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# It takes 2.0 to tango

**Robyn Rebollo\***

Or perhaps it takes three, four or more excited and engaged people on their blogs or chat rooms; sharing ideas, discussing new resources and offering their professional advice on the most relevant online issues of the day. Actually the recently-coined term “Web 2.0” has been quite overused, making it an unacceptable description by the collaborative internet innovators of recent times. So what exactly is Web 2.0? Is it still mainly about collaboration, personalisation and ease of use (open source and simplistic web publishing tools that your grandma could figure out)? I believe it’s still about these core components, along with the rapid delivery of information through RSS (real simple syndication/rich site summary) and online communication via IM (instant messaging) and SMS (Short Message Service) capabilities. Keeping up with all the internet and techie acronyms can get a bit overwhelming for folks who don’t use the terminology all the time. An excellent web resource to refer to for computer and internet related acronyms is Netlingo at <http://www.netlingo.com>.

## INSTANT MESSAGING

Instant messaging has become a mainstream way of communicating online at the workplace, home and on the fly. Does your current employer have Windows Live Communication Server integrated at their place of business? According to the promoters at Microsoft, “Windows Live enables corporations and organisations to reach, collaborate, and respond to information more quickly as compared to telephones and e-mail.” The Windows Messenger program has been a standard on most computers since 2003, and you’ll find it on the *Start* menu if your pc/laptop includes a Windows XP platform. Windows Messenger allows you to contact work colleagues if used at work, or friends and family if used at home; via IM, voice, or video. Here’s a screen shot of an active Windows Messenger user:

**FIGURE 1 Windows Messenger user**



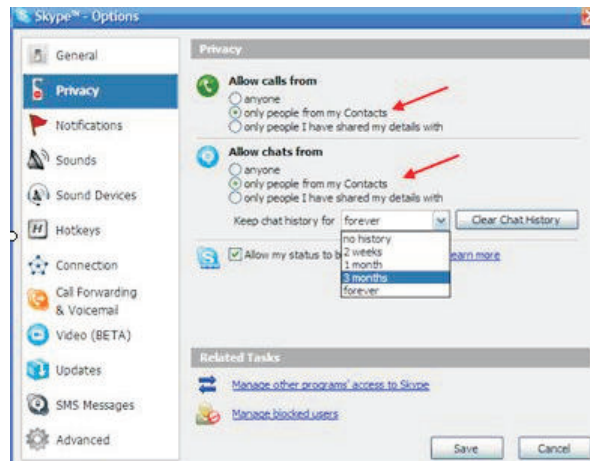
For more information on Windows Messenger, check out Microsoft’s Tech Net FAQ’s here: <http://www.microsoft.com/technet/prodtechnol/winxppro/maintain/wmsgfaq.msp>.

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Another great IM product that I support is Skype. It is highly recommended by online people who resist using Microsoft-based applications. It's easy to download, configure and all the standard offerings are free. I've been communicating with my family in the United States using Skype from work and home in Australia. The VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol) service works best when using a high speed network line, and with my simple Logica video camera, I am able to be visually present to my family. Did I mention this was all free? When configuring Skype, make sure to review your privacy settings. It is recommended that you allow online instant messages and phone calls from only people who are listed in your personal contacts.

**FIGURE 2 Skype**



There are a few fun options in Skype, similar to what you see on other main IM services these days. You can select a Skype Avatar (a graphical image of a user, such as used in graphical real-time) as a personal virtual representation of yourself, or build one from several of the sites now available. Just go to Google or Ask.com and type the term "Avatars" for suggestions. Here is one I created:

**FIGURE 3 A Skype avatar**



While many IM embracers have recognised the benefits of using instant messaging devices during work and play, there is still the justified fear of parents about their children interacting with IM services online. Parents need to be honest and open with their children, and educate them about the darker side of the web, where predators and stalkers roam. Disallowing our youth to engage with other like-minded peers on the internet is not a good option though, since their grasp on "all things internet" far surpasses anything adults know about the web and online collaborative technology. I recently learned about a wonderful toy that my godchild has been using for over a year called a Webkinz

([www.webkinz.com](http://www.webkinz.com)). A Webkinz is a stuffed animal that comes with a secret online code that a child can access via the Webkinz site. The site has been specially designed for children aged 6-13+ and is intended to include content for all ages and levels of computer skill within that range. It provides a safe environment for children to learn about online learning and collaboration (through a protected online chat room), while enabling a secure environment for them to interact. By allowing our children to use family safe websites such as Webkinz, they will be better prepared for what comes ahead in the virtual landscape (go to Second Life, [www.secondlife.com](http://www.secondlife.com), to find out!). The Australian federal government recently distributed a print copy publication called *A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety* to every home in Australia. The guide provides internet safety advice specifically written for parents in mind. Additional guides for both Librarians and Teachers are also available on the NetAlert website ([www.netalert.gov.au/advice.htm](http://www.netalert.gov.au/advice.htm)).

### SHORT MESSAGE SERVICES

Many of us reach for our mobile phones and PDAs to communicate when not using our computers. It is apparent that SMS now dominates Australian use of mobile phones. It's much cheaper than a voice call, and quicker conversation too. Have you seen the *Herald Sun's* 2007 article called Generation TXT?<sup>1</sup> It reports that Australians:

- spend, on average, an hour on the mobile phone every day and 35 minutes of that is spent texting;
- the average Australian makes 3.5 voice calls each day, but sends nine text messages; and
- Friday is the most popular day to send a text and the busiest time for text messaging is between 7 and 8pm.

The article highlights a number of interesting tidbits, including analysis from a group of psychologists who believe the way we write SMS postings tell us something about the career paths we have chosen! Did you know that Australia has one of the highest mobile phone penetration rates in the whole world? Just check out consumer behavior researcher Diana James' preliminary report about mobile phone use, and you'll be quite startled at the findings.<sup>2</sup>

Another alarming yet amusing piece of knowledge regarding mobile phones concerns the use of ringtones. Did you know there is a specially designed high pitched ringtone that only teens can hear? The tone/pitch was originally designed in Great Britain by a company called Compound Security Systems ([www.compoundsecurity.co.uk](http://www.compoundsecurity.co.uk)), to deter teenagers from loitering. A smart British teenager decided to copy the pitch and create a personalised ringtone that only teenagers could hear. Coined the *Teen Buzz* and *Mosquito Ringtone* in the online teenager sphere; it received a barrage of press coverage in June 2006 when it was discovered by the wider community.

### RSS – REAL SIMPLE SYNDICATION/RICH SITE SUMMARY

RSS is my information lifeline for keeping informed of the latest developments in the online information and technology sectors. What is RSS? Simply put, it is a dynamic web feed used to publish frequently updated pages on the web. RSS is used in a variety of communication outlets, including podcasts, blogs, and websites that provide constant information to their audience base. Most of us by now are familiar with image or logo which indicates sites that support RSS. I refer to it as "that orange square":

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/story/0,21985,21798238-662,00.html> (viewed 15 October 2007).

<sup>2</sup> See [http://www.bus.qut.edu.au/faculty/schools/ampr/documents/mobile\\_phones.pdf](http://www.bus.qut.edu.au/faculty/schools/ampr/documents/mobile_phones.pdf) (viewed 15 October 2007).

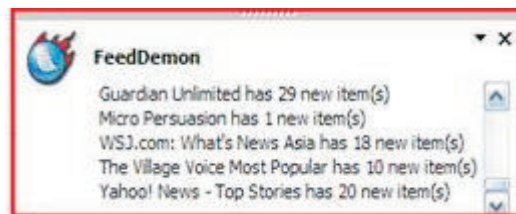
**FIGURE 4 RSS**

There are a range of additional logos that websites use to inform the online public that RSS is available. Most of the logos represent an aggregator web service or software that store and display RSS. Here's a screen shot of several examples:

**FIGURE 5 RSS logos**

There are three main types of aggregators. These include:

1. Web browsers – Aggregators that are included in a web browser. More of the popular ones include Firefox, Safari and Internet Explorer 7.0. The key to an intuitive and easy to use web browser aggregator: the functions are unobtrusive and seamless to the user.
2. Desktop aggregators – Aggregators that are software programs installed on your pc/laptop that notify users when feeds are updated.

**FIGURE 6 An RSS aggregator**

They also provide several functions for categorising and managing your feeds. For example, Feed Demon, the software aggregator I use, includes an area called *Feeds I Pay The Most Attention To*, and *Feeds I Pay the Least Attention To*.

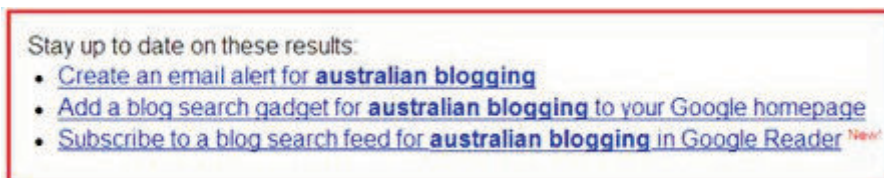
**FIGURE 7** RSS feed display

3. Online Aggregators – Bloglines and Google Reader – These include web-based services that anyone can access from any computer or appliance with a web browser. The key advantage with aggregators supported on the web is that you can access them anytime, anywhere (on your PDA, on vacation from a cyber cafe, or from or work). The one challenge with these aggregators is you need to manually access the site to receive any new updates. There are no electronic notification features at this time.

As more and more blogs hit the web, it is important to aggregate content that is only relevant to you. Otherwise, you may experience information overload due to the abundance of feeds you have to review and manage. Are you looking for recommended resources that will help you identify noteworthy RSS feeds worth subscribing to? Let me suggest the following web directories to get started:

Australia Index ([www.theaustralianindex.com](http://www.theaustralianindex.com)) – This site includes a comprehensive directory of Australian blogs. The blogs are categorised by State and 50 subject areas. As of October 10, it included 3204 blogs and counting.

Google Blog Search (<http://blogsearch.google.com>) – Google’s space where the search technology is focused on blogs. This is a good place to locate blogs and also search for specific postings on a particular topic. Google makes it easy for you to keep track of any additional blogs that might take your fancy by offering the following tracking features for your search:

**FIGURE 8** Google Blog Search

Yahoo’s RSS Directory (<http://dir.yahoo.com/rss/dir/index.php?skw=rss+directory>) – According to Yahoo, “the Yahoo! Directory is a human-created and maintained library of web sites organised into categories and subcategories.” It a good place to locate RSS feeds that aren’t coming from blogs.

Many information professionals usually hear about a sensational blog by word of mouth, or from a colleague or friend. That particular blog's author will lead you to additional blogs he or she reads consistently. It's all in the sharing!

If you are you feeling a bit overwhelmed, then check out Jenny Levine's presentation on RSS called – How to Use RSS to Know More and Do Less (<http://theshiftedlibrarian.com/presentations/2006/20060613SLA.pdf>) and Lefever's YouTube tutorial called RSS in Plain English (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0klgLSxGsU>). LeFever does an excellent job of communicating the main concepts of RSS in a *speak easy* fashion. His additional video tutorials on Social Bookmarking (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x66lV7GOcNU>) and wikis (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dnL00TdmLY>) are also worth reviewing.