

Nature Medicine 2.0

In the future, *Nature Medicine* will be famous to 15 people.

Web 2.0 is all the rage. The idea of a second-generation Internet that emphasizes collaboration and sharing among users seems to have captured our collective imagination. Everybody seems to be keeping a blog, editing Wikipedia, updating their MySpace profile, or posting something in Del.icio.us, Digg, YouTube or Flickr. Such seems to be the impact of this trend that, if you're not a user of these sites (or at least familiar with what they are), you get the uncomfortable feeling that the times have left you behind.

At some level, the emergence of Web 2.0 rests on the belief—recently exemplified by the decision of *Time* magazine to choose an anonymous ‘You’ as ‘Person of the Year’—that Internet users can be in control of the information they have access to. Gone is the era in which a small group of ‘experts’, who controlled mass media, simply fed us data. It’s now time for ‘you’ to make the rules.

Scientific journals, as it turns out, are also information providers. This has led us to wonder about the effect that Web 2.0 may have on our trade—what ‘you’ would do if you were our manager. In a certain way, this isn’t a new question; the very creation of the Internet has already changed the landscape of scientific publishing once. Journals have far fewer print subscribers because most people prefer to gain access to papers online. The availability of search engines such as PubMed means that you can come to our website, download a manuscript and leave right away, perhaps without consciously realizing whether the paper came from *Nature Medicine*, *Nature Immunology* or a journal from a completely different publisher. And let’s not forget about the push for open access to scientific information, which was made possible in the first place by the advent of the Internet.

So, what is the Web 2.0–driven scientific publishing world going to look like? For starters, what already is a very specialized market (people interested in, say, apoptosis) will become even more fractionated (people specifically interested in apoptosis in the developing liver of the mouse and who use detection kits from Stratagene—a set of conditions almost as strict as those you might expect to find on a dating website). Second, blogs and social-networking sites can provide a forum for giving visibility to papers published in obscure

journals and deprecate articles from high-profile titles. Third, the availability of wikis that cobble together documents from the collective knowledge of their users may eventually make it unnecessary for journals to publish reviews—you could theoretically update and expand one broad review on any topic *ad infinitum*.

What we have, then, is a world divided into small tribes (some of which could well fit in a family minivan), in which the safety of being one of many people able to express their points of view has replaced the authority of experts, and in which, using a clever, increasingly cited paraphrase of Andy Warhol’s “15 minutes of fame”, everybody will eventually be famous to 15 people. In such a world, is there room for journals like *Nature Medicine*?

Another way to ask this question is to wonder about the effect that Web 2.0 (and the Internet in general) has had on the value of brands. There is less use for brands in the tribal, anonymous Web 2.0 world, but they are not altogether redundant. If anything, this version of the web has led to the appearance of new brands that seem to have been part of a process that looks a lot like a winner-takes-all competition. Whenever you hear about the Web 2.0 success stories, it’s always the same names (which we listed above), ready to join the pantheon of similarly triumphant websites such as Google, Amazon and eBay.

Extrapolating this conclusion to the realm of scientific journals, it’s clear that ‘brand’ continues to matter to readers. And it will continue to do so until there is a better way to filter scientific information than the service provided by high-profile journals. When at long last that happens, brand name will continue to matter, though. The challenge for the existing journals is to find the way to become the winner that takes it all.

Not surprisingly, there is a lot of discussion about the ways in which journals need to adapt in order to survive in the Web 2.0 world. But all of this passionate discussion notwithstanding, the solution is still anyone’s guess. If ‘you’ are the one who makes the rules now, why don’t you come to our blog, Spoonful of Medicine (<http://blogs.nature.com/nm/spoonful/>), to give us the answer?