



THE WORLDWIDE WEB
IS NOT EXACTLY SHRINKING,
BUT IT IS GETTING RELATIVELY LESS
BIG; THE QUESTION IS, RELATIVE TO WHAT?
STEVE HOLDEN EXPLAINS.

So here's the story: the worldwide web 2.0 is fast replacing desktop software by putting apps in the cloud. Instead of buying software and installing it on our computers, we're now accessing web-based tools and apps, many of them free, often through our browser. Like birds in this amazing cloud, we are, it seems, unopinioned. Not even the sky, it seems, is the limit.

Trouble is, there's another revolution that is affecting the web, driven by the proliferating gadgets of mobile computing – iThingies and their handheld copies. Simply put, we're now wireless in the age of the app.

If you think all this go-go-gadget activity is just cosmetic, though, think again. It's part of a fundamental shift. Your latest iThing and the apps and content you just downloaded through iTunes for a dollar or for free are in a world beyond Google, an expanding part of the internet beyond the web and its 40 billion public HTML pages.

Think back to the last time you were on Facebook, if you're not on it right now,

and consider how often you use your actual browser. Facebook, with 500 million users, isn't so much a website as a virtual world; well, a platform, at least. When Facebook was launched in February 2004, Google's search engine spiders weren't allowed to crawl its servers.

According to Heather Dougherty, an analyst for Hitwise Intelligence, Facebook in March surpassed Google in the United States to become the most visited website. Visits to Facebook in March increased by 185 per cent compared with the previous March, while visits to Google in March increased by nine per cent compared with 12 months earlier. Facebook and Google each accounted for seven per cent of all US internet visits in March, but like a younger sibling, Facebook was the one doing the most growing.

What about video-sharing site YouTube, 'the largest worldwide video-sharing community'? There are an estimated 52.1 million users on YouTube worldwide, besides

the casual browsers. According to YouTube, a subsidiary of Google acquired in 2006, they're watching two billion videos and uploading hundreds of thousands of videos a day on the site.

Why exactly did Google buy YouTube, for US\$1.65 billion in Google stock? Shoring up its market share may have had something to do with it.

One of Google's problems, though, is that when 52.1 million YouTube users head straight for their bookmark, who needs Google?

Your browserless activity isn't confined to Facebook or YouTube, though. Consider the time you clock up online looking at email and RSS; the time you spend listening to a podcast on your smartphone; the streamed movies you watch. A whole pile of video and peer-to-peer traffic, basically, is taking the biggest share of the internet.

According to estimates by Andrew Odlyzko for Cisco based on data from the Cooperative Association for Internet Data Analysis at the University of California at San Diego, video now accounts for 51 per cent of US internet traffic and peer-to-peer filesharing accounts for 23 per cent. The web accounts for the remaining 23 per cent, with another three per cent left over for everything else.

So here's the story: the worldwide web is not shrinking, but it's not growing as fast as video and peer-to-peer. Yes, the worldwide web 2.0 is fast replacing desktop software by putting apps in the cloud, and instead of buying software and installing it on our computers, we're now accessing web-based tools and apps, many of them free, but more than that, and weird though it might sound, we're getting something else – content. **T**

This month's Last word was written by Steve Holden, Editor of Teacher, and last year's highly commended winner in the Best Columnist category of the Melbourne Press Club Quill Awards for The last word.