

The year in pop culture

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Created 25/12/2006 - 7:16pm

Submitted by srlinuxx on Monday 25th of December 2006 07:16:40 PM Filed under [Misc](#) [1]

It's not always about you, you know.

Except in 2006, it was.

It was all about YouTube, the Internet phenomenon that felt like the final elimination of the increasingly blurry line between the providers of entertainment and the consumers. On YouTube and its multiplying online kin, you're both.

If Web surfing is a metaphor that's starting to feel a little old, YouTube feels like the next wave. Google's CEO Eric Schmidt called it "the next step in the evolution of the Internet" and bought the Web site for \$1.65 billion in October, but that's just boring business. To tens of millions of people, YouTube is the go-to source for whatever is popping in pop culture at the moment.

You name it, YouTube has it: Big-name rock bands promoting their latest hit video, and teenage girls lip-syncing the same song in their bedrooms on jittery cellphone footage; clips of faux news commentator Stephen Colbert, David Letterman and his guests, the "Numa Numa Guy," high school football game highlights, Iraqi war footage shot by U.S. troops, card tricks, cartoons, police brutality, movie trailers real and faked, and the kitsch-tastic glory that is David Hasselhoff singing "Hooked on a Feeling."

And viewers don't just watch passively; they post comments, e-mail their friends, form clubs, start channels. YouTube is a prime example of a "weapon of mass collaboration," according to the new book "Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything" by Don Tapscott and Anthony D. Williams.

It's one of the leaders of a paradigm shift in the culture, they write, along with similar sites like MySpace, Google Video and Revver, as well as other cyber-collaboratives like Wikipedia and Linux.

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