

Wading into the Waters of Web 2.0

By Lori Bocklund, President

The National Association of Call Centers | Volume 4, Issue 2, Jan 23, 2009

When I was a child, my dad often took us swimming in his beloved Lake Superior. While the natural reaction was to run screaming towards the warmth and safety of the beach as soon as we put our skinny little legs into that chilly water, he would encourage us by saying: “Just stay in long enough to get used to it, then we’ll have fun!” And so we did.

As I’ve waded into the waters of Web 2.0, I’ve more than once had the urge to run screaming back to a comfortable place. I’ve triggered RSS feeds and wondered how on earth I can keep up with yet another stream of information. I’ve poked around blogs and wondered who reads all this drivel. I’ve put “gadgets” in my iGoogle and “widgets” on my web pages and tried not to be distracted by the continuous updates. I’ve read wikis and reviewed their edit history and wondered: Who has time to write all this stuff? And who is using this sometimes unsupported information in what ways? I’ve been burned by someone abusing access to my LinkedIn connections to make introductions without my knowledge or approval. *(I’ve since disabled this capability even though most folks in my network would use it appropriately.)* I’ve been uncomfortable with my personal and professional worlds colliding on my Facebook account. *(Should my goofy communications with my 20-something nieces and nephew be in the same place as interactions with my more middle aged friends and colleagues?!)* I was creeped out by a stranger who “followed me” on Twitter. *(I learned how to block him, but wondered why they make automatic approval the default.)* I’ve yet to create an avatar, but I’ll do it if they’ll let me be tall in my virtual world!

I don’t know how far you’ve waded into these waters, but if you’re reading this article, you’re curious about it. Well, I think it’s important to turn that curiosity into action and begin your own experimentation. You have to go in far enough and stay in long enough to get used to it. Then we’ll have fun. Let me paint two scenarios to make my point.

Company BB is too busy to worry about Web 2.0, a seemingly overhyped trend that feels distant and irrelevant – something only the millennials are doing. Unbeknownst to Company BB’s management, thousands of their customers are asking questions on “GetSatisfaction” and seven of their CSRs have signed up to provide answers. CSRs log into Facebook while on calls, offering a non-stop distraction. Competitors are starting to use Twitter to notify customers in real-time of exciting product news or sales or follow “tweets” - and its triggering action. The CSRs built a “how to” wiki on a public website and are using it to help each other find workarounds to meet their key performance metrics. Disgruntled employees have taken their dissatisfaction with Company BB and vented it on a social networking site that can be found easily by prospective employees and customers.

Company Y is addressing the Web 2.0 phenomena proactively. They tap their reps insights to support knowledge building through less structured wikis or more structured knowledge management. They recognize that their millennial employees want to be “connected” with each other and the outside world. Management works with them to define the operating principles and identify tools that promote effective teamwork. They even let CSRs post “how to” content in text and videos on the web to augment existing self-service options and reduce call volumes.

Company Y also looks at ways to engage their customers through social media. They tap their customers’ experiences to rate and comment on products and encourage them to ask questions. They offer answers to



questions posed by one or hundreds of customers, preempting calls to the center. They use these interactions to learn about customer needs and improve their ability to satisfy them. And they let customers sign up for notification to provide information and updates to orders or issues.

While these are fictitious companies, the descriptions are what is possible – and what is going on – with Web 2.0. If you're willing to wade into the waters with me, watch for additional articles down the road. I'll share what I think Web 2.0 means to our industry, how you brace yourself for the plunge, and how we'll make it an experience we'll ultimately enjoy, despite the initial chill.