Web 2.0: Open Reviewing, Postpublication Reviewing, Open Networking, Blogs, and Wikis

Moderator:
Joy Moore
Nature Publishing Group
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Speakers:
Joy Moore
Nature Publishing Group
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Alex Frost
Sermo
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Reporter:
Shauna Kanel
University of California, San Diego
La Jolla, California

Did you read the newspaper this morning? Was it a paper copy, the online version, or an RSS feed?

Internet technology is advancing quickly, and science publishers need to evolve with it to stay current. The Web is no longer 250,000 read-only sites representing the opinions of technology-savvy HTML programmers and supercilious whiz-kid hackers. It is being transformed right before our eyes to represent its users more than ever, connecting more than 1 billion global users to 80 million largely read-write sites, allowing everyone and anyone to participate. User-generated content adds to the collective intelligence on the network, and the new Web—Web 2.0—swells with international collaboration and customizable options.

Joy Moore, a publisher with Nature Publishing Group (NPG), began the session on how to survive in this new environment. Addressing a need and fill-ing the void online are the quickest and surest ways to develop a successful online community that will serve both users and sponsoring organizations.

Moore helped to develop NPG's premier online community, Nature Network Boston (*network.nature.com/boston*). It is easy to use and free to join, and members are given as much space as they want to blog about themselves, post their curricula vitae, join groups, exchange ideas in forums, and network locally and globally. Users can link to NPG's other resources, such as *news@nature.com*, *naturejobs*, and *connotea*—a free, online reference organization tool.

Examining Nature Network allowed Moore to identify key techniques for building a thriving online community. The site should be free to users. People don't want to pay for something when free alternatives exist. Members should be given incentives to join the network and become involved, such as ease of use. Allow sponsors and advertisers to fund the site by advertising products that draw traffic to their own sites. If the balance is just right, satisfied users should become future customers.

Sermo—which means conversation in Latin—is a physicians-only online community in which members can connect, ask and answer questions, and discuss diverse topics, all with the aim of improving medical practice and patient care. Only 1 year old, Sermo is projecting 75,000 physician members by the end of 2007.

Filling a need online is one reason for Sermo's initial success. Outpatient medical care has detracted from the physicians' community; two-thirds of physicians now practice with fewer than five colleagues. "The sense of community among physi-cians is probably the foremost motivator for joining Sermo," said Alex Frost, vice president for research initiatives.

Such participation incentives as anonymity and stipends for posting coupled with low participation risk and plenty of options draw in users. Physicians can share and critique early data, rate postings and users, and vote on questions posed by others. That is all part of Sermo's "anonymity with accountability" stance, granting users privacy but holding them responsible for their input into the community. Their personal risk remains low, as does risk to other users.

Sermo is free to users, and it relies on clients instead of advertisers or pharmaceutical companies to support itself. Financial institutions, health-care companies, and such organizations as the American Medical Association join for a fee and in exchange receive early data on clinical trends. The only interaction they have on the network is in creating postings, which are clearly identified as "client" postings.

With 15% and 13% participation rates, respectively, Sermo and Nature Network boast involvement that exceeds the Internet-wide average. The 1% rule states that for every 100 people online there will be one person who creates online content and 10 people who will interact with it. They seem to have found the ideal combination of factors for making a successful online community, and they hope to serve as models for the future of scientific communication.

Frost ended the session with this advice: "Don't try to stop social interaction—channel it!" 🐾