JWT

WORK IN PROGRESS
THE NOW WEB

A JWT TRENDLETTER AUGUST 2009

EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY

A new Web is emerging, one characterized by constantly updating streams of real-time information, conversation, memes and images that's markedly different from the static pages that once defined the Web. Given the growing influence of these streams, brands must understand what the Now Web is about and jump in.

This *Work in Progress* explains what the Now Web looks like and examines its implications for mass culture, entertainment and media. It explores what marketing with a Now mind-set means, and takes a closer look at campaigns that have captured the Now.

Key Questions

- What's different about the Now Web? What sites and services are typically "Now"?
- How is the Now Web fostering the rise of mass experiences? What are the positive and negative implications of this?
- What's the potential for entertainment programming to become a more "Now" experience?
- How is this trend impacting the news media?
- How can brands become more "Now"? Which brands are doing what in this space? What does a "Now" campaign look like?

Key Findings

The Now Web is less static and more dynamic. The conversations enabled by social media are a central element, with Twitter and Facebook as key tools. More emphasis is being placed on real-time search and mobile connectivity. These real-time conversations are giving rise to an increasingly mass culture—people around the globe are experiencing events together, using the Web to rally like-minded people, spreading Internet memes and sometimes rumors rapidly.

The rise of real-time, interactive viewing on the Web is also bringing entertainment programming into the Now; at the same time, television will increasingly enable more live interaction among viewers. The weaving of the real-time stream into entertainment has many possible applications.

As the Now Web shifts our perceptions of "current," how and where we get news is quickly changing. The real-time stream is a challenge to traditional news media, but the best providers of content, and those most able to leverage networks and relationships within the stream, may gain new audiences.

For businesses and brands, the Now Web will make it increasingly easy to get a finger on hot topics and consumer sentiment. The challenge is to also respond in Now time. Brands must tune into real-time conversations and participate in dialogue through social media; marketers can also inject a measure of Now into brands by making their Web sites, and even their ad campaigns, more real-time. As the stream of information that people consume, produce and share online flows ever faster, they will increasingly expect brands to be along for the ride.

JWT

Like any emerging technology, the Web has continually reinvented itself, first as sites that simply reproduced printed matter, later as the more interactive environment of Web 2.0. Today the Web is increasingly real-time and fluid—moving away from an environment based around pages to become more like a flowing stream of information.

The real-time stream is fast becoming a dominant metaphor for consuming information, increasingly displacing or at least transforming the traditional Web page. —ERICK SCHONFELD, co-editor of the blog TechCrunch

The Stream is the next phase of the Internet's evolution. It's what comes after, or on top of, the Web we've all been building and using. —NOVA SPIVACK, longtime Web entrepreneur and CEO and founder of Twine.com

A real-time, flowing, dynamic stream of information—that we as users and participants can dip in and out of, and whether we participate in them or simply observe, we are a part of this flow. … This world of flow, of streams, contains a very different possibility set to the world of pages. —JOHN BORTHWICK, Web entrepreneur and investor, CEO of betaworks

These observations, all posted online in the last few months, reveal an emerging vision of the Web, one that will come to feel increasingly apt. It's often termed the real-time Web and sometimes the Now Web, a name that perhaps best captures what "the stream" represents.

"The Stream is the dynamic activity of the Web, unfolding over time," Spivack wrote in a long post last May. "It is the conversations, the live streams of audio and video, the changes to Web sites that are happening, the ideas and trends— the memes—that are rippling across millions of Web pages, applications and human minds."

What's different about a stream, explained Spivack, is that unlike a page, it is defined by constant change; by interface-independence (the consumer, rather than the provider, controls the interface); and by conversation rather than hot links.

Consumer conversations, of course, can make or break brands—and given the growing power of these streams, brands must understand what the Now Web is about and then jump in. This *Work in Progress* explores what marketing with a Now mind-set means, and takes a closer look at campaigns that have captured the Now. We also explore in greater detail what the Now Web looks like and its implications for the mass culture, entertainment and media.

HOW IS "NOW" DIFFERENT?

The Now Web is less static and more dynamic than what we're used to, enabled by technologies that allow for faster update speeds. It's sites like FriendFeed, a continuous scroll of what your contacts are doing on Twitter, Flickr, Facebook, Netflix, Digg, etc.; it's Zappos' U.S. map showing what shoppers around the country are buying in real-time; it's "White House Live" on Facebook, which streams video of events and allows members to chat in a neighboring window; it's *The New York Times*' new Times Wire, an automatically updating, customizable listing of posts.

On the tech news site GigaOM, Kevin Kelleher uses a library/coffee shop analogy to explain what's different about the Now Web:

> *In college, most of us spent a lot of time in the library but also in a social hub like the campus coffee shop. One was a place for digging up information, the other a more dynamic, conversational setting, where ideas were casually exchanged. Google has been the Web's library: archival, organized and oriented around research. Twitter and Facebook, on the other hand, are coffee shops: instantaneous, conversational and oriented around discovery.*

Twitter and Facebook pop up a lot, since they currently serve as tools for producing much of the stream. Both have raised their profiles immensely in the past year. Nielsen reports that Twitter went from 1 million unique U.S. visitors in June 2008 to 21 million in June 2009. And Facebook visitors in the U.S. spent an average of four hours, 33 minutes on the site in June, a 240 percent increase over June 2008.

Notably, in July, Twitter revamped its non-member home page to emphasize its Now-ness: It no longer describes itself as "a service for friends, family and co-workers to communicate," but rather as a tool to "share and discover what's happening right now, anywhere in the world." In August, Facebook acquired FriendFeed, which gives it more advanced real-time search capabilities, and concurrently introduced a more Twitter-like search function (now users can easily search all public profiles in the network).

On a core level, the Now Web is all about real-time search. A handful of new real-time search engines—among them OneRiot, Topsy, Collecta and Scoopler—are based on a notion articulated by OneRiot: "Increasingly, the web's most interesting content is what our friends and other people are talking about, sharing and looking at right now." Or as Topsy puts it, while Google treats the Web as a network of documents, today's social Web comprises "conversation in a network of people" that comes in smaller Tweets, blog posts and reviews rather than longer, static Web pages.

Real-time search engines take various approaches but all focus on what's being Tweeted and shared around the Web. The sites are designed in part to identify current hot topics, and most spotlight a handful of these on their home page.

The ability to find whatever's trending is also part of the appeal of Twitter, whose search function delivers completely unfiltered, chronological results. Microsoft's new Bing search engine offers Bing Tweets, which sorts Twitter trends into

categories including People, Places and Products; searching on a topic produces typical results as well as a scrolling list of Tweets. And TweetTabs allows people to track general or specific Twitter trends using tabbed columns.

A new way of living and working online may be further ushered in later this year with Google's Wave, an application that runs in a Web browser. Groups of people will be able to set up a Wave and collaborate on a document in real-time, or trade photos and video, or drag in a widget that allows them to play a game together. Users will be able to show their content from Twitter, Flickr, etc., in their Wave, and they'll be able to save what's happened in their Wave and publish it. There will also be chat via live transmission (i.e., whatever you're typing is visible to the party on the other end).

Since the Wave exists online rather than on a user's computer, people can easily access it on the go, helping to make the flow more continuous. What defines the Wave, says Google, is that it's shared, it's live, and it's "equal parts conversation and document."

One industry tied inextricably to the Now is mobile, a platform that facilitates real-time updates and connectivity. Real-time updates are increasingly sophisticated as newer phones and applications allow people to shoot streaming video and then upload it instantly. And real-time connectivity is being facilitated by phones like the latest Chat models from INQ Mobile, which have Facebook and Twitter running in the background—i.e., users don't have to open applications to see their stream. (The phones are sold in several European countries and may expand to the U.S. market with new models due in September.)

THE MASS NOW

Barack Obama's inauguration, last January, was arguably the first mass Now experience. People Tweeted about it, and they watched it together on Facebook, which hosted a live CNN stream and a concurrent scroll of status updates from people watching (roughly 1.8 million status updates featured the word "Obama").

Six months later, global Web traffic reportedly surged to 33 percent above normal during Michael Jackson's memorial. (CNN reported that Jackson's death "nearly brought the Web to a standstill, with several sites buckling under the sheer weight of traffic.") Roughly 759,000 people watched it via CNN's Facebook Live, but other major media outlets had jumped on the social media bandwagon as well; ABCNews.com and MTV.com also connected with Facebook Live, while MSNBC annexed Twitter to its live feed.

"The immediacy of the live web and its ability to let people collaborate and share was better than watching [the memorial] on the tube," Mark Ghuneim, founder of social media tracking service Trendrr, told the BBC. "The TV showed itself as a much more isolated experience."

One implication of the Now Web is the rise of a more mass culture—people around the globe experiencing events together, using the Web to rally like-

minded people, spreading Internet memes and sometimes rumors rapidly around the globe.

Jackson's death was also interesting in this regard. Many heard the news via the Now Web—Facebook status updates, Tweets, etc.—since there was a significant lag between when TMZ broke the news and when the mainstream media confirmed it. Word can spread like wildfire through the Now Web, especially via Twitter, where people tend to Retweet hot items. And in the wake of Jackson's death, the stream of the real-time Web quickly filled with outpourings of emotion and personal stories, old video clips, favorite-song lists and so on.

"Mourning has become more public than private: a collective expression of loss," noted writer Pete Cashmore on the social media blog Mashable.com.

Not long before Jackson died, the disputed presidential election in Iran vividly demonstrated the power of the Now Web to spark mass action. While the Iranian government blocked access to much of the Web, it failed to effectively block Twitter, which served as a key way for anti-government protesters to coordinate their actions in a country where the media is tightly controlled. It was also one of the only ways for Iranians to tell the outside world what was happening in the country (although it's impossible to verify where Tweets are coming from, and what's authentic). A similar phenomenon happened in early April in Moldova, when thousands of disaffected youth used Twitter and other online platforms to organize protests against the country's Communist leadership.

The darker side of this is the way in which mobs—real or virtual—can quickly form via the Now Web. Today's online communication platforms "facilitate mob creation and growth like never before," argued TechCrunch founder and co-editor Michael Arrington in a June post. Real-time sites like FriendFeed can serve as the nexus for conflicts, and "things can get out of control instantly," wrote Arrington, who has himself been the focus of flared tempers.

"No longer is there time to take a deep breath and think things through," observed Steve Hodson on another tech blog, The Inquisitr. "Now we are dealing with raw emotions that don't have a chance to cool off before—often in seconds—they get re-enforced by a new flood of heated emotions."

This hyperactive cycle also works to propagate false rumors. In the wake of Michael Jackson's death, word of the supposed demise of various celebrities, notably Jeff Goldblum, raced through Twitter and Facebook. While the celebrities immediately refuted the rumors, the potential is clearly there for people to spread disinformation that's inflammatory and dangerous.

Such rumors can be classified as Internet memes—cultural phenomena that spread quickly through the Web. These are nothing new, but now they travel faster and further than ever. Before the Now Web, for example, it's unlikely the Susan Boyle video would have racked up millions of YouTube views in a matter of days. Boyle's moment became part of the mass Now, a triumph—and eventual breakdown—shared by millions around the globe.

NOW ENTERTAINMENT

As people increasingly log into Facebook to watch live events like Obama's inauguration or Jackson's memorial, what's the potential for entertainment programming to become a more "Now" experience?

This year experiments have included a live Oscars broadcast on Jaman, a high-def video and movie site, accompanied by Facebook chat; a live NBA All-Star broadcast on TNT's site, also with Facebook chat (although technical problems reportedly marred the experience); and a similar "virtual viewing party" on Bravo for the May season finale of *Real Housewives of New York City.* The Jonas Brothers debuted a new single in May via live video stream on their Facebook page, which included a chat feature for fans.

Broadcasters have been experimenting with various permutations of "social viewing"—although not necessarily live viewing—for a while now, with various degrees of success. CBS, for example, has been operating a social viewing "lounge" on its site, where people can watch recent episodes of its shows and chat with others who are also watching. Whether viewers will embrace this type of experience is still unclear, but several Web businesses are betting that there's a niche in the realm of real-time video viewing.

The Jonas Brothers Webcast used technology from Ustream, which operates a "live interactive video broadcast platform" at Ustream.tv; viewers can watch user-created content or a few professional broadcasts while chatting with others watching in real-time. Then there's View2gether, "which enables viewers to pick and watch videos together in real-time," and Watchitoo, a platform where users can "collaborate with real-time instant messaging and video chatting, while sharing synchronized content."

If the Web is helping to enable real-time, interactive viewing, television is slowly enabling more live interaction among dispersed viewers. In the U.S., Verizon started adding Facebook and Twitter widgets to its FiOS (fiber optic) TV service in July, building a layer of engagement for viewers and another platform for marketers and content providers to communicate with them. Fans can watch a baseball game on a split screen, for example, while monitoring what other viewers are saying about the action (viewers need only select "current channel" on the widget to see all Tweets related to whatever's on). But viewers won't be able to upload information using their TVs, at least initially.

The widgets include onscreen ads that are akin to banner ads; clicking on one with the remote launches a commercial. FiOS viewers with DVR service will soon also be able to watch Web video from several sites (Bip.tv, Dailymotion and Veoh).

At January's Consumer Electronics Show, "nearly every major television manufacturer was demonstrating some sort of web-to-TV integration," ReadWriteWeb reported. This included sets from Sony, Samsung and LG that integrate Yahoo! widgets; these aren't necessarily conversational (an eBay widget in which users can bid for items and receive real-time updates, for example), but many are, such as Twitter and MySpace. The latter allows two-way interaction and is ad-supported.

Watch also for TV shows to incorporate more real-time interactive elements, beyond viewers voting via text. This summer, for example, VH1 launched *The*

Great Debate, which uses interactive out-of-home screens as well as Twitter and Facebook to generate viewer participation in debate around pop-culture topics. In the radio world, CBS Radio recently launched a weekly two-hour listener-controlled program on San Francisco's KITS-FM through a partnership with Jelli, a Web radio service that lets users dictate what's played in real time.

"The real-time Web represents a huge opportunity to engage with both online and traditional media audiences," said Michael Marquez of CBS Interactive in a release.

The weaving of the real-time stream into entertainment has many possible applications, even beyond the first and second screens. Imagine watching an orchestra playing Beethoven's Sixth as your mobile device displays Tweets with the conductor's program notes at specifically timed intervals. That happened this summer, when National Symphony Orchestra conductor Emil de Cou created what he described as "an adult musical pop-up book" for Twitter members attending a performance at Wolf Trap, an outdoor venue near Washington, DC.

NOW MEDIA

The Now Web is changing our perceptions of "current"—a definition that's already shifted radically from the days when people relied on the evening news and the morning paper to keep up to date. "As the pace of the Stream quickens," says Twine's Nova Spivack, "what we think of as 'now' gets shorter. Instead of now being a day, it is an hour, or a few minutes. The unit of change is getting more granular."

This has clear ramifications for the news media, which are competing with the power of Twitter and other social media tools as they race to verify facts. Today, there's an "insatiable demand for up-to-the-second information," observed Gerry Campbell, CEO of real-time search engine Collecta, in a recent MediaPost column.

Increasingly, the public itself is providing that information, re-broadcasting news via social media as soon as it breaks (as happened after Jackson's death) and also serving as on-the-ground reporters, Twittering from the site of news events.

Some see Twitter as the game changer for media. It "absolutely changes the media landscape," communications strategy analyst Ross Dawson told the Associated Press in July. "I like to refer to Marshall McLuhan's description of media as 'an extension of our senses.' Now, Twitter is extending our senses to tens of millions of people who are often right on the scene where things are happening."

After the terrorist attacks in Mumbai last November, people at the scene broadcast numerous Tweets with details ("Mumbai terrorists are asking hotel reception for room #s of American citizens and holding them hostage on one floor" was one quoted by the U.K.'s *Telegraph*). It went well beyond Twittter though: A man walking the streets with his camera posted a hundred-plus photos to Flickr, a Wikipedia page was quickly created and fleshed out in real-time with updates and background context, and local bloggers sent details from their vantage points to Mumbai's Metroblog.

In turn, mainstream media outlets cited some of these reports and showed photo and video images from "citizen journalists," a pattern that was repeated in June following Iran's presidential election. Of course, citizen journalism can be unreliable and is hardly a substitute for professional reporting—the future of news will likely integrate the two for a wider perspective. Some see established news sources becoming more wiki-like, with eyewitnesses able to contribute reports and an editor assessing how they fit together.

"The two worlds of Old Media and New Media need each other and have for a long time," observes Jeff Pulver, a co-founder of Vonage who's now working in the realm of "TV on the Net." Citing as an example the Susan Boyle video—which broadcast media picked up as its popularity grew, further enhancing its profile in the Now Web—he notes that "when Old Media and New Media can be catalysts for each other, amazing things can and will happen."

Another new challenge for the media is that people are spending less time visiting Web sites for news, gossip and other daily tidbits and instead are relying on Twitter, Facebook and other tools of the Now stream. But this may actually be good news for traditional media.

In a post on his PR 2.0 blog last spring, Brian Solis pointed out a finding from Comscore, an online marketing research firm, from earlier this year that the average Twitter user in the U.S. is two or three times more likely than the average Internet user to visit the top online news brands. "Twitter, Facebook, FriendFeed and active online social interaction breathe new, and measurable, life into great content where it's hosted, simply by connecting it to the potentially attentive people where and how they are currently engaged," argues Solis, principal of a PR and new media agency in Silicon Valley.

The best providers of content, and those most able to leverage networks and relationships within the stream, may gain new audiences through the Now Web. And the Now Web may serve to prolong the natural life of some content, so that yesterday's news bounces around for several days or more.

MARKETING WITH A NOW MINDSET

For businesses and brands, the Now Web will make it increasingly easy to get a finger on hot topics and shifting consumer sentiment. The challenge is to also respond in Now time—to take advantage of short-term opportunities and to swat away potential problems before negative word-of-mouth gains momentum.

This requires adding a new set of quick-response skills. Marketers "are built like battleships for long, sustained warfare, [but] this is guerrilla warfare," Forrester senior analyst Lisa Bradner told *Adweek* recently. Ernie Mosteller, VP, interactive creative director for the Brunner Digital agency, uses a different metaphor: "Advertising creative used to be akin to crafting a novel or a film. Real-time creative is like improv. To be successful, you need both skills on hand."

The most basic Now behavior for brands is to tune into real-time conversations and to participate in dialogue through social media platforms. How brands can best adopt social media is a complex topic unto itself, but what's important to note here is that in the Now Web, consumers expect near-immediate brand

response and an ongoing steam of conversation with brands (what's sometimes called social CRM).

Pepsi, for example, reacted quickly after Jackson's death, sending out a "thank you, Michael" Tweet to acknowledge the King of Pop's commercials for the brand in the '80s. In a "Twitter 101" case study published by Twitter, Pepsi brand director Anamaria Irazabal says that with micro-blogging, "We can move at the speed of culture. Twitter means we can react to something that happens and provide a platform for dialogue. That's the key word. It's about engagement and building the relationship."

Customer service will also increasingly need to be Now. More brands are adopting live assistance on their sites—a technology that's been available for some time but has improved greatly in the recent past—including Overstock.com, Apple and Bank of America, according to *Adweek*. Real-time customer service is also happening through Twitter, with company representatives monitoring Tweets and offering advice or assistance where relevant. Companies like Pepsi, JetBlue, Ford and Comcast have become models for this type of proactive management of the Twitter stream.

"We're getting to a point if you're not responding, you're not being seen as an authentic type of brand," Adam Brown, head of social media at Coke, told *The Wall Street Journal* in August. (Brown, appointed in March, is the first person in this role at Coke.) Rival Pepsi responds to all Tweeted complaints; says Irazabal in "Twitter 101": "When we respond quickly, people give us kudos."

Twitter can also be a way to cut off customer complaints at the pass. "If there's a rash of delays, I can say, 'Heads up, everybody.' When travelers have more knowledge, it helps them keep calm," JetBlue's Morgan Johnston, manager of corporate communications, says in another "Twitter 101" case study. (These Tweets potentially reach a meaningful percentage of flyers: JetBlue now has a million-plus followers on Twitter.)

By contrast, brands that don't respond in the Now risk a gathering storm of bad PR as complaints, concerns or false rumors get re-Tweeted. Much as political protests can be organized quickly and efficiently on the Now Web, so too can protests against brands.

In April, for example, an Amazon backlash broke out on blogs and Twitter after a blogger noted that the bookseller had reclassified as "adult" all titles with gay and lesbian themes and taken them off the main search and sales rankings. While Amazon reacted within a few days, a more careful monitoring of the stream may have nipped the issue in the bud—reports of this reclassification had been circulating for several months before coming to wider attention.

Conversely, the Now Web can be helpful in refuting rumors. Earlier this year, Starbucks used Twitter as one of several platforms to dismiss the false rumor that the company would not send coffee to troops as a protest against the war in Iraq.

Effective Now sales tactics include using platforms like Twitter and Facebook to push time-sensitive offers. Discount codes "can be limited in number, so that

only those customers who order promptly can benefit from them," advises Rob Knight of PRWD, a usability and technical development agency in the U.K.

As Knight notes on PRWD's blog, Dell and Zappos are among the brands that have best leveraged this technique. The online shoe seller—one of the most popular brands on Twitter, with more than a million followers—uses Twitter to advertise coupon codes and other promotions, "prompting surges of shoppers towards the Zappos site." Dell has been especially successful using Twitter to advertise the refurbished equipment available at Dell Outlet, which has close to a million followers; on other Dell accounts, it also broadcasts deals that are exclusive to Twitter.

Twitter isn't the only way to inject a measure of real-time into a brand. Shoppers like to know what others are buying or browsing—something that many retailing sites have leveraged—and as Knight explains, the Now Web "creates the opportunity to speed this up, giving customers information about what others are buying *right now*." The point isn't necessarily to get people excited about specific items but to inspire confidence in the brand and engagement with the site (immediacy helps develop feelings of engagement).

Zappos recently added a map that shows what people around the country are buying as the orders come in (generally about half a dozen images appear at once). U.K. bookseller The Book Depository has a small map on its home page showing one book at a time and when it was purchased (generally no more than an hour or two earlier).

Similarly, a "Watch Others" feature on Charlotte Russe's site shows five of the apparel retailer's most viewed products, updating automatically every 15 seconds. Charlotte Russe is also trying to re-create a "live" shopping experience, using the ShopTogether tool from a company called Decision Step: Two friends can see which items each is looking at and simultaneously chat in a browser window.

Skittles has gone for broke in the Now realm, turning its Web site into a showcase of real-time social activity related to the candy brand. A small "Warp the Rainbow" box in the foreground allows viewers to click on "home," bringing up the Skittles Facebook page; "chatter," leading to a page of current Tweets about Skittles; "pics," linking to all photos on Flickr tagged "skittles candy"; and "videos," linking to Skittles' YouTube page. Clicking on names of Skittles varieties leads to a Wikipedia page.

Real-time technology ultimately "is all about giving individuals access to extra information that they wouldn't get from an old-fashioned, static e-commerce site," observes Knight. "In many cases, real-time update technology provides a means of keeping a site fresh even without requiring much intervention."

There may also be a Now way to approach media planning and buying: Identify which topics or URLs are heating up, then make relevant spot buys online; those ads could later theoretically shift over to whatever pages are being Retweeted the most. Nova Spivack notes that "an advertiser that is able to detect and immediately jump on the hot new meme of the day could get their ad in front of the leading influencers they want to reach almost instantly."

A CLOSER LOOK
CAMPAIGNS THAT CAPTURE THE NOW

We've discussed ways in which brands can become more Now, as well as Now strategies with which marketers can engage consumers. But is there such a thing as a Now ad campaign? Consider what these brands are doing:

Royal Caribbean: This campaign, from JWT, is unique in that it takes a real-time approach to traditional, not digital media. Earlier this summer, a team from the agency shot candid footage as well as scripted material onboard a cruise, edited the footage at night, then e-mailed the files to land-locked colleagues, who put the finishing touches on the spots.

These "postcards," as the cruise line calls them, ran on TV for just 24 hours after they were produced. They are posted on the Royal Caribbean site, however, and the footage will be re-used as content for more traditional commercials. The brand is planning additional postcard segments from upcoming cruises.

The campaign was in part a response to the more real-time planning that cruise customers have engaged in during the recession. Rather than book well in advance, people are planning shorter holidays more spontaneously, often lured by slashed prices. The ads are meant to encourage these quick breaks, as Michael Stoopak of JWT New York told *The New York Times*. Watching a cruise in progress "makes it feel immediate and urgent and, most importantly, attainable," he explained.

Sprint: This is as Now as it gets: A campaign for Sprint's Now Network demonstrates that, as a press release put it, "In today's world, you can get virtually anything you want in real-time, which is what life on the Sprint Now Network is all about."

A hypnotic microsite brings the real-time stream of the Now Web to life: It's composed entirely of real-time widgets showing an array of automatically updating statistics—from current temperatures in world cities to top words being used online to the current world population—as well as news headlines, live Webcam footage and videos being watched on YouTube.

The first wave of TV commercials mimicked this approach ("1 million e-mails are en route; 7 percent of them contain the words 'miracle banana diet'"). More recent ads have tied the Now Network to Sprint's new iPhone rival, the Palm Pre.

The initial campaign—which won the gold Lion for Integrated Campaign at the Cannes Advertising Festival in June—also included interactive elements. A YouTube initiative, for example, had users film themselves while enacting a pre-assigned number (most held up the relevant number of fingers), which then served as a digit on a Now Clock. It also included a counter of videos going up on the Now Network and a sampling of videos being watched.

Visa: The worldwide "Go" campaign incorporated live video into banner ads, showing people in six cities worldwide on the go in real-time—rushing by in New York's Times Square, hanging out in Wenceslas Square in Prague, etc. Viewers could control the camera angle and switch between cities.

According to a report in *Adweek*, additional banners, which identified a user's location, provided suggestions for what to do right now, such as "It's 8:14 a.m., why not go for a treat?" Rolling over the unit conjured a map of suggested places to get treats (Visa partnered with sites such as OpenTable and Daily Candy to help provide recommendations).

Fox Home Entertainment: To promote the July DVD release of the first season of its show *Dollhouse*, Fox created a rollover ad that "not only streams Twitter tweets, but allows people to jump into the conversation through the ad," as MediaPost put it. Once rolled over, the ad displayed Tweets from Eliza Dushku, the show's star, and asked fans to Tweet about the show; Tweets that were approved appeared in the ad. Also in the ad were video clips from the show, photos and commentary from the show's creator, Joss Whedon.

WHAT IT MEANS

"The news industry's big conundrum applies to every other business, too: It used to be that there's nothing more boring than yesterday's newspaper. Now there's nothing more boring than today's." —TIM LEBERECHT, VP of marketing and communications for Frog Design, writing on CNET

As the stream of information that people consume, produce and share online flows ever faster, they will increasingly expect brands to be along for the ride: by meeting their expectations now, by answering complaints and questions now, and by simply joining in the ongoing dialogue.

It's become increasingly imperative for businesses to be transparent, and real-time makes this even more important. Similarly, it's becoming more and more crucial for companies to truly listen to their customers, to turn on a dime without bureaucratic delays, and to flatten hierarchies to make this possible.

"We're moving away from an era of monitoring to an age of engagement," writes Brian Solis in his PR 2.0 blog. He believes that the key shift represented by the social and real-time Web is the "opportunity to learn from public sentiment and create a more aware and adaptive organization that leads communities through action."

It's not only business that needs to evolve in this way—government is changing too. The Obama administration has heaved the White House into the modern digital age, with frequent e-mail communiques to supporters, blog updates, Facebook engagement and so on. Obama has more than 2 million followers on Twitter, and the White House account has around 950,000. In the U.K., where the government is also making a concerted effort to better connect with citizens through social media, a 10 Downing Street account has more than a million followers. (Of course, given the ever-changing nature of the Now Web, these figures were rendered outdated only seconds after publication.)

"There are many who worry about the dehumanizing effect of technology," write Tim O'Reilly and John Battelle in a recent white paper, "Web 2.0: Five Years On." "We share that worry, but also see the counter-trend, that communication binds us together, gives us shared context, and ultimately shared identity."

The Now Web has the potential to empower citizens, consumers and businesses. But will it also clip our attention spans even further and make us increasingly less interested in deep analysis and things that take time to digest and appreciate? Will we lose a sense of the past as we focus purely on what's now and next? "The cacophony of the crowd erases the past and affirms the present," observes John Borthwick.

Nova Spivack makes a similar point:

Things quickly flow out of view, into the past. Our attention is mainly focused on right now: the last few minutes or hours. Anything that was posted before this period of time is "out of sight, out of mind."

The Stream is a world of even shorter attention spans, online viral sensations, instant fame, sudden trends, and intense volatility. It is also a world of extremely short-term conversations and thinking.

It may be, however, that the Now Web is just one aspect of digital life. As Borthwick noted, the stream "isn't an in-box we have to empty, or a page we have to get to the bottom of—it's a flow of data that we can dip into at will." It's also true that many conversations in the stream revolve around and link to substantive analyses and sophisticated ideas. A Facebook or Twitter link can inspire a dip into literary classics, as the BBC book list meme that spread on Facebook did recently for some.

Still, like any cultural shift, there will be backlash, with people increasingly inclined to sit and savor the quiet moments, to value what's unhurried and considered. This started back when the Blackberry first brought work and other demands to our attention 24/7. If the Slow Food movement was a response to fast food and fast eating, watch for a broader "slow" movement, with people taking time out to reflect and relax, and at least momentarily saying no to the Now.

ABOUT JWT: *JWT is the world's best-known marketing communications brand. Headquartered in New York, JWT is a true global network, with more than 200 offices in over 90 countries employing nearly 10,000 marketing professionals.*

JWT consistently ranks among the top agency networks in the world and continues its dominant presence in the industry by staying on the leading edge—from producing the first-ever TV commercial in 1939 to developing award-winning branded content for brands such as Freixenet, Ford and HSBC.

JWT's pioneering spirit enables the agency to forge deep relationships with clients including Bayer, Cadbury, Diageo, DTC, Ford, HSBC, Johnson & Johnson, Kellogg's, Kimberly-Clark, Kraft, Microsoft, Nestlé, Nokia, Rolex, Royal Caribbean, Schick, Shell, Unilever, Vodafone and many others. JWT's parent company is WPP (NASDAQ: WPPGY).