



Enhancing Worker Productivity in a Business 2.0 World



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Web 2.0 collaboration tools for business, in conjunction with pervasive mobile computing and in-depth enterprise search capabilities, are positioning information technology as the critical driver of individual and workgroup productivity.



It's a dog-eat-dog world of business out there. Keeping pace with the latest developments in technology is imperative if your business is to survive and thrive in today's rapidly evolving business landscape. This evolution is part of a more general movement towards the "Connected Life", as personal technologies such as smartphones and social networking infiltrate the corporate sphere — while at the same time, the workplace continues to move out of the conventional office building.

In the workplace of 2010 and beyond, executives will have relevant business information at their fingertips, employees will harness the power of the Web to collaborate for their work, and everyone will be connected to their home base whenever and wherever they may be.

The implications for business and IT leaders in a world with pervasive connected intelligence represents amazing new business opportunities. There are some four billion mobile phones on the planet today and

around two billion people on the Internet. Within five years, 90 percent of those mobile phones will be Internet transaction devices — that means potentially five billion mobile phones and five billion users on the Internet. Business and IT leaders need to be ready for this accelerated, fast convergence to be able to re-think, embrace and profit from this technology revolution.

Success in this new world of business is all about immediacy of access to information, to applications and to one another. Even small enterprises are increasingly online, mobile and Web 2.0-driven — to the point where IT is no longer just a business tool, it is business — the heart and the circulatory system through which most transactions flow.

Even as new technology innovations are breaking barriers in terms of access to information, worker productivity is simultaneously being heightened through the liberating capabilities of collaboration. New tools are emerging which enable workers to communicate and collaborate seamlessly with one another, with their partners and with their customers.

Virtualisation, cloud computing and other technologies based on Internet delivery and infrastructure mean better management of IT resources, enabling companies to become more agile and respond more quickly to macro-economic and customer demands.

Moreover, these technologies and services can be implemented quickly and without significant upfront expense; instead of investing millions of dollars to get millions in benefits, with these technologies, up front investments are measured in thousands of dollars to get those same benefits.

New Generation, New Needs

New generations of IT-savvy, always-connected workers are entering the workforce with the expectation that their IT tools at work should be at least as powerful and adaptable as their IT tools at home. In the meantime, smartphones, netbooks and consumer laptops have flooded into the market at aggressive price points, and social networking and Web 2.0 applications have become mainstream. Smart companies are addressing the changing expectations and requirements of their current user base, while planning ahead for the coming generation of workers and technology.



Many workers at medium-to-large organisations remain stuck on old-school technologies like desktop PC's, Microsoft Office and e-mail. Much of the blame goes to their employers, which are failing to satisfy pent-up demand for smartphones and squashing younger employees' love of social networking technologies.

To ignore or reject such outlets is a big mistake. Today's knowledge workers want to use productivity devices that are suited to their individual work style. Competitive advantage is sure to follow when employees can have more instant communications with internal and external parties; however, these users also require the appropriate access to information and business applications from their companies — with secure support.

The New Mobility and the "Anywhere, Anytime" Office

As more and more devices offer portability and mobility — not only to consumers but to professional users as well — the four walls of the office are rapidly becoming irrelevant.

Businesses are becoming more mobile, enabling corporate users, for example, to edit a speech or a press statement on the go, in real time, and in collaboration with other workers. Companies of all types are looking at their global supply chain and realising that their executives and managers, who are increasingly in the field, need to be able to have more real-time access to actionable data that they can use. Experts see a similar trend in devices, as more and more gadgets move towards "miniaturisation". The trend for miniaturisation of devices will mean more work will be done on smartphones and netbooks as these devices become more affordable and, consequently, their use as business tools continues to escalate.

Corporate users want all information at their fingertips,

and to stay connected with the office and clients while still being able to do business in the field. IT needs to integrate these mobile tech platforms so that they'll be fully interoperable with their global supply chain.

IT shops should be looking at mobile technologies as a way to link customer, partner and company information. Devices like BlackBerrys and iPhones are widely popular, but in many cases these mobile devices have not yet been fully integrated into the IT architecture. Companies need to make it possible for critical employees to access data warehouse information, search for inventory, identify knowledge resources or do group CRM from a wireless device.

That means IT taking the lead in showing how to migrate a CRM platform to a wiki, for example, and enabling the freeing-up of knowledge or enabling the organisation to realise competitive advantage — in other words, using such tools as enterprise 2.0 or predictive analytics to do better data mining, customer mining or to be able to identify where the next market, customer group, product or service will come from.

Optimising IT for Productivity

IT leaders are increasingly being challenged to manage more and more computing assets while keeping a cap on complexity and costs.

Meanwhile, the nature of technology itself is changing, transitioning from "heavy" owner-operated solutions to lighter-weight services.

The rise of SaaS (software as a service), cloud computing and online applications will eventually put the traditional desktop tools in peril as the Internet transforms into a powerful collaborative productivity platform. Innovative technologies like virtualisation, cloud and Web 2.0 enable companies to get out from under a front-loaded heavy investment model that limits IT's agility and flexibility. These lighter-weight technologies, implemented properly, create the opportunity for IT to change its role — and the operational performance of the enterprise.

The last move requires adopting new technologies — technologies which don't require a huge upfront investment but in many cases promise significant benefits. The shift to easy-to-implement, flexible technologies is part of the new imperative for IT leaders to lead more agile organisations that are synchronised with business objectives.

This shift also changes IT's role from conventional application, desktop administration, governance and user-expectation models to a flexible, network-and-services based process. The value of this shift is not only measured by cost savings, but in changing the dynamics of work behaviour to accelerate knowledge and increase collaboration.

The ultimate goal is the blending of the separate specialties of IT management and line-of-business initiatives into a single, process-based environment that can function at "customer speed".

To achieve that goal of enterprise optimisation, any enterprise or public sector institution is forced to confront myriad, dimensional issues that sit plainly at the intersection of commerce and technology. The greatest technology and management issues aren't tied to either discipline; rather problems arise when the two aren't blended effectively, efficiently and in ways that support specific operational goals tied to revenue generation, operating efficiencies and/or customer responsiveness.

Companies focused on business growth have made technologies such as virtualisation, cloud computing, Web 2.0, networking and mobility top priorities. But taking advantage of these new technologies means making the right investments in terms of software, solutions and infrastructure, and maximising those technologies to enable your workforce to achieve positive results for the company.

Virtualisation and the Cloud

With an increasing demand for faster access, richer content and a more mobile environment, virtualisation has finally become the hot topic for businesses large and small. Budgets that were previously allocated for storage and server purchases are now being reassigned to establish virtualised and cloud-based infrastructures.

Virtualisation, cloud computing, (SaaS) and other solutions will bring about unprecedented efficiencies while enabling customers to free up resources to innovate and gain competitive advantage.

Advancements in virtualisation technology have led to strong interest in cloud computing, particularly among small businesses or start-ups who cannot afford upfront IT investment. Cloud computing will be a transformative technology for most businesses, large

and small, changing the way people work and how companies operate as they shift to consume services in a more cost-effective way.



With the increased number of SaaS and cloud computing offerings that are becoming available, the options for delivering applications, tools and data to users are also changing. In addition to cost benefits, companies will need to examine how these new delivery models can provide greater transparency and flexibility in their delivery environments and less dependency on dedicated assets.

IT's New Focus

IT organisations are moving beyond IT beyond merely managing resources to taking responsibility for managing results.

The reason? Business expectations are shifting from a focus on cost-based efficiencies to achieving better results based on enterprise and IT productivity. These productivity gains will come from collaborative and innovative solutions that take advantage of the new "lighter-weight" services-based and social media technologies, including virtualisation, cloud computing and Web 2.0/social networking offerings.

This change in business focus is prompting many companies to accelerate IT's move away from a supporting role to assume its place as a strategic contributor to the business, one that is focused on innovation and competitive advantage. IT departments have aspired to this shift for years, but economic, strategic and technological changes have only recently made it possible.

Tomorrow's IT leaders will be the ones to walk into the CEO's office and say, "We've identified a new customer group, we've identified some new product or service opportunities. We've identified new markets that we are not competing in but that we should be, and here's how we can innovate to go after them."

Enterprise 2.0

Web 2.0 innovations for the enterprise represent a fantastic opportunity to serve customers better, manage knowledge and to be more effective at finding new opportunities.

Integrating new communication platforms such as social networks and wikis, as well as pervasive enterprise search capabilities that yield predictive analytics and better business intelligence, is an efficient way to increase worker productivity and revenues.

Companies have realised for a long time that there is much knowledge to be gained from casual conversation in the hallway or around the water cooler. But there were hardly any ways to find the source of such knowledge and the information wasn't able to be easily archived.

Enterprise 2.0 tools, such as knowledge portals, enterprise-wide search technology and wikis, are rising in popularity among businesses because these tools allow businesses to see immediate feedback on issues and new ways to capture knowledge expressed via informal channels.

Collaboration has become a buzzword in the past two years. Businesses have been using tools to help workers collaborate for decades, but the range of choices keeps increasing, from pure voice tools to unified messaging and high-end telepresence and beyond.

Collaborative applications, by definition, are tools to enable information workers to work together by sharing information and processes. Therefore the value of these tools relies on their pervasiveness, regardless of company size or industry.

But as technologies advance and business processes evolve, the popularity of collaborative tools changes accordingly. IT leaders at many companies are investing in unified communications and collaboration technologies to help them better link employees

worldwide and enable virtual teams for the global business.

Smart organisations are also building global models with virtual teams. Despite regional differences, customers — both internal and external — expect services delivered consistently around the world.

Enterprise Search - the New Competitive Advantage

Companies want desperately to use the vast amounts of data they hold to gain insight into new opportunities, customer wants and needs, marketplace trends, competitive threats, and, of course, their finances.

However, making the most out of the information spread across the business remains a challenge. Thankfully, new developments in enterprise-level search are emerging which act as a booster to user productivity by providing semantically meaningful searches, the results of which can also be dovetailed into social networking and other Web 2.0 tools for the enterprise.

Different from consumer search tools, enterprise search allows employees to search for people, resources and even help reveal hidden information. For instance, when a region doesn't meet the expected revenue forecast, enterprise search tools can help managers dig out what could have led to this.

In ordinary office productivity work, enterprise search tools can give more meaningful results than an ordinary search engine on unstructured data, because of its ability to recognise the semantics of such elements as a date or an address. Its pipeline architecture enables different inquiries to be made concurrently on a stream of documents as they pass down the pipe, meaning multifaceted queries can be executed more efficiently.

Documents retrieved by the search will be able to be further interrogated interactively and the documents and their interrelationships presented in graphical format. Another common use for high-end search capabilities is in monetising website offerings by guiding users to content for which they will be willing to pay, and bringing up relevant advertising messages.

Web 2.0 technologies, such as information tagging, blogs, and wikis, are ideally suited to form the backbone for this kind of comprehensive knowledge

management approach. Enterprise 2.0 tools act as supplements to traditional productivity tools that allow collaboration within the enterprise and its clients across the globe. Users can look at a series of documents and tag and rate them for value, as is typically done on social networks, and this will be fed into the criteria for future searches.

These Web 2.0 technologies let users validate information through tags and ratings, making it more useful to their often-changing needs. For instance, the documents found by most people in the organisation to be of high value will appear at the top of a search list. The same is true when ranking expertise in the organisation — rating people according to the value of the information they have previously supplied.

Enterprise portals can similarly provide a single view of all vital company information, including up-to-date incident reports, emergency contacts, and detailed procedures and action checklists. Systems also can be enhanced with server-based document workflows and configured to send alerts to staff via SMS.

KM platforms can also contain discussion forums, different portals for professional development and knowledge sharing for training, project-related documents for local and overseas offices, and corporate news. This allows employees to share knowledge, facilitate communications, and also enables project teams to manage a wide range of documents, including progress, legal information and even technical drawings.

Document Management 2.0, Content Creation & Collaboration



The future of IT and enhanced competitive advantage requires social interactions and greater collaboration. Web 2.0 tools and Generation Y's approaches to

collaboration are impacting how documents get written, and smart organisations that consider and respond to these next generation content creation trends will be ideally positioned to create and disseminate the information that forms the core of their businesses.

Enterprise/Web 2.0 has given rise to a new world of collaborative authoring that seeks to improve on the document-centric approach to writing. Teams of information workers can now use wikis in the place of early draft documents that might have formerly been circulated to a group via e-mail or posted on a shared site. Blogs can bypass a document view entirely.

Enterprise Web 2.0 may have just arrived, but it can deliver high value, particularly by being able to enhance content by associating it with peers and experts. Tomorrow's users will eventually be able to add to their productivity-application mix any number of next generation authoring tools, including blogs, wikis, information visualisation and XML authoring. New work methods will also include collaborative authoring with Web 2.0 and social networking tools. The challenge for management will be to consider how to handle documents that are perpetually updated and how to strike a balance between quick publishing and edited/approved content.

Risks and Costs

Despite their benefits, collaboration tools do raise some concerns among business leaders. An increasing headache for businesses living in the closed-shop IT world is the amount of potential there is for social networking employees to leak sensitive data to a third-party or publicise potentially damaging information that otherwise wouldn't have travelled beyond the water cooler.

Privacy and security concerns have businesses wondering how they can use social networking to improve collaboration among internal employees without exposing themselves to risk.

On one hand, employers see the benefits of these communication tools; but on the other, they have concerns. Tools like enterprise wikis and knowledge portals are within a company's control, but widely used personal social networking tools such as Facebook and free IM aren't. It is also hard to detect over-use of such tools for personal purpose, which has a negative impact on productivity.

Resistance also comes from the lack of readiness to share knowledge. People aren't used to sharing knowledge and many employees often need training to fully understand the benefits of knowledge-sharing.

Another objective of deploying Web 2.0 collaboration tools is to save cost. But costs vary depending on the types of tools adopted, and training costs are often not taken into account when executives begin planning. Risk mitigation is another overlooked cost. When collaboration tools are used, businesses need to deploy security tools to protect their networks and infrastructure.

There are also the costs associated with over-collaboration. Collaboration tools make meetings between multiple parties a lot easier. Sometimes, however, people run the risk of over-organising, over-collaborating and becoming counter-productive — in other words, becoming less responsive, missing business opportunities and, critically, less productive.

Conclusion

In 2010's post recession landscape, agility and mobility are shaping up to be the core battleground of competition for companies to stay afloat.

As IT organisations move from cost-cutting measures to raising IT productivity, IT leaders are working to get more units of value from the same resources, which requires focused investments in new technologies.

Today's younger top management is less resistant to such technology, but they must take the lead to drive adoption. Top management also has a role to play in breaking the silos formed by different business units. For instance, factories in different locations belonging to the same manufacturer might not be aware of best practices deployed by one among them. Top management can endorse that best practice and employ it in different locations. The same applies when deploying collaboration tools.

When management endorses the use of collaboration tools, a company has a higher chance of attracting the top young talent. Young graduates have used Web 2.0 tools for a long time, and they expect to use similar tools to facilitate innovation at work.

IT departments also have their place in driving adoption of collaboration tools. The IT team supports

and builds applications to enable daily operations. They can provide a bird's eye view over areas or business units that require improvement and recommend the appropriate technology to encourage collaboration. To become an effective driver of adoption, however, IT must have a solid understanding of business processes across a company, work closely with different business units and have a proactive leader.

Now that the economy is more buoyant, companies are evaluating their business and technology priorities and shifting their focus from efficiency to effectiveness as they gear up to improve customer and citizen service delivery, revamp business processes and extend IT's direct impact on organisational success.

At the centre of organisational success is employee productivity. However, the challenge for senior IT executives is increasing employee productivity by giving workers the tools and support they need — when and where they need them.

About Gen-i

Gen-i is at the forefront of helping customers take advantage of the convergence of technology and telecommunications, and the new opportunities this makes possible. Gen-i works alongside its 3,300 corporate, government and business customers to deliver seamless and integrated ICT solutions. Gen-i achieves this with the support of over 3,000 highly skilled people in 17 locations across Australia and New Zealand.

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