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Webs, Blogospheres, and the *American Journal of Neuroradiology*

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Webs, Blogospheres, and the *American Journal of Neuroradiology*

Most of us are somewhat familiar with the history of the internet. In the early 1960s, Joseph C.R. Licklider created the first computer network at the US Department of Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency.¹ The project then extended to outside sites including major academic centers such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and University of California, Berkeley. Shortly thereafter, one of the major forward steps leading to the transfer of news and messages took place at Duke University and here at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. In the 1980s, several government agencies (including NASA) developed what was truly the first decentralized internet. Soon, connections were established with Norway and Great Britain, and promptly afterward, the World Wide Web (WWW) was born. Telephone connections and access to business and commerce rapidly followed. The “killer application” that solidified the role that the WWW plays nowadays in our lives was e-mail. The second “killer app” was search engines. Although some people think of life as impossible without Google and e-mail, these will change soon, too. Younger, digital-native generations are using less e-mail and migrating toward instant messaging, blogs, and other social interaction options.

The term *Web 1.0* was retrospectively created (thus, it is a *retronym*) to define the WWW before the creation of Web 2.0. Web 1.0 was limited by broadband (which slowed its connections) and by somewhat simple browsers. Basically, information flowed in a 1-way fashion and most pages were “static.” Increasing broadband speed and greater internet literacy led to the development of information sharing, group-hosted services, social networking, video-sharing, wikis, blogs, and other refinements found in Web 2.0. The major aspects characterizing Web 2.0 are interconnectivity and interactivity. Until recently, I characterized the functionality of *AJNR*’s Website as basically 1.0. With the introduction of our blog site, we began bringing some sophisticated features of Web 2.0 into it. Of course, previous features such as keyword search, links, tags, and signals (such as our RSS [Really Simple Syndication]) feed were already simple 2.0 features. However, until our blog site opened, constant updating of information was not possible. Podcasts are also 2.0 features found on other journal sites, but at *AJNR* we believe our Editor’s Choices and Fellow’s Journal Club selections fulfill the same needs.

Earlier this year, we opened our blog site (www.ajnrblog.org). The term *blog* is a contraction of *Web log* and refers to commentaries, written or structured in other forms such as video, sound, or graphics that are kept (usually in chronological order) on a Website. Today, we understand blogging to mean “opinion” or “talk” about a topic held in cyberspace. Within the blogosphere, *AJNR*’s site falls under the category of education. Blogs are very popular and provide an alternative means of communication to e-mail and instant messaging. Entries can be searched and are displayed by frequency of use

(most popular) or entry date (most recent). For users of the *AJNR* blog site, a simple registration form needs to be completed before being able to post comments. Contributors may upload their own pictures, which appear with every comment they enter, thereby creating a more “personal” feeling. Blogs can be graded and linked/indexed to other social networking sites such as My Space, Facebook, Reddit, etc, or can be directly e-mailed. Authors of blogs should be able to incorporate pictures, sound bytes, and even video into their comments.

It is my hope that our blog site will be used mostly to comment on articles published in *AJNR*, thus providing constant “peer review” and refreshing of data. Entries are “embargoed” for a short period while they are read by our moderator (Dr. Robert Quencer). This warrants that no inappropriate comments or language will be posted. If a comment refers to a specific publication, the original corresponding author is notified and is given the opportunity to respond. I hope that as traffic increases, our blog site will take the place of our current Letters to the Editor section. Although blogging is fun, it is also a responsibility because, in other circumstances, it has brought with it unforeseen legal consequences.

Blogs are part of what has been called electronic social networking. A social network defines a group of people who share common visions, ideas, and other values. Hence, neuroradiologists are a type of social network node. We share many of the features of a social network including (but not limited to) closeness; cohesion; prestige; centralization; and, with our blog site, increased ability to reach each other. Because our blog site is not truly intended for social networking (eg, Facebook), I prefer to think of it as a node of academic or professional networking.

Another 2.0 feature found in *AJNR*’s Website that may not be familiar to all of its users is the RSS feed. This is a channel that feeds directly into your computer or handheld device an aggregate of frequently and timely updated works (the media, particularly news agencies, use it more commonly). By subscribing to our RSS feed, you get an automatically updated list of *AJNR* contents displayed in different article categories. Subscription places an icon on your browser’s toolbar or any other place you choose on your computer screen. A simple click on the orange-and-white icon on the left bottom corner of our Website accomplishes this.

Last, I want to mention Web 3.0², the next and future iteration of the WWW. No one knows what Web 3.0 will look like or what we may be able to accomplish by using it. Many of its uses are purely speculative because they are not technically feasible currently. What will differentiate it from the current 2.0 version is that it will probably be intelligent. This means that the future WWW will incorporate features such as machine learning, data mining, and other aspects that will lead computers to understand the information they now contain and transmit. Web 1.0 was a “read-only” concept, 2.0 became “read-write” and 3.0 will be “read-write-execute.” As computer sophistication increases, the Web may be able to reason in a semi-human fashion (although there are many skeptics, this is taking place already to a minor degree with Google). From there, perhaps we will see the fusion of biologic beings with the Web, blurring the distinction between the Web and reality. Wouldn’t it be great to have all of the contents of

AJNR in your head and to know they would be constantly updated?

References

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