

Online predictions for the New Year

By [Matthew Buckland](#)

12 Jan 2009

We may be in the throes of a global financial crisis, but that doesn't mean we won't see innovation on the web. In fact, leading trend analysis blog Read Write Web reminds us of the old cliché that "tech innovation thrives in times of recession". Tight economic conditions incubate intense creative and lateral thought, because a person's very survival is at stake. And the stakes are high.



There just isn't money to throw around and a cushion to fall back on. It perhaps explains why innovation in the online space often emanates from shoe-string garage operations, as opposed to many big, cash-flush corporates such as Microsoft. Also, think of all those unemployed people forced into entrepreneurship... we'll be seeing a whole new generation of web entrepreneurs borne out of this recession.

It's going to be a wild 2009, and here are some key trends to watch out for:

Publishing and e-commerce sites as social networks: All major sites will have social network layers allowing users to connect to each other, facilitating peer recommendation of content and sharing of content. The *New York Times* is leading the way with its recently launched [TimesPeople](#) which does just this. Viral functionality such as "Send to a friend/email a friend" will make way for more sophisticated sharing that involve mining email contact lists. The stark differences between a social network and a publishing/media site will diminish over the years, as publishers wake up and encourage their readers to connect and share - much like social networks.



2. **Niche social networks:** Expect a raft of niche social networks and exclusive networks to launch. The thing about Facebook is there is no privacy - people will want privacy, intimacy and specialisation in some cases (for example, a person joining a social network focused on a medical condition). There will be some big launches, too: Apple will launch a social network, akin to Facebook, but initially mobile driven from the iPhone. With its scalability issues under control, Twitter will jack up its rather thin offering, with an improved user interface and more social networking features.
3. **Applications continue moving online:** 2009 may be a seminal year for this trend and it will be catalyst for full-out warfare between Google and Microsoft. We've seen how Google launched Google docs, an online version of Microsoft Word and Excel. It was a direct lunge at Microsoft's jugular. Microsoft, which is like a dangerous mangy dog, will respond by launching its own online versions of Word, Excel and Powerpoint to take Google head-on. Microsoft may go a step further and turn Outlook into an online social network, arguably where email and contacts are headed anyway. Google will retaliate by announcing an online operating system, rivalling Windows, linked to a new GooglePC, a strike at the very heart of Microsoft. This may actually be an extension of Android, its Mobile OS, which it will extend to other digital devices - not just the mobile phone. We may see activity happening the other way too, with Facebook launching a browser.
4. **Explosion of mobile content and advertising (and other digital devices):** It's become *passé* to talk about the exponential growth of the mobile web, because it's just so damn obvious. Early trends are telling a story of unbelievable growth, showing previous estimates to be too conservative - an unusual thing for the hype-prone online sector. Indications are that in South Africa, the mobile web - still in its infancy - is already double the size of that of the traditional web in terms of readers. It's not going to be just about cellphones, however; we'll see more digital devices come online too, including digital cameras, car radios and even microwaves.

5. **Multimedia content and advertising:** As broadband marches on, so interactive video advertising will increasingly become key. It's surprising how many traditional publishers and advertising agencies have not got to grips with multimedia advertising as an offering. There is just nothing like an assault on all senses for advertisers to get the message across. It beats a banner ad.
6. **Targeted/profile-based advertising:** Inspired by Google's AdSense, which is by far the most superior advertising model ever created, online media will get its act together and deliver advertising and content that is targeted. Targeted advertising means relevant advertising, which is infinitely more useful to the user and advertiser. We'll see another big player launch an online advertising network, perhaps even a consortium of online publishers tired of splitting ad revenue with Google. Microsoft will extend its own AdWords model and finally launch a self-service AdSense rival, which is currently under trial.
7. **Personalised content:** As the web continues to pile up with masses of content and the user is overwhelmed, publishers will look at ways of delivering only content that is relevant, based on a user's surfing habits, profile and demographic information and peer recommendations. This will trump privacy concerns, as it will be such a useful and necessary thing.
8. **Blogging as social networks:** Blog dashboards will include contacts and people to market/ share content. Social networks will upgrade their blog abilities. Blogs don't social network very well, and social networks don't blog very well. We'll see a coming together of these two types of social media. The chief innovator here will be Wordpress.
9. **Monetising international traffic:** This will be the year that major publications wake up and realise that the Internet is an international medium. Borders and regions are relevant to a print publication delivered in a truck, but not the Internet. Media owners will look at their highly fragmented international audiences and look at new ways of monetising their international traffic, apart from just slapping on Google AdSense.
10. **Better and more inclusive application of "user generated content":** Publishers will develop a more sophisticated understanding of content generated by users (UGC). They will understand that their user base is varied and contains different types of users, with different abilities. They will identify experts in their community and interact with them differently.
11. **Computer-generated content (CGC) via semantic tag structures:** these will play a key role in helping us organize and categorise content on the web. They will help aggregators and filters organise and process information, making sure only high quality, influential and relevant stuff is seen.

ABOUT MATTHEW BUCKLAND

Matthew Buckland is GM of Publishing at 24.com. He's the former boss of the *M&G Online* and co-founder of blog aggregator *Anatomu.com* and group editorial blog *Thought Leader*. He has spoken locally and around the world on online media issues, including New York, London, Amsterdam, Germany, Dublin and Kenya. He's a prominent blogger, blogging regularly at www.matthewbuckland.com on new media, Web 2.0 and technology issues.

■ The great internet radio swindle - 5 Jul 2012

■ Why Google Buzz will work - sort of - 15 Feb 2010

■ Ten questions for Google SA's new head, Stephen Newton - 17 Aug 2009

- Future of online advertising lies in collapse of print - 26 May 2009
- Social network approach to viralising articles - 5 Mar 2009

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>