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## How Functional Widgets Are Shaking Up the Web

Those Little Boxes on Your Screen Are Revolutionizing Net Content Consumption

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Call them widgets, gadgets, modules or even blog bling. But no matter how you classify the tiny chunks of code showing up as embedded portable boxes across the web and on desktops, they're set to change the way content is delivered and consumed.



Widgets we like: The [VW Rabbit Widget](#) is your guide to cool and affordable events in dozens of U.S. cities.

Widgets and gadgets have been around in various forms for years -- YouTube video boxes on web pages are likely the most popular to date -- but it's the Web 2.0 versions with self-contained interactive and robust functionality that are pushing widgets beyond simple information, decorative or novelty use. Top tech-industry pundits, such as Engadget's Peter Rojas and GigaOm's Om Malik believe widgets and gadgets are the next big thing on the web, and Newsweek went so far to assert that 2007 will be the year of the widget.

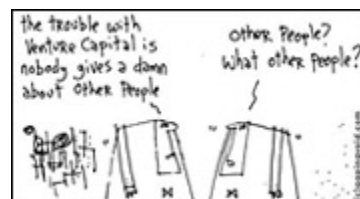
Yahoo, another longtime widget distributor through its 2005 purchase of widget pioneer Konfabulator, will unveil the next version of its Yahoo Widgets 4.0 on March 22. Google added Google Gadgets to its Desktop last year, and said this month that more than 4,000 gadgets have been created to date.

### 'Sexier' widgets

"Widgets can now offer full-featured functionality in the body of the widget," said Lawrence Coburn, a widget consultant and author of widget-review blog "Sexy Widget" (his day job is CEO of [RateItAll.com](#)). "Through these satellite widgets, we will start to see distributed companies that don't exist as a destination."

He offered the example of recent Yahoo acquisition MyBlogLog, which launched as a distributed social widget, not a website. It began as a chunk of code that bloggers could put on their sites to show photos and profiles of recent visitors and foster networking.

### Smarter widgets



Widgets we like: Display popular web cartoonist Hugh McLeod's latest sketched witticism with the [Gaping Void](#) widget.

Another expected development: contextually aware widgets, which, like AdSense ads, can post content or make suggestions based on user behavior online. Two widgets, Criteo and iLike, already offer contextual widgets for retail and music suggestions, respectively. There is also the potential to put ads inside widgets and showcase certain advertising as the widget. Marketers including VW, Nike, Target and UPS have created branded widgets, with others such as Woot and ChipIn creating transactional ones. The NBA recently got in the game with an aggressive widget-marketing strategy, unleashing widgets for each of its roughly 350 players.



Widgets we like: [Sing that iTunes!](#) displays lyrics of the song currently playing in iTunes.

"There's a lot of promise, but we're still in the early stages of marketers using them," said David Berkowitz, director of emerging media at search-focused agency 360i. His research recently found just 8% of the top network- and cable-TV programmers use emerging media such as widgets in their media-marketing efforts. Already widget aggregators such as Widgetbox and Clearspring have seen jumps in number of users and picked up substantial private-investment dollars.

Of course, all the activity and popularity is not to say widgets are a done phenomenon. Still, Mr. Berkowitz said, "these days things move so quickly from early adopter to 'me too,' so there is a limited window where you can get in there and make an impact."

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