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You'd have to be dwelling under a quarry to have missed the furnace-explosion of inertia driving new Web development under the moniker of "Web 2.0." While there's no official spec (at the W3C for Web 2.0), the loose consensus outlines a Web experience that's vastly different from the early days of mere "information portals."

Tim O'Reilly of O'Reilly Media lays claim to originating the phrase in 2004 during a conference brainstorming session about the future of Web experiences and interactions. Much discussion and many threads have followed, but the cognoscenti have developed a working definition of the promise of Web 2.0, outlined in seven principles:

1. The Web as platform
2. Harnessing collective intelligence
3. Data is the next "Intel Inside"
4. End of the software release cycle
5. Lightweight programming models
6. Software above the level of a single device
7. Rich user experiences.

While the exploration of these concepts merit extensive discussion, the mainframe industry in general, and IBM System z development in particular, must focus on at least two of these principles. The Web as the platform for accessing information is simply the de facto standard. Using the browser for information has become more the norm for most people than a newspaper or radio because it's simple, and because of immediacy and currency. But Web 2.0 moves information access toward a different experience. What most people haven't enjoyed about the Web is the static nature of the data and lack of additional function they've grown accustomed to in desktop applications. Here's where things change.

Foremost among the new technologies designed to change this experience is AJAX. Naturally, it's an acronym, but leaving that behind, what's important is what it offers in moving us toward a new experience: desktop application functionality over the Web. Think drag-and-drop, right-mouse click, context-sensitive menus, information updates without a screen refresh, all within any standard Web browser. In fact, done well, it looks and feels just like a desktop app, but with all the benefits of Web access, including information from anywhere, no software to install, update and maintain, and centralized data. Google was one of the first exploiters of AJAX demonstrated in both its Google Maps and Gmail applications. Many new Web deployments are now employing AJAX to deliver

a much more interactive feel, and soon it will be the rule rather than the exception, and everyone will come to expect the experience it provides.

AJAX follows recent conventions by being an open standard, which means exponential adoption and exploitation. Microsoft has jumped on the bandwagon with its ASP.NET AJAX development extension for ASP.NET, making it far easier to craft AJAX .NET applications with their toolkit. All development departments should take note of this shift in technology, as the promise of Web 2.0 and AJAX experiences are changing our expectations about interfaces.

For the mainframe, the promise is amazing. IBM (and most other software vendors) has done a magnificent job of keeping the mainframe competitive in all areas except one. It's like that old phrase, "It's the _____, stupid!" Here we fill in the blank with "interface." The one continuing legacy that haunts the mainframe and, in fact, keeps it fresh in people's minds as a legacy, is the "green screen." It's long overdue for IBM to offer a complete and total alternative to the 3270 interface. Purists and heads-down, data-entry users may still need it in some form. But IBM must help the world move into the next generation, or "Mainframe 2.0" (a term first coined by illustro in 2006), where the only "public" view of the mainframe for all functions is through a rich, Web-based interface to include these newest technologies. Or, continue to battle extinction.

In Mainframe 2.0, the excitement of all the new technologies will become a reality. It's more than possible to integrate AJAX technology with mainframe applications. This means organizations can leverage all the inherent and continued benefits of System z architecture, complemented with Web-based, desktop application-functional applications. No sacrifices here. Mainframe 2.0 will deliver what all the conversions to new platforms fell short of. It's a simple equation: (desktop application functionality) + (Web-based access) + (mainframe performance, data management, and application strength) = Mainframe 2.0. Simple math, but a powerful result.

So, stop thinking you have to rewrite, redeploy, or repurchase your business applications just to offer your mainframe users the interface they deserve. You already have all the answers in your own backyard.

That Sums it up. **ME**

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