



## SOCIAL MEDIA'S GREAT UNCLE, NAPSTER

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A few short years ago, there was little talk about the transformative effect social applications and Web 2.0 phenomena such as the open source movement, sharing, collaboration and consumer-generated media would have on the internet. Yet, there was a key moment in 2000 when a door to the future cracked open and told the story of 2006 with startling accuracy. That door was the music-sharing community called Napster.

Napster signaled what was possible when a breakthrough social application (in this case music sharing) empowered individuals with choice and lowered the barriers for self-expression and easy access to desirable content. The meaning of Napster was crystal clear – the forces of human nature (especially when super-charged by technology) reign supreme.

Napster's footprint suggests we not only should have seen last year's breakout hits YouTube, facebook, Flickr and MySpace coming, we shouldn't be any more surprised by their popularity than their potential demise. Why? Because applications and services enabled by new technology will come and go; the forces of human nature – of individual identity and interpersonal connection, in particular – are constant.

### **Learn from the past: approach the future with extreme pragmatism**

Over a decade ago Alan Kay, a preeminent computer scientist and Apple Computer Fellow quipped prophetically that, "... the best way to predict the future is to invent it ..."

Fortunately, we don't have to invent the next MySpace; as marketers we only need be prepared to understand and appropriately leverage their respective Web 2.0 roles.

For its part, MySpace significantly lowered the bar for creating a great personal brand online. In other words, MySpace made it easy to look cool to others and (strangely enough) to yourself. For marketers, the MySpace challenge is to create desirable content and features that members will want to co-opt and place on their own pages to enhance their personal brand.

### **The rise of portable content**

In this new model, a sports brand can place a soccer tips video on its website and make it just as easy for a coach to add that video to the team's website, as a player to lift it from the team website and place it on their MySpace page. This is called portable content. The role of portable content is to create a persistent brand presence wherever it is that people can be found digitally. This is not just limited to MySpace or blogs – portable content extends to the desktop through technology like widgets and even to the gaming console and mobile phone.

### **Looking forward to 2007 and beyond**

These days, a major brand's marketing plan that doesn't at least have a nod to social media, social applications or social networks could be viewed as sluggish.

However, just a nod is the beginning of the end. Brands expect a kind of leadership today that is one part breakthrough marketing and creative, one part technology and equal parts futurist and social anthropology. The surprise unseating of a well-entrenched marketing executive or advertising agency by a major brand may well have been the result of underestimation of this new requirement.

Predicting the future has never been more intimidating because the new "digital-world" is heavily incentivized to generate disruptive innovations. Additionally, the barriers to open-source collaboration and co-creation are minimal; and thanks to an always-on broadband internet, there is no longer any distance between what is possible and a mass audience. The safe bet: facilitate human nature.

