"Web 2.0": The New Internet

by Peter McCracken

One of the biggest buzzwords on the internet today is "**Web 2.0**" and associated terms, such as "**Library 2.0**." What do they mean exactly? In a nutshell, Web 2.0 focuses on user-generated content and user interaction with a web site. In most cases, the web site simply serves as a platform and structure to hold the content; all of the actual content is written by someone other than the web site creator. One example of this type of content is the "reviews" feature at Amazon.com. A simple list of the books you could buy is Web 1.0; letting users write reviews that others can see is Web 2.0.

In maritime history, we can find many examples of user-generated content. To start, visit **YouTube** (**http://www.youtube.com**) and type in "maritime history" in the search box. You won't get the same results I just got—who knows what will be added or removed between when I write this and when you read it—but I found videos about master planning at Seattle's Center for Wooden Boats, an introduction to the Fisheries Museum of the Atlantic, a piece about a huge maritime drug seizure, the QM2 and QE2 meeting in Sydney harbor, how archaeologists draw pictures and maps underwater, and much, much more.

Another hallmark of Web 2.0 is "**tagging**," meaning that users describe content with whatever terms they think best fit. **Flickr** (**http://www.flickr.com**), which hosts individuals' photos, is one of the premier "tagging" sites. Anyone can post images on the site for anyone else to see. Because different people use different terms for the same thing, you need to try a variety of synonyms when searching such sites: one person might use "aircraft carrier" when describing his photo of USS *Yorktown*, while others might use "naval vessel," "*Yorktown*," or even just "CV-10," "CVA-10," "CVS-10." Flickr will provide you with some fantastic images—and lots of pedestrian ones—from all corners of the globe.
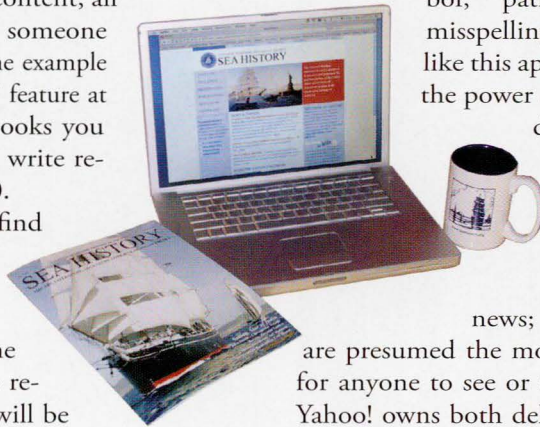
Tagging is where libraries and Web 2.0 differ widely: libraries developed standard subject headings, so books about World War II naval operations have standardized headings like "Pearl Harbor (Hawaii), Attack on, 1941." Someone posting *photos of their visit* to the memorial site in Pearl Harbor might use tags like "Hawaii," "Pearl Harbor," "patriotic," "disaster," "Arizona," or even misspellings like "Misourri." While some dislike this approach (and it does has its problems), the power of a huge crowd is usually effective in describing any particular image.

Other Web 2.0 sites worth noting include **Digg** (**http://www.digg.com**) and **reddit** (**http://www.reddit.com**), which are sites where people vote on stories in the news; those with the highest popularity are presumed the most valuable, and they rise to the top for anyone to see or read. **Del.icio.us** (**http://del.icio.us**; Yahoo! owns both del.icio.us and Flickr) is a very popular site where people store *bookmarks* of the sites that interest them. The more people bookmark a given web site, the more interesting it (presumably) is. A search for "maritime history" here will show the most popular bookmarked web sites among del.icio.us users. At each site, you can create a free account and store information about the items most relevant to you. Those collective opinions then inform the overall knowledge of the entire community.
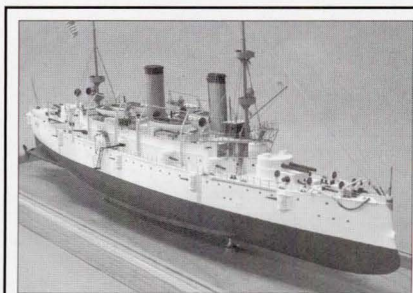
Finally, **Wikipedia** (**http://en.wikipedia.org**, for the English version), which has been mentioned here before, is a perfect example of user-generated content. Anyone can write or edit nearly any entry in the online encyclopedia, and the community of users will further edit and expand the entry (or even delete it if someone deems it self-serving or inappropriate). While Wikipedia gets a lot of grief, it's an amazing and useful way to learn a little bit about nearly everything.

Suggestions for other sites worth mentioning are welcome at **shipindex@yahoo.com**. See **http://www.shipindex.org** for a compilation of over 100,000 ship names from indexes to dozens of books and journals. ⚓