applications include:

- **Information sharing** > *Blogs, YouTube* and the micro-blogging platform of *Twitter* and others like *Yammer, Ning etc*
- **Content co-creation and collaboration** > *Wikis* (*Wikipedia* being the most famous)
- **Online Social Networking** with a focus on the individual profile built around friendship networks or business > *Facebook, Myspace, LinkedIn* and virtual worlds like *Second Life*
- **Re-use/re-mix of information across media** > *mashups* that incorporate video and other media
- **User created navigation and categorisation of information** > *tagging, folksonomies (taxonomy created by folk), social bookmarking.*

Overall, Web 2.0 is a force towards greater connectivity – it allows people to find each other and to create communities of interest around issues that matter to them.

The 2005, the Victorian [\*Parliamentary Enquiry into Electronic Democracy\*](#) argued for the use of Information Communication Technology by the public sector to improve and expand the engagement of the public in government policy making processes.

Since then, and because of the rapid development of both the tools of Web 2.0 and uptake of their use by the community, the impetus for enhanced online engagement with citizens has gained momentum.

For government, Web 2.0 offers *additional* avenues for consultation and interaction with citizens and the business community in ways that can facilitate dialogue, creativity, collaboration and partnership.

It is a force for the creation of new public value as yet undefined.

Metaphorically, Web 2.0 is like a virtual, mega- electronic, town hall where many more voices can be heard speaking to us, with us and to one another, but where citizens can also be invited to participate as active partners in the design and construction of the town hall.

In the practical business of government, it means a greater opportunity for citizens to act as partners with government in the co-creation of policy, planning and priority setting and for government to harness a larger, collective intelligence and deliver a richer user experience.

Web 2.0 gives a 21st century spin on Abraham Lincoln's adage: '*Government of the people, by the people for the people*'.

## **More Reasons Why Government Should Be Using Web 2.0 Tools**

- Web 2.0 gives government new ways to hear the voice of the citizen and to talk with them in a different type of dialogue. The online environment

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becomes an additional means by which analysts in government can tap into public opinion as a way of improving service design and delivery.

- The social web, can be a bell-weather for broader, societal trends, that offers government a new way of listening to the conversation so as to glean new insights as they are forming. It's a form of real time, rapid public polling.
- Web 2.0 offers government a modern interface with which to re-establish the 'public town square' by creating the space for disparate voices to be heard and to be connected to each other.
- Government can act as creative broker by opening up access to government information and data and facilitating opportunities for new and unexpected community driven initiatives to emerge or for new opportunities for business to value/add and create new services.
- It recognises and welcomes the power shift that occurs when mobile communications in particular empowers citizens with an 'on the spot' advantage to broadcast an image or tweet an event before the official announcement or press release. Because Web 2.0 tools can act to contest the space for authority once the sole preserve of government or officialdom, it makes sense for government to facilitate a partnership culture for this to occur.
- All of these elements serve to welcome into the mix of government consultative processes a new creative energy drawn from different social sub-cultures and therefore new ways of thinking – it's a new front door to government.
- It can be a force for organisational cultural change because it creates new ways of doing things that can lead to a reinvigoration of internal government processes.
- The transparency and accountability of the process may strengthen citizen goodwill towards government.

It's important to remember that although Web 2.0 offers exciting new technology tools, the tools themselves are not what matter so much as the potential that they bring for the improvement to services, the strengthening of the democratic contract and the creation of collaboration within and among agencies as well as fostering greater community participation.

## **Demographic Uptake and Projects of Web 2.0 and Impact across Australia and/or Victoria**

Uptake and usage of digital media applications by Australians is growing.

Research by *Sensis* in 2008 has revealed that *blogging* for example, has increased in popularity with 39 per cent of Australians having read a blog in the past year (up seven percentage points) and 14 per cent having written a blog (up four percentage points).

One in five Australians now belongs to some form of online community, with 36 per cent of Australians using social networking sites. (2)

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## Internet applications in the last 12 months

	Internet users last 12 months	All Australians
Paid for purchases or bills	71%	63%
Made bookings	70%	62%
Undertaken banking	70%	62%
Ordered goods/services	64%	57%
Read a blog	44%	39%
Supplied personal information online	43%	38%
Used a social networking site	41%	36%
Downloaded or streamed video content	35%	31%
Bought through an online auction site	33%	29%
Used the internet to make phone calls	25%	22%
Belonged to an online community	22%	20%
Written a blog	16%	14%
Sold through an online auction site	14%	12%
Uploaded a video onto the internet	11%	10%

*Q. In the last twelve months have you undertaken any of the following via the internet?*  
Base = All consumers

SOURCE: Sensis® e-Business Sweeney Research

## Internet applications in the last 12 months

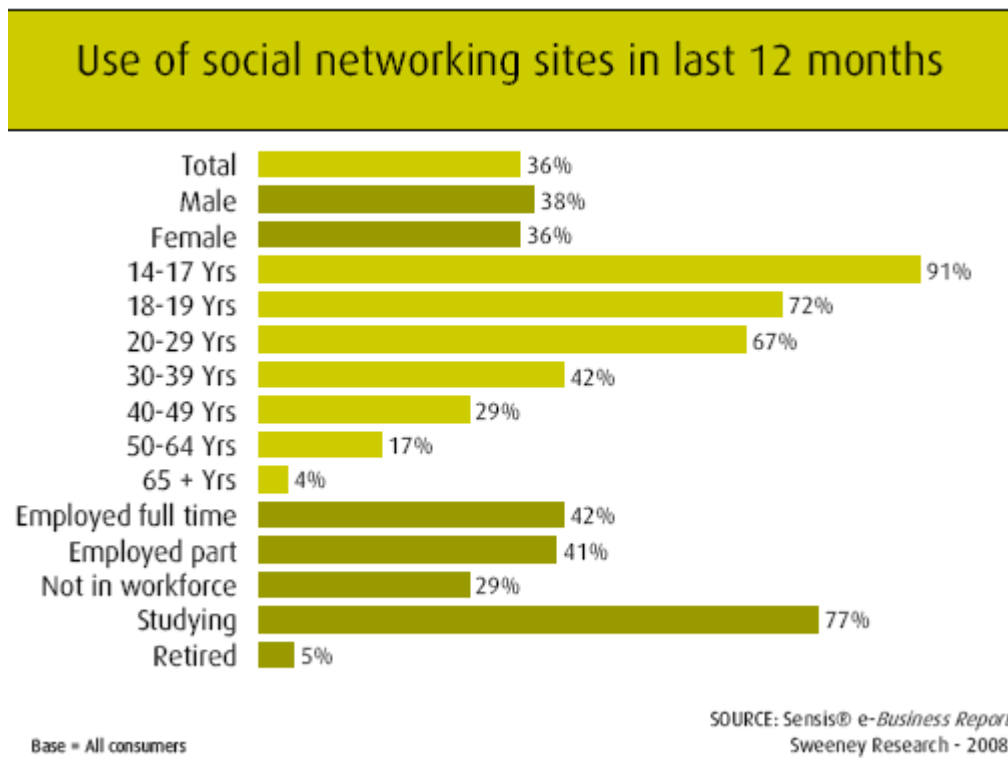
### Trends – All Australians

	2007	2008	Increase
Undertaken banking	54%	62%	8%
Used the internet to make phone calls	14%	22%	8%
Made bookings	55%	62%	7%
Read a blog	32%	39%	7%
Ordered goods/services	50%	57%	7%
Paid for purchases or bills	57%	63%	6%
Supplied personal information online	34%	38%	4%
Written a blog	10%	14%	4%
Bought through an online auction site	26%	29%	3%
Sold through an online auction site	12%	12%	0%

*Q. In the last twelve months have you undertaken any of the following via the internet?*

SOURCE: Sensis® e-Business Report Sweeney Research - 2008

- 36 per cent of Australians reported that they had used social networking sites in the past year.
- Age is the key demographic influencing use of social networking sites, with younger Australians much more likely to use a social networking site. The heaviest users were the 14 to 17 year old age group, where 91 per cent reported using social networking sites.
- Usage decreased progressively with age, with only four per cent of those aged 65 and above reporting using these sites.
- The frequency of usage was also very high, with 17 per cent using them several times a day, and 23 per cent using them daily.
- Four in ten users access social network sites at least daily. Only 23 per cent reported usage less than once a week. (3)



Overall, the *Sensis* research concludes that one in five Australians now belong to some form of online community.

[Quantum's AustraliaScan](#) research reinforces these findings and tells us more about the general mood in the community. It found that in 2008/09 Australians are:

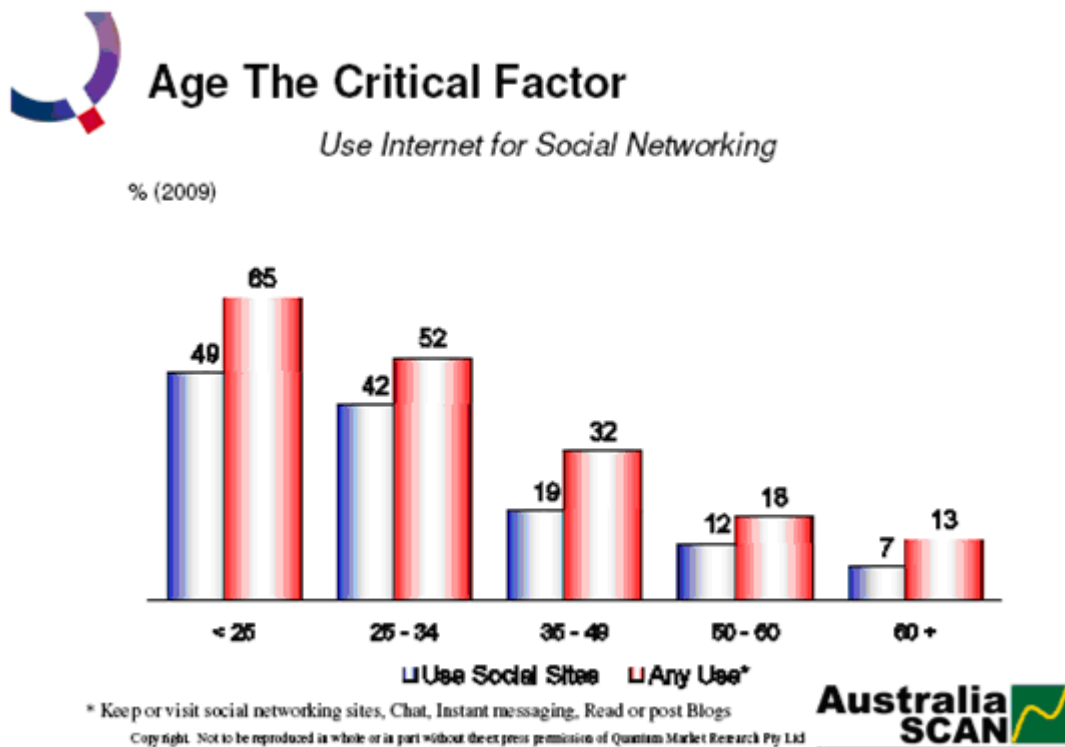
- Staying Closer to Home
- Seeking to saving Time & Money
- Doing It Themselves/Taking Back Control of their lives
- Using home Broadband to bring the Net to Life
- Expecting More Of Government

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- Displaying a preference for the Local and Personal
- Digitally not equal - Digital Divide Still Exists (4)

*AustraliaScan* research on online social networking in Australia and Victoria makes the following points:

- Overall, Victorians appear to exhibit few, if any, differences from the national picture on on-line social networking uptake.
- Social networking is heavily skewed towards the young and the child free.
- Women are slightly more likely to use social networking than men. Young mothers are notable as they appear to continue using social networking sites after their children arrive; whilst men fall away.
- Those in households where government benefits are received are less likely to use social networking sites, but this is largely due to the age effect where Pensions outnumber recipients of Youth Allowance, Parenting Payments and the Baby Bonus.

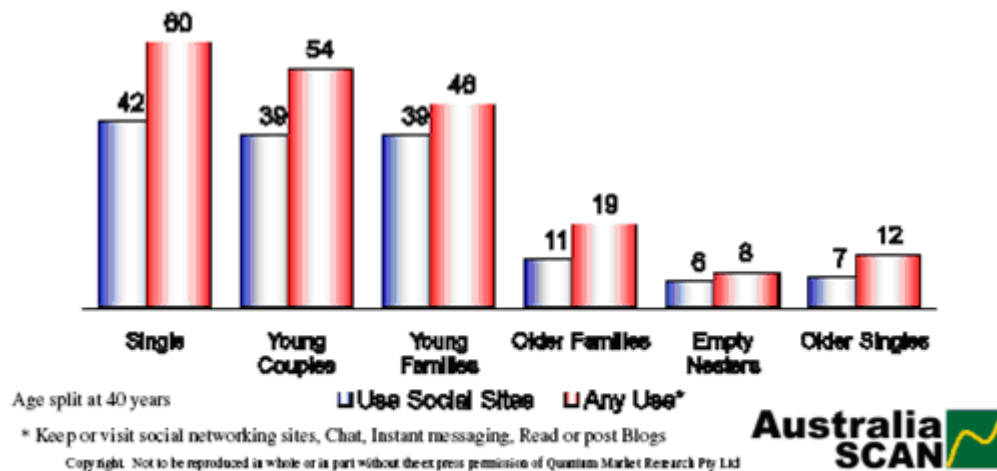




## Life Stage

Use Internet for Social Networking

% (2009)



Different research by [Nielsen Online](#) (5) in 2008 shows that:

- New media is becoming more of a mainstream media option for consumers.
- 16 per cent of Australian internet users are 'bloggers' and 48 per cent have read content from a blog, with nearly 20 per cent reading them on a daily basis.(6)
- The trends in Australia are towards more use of audio and video online.
- Over 4 million Australians view *YouTube* videos, with 40% intending to access more video.

During the period 2007-08, *Neilsen* found that:

- Reading wikis has increased from 37% to 61%
- Reading blogs has increased from 48% to 60%
- 86% of *online Australians* read opinions specifically about products, services and brands via blogs, forums or other websites.
- 41% of *online Australians* publish their opinions via blogs, forums or other websites.

## Demographics

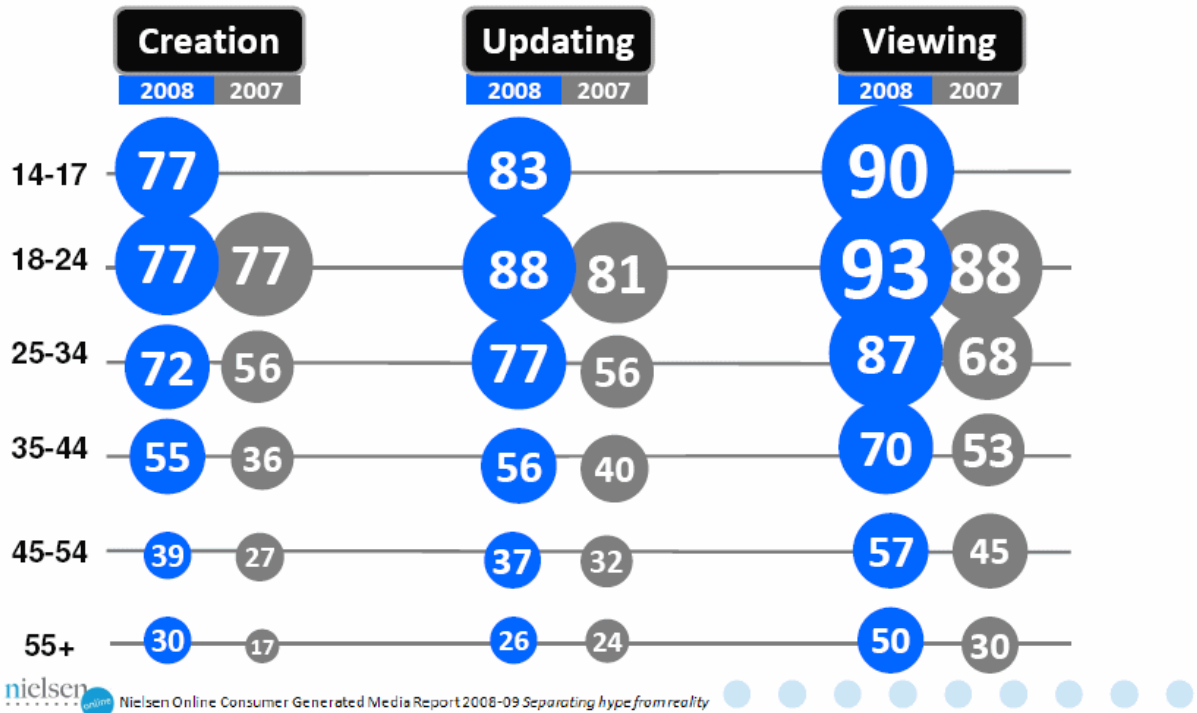
While these online social media activities remain most prevalent among younger consumers (the 14 to 25 year old demographic), there has been significant growth in

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uptake by older audiences (25-44) with the trend towards it becoming more of a genuinely mainstream media option for online consumers under 45 years of age.

### Social networking profile...

Younger demographics were the first to adopt online social networking and currently have high levels of usage overall. Older demographics are now following suit – with large gains in participation in 2008 amongst those aged above 35 years.



## Social Networks

More than half of Australian Internet users belong to an online social network.

Two in three online Australians looked at content on social networking sites in 2008.

The main barrier to uptake of online social networking is concern over personal information privacy.

## Video

19% of Australians have uploaded video to the Internet; 40% have shared a video link.

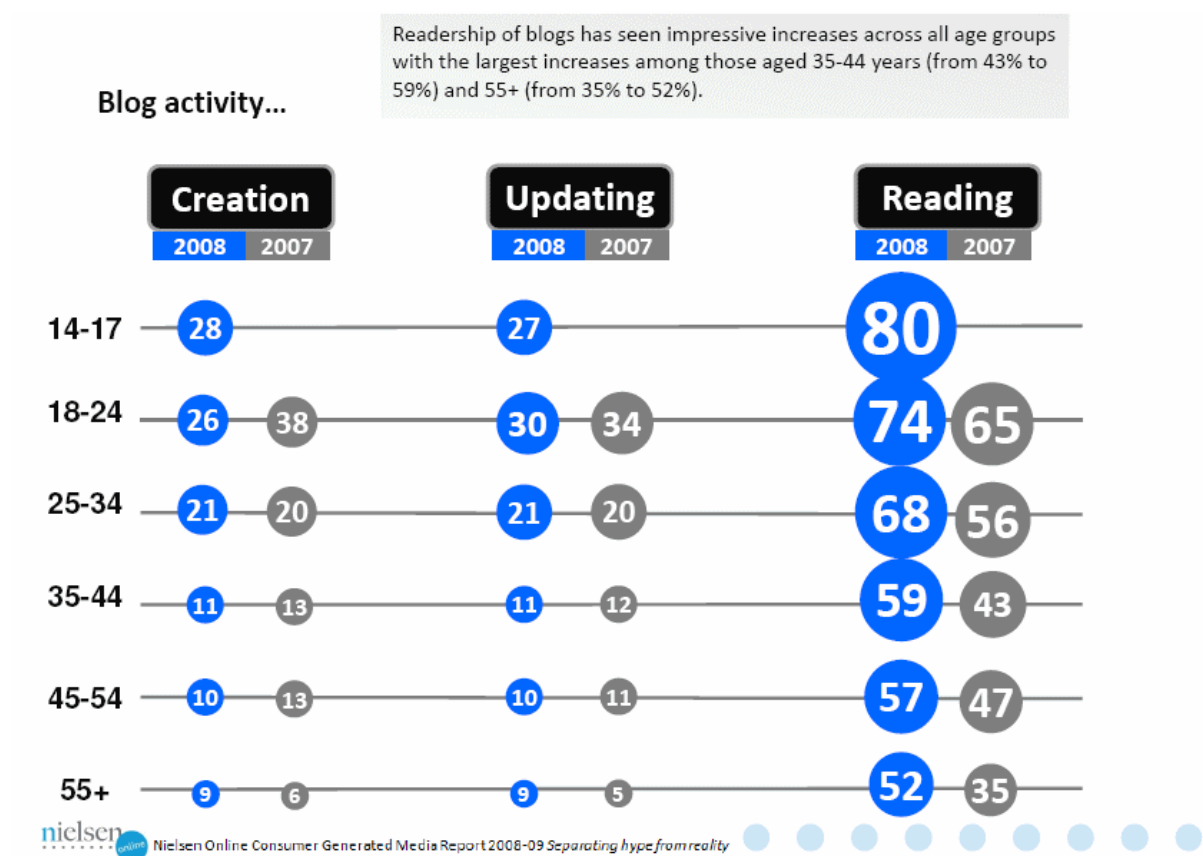
*YouTube* is the clear online video choice for Australians

- 75% have visited the site

<http://www.egov.vic.gov.au/index.php?env=-innews/detail:m1035-1-1-8-s-0:n-1753-1-0-->

## Blogs

There was a significant increase in the creation and consumption of blogs from 19% in 2007 to 45% in 2008.



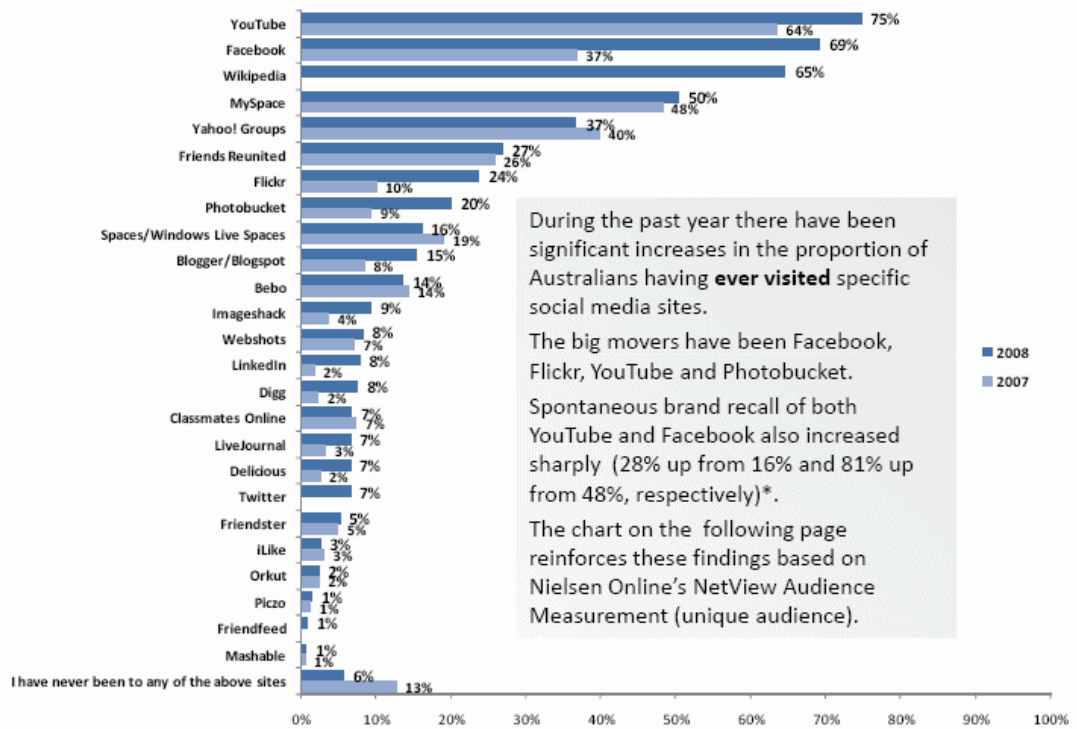
## Forums

- Direct communication (email) with organisations has decreased from 40% in 2007 to 26% - it has been replaced by making comments in a public forum – predominantly on message boards or websites.
- In 2008 users spent 63% more time on social media sites than they did in 2007.
- Time spent on community and blogging sites is growing at over 3 times the rate of overall internet growth.
- Over 5 million Australians are now on *Facebook*.
- *Twitter* first came to prominence in early 2007, with the majority of its visitors being 18-24 year olds. Today, the site's largest age demographic is 35 - 44 year olds.

The graph by *Neilsen* of Australian consumption of social media reveals that *Youtube* dominates activity in this space.

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Figure 1.8 Proportion of online Australians having ever visited site: 2008 vs. 2007



\*Source: Nielsen Online Australian Internet & Technology Report 2008-2009

nielsen online  
Nielsen Online Consumer Generated Media Report 2008-09 Separating hype from reality

With the general trend towards greater uptake of Web 2.0 technology in the community, it would be very short sighted if government remained too cautiously outside the communications style actively embraced by citizens.

There is also evidence that supports the value of social networking sites as vehicles for the public good. In the US, *Facebook* has generated many activity networks to raise money for charity.

An organisation called *Meetup.com* helps interest groups formed on the Web to get together in person - and a large number of these meet up for civic purposes - for example, groups devoted to cleaning up local parks, streets and neighbourhoods.

*Twitter* and *YouTube* have also been used to help organise political protests as seen in Iran's recent election.

From the political perspective, successfully tapping into Web 2.0 communities can potentially strengthen re-election prospects for office holders

## Examples of Web 2.0 Activity in Victoria

### The Premier of Victoria website

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In Victoria, the Premier's website has been the leading example of proactive use of Web 2.0 tools in communicating with citizens.

Web 2.0 online engagement on the Premier's website is used to extend consultation.

The site has invested in the use of *YouTube*, *Facebook* and *Twitter* as well as other Web 2.0 tools such as *blogs* and *Live Chat* used as a forum with guest visitors on moderated themes.

- *YouTube* provides the Premier's office with a cost effective method for hosting a variety of informational videos and allows for an exposure to the 4.1 million Australians who use it.
- *Facebook* creates an additional opportunity to listen to ideas from individuals and discover issues, provide feedback and share information.
- *Twitter* is used as a medium to broadcast Victorian Government information.

In July 2009, the site invited citizens to post their question to the Premier of Victoria and to vote on the questions that they want the Premier to answer. The [Premier undertook to answer the five most popular questions](#).

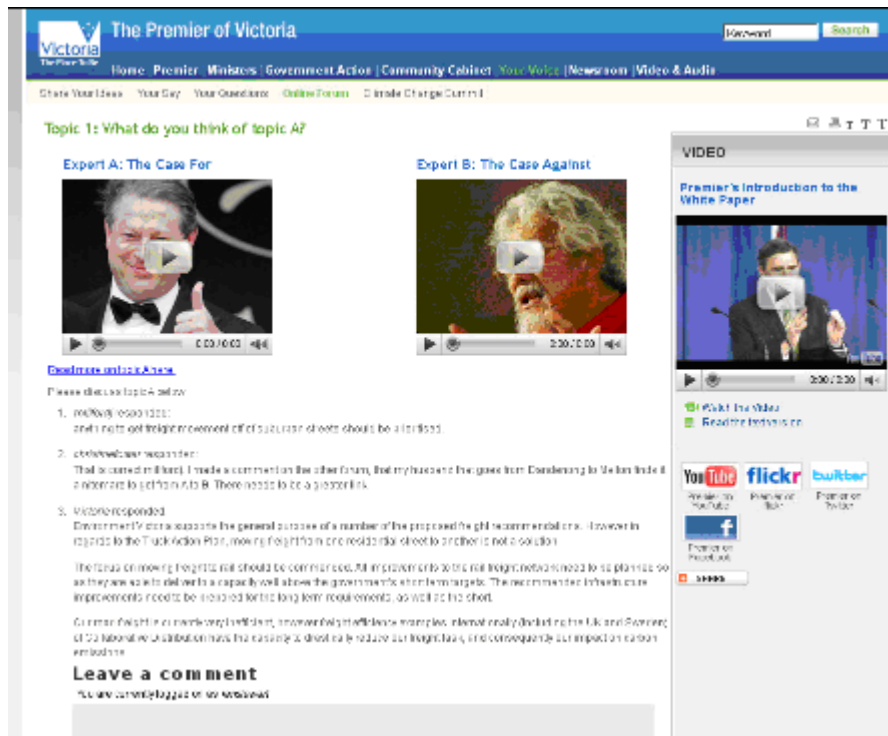
The first round of questions was completed on 31 July. The Premier's *Question Time* has been very much a learning experience. The Premier's call to action video has had 3,888 views, while a question on Collingwood attracted 5,531 and Gippsland Lakes 3,129.

### **A Video format for Climate Change Green Paper**

The Premier's Website is also planning a consultation on the topic of climate change.

<http://www.egov.vic.gov.au/index.php?env=-innews/detail:m1035-1-1-8-s-0:n-1753-1-0-->

A [Green Paper](#) will be presented in segments with discussion points presented via video. The video will rotate fortnightly with a presentation of the pro and con arguments in the paper to help to stimulate further discussion for each section. See the 'in development' mock up in the screen grab below.



This creative Web 2.0 approach to policy development is both novel and practical because it allows for a more readily accessible way to convey complex policy issues.

A video format easily engages the visitor and is more likely to capture a broader spectrum of citizen involvement in the policy deliberation process.

The Premier's site is currently also exploring an online application that allows users to submit their ideas to the Premier. Other users can rate the idea and make comments.

## Small Business Victoria Face book

*Small Business Victoria* has started a **Facebook forum** as a low cost way to trial small business online networking to see if there is value in considering it as an on going feature of *Business Victoria* online.

[Business Victoria's Facebook page](#) is a user generated site which brings together small business owners and those intending to go into business for the purpose of networking and information sharing.

The Facebook forum was introduced with the following objectives:

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- To improve search engine optimisation and discoverability for *Business Victoria*
- To provide networking opportunities for small businesses online
- To give *Small Business Victoria* access to further databases of potential users of its services
- To give insights into small business needs and concerns

The *Facebook* forum is moderated by the *Business Victoria* call centre

### **Department of Transport Eddington Forum (hosted on Premier's website)**

The Premier's Website hosted a successful online consultation on behalf of the *Department of Transport* on the *Eddington Transport Plan*.

- During the Transport forum, the site featured a video of Rob Hudson MP in which he summarised the main points of the plan.
- The forum attracted numerous posts per hour creating an intense workload for staff with 2 people answering questions and 2 more to help research answers
- Moderation by mid level staff and questions answered by senior staff or politicians

In all, the consultation received:

- 1300 views
- 200 registered users
- 250 posts

A general observation from staff arising from this online engagement was that government is more likely to receive heated posts than the majority of corporate engagement sites and that this experience will depend on the nature of the theme on which consultation is being invited and the degree of pre-publicity that it may have received

### **Parks Victoria - *wePlan* – Alpine Planning the Future of Victoria's Parks**

In December 2008, a project website incorporating a blog called [\*wePlan Alpine National Parks\*](#) was created to enable community input into issues regarding planning for Victoria's Alpine National Parks.

It also offered a wiki and an online *Geographic Information System* where citizens could identify and map the places they valued.

Minister Jennings launched the pilot and was one of the first blog contributors. To date, the site has attracted over 380 registered users who continue to make valuable contributions to this pilot online planning initiative.

### **Youth Central – *Department of Planning and Community Development***

<http://www.egov.vic.gov.au/index.php?env=-innews/detail:m1035-1-1-8-s-0:n-1753-1-0-->

This site offers an option to *Ask the Premier a Question* via *Youtube*, plus a *Have Your Say: Speak Out* link. The site has run 10 online consultations using a simple web-based form to gather feedback and collect data.

Currently it features: *Myspace*, *youtube*, streaming/podcasting, and collaboration tools.



## Melbourne City Council – Future Melbourne Wiki

The City of Melbourne used an online collaborative platform (wiki) to consult on and help draft the *Future Melbourne Community Plan* - the 10 year plan for *Future Melbourne*.

The online public consultation period ran from 17 May -15 June 2008 and resulted in:

- 2,500 page views per day, with 30,000 in total over the four week period.
- Over 7,000 unique visitors to the site over the course of the consultation.
- 131 members of the general public registered to edit the plan via the wiki
- It attracted a wide variety of participants from around Melbourne, Victoria, Australia and the world.

The City of Melbourne was the first government in Australia to use this highly interactive online tool for public consultation and collaboration. For the first time, the community was able to directly contribute their ideas to enhance and develop the city towards 2020 and beyond.

With the shift towards staggered working hours and the demise of the standard nine to five workday, it is increasingly difficult to schedule traditional fixed public meetings at a time that is convenient for most people.

The wiki was seen as the perfect fit for the project as it enabled wide-scale collaboration unrestricted by time or geographical constraints. This meant a wide variety of participants were able to take part, whether city residents, workers, visitors or students.

## Additional Victorian Government Web 2.0 Initiatives

### eGovernment Resource Centre – Online Forum

The Victorian government's *e-Government Resource Centre* – an internationally recognised resource repository for information about digital innovation launched an [Online Forum](#) on 17 July 2009. The Forum is currently covering the following topics:

- [General eGovernment Questions](#)
- [Government Mashups](#)
- [Government Service Delivery](#)
- [Government use of GIS and Google Maps](#)
- [Government use of Web Analytics](#)
- [Government Website Standards, Policies, Guidelines](#)
- [Government websites and SEO](#)
- [Online Video and Government use of YouTube](#)
- [What use is social media to government?](#)

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## Department of Innovation and Regional Development Public facing Blog on Online Citizen Engagement

In December 2008, a public-facing blog on the theme of [online citizen engagement](#) was created by a Victorian public servant in *Information Victoria*, DIIRD to encourage dialogue and share resources on the theme of online dialogue with citizens, open government and digital participatory innovation.



**Citizen Engagement Blog**

FRONT PAGE WHY CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT?

**Hi World**  
5 December 2008 12:00 PM  
By [Author Name]

Hi World - the blog of the Department of Innovation and Regional Development, Victoria, Australia and a government employee and the... (text continues)

Categories: Public Sector  
Tagged: Citizen Engagement, Web 2.0

22 Comments

**Public Sphere: ICT and the Creative Industries**  
Assisted by Design, Learning & Development

**TAGS**

- Citizen Engagement
- deliberation
- Digital participation
- Government 2.0
- Networks
- ICTW
- government New
- Media online dialogue
- Public Sector
- Public Sector Innovation
- Web 2.0

**CATEGORIES**

- blogging by public servants
- Citizen Engagement
- Creative Industries
- Government 2.0
- Innovation

## Victoria Online

The whole of Victorian Government portal, [Victoria Online](#), is in the process of developing a "Social media" page which will link to all social media tools that are currently used across government and will include podcasts, twitter, Youtube, and Flickr sites.

## Other Web 2.0 Initiatives from Australia and Internationally

### Australian Government Information Management Office (AGIMO)

The [Australian Government Information Management Office \(AGIMO\)](#) within the *Department of Finance and Deregulation* is leading the way in Australia with initiatives aimed at systematically approaching Web 2.0 online engagement.

<http://www.egov.vic.gov.au/index.php?env=-innews/detail:m1035-1-1-8-s-0:n-1753-1-0-->

See the [Online Consultation Guidelines](#).

The Federal Government undertook Online Consultation Trials from December 2008 – March 2009. The departments and topics were:

- *Department of Broadband and Digital Economy* set up a blog to discuss the digital economy. Minister Conroy's announcement of proposed internet filtering ('Clean Feed') sent the DBDE blog into meltdown with a large number of posts and a heated discussion.
- *Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations* forum for teachers/educators on early education. The DEEWR forum was launched amid the collapse of the nation's largest childcare provider, *ABC Learning Centres*.
- *Federal Attorney-General's Department* consultation site was targeted by the long-running campaign for an Australian Bill of Rights.

These trials demonstrated that online consulting on controversial issues can sometimes lead to the process being hijacked by concerted lobbying and that poor timing relative to other community development can negatively impact the consultation process. Other general observations by the federal government on their online engagement experience are as follows:

### **Time frame**

- fast response required
- A challenge in Public Service environment
- Resources need to be adequate
- Dedicated staff required to handle large volume of blog posts, comments, e-mails, etc

### **Culture**

- Public Service culture presents some challenges
- 'Champions' required to change PS culture
- Public Service staff also need protection from political blame
- Citizens should be able to talk in their language
- Policy on slang, swearing, humour, parody, etc
- Government sites can be intimidating, remote, unknown
- "Fish where the fish are" – eg. *GetUp*, *NetMums*

### **Federal Government - Government 2.0 Taskforce**

In addition to the above mentioned consultations, the Federal Government has established a *Government 2.0 Taskforce*, under the auspice of Minister Tanner.

See the [introductory video](#)/

Chaired by Nicholas Gruen, the Taskforce is made up of policy and technical [experts and entrepreneurs](#) from government, business, academia, and cultural institutions.

<http://www.egov.vic.gov.au/index.php?env=-innews/detail:m1035-1-1-8-s-0:n-1753-1-0-->

The Taskforce is also intending to [fund initiatives](#) in alignment with government 2.0 objectives.

### **Taskforce Terms of reference**

The Government 2.0 Taskforce will advise and assist the Government to:

- make government information more accessible and usable — to establish a pro-disclosure culture around non-sensitive public sector information;
- make government more consultative, participatory and transparent — to maximise the extent to which government utilises the views, knowledge and resources of the general community;
- build a culture of online innovation within Government — to ensure that government is receptive to the possibilities created by new collaborative technologies and uses them to advance its ambition to continually improve the way it operates;
- promote collaboration across agencies with respect to online and information initiatives — to ensure that efficiencies, innovations, knowledge and enthusiasm are shared on a platform of open standards; and
- identify and/or trial initiatives that may achieve or demonstrate how to accomplish the above objectives.

The Taskforce will advise Government on structural barriers that prevent, and policies to promote, greater information disclosure, digital innovation and online engagement including the division of responsibilities for, and overall coordination of, these issues within government.

It is expected that the Taskforce will provide a final report on its activities to the Minister for Finance and Deregulation and the Cabinet Secretary by the end of 2009.

### **Senator Kate Lundy – blog: Taking Australia Forward with Openness and Vision**

This politician's blog is actively experimenting with Web 2.0 tools with links to *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *Youtube* and a *Vimeo* channel that currently holds 30 videos made by [Senator Lundy](#) as part of her *Public Sphere* commitment to *Government 2.0* ideals.

### **Australian Youth Forum website**

The [Australian Youth Forum](#) is run by the Australian Government as an online communications channel for youth. It invites online input on a range of policy issues relevant to young people and incorporates Web 2.0 tools as part of its remit to invite youth participation.



## Mosman City Council use of Twitter and other Web 2.0

[Mosman City Council in NSW](#) has been active with Web 2.0 tools, using both an online engagement site and a Twitter service to inform residents of what's happening in Mosman. Their twitter policy states:

- *Our Twitter channel supplements the information we publish on our website.*
- *We can remind you of important events and alert you to late-breaking news.*
- *We can link to interesting and useful information about Mosman published by other people.*
- *We can better communicate with those using mobile devices.*

See the [Mosman City Council twitter guidelines](#).

Twitter has enabled Council to have a different type of conversation with constituents with notifications of Council events being re-tweeted by Twitter users to a wider variety of people than would normally have been possible for Council to engage with.

The Council is also actively listening into social media feeds to see what people are saying about the suburb and localities. Part of the reason the Council chose to embrace social networking - including Twitter, Youtube and Flickr - was to increase traffic to its website.

<http://www.egov.vic.gov.au/index.php?env=-innews/detail:m1035-1-1-8-s-0:n-1753-1-0-->

## Smart Services CRC

To better understand online community behaviour, the experiences of the business and community sectors in this space are worth further investigation.

*Smart Services CRC* is a commercially focused collaborative research initiative, developing innovation, foresight and productivity improvements for the services sector. *Smart Services* was awarded \$30.8 million to be invested over 7 years for research and development to support innovation in Australia's services economy.

It's an initiative supported under the Federal Government's *Cooperative Research Centre Program*.

Initial research is focussed on the digital media, finance and government sectors (including the health sector) to develop exciting new capabilities. A report on [Social Media: Tools for User-Generated Content was released in March 2009 \(in pdf format 1591kb\)](#). (This document requires the use of [Adobe Acrobat Reader](#)). You can also [convert PDF documents into alternative formats](#).

## Queensland Government – Get Involved

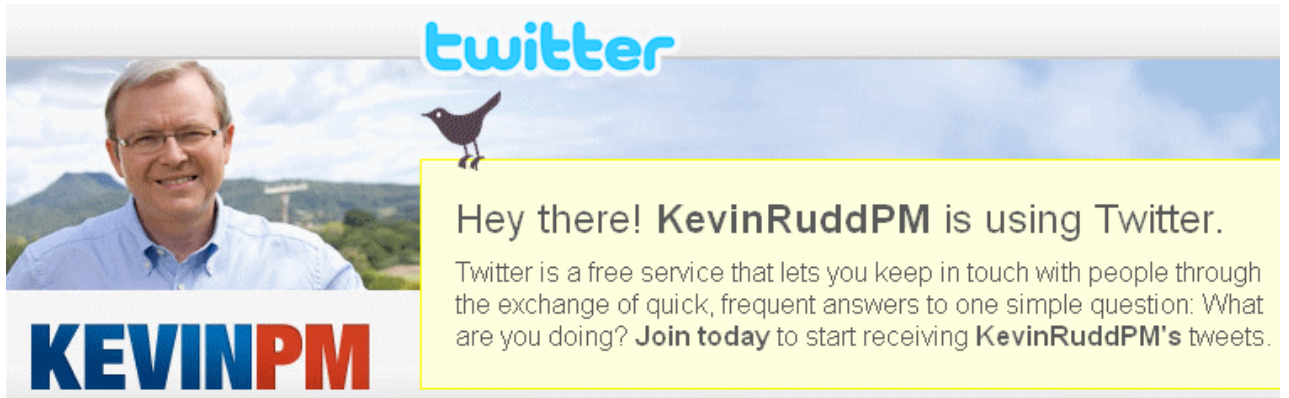
Run by *Smart Services Queensland, Department of Communities*, the [Get Involved](#) website invites a *Have Your Say Consult Queensland* link to government about key issues that are being considered.

It invites citizen to take part in an open public consultation or to find out about the outcomes of public consultations that have recently closed.

## Twitter Strategy

Australian politicians are beginning to interact more with their constituents online, with the numbers who are blogging or using the micro-blogging site Twitter increasing. On Twitter, users post messages of up to 140 characters called tweets; Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and South Australia Premier Mike Rann are avid twitterers. During the 2007 federal election Kevin Rudd, former PM John Howard and other politicians used video-sharing website *YouTube* as a video platform for their messages.

The Federal Government is now considering whether it should develop a Twitter-specific policy as Britain has done.

A banner for Kevin Rudd's Twitter account. On the left is a photo of Kevin Rudd in a light blue shirt, with the text 'KEVIN PM' below it. To the right is the Twitter logo (a bird) and the text 'twitter' in blue. A yellow box contains the text: 'Hey there! KevinRuddPM is using Twitter. Twitter is a free service that lets you keep in touch with people through the exchange of quick, frequent answers to one simple question: What are you doing? Join today to start receiving KevinRuddPM's tweets.'

British government departments are being guided on how to use Twitter via a **paper** developed by Britain's *Department for Business, Innovation and Skills* (BIS) - [Template Twitter strategy for Government Departments \(in pdf format - 75kb\)](#) . ((This document requires the use of [Adobe Acrobat Reader](#)). You can also [convert PDF documents into alternative formats](#).)

Currently, the Australian government has interim protocols on how to behave on social networking sites but no specific policy on Twitter.

The Government 2.0 Taskforce as part of its work will be considering Britain's guidance on the application of social media in improving online engagement with citizens and information dissemination.

See also [other Australian government activity on Twitter](#).

### **Ask a Pollie – Microsoft beta website**

The '[Ask a Pollie](#)' website trial launched in June 2009 is aimed at determining the value of using online video by politicians to get their message out instead of traditional text-based press releases.

Visitors to the site will be able to comment on the two-minute videos.

This initiative is following the lead of **US President Barack Obama's approach by launching an interactive website to connect politicians with their constituents.**

Content on the site shows videos by Federal politicians including Finance Minister Lindsay Tanner and Family First senator Steve Fielding. Among topics being included in the presentations will be issues on the environment, education, ethics, health records, trade and the economy.

[Ask a Pollie](#), is being promoted online and on kiosks at shopping centres and airports.

### **ABC – 'Pool' – a beta project**

Launched in August 2009, the ABC is building an online 'town square' for all Australians through its Web 2.0 website [Pool](#). Citizens are invited to use and re-mix

<http://www.egov.vic.gov.au/index.php?env=-innews/detail:m1035-1-1-8-s-0:n-1753-1-0-->

media made available from the ABC archive to create mashups as well as to participate in discussion forums.

*Pool* is a collaborative space where audiences become 'co-creators'. It's a place to share and talk about creative work - music, photos, videos, documentaries, interviews, animations and more.

## **Australia 2 BETA**

The [Australia 2 Beta site](#) is a not-for-profit website maintained by volunteers that encourages Australians to determine the **Top Priorities for Australia** in Government 2.0 initiatives like:

- Policy Reform for Government staff to access and use social media;
- Making all government data searchable and accessible;
- Crowd sourcing integration into normal government consultation

It is not endorsed by any Australia government and the views expressed within it are those of Australia 2 BETA's members and do not necessarily represent the views of the Australian Government or any other organisation or individual.

## **New Zealand Government - Police Act WIKI**

In 2007, order to raise awareness of and increase public participation in the redrafting of [New Zealand Police Act](#) of 1958, a Web 2.0 tool - a wiki-based collaborative was introduced.

The wiki ran between September 26th and October 1st, 2007 starting with the contents of the *Police Act 1958* and inviting anyone to edit it as they would a Wikipedia article..

The wiki was monitored by up to four full-time employees at any one time.

This bold attempt at participatory legislation proved that a wiki could be used as a model for consulting the public. It showed that collaborative technologies can act to incorporate citizens into policy deliberations.

## **The New Zealand State Services Commission - WIKI**

New Zealand is continuing its innovative work in the Web 2.0 space via the [Participation Wiki](#) – a community of registered users able to share information on developments internationally in the area of government innovation and the use of Web 2.0 tools.

## **Washington Data -Apps for Democracy**

*Applications for Democracy* was launched by the US Government in October 2008 as a technology contest to software developers to compete for the best new applications to make DC government data more accessible and useful for the public.

<http://www.egov.vic.gov.au/index.php?env=-innews/detail:m1035-1-1-8-s-0:n-1753-1-0-->

Developers and designers competed by creating web applications, widgets, Google Maps *mash-ups*, iPhone apps, *Facebook* apps, and other digital utilities that visualize real-time data from multiple agencies for citizens to access. See all the [Apps for Democracy winners](#)

Vivek Kundra, the Obama administration's CIO, created [data.gov](#), a catalogue of all the US federal government's Web services. (Web services, as opposed to static government Web sites, provide raw government data, allowing third parties to build alternate services and interfaces to government programs.)

The Sunlight Foundation's *Apps for America Contest* (modelled on the successful [Apps for Democracy](#) program that Kundra ran while CIO of Washington, D.C.) is now seeking to seed the process of citizen innovation using these data services.

The US federal government is beginning to provide an open platform that enables anyone with a good idea to build innovative services that connect government to citizens, give citizens visibility into the actions of government and even allow citizens to participate directly in policy-making. (7)

### ***Obama For America: US 2008 Presidential Campaign and Transparent and Open Government initiative***

Like President Kennedy in the 1960s who effectively used the then new medium of television, President elect Obama tapped into new media Web 2.0 tools to successfully campaign for the 2008 Presidency.

As a less well known outsider candidate up against more established rivals, Obama strategically employed new media tools to get more traction among American voters.

*He used new social networking tools to create a connection and conversation among target audiences, consumers or voters. It actively invited a personal commitment by individuals to the campaign and generated a strong sense of community activism in the process.*

The tools used in the campaign were a combination of websites and blogs as well as social network sites such as *Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, Digg, YouTube, LinkedIn* among others as well as use of an Obama Mobile option with the words: ***Text Hope*** as the call to action.

Obama's online campaign gathered:

- over 13 million email addresses,
- an additional 5 million plus supporters in Facebook and MySpace,
- One million Americans signed to receive text messages,
- 2 million profiles were created on his official website – [Obama For America](#)

The site gave people the online tools to help them organise locally and to get involved at a grass roots level.

<http://www.egov.vic.gov.au/index.php?env=-innews/detail:m1035-1-1-8-s-0:n-1753-1-0-->

Since gaining office and to maintain the online grassroots momentum of that success, a successor website has been created called [Organizing for America](#).

By the use of blogs, podcasts, email and SMS, Obama was at the forefront of strategic and passionate use of Web 2.0 tools to effectively harness the power of 21st century communications.

One of his first acts as President was to issue a memorandum for the heads of executive departments and agencies on the topic of **Transparency and Open Government** in which he said:

*My Administration is committed to creating an unprecedented level of openness in Government. We will work together to ensure the public trust and establish a system of transparency, public participation, and collaboration.*

**Government should be transparent.** *Executive departments and agencies should harness new technologies to put information about their operations and decisions online and readily available to the public. Executive departments and agencies should also solicit public feedback to identify information of greatest use to the public.*

**Government should be participatory.** *Public engagement enhances the Government's effectiveness and improves the quality of its decisions. Knowledge is widely dispersed in society, and public officials benefit from having access to that dispersed knowledge. Executive departments and agencies should offer Americans increased opportunities to participate in policymaking and to provide their Government with the benefits of their collective expertise and information. Executive departments and agencies should also solicit public input on how we can increase and improve opportunities for public participation in Government.*

**Government should be collaborative.** *Collaboration actively engages Americans in the work of their Government. Executive departments and agencies should use innovative tools, methods, and systems to cooperate among themselves, across all levels of Government, and with nonprofit organizations, businesses, and individuals in the private sector.*

The White House's website now features a Briefing Room page which has blogs, videos and text about the President's movements and messages, but surprisingly, does not accept comments from the public.

## **US – GovLoop**

A new social network Web site called [GovLoop.com](#) was created a year ago within the US *Department of Homeland Security* to share experiences and best practices.

More than 14,000 people have joined, creating nearly 500 sub-communities and over 1,000 discussion forums. Brainstorming sessions online has produced ideas on everything from government transparency to interoffice communication.

<http://www.egov.vic.gov.au/index.php?env=-innews/detail:m1035-1-1-8-s-0:n-1753-1-0-->

The White House recently reached out to *GovLoop* to promote a discussion on how to improve President Obama's *Open Government Initiative*.

## **UK – Appointment of Director Digital Engagement**

In May 2009, The UK Cabinet Office appointed a new Director of Digital Engagement to oversee the Government's online communications strategy.

The Cabinet Office envisaged this new role as working across government departments to encourage, support and challenge them in moving from communicating to citizens on the web to conversing and collaborating with them through digital technology, including blogs and social networking sites such as *Twitter* and *Facebook*.

The Director's role is to:

- Develop a strategy and implementation plan for extending digital engagement across Government.
- Work with communications, policy and delivery officials across Government to make digital engagement an everyday part of the work of Government.
- Work with Directors of Communications to ensure that digital media are included in the reporting of reaction to Government policy and initiatives
- Act as head of profession for civil servants working on digital engagement.
- Ensure that digital engagement is always a leading part of Government consultations.
- Introduce new, cost-effective techniques and software for digital engagement.
- Convene an expert advisory group made up of the leading experts on digital engagement to provide advice to Ministers and act as a sounding-board for the Government's digital engagement strategy.

## **UK Government: Show us a Better Way website**

The UK Government launched the [Show Us a Better Way](#) website as a way of encouraging citizen ideas for new products that could improve the way public information is communicated. It asked: *What would you create with public information? Do you think that better use of public information could improve health, education, justice or society at large?*

## **Internal Facing Web 2.0 Activities in Victorian Government**

### **VPS Government Blogs**

There are currently 10 internal to government blogs from across the VPS hosted via services provided by the whole of government intranet, *Central Station*.

### **Australian Synchrotron Blog**

<http://www.egov.vic.gov.au/index.php?env=-innews/detail:m1035-1-1-8-s-0:n-1753-1-0-->

This blog has been created for Victorian Government scientists and researchers to share information, ideas and research tips, including how to access Victorian Government 'Foundation Investor' beam line time on the Australian Synchrotron.

## **Escene**

The blog created by the *eServices* group at *Information Victoria* aimed at providing information, links and commentary on all things web.

## **2008 VPS Innovation Forum - Blog**

In late 2008, the *VPS Innovation Forum* was created by the Victorian *Department of Premier and Cabinet* with the purpose of discussing ideas for improvement and innovation within the Victorian Public Service.

The forum focussed on 4 themes:

- Policy Development
- Services Delivery
- Ways to Collaborate
- Workplace processes

Advice and support in creating the blog site was provided by the *eServices Unit, Department of Industry, Innovation and Regional Development*.

The forum was overwhelmingly successful, receiving 240 contributions across 17 departments and agencies. In total, 3094 people visited the site over the course of the forum, 1775 of these on the final day when the Secretary and Deputy Secretaries from the Department of Premier and Cabinet went online to respond to the comments being posted by members of the VPS.

## **Parliamentary Enquiry: Economic Development and Infrastructure Committee Report on *Inquiry into Improving Access to Victorian Public Sector Information and Data* (June 2009)**

This report by the Parliamentary [\*Inquiry into Improving Access to Victorian Public Sector Information and Data\*](#) contains 46 recommendations underpinned by the central principle that in the 21st century, information is a powerful resource that can be used to drive innovation, commerce and social engagement in ways scarcely anticipated.

It identifies information generated by government as one of the last 'great and relatively untapped resources' and argues for open access to government information as the default position.

## **Conclusion**

<http://www.egov.vic.gov.au/index.php?env=-innews/detail:m1035-1-1-8-s-0:n-1753-1-0-->

Any paper that seeks to capture an overview of developments and thinking in government regarding the use of Web 2.0 tools is quickly outpaced by the exponential rate of creative adaptations and change.

The opportunities and challenges for government however are not so much the tools but the way they can be used to change the way government works, Ultimately, Web 2.0 is part of a cultural process towards a more open and inclusive model for government operations that enables citizens to become partners with government.

By actively inviting a partnership with citizens, government decision-making is strengthened and endowed with renewed authenticity and transparency. Use of Web 2.0 tools by government may help to craft a more deliberative dialogue with citizens to better meet their needs.

## Further Information

Information Victoria, [Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development](#).

Email: [administration@egov.vic.gov.au](mailto:administration@egov.vic.gov.au)

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## Footnotes:

(1) Stephen Coleman and John Goetz, [Bowling Together: Online Public Engagement in Policy Deliberation](#), Hansard Society, 2002

(2) Sensis e-Business Report: [The Online Experience of Small and Medium Enterprises](#), Australian Policy Online, July 2008

(3) Ibid pps 17-18

(4) *AustraliaScan* presentation, Victoria Online Seminar, May 20 2009

(5) [Nielsen Online \(2008\) Consumer Generated Media Report: Separating Hype From Reality](#), First Edition, January, p.89. ((This document requires the use of [Adobe Acrobat Reader](#)). You can also [convert PDF documents into alternative formats](#).)

(6) Nielsen Online (2008) *Consumer Generated Media Report: Separating Hype From Reality*, First Edition, January, p.89...

(7) Tim O'Reilly: [Gov 2.0 The Promise of Innovation](#), 10 August 2009

