

Exploring new ways



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BEN BENEDICT The Creative City

Ben Benedict is a reporter for The Londoner. You can reach him at 519-673-5005 (ext. 428) or bbenedict@thelondoner.ca.

Social networking online 10 years ago only a very few U.S. would have had an inkling as to what that meant, let alone its implications and effects on our personal and professional lives, but today that impact is inescapable and Londoners are no exception.

There are several local sites like SoulfulEncounters.com, a social networking community for the disabled developed by **Louise Maxwell** more than two years ago, and the recently developed NetVillage.ca by business partners **Noel Rondinelli** and **Robin Anselm**.

"We want to focus on the fact that it's Canadian and we also want to focus on different social elements like networking and lobby groups or an opportunity to match travel companions or non-profit groups even," says Mr. Rondinelli. "We feel with everything else there's an evolution. We went with a Canadian focused site because there was nothing else like it on the net."

Then there are local experts like **David Canton**, a business lawyer with Harrison Pensa, an author and columnist as well as one of the leading bloggers on legal, business and technological developments within London. He

recently spoke at an InterNetwork London meeting, a networking group for technology professionals in the city on social media as a business tool.

"It started with blogs and online computer geeks," Mr. Canton says. "Now blogs have a real strategic purpose in business. Now you have things like Facebook that connects young people who are looking for that. It's new this Web 2.0 stuff and it's been about the wisdom of the crowd. Mostly it's still a time sink for people who want to entertain themselves."

Online sites include LinkedIn, Second Life, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube and Wikipedia. However, even amongst technology professionals present only a limited number use social networking, even fewer use it as a business tool and even fewer yet took notes.

It was the reason **Rosemary Travis** with TVCogeco in Sarnia made the trip specifically to hear Mr. Canton's presentation and took notes, illustrating the impact social media is having on the business world.

"My purpose is specific - I'm a volunteer recruiter targeting students so I need to understand how they network to reach them as well as the privacy issues," Ms. Travis says.

While social networking may still be primarily 'sink time' others are finding ways to be effective users. "The tools are starting to emerge and people are starting to understand how to use them. There are authors who are posting draft chapters to have online readers post comments so it becomes part of the process. The fear is that the book won't sell but they are now actually selling more books because of it," Mr. Canton says.