The month of January is named after the Roman god Janus, who was the god of gates, doors, doorways, beginnings, endings and time. In Roman sculptures that have survived, Janus is shown as having two heads; one head looks back at the last year while the other looks forward to the new, simultaneously into the future and the past.

This personal and inevitably eclectic review of 2010 attempts to emulate Janus by looking at the past year and highlighting issues that we should take forward into the future.

Social Media

2010 was the year in which social media definitely came of age. In many Western countries, traffic on Facebook overtook that of Google and brand owners realized that they had to have an effective presence to assure brand retention. Facebook's revenues grew fast than anticipated, enhancing its value as a potential investment.

Coca-Cola now has a fans presence on Facebook with more than 21 million members, and grows at a monthly rate of approximately 1.3 million fans. Even media companies have discovered that they need to think about a presence on social media portals, and not just focus on their own sites.

Old and new media

Until last year it was received wisdom that old media such as newspapers, radio and television were media dinosaurs facing extinction. From that perspective, 2010 was a surprise as advertising revenue recovered across the board, and in some countries, television lead the way with year-on-year increases of 15%. There is still a lot of life left in these old dinosaurs!

What is clear is that the transition from old to new is an issue of viable business models. The younger, well-educated demographics look to the Internet for news, but where are the revenue streams to provide insightful news coverage? Let us hope that old media will be able to come up with sustainable business models so that quality journalism does not disappear in the meantime.

Network neutrality – all animals are equal, but some are more equal than others.

2010 was also a year in which the controversies about the nature of the Internet became ever-more acrimonious.

When the Internet was first created, there was a shared ethos of a common resource, and best-effort delivery of content. When the Web appeared in 1990, the content was text and statistics. Over time, it evolved into a huge collection of sites and portals offering rich media such as video, music and photos, which dramatically raised the demands made of the network infrastructure.

When it comes to infrastructure "there is no such thing as a free lunch" – someone has to pay for all those new routers and cables. Although the number of Internet users has also increased dramatically over the last 10 years, the revenues received by the telecommunications companies that keep the backbone running have not kept up.

Their response has been to suggest a business model that does away with the equality model by upgrade the Internet to version 6. Not only does this allow for a huge increase in the number of IP addresses (the basic identifiers used to name sites and users), it also allows for traffic shaping, depending on the agreement each user has with the Internet service provider.

Those wishing to move from a "best-effort" model to one with guaranteed "quality of service" can pay more and as a result be given priority when sending or receiving data on the Internet. Those who do not pay for this service will continue to rely on the "best effort" model and will experience delays at time when there are many simultaneous users all trying to access their favourite videos or files.

Most Internet users are like the pigs in George Orwell's "Animal Farm". They are not aware that these changes may be under way and that the Internet could change from being a place where all animals are equal to one where some animals "Are more equal than others". Traffic shaping already takes place, but the basis for doing so is often far from transparent, and it is difficult to challenge decisions taken by Internet service providers and telecommunications companies.

Telecommunications regulators around the globe have been active for some time to address the underlying issues of "network neutrality", as it is called. 2010 was yet another year in which small steps were made. Will 2011 be the year where agreement is reached, and we will know on what

principles the future Internet will be based?

From smart phones to tablets

Mobile phones became the most ubiquitous IT devices on the planet in 2009. Along with radio and television, they are the most widely used devices on the planet, overshadowing computers and the Internet.

In 2010 there was continued growth in the market for smart phones, lead by Apple's iPhone and a surge in Android handsets. Microsoft put in a late bid to maintain a presence in this market with the launch of Windows 7 smart phones. On paper the new Microsoft initiative has several good features, but only time will tell if these handsets will be a success.

Apple launched its iPad in 2010, contributing to Apple's strong growth and allowing it to overtake Microsoft as the most valuable technology company in early May, 2010.

While many have tried to launch tablets before, Apple seems to have come up with a formula for the iPad that creates a new niche that is different from e-book readers such as Kindle, netbooks, smartphones and laptops. Newspapers and magazines are not the only ones who have identified the iPad as an interesting distribution platform. General practitioners receiving patients in their surgeries in the United States, primary school children and those who have to do presentations for small groups are beginning to use tablets as an easy-to-use interactive device for multimedia. We have also seen new interactive products that are designed for use by a grandparent or parent sitting with a small child on his lap that follow up television programmes.

In 2011 we can expect that the iPad will open up the market for a wide range of tablets that differentiate themselves from other kinds of handheld devices.

To be or not to be – 3D?

Many of those reading this article will have come across 3D media in the past, and will have memories of plastic glasses with two colours or polarizing filters and, perhaps, mixed feelings about the experience.

2010 marked the coming of age of 3D films for cinema distribution, and consumer electronics manufacturers gearing up to sell flat panel displays for 3D television and 3D games that give a 3D experience without the use of glasses.

The question is whether this is just a new iteration of "toys for the boys", or whether this time we are on the verge of a new mainstream distribution platform to make television and interactive media more immersive experiences. There are some indications that this time, indeed, 3D has come to stay.

There are, however, some awkward issues to be resolved first, the most important of which seems to be the side-effects of viewing 3D television. The proportion of 3DTV viewers who report minor or serious problems after having watched for an hour or so is too big to be ignored. Media industry players such as Disney have much at stake and are funding research projects to get to the bottom of the problems and come up with viable solutions. For my part, 2011 will be a year in which I follow the results of this research very carefully before passing final judgment on 3D television.

Wikileaks and web censorship

Towards the end of 2010, the availability of official documents made public by Wikileaks became a significant force to be reckoned with in international journalism. In December, 2010, when concerns about the legality of the sources of Wikileak documents became widespread, various organizations tried to disassociate themselves from Wikileaks, including service providers, ISPs and credit card companies handling donations to Wikileaks. They refused to give Wikileaks access to a DNS server, run its servers or handle electronic money transfers. This in turn lead to counter-actions from angry consumers who orchestrated surges in use on credit card company sites to disrupt their Internet-based services.

Prior to this episode, many had thought it was an easy matter to close down a controversial website. What we can now see is that an organization that wants to retain a presence online can do so by orchestrating a support campaign using Twitter and setting up hundreds of mirror sites that come and go, ensuring that the general public has access to content.

Although I personally have mixed feelings about Wikileaks, it is heartening from a democratic perspective that those who would like to bring pressure to bear on an autonomous organization find it difficult to do in practice.

All in all, 2010 was an interesting year from a media perspective, perhaps a turning point for the years to come.

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