

Collaboration 2.0

Taking Collaboration to the Next Level: From the E-mail and Document-centric World of 'Enterprise 1.0' to the People-centric World of Enterprise 2.0

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► EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Information workers must carry out their tasks and duties in a complex and increasingly regulated world, and so business leaders, and CIOs in particular, must find new ways to empower the beleaguered workforce without transferring that burden to an already overstretched IT department. In most circumstances this means delivering more with less, and with the 'credit-crunch' affecting almost every business sector, now rather than later. With over 80% of salary costs now associated with 'information work', the link between employee efficacy and business profitability is clear, and in Ovum's opinion, 'smart work' is the only way forward.

While most business collaboration continues to be conducted in the 'Enterprise 1.0' world of e-mail and shared folders, forward-looking organizations are increasingly considering socially oriented and real-time collaboration solutions as a way to instantly, seamlessly, and often virtually, increase productivity between employees, suppliers, customers, and stakeholders. In response, vendors are homing in on the market for socially oriented, web-based enterprise collaboration solutions, now commonly referred to as Enterprise 2.0.

The term Enterprise 2.0 has become something of a catch-all phrase that describes the wholesale shift in enterprise IT thinking. Driven by changing business needs and social factors, organisations are starting to do things differently. Speed, agility, mobility, reuse, and innovation are the transformative drivers that are forcing organisations to push aside the old Enterprise 1.0 technologies, models, and architectures to work smarter in the new Enterprise 2.0 world of service-oriented, highly virtualised, truly commoditised, and eventually 'utility-ised' systems and solutions.

Building on the term and concepts of Web 2.0, Enterprise 2.0 describes a fresh and some would say new approach to the design and provision of business applications that incorporate aspects such as social networking, dynamic team collaboration, and real-time communication. In addition, Enterprise 2.0 focuses a great deal of attention on the user's 'experience' or 'joy of use', still something of a novelty in enterprise IT.

Enterprise 2.0 exploits Web 2.0 technologies, streamlines functionality, and reduces costs for many business processes. Transparency of information and 'a single version of truth' created by smarter collaboration means fewer and more effective e-mails, phone calls, and meetings. The chief barrier to widespread adoption of Enterprise 2.0 is one of business attitudes. Many organizations are built around a one-way flow of information from the top down, while Enterprise 2.0 is about openness, soliciting ideas and feedback, and sharing information and ideas. This can be threatening to organisations whose leadership, at any level, does not expect to be questioned.

As more social technologies bleed into the enterprise, employees are increasingly moving away from the document- and e-mail-centric world of Microsoft Word and Outlook. Instead, corporate IT users are visiting and/or using blogging and microblogging sites such as Twitter, chatting on IM, or using enterprise social networking sites such as LinkedIn. They are also checking personal online e-mail accounts and consumer social networking sites such as Facebook.

There are also new products, services, and technologies entering the enterprise collaboration space that embrace these new ideas, helping workers to more broadly incorporate their professional and personal networks, and even combining various information types and sources through mashups. Moreover, the ability to construct one-off, short-lived, time-sensitive, situational applications and to then share these with co-workers, partners, and customers, shows how working smarter can be more beneficial than merely working harder.

Addressing Today's Business Issues

In the past, the shape and nature of corporate IT was determined by a number of factors, most of which related to the very specific nature of the organisation's business and operational requirements. Enterprise 1.0 was dominated by a document-centric collaboration environment and a handful of powerful vendors and service providers, with Microsoft in particular leveraging its monopoly in PC operating systems to dominate the information worker market with its Office Suite of applications.

Technology and established vendor participation will certainly play a part as the market evolves, but Enterprise 2.0 represents more of a philosophical shift than it does a prescribed set of IT products or solutions. As with the consumer-oriented Web, Enterprise 2.0 is very much concerned with the user experience of corporate systems and applications, and on extracting business value from the social contributions and interactions of an organisation's various stakeholders. Understanding what experience is expected by which constituency is crucial, and this is the challenge for business decision makers.

There are many business drivers associated with the push to adopt Web 2.0 concepts and philosophies, the most important of which relate to the areas of customer service, cost-reduction, innovation, risk-mitigation, and market opportunities. However, the effects relating to the 'consumerisation of IT' should not be ignored, especially with newer, younger workers. We are already starting to witness the effects of consumer-driven IT, as IT departments are forced to consider the addition of Web 2.0 functionality to the working environment lest they be side-stepped altogether.

The business issues that are forcing IT management to re-evaluate their strategies are many and varied, but some common trends have become evident. The management of customer, partner, and vendor relationships continues to remain pivotal for most organisations, and so the social aspects of Web 2.0 are mirrored in the corporate world of Enterprise Web 2.0. In addition, workforce mobility and changing communication patterns are two more trends that are driving change at the infrastructure layer, so unified communication and collaboration requirements form an important part of Enterprise 2.0 strategy.

Risk-management and mitigation continue to be a high priority for CEOs, and this has produced a cascade of requirements impacting corporate IT, much of which relates to the governance and control of information. With employees tempted to use effective but ungoverned public collaboration services, the need has arisen to offer the proactive information worker something that is amenable to both the organisation and the individual.

If successfully implemented, Enterprise 2.0 offerings can enable organisations to streamline processes and reduce costs for many business functions. For example, an online collaboration and information-sharing platform enables networks of employees, partners, customers, and stakeholders to connect, collaborate, and find information more easily. Moreover, the transparency of information means that people do not need to track down important e-mails or word-processing documents when a key participant is unavailable. The upshot of this is fewer e-mails, phone calls, and scheduling of meetings, and those that remain are more effective.

Enterprise 2.0 offers potential to many areas of business, for example:

Project Management

General project and task-management stands to benefit significantly from the enhanced collaborative aspects of Enterprise 2.0. Day-to-day project management is simplified with a single meeting environment, which eliminates the need for e-mail swapping, phone calls, conference calling (and planning), and travel. Document co-authoring through wikis makes multiple e-mails redundant because the most up-to-date version of a document is readily accessible, i.e. there is always a 'single version of the truth'.

Sales and Marketing

Sales and marketing are business functions that are often cited as great beneficiaries of Enterprise 2.0. For example, an on-demand webinar can address a wide-ranging and large online audience without the need for travel or scheduling. Moreover, the sharing of contact, links, and other pieces of useful information via mobile devices and browser-based tools makes for a more readily usable way of working. Integration of enterprise social software and unified communications software with popular line-of-business applications, enterprise applications, and office productivity tools can significantly extend the business value of these investments.

Training and e-learning

Training and e-learning can leverage the business value of Enterprise 2.0 investment. For example, wikis and persistent group meeting rooms can create a single repository for training and educational material, and can be much more personable as a result of the implicit social elements of Enterprise 2.0. Trainees and students are able to control the frequency and delivery of information, and can readily interact with instructors and peers using a variety of collaboration and communication facilities. When viewed as a next-generation collaboration platform, Enterprise 2.0 offerings can enable a whole range of ad hoc training and mentoring capabilities.

Enterprises can no longer ignore the immense gravitational pull of Web 2.0 technologies and concepts. However, Ovum is witnessing a repeat of history in some cases as businesses and institutions choose not to invest in this area because they fail to see the relevance of this sea change for their organisations. This is a concern because the Web is central to so many aspects of business and commerce. Even the public sector with its traditionally cautious approach to new technology and process change has recognised the importance of Web 2.0, and the people-centric aspect of Web 2.0 probably makes this era of information and communication technology evolution the most relevant yet.

Considering Technology Issues

Enterprise 2.0 might be about putting the 'user' (employee, customer, or stakeholder) first, but in order to do so it also requires supporting technology. And so at the IT infrastructure level, Enterprise 2.0 means Internet Protocol everywhere, for voice, for video, and for data, including IP gateways to legacy systems. Enterprise 2.0 also means 'open' standards rather than proprietary or 'closed' systems. Furthermore, Enterprise 2.0 technology means user-driven technology and not IT-driven technology.

The fact that consumer-centric social networking sites can provide free user accounts must tell us something about the economies of scale that come into play at a global level. As a result of greater financial pressures an increasing number of organisations are considering the move to hosted e-mail and collaboration accounts. Google's US\$50 per user per year managed business account (Google Apps Premier Edition), Microsoft's own Business Productivity Online Suite (BPOS) at US\$10 per user per month, and IBM's LotusLive offerings starting at US\$3 per month per user, all point the way to the 'utility-isation' of core IT services, and so any Enterprise 2.0 offering will be expected to cost less than the Enterprise 1.0 product that came before it.

Real-time communications and social networking are fundamental components of the "new world of work". Whether it's real-time (instant messaging, video conferencing, white boarding, application sharing) or asynchronous (blogs, wikis, profiles, status updates, microblogging, team/project workspaces, file sharing, community forums), moving to an Enterprise 2.0 environment is something that all IT managers should be thinking about.

If IT has become a commodity, or 'ticket-to-entry' in the ever-expanding competitive market, then only an organisation's people and processes and how well they use IT can make a difference. But it is not that simple because only a small fraction of an organisation's processes are actually on computer systems, and these are not necessarily the most important processes. Even the most rigid, hierarchical processes have people at their core, and the exceptions that any human system creates can ultimately only be handled by people. Having accepted the fact that 'processes' means 'people', it becomes necessary to look for ways in which these people (processes) can self-organise and reference one another. Then, where possible, the processes need to be encapsulated in a set of business services.

One day (we might call it Web 3.0 or the Semantic Web), artificial intelligence (AI) will enable organisations to automatically handle more business process exceptions, but until that day arrives, organisations must do more to aid inter-department and inter-company collaboration. Workflow has not yet figured largely in the consumer-oriented world of Web 2.0, but Ovum sees this as pivotal when considering Enterprise 2.0.

The Management and Governance of Enterprise 2.0

As a topic, Enterprise 2.0 generates a number of questions from Ovum subscribers. These are being addressed as evidence from early adopters comes to light. For example, organisations that have progressed down the software-as-a-service (SaaS) route, such as with Salesforce.com, are starting to integrate across service providers and technology boundaries much as traditional IT departments do in-house today. The learning curve still looks steep, but there are signs that the gradient is reducing as the market matures.

We have seen that Web 2.0 is about empowering the user, and that unexpected things happen as a result. Business and IT managers must therefore prepare themselves for the new generation of power users who will think nothing of collaborating outside a traditional hierarchical structure and in order to achieve their goals will undoubtedly participate through unmanaged and ungoverned systems, potentially exposing the organisation to risk as a result of sharing information in an uncontrolled manner.

Businesses and institutions clearly consist of people, and these people are the recipients of products, goods, and services from other organisations and sources. Perhaps this is an obvious statement to make, but some managers still seem to think that the world of Web 2.0 only exists beyond the walls of the enterprise. While every corporate employee is a consumer, not every consumer is a corporate employee, and so organisations must consider carefully how best to exploit virtual communities and social networking sites. Some organisations might decide to use public-facing sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, or Google. Others may opt for the 'safe' option by implementing a business social software solution. And there will be those who will seek to exploit the strengths of both by intertwining their business model and processes in innovative ways.

As with Web 2.0, Enterprise 2.0 is not PC-centric. Thanks to companies like Apple, Microsoft, Nokia, and now Google, the smartphone is fast becoming the device of choice for tech-savvy users. But here lies a challenge for the corporate IT department because among the tech-savvy users are an increasing number of tech-savvy senior managers, and these managers will want corporate IT on their terms, not those of the corporate IT manager.

Conclusion

In the consumer space, Web 2.0 is very much about 'participation' and 'contribution', tenets dearly sought by most companies and institutions, and so the challenge for senior executives and business decision-makers is to capture this momentum and ingrain it within the corporate culture and the organisation's people-centric business processes as part of Enterprise 2.0. More importantly, collaboration costs can be reduced and enterprise innovation and flexibility improved by using newer collaborative tools that mimic real human behaviour, rather than forcing people to adhere to inflexible legacy tools.

It would be a mistake to think that Web 2.0 is all about technology, and likewise Enterprise 2.0, but it would also be a mistake to dismiss the technology altogether. Therefore, the selection and implementation of enterprise social software solutions and real-time collaboration solutions requires careful thought, consideration, and planning.

If the information-management and collaboration market is assessed from an Enterprise 2.0 perspective, then we see that some providers are taking a product-based approach, tailoring solutions to meet particular business scenarios, while others favour embedding facilities into operating systems, portals, application platforms, and the Web. So choosing the right offering is no longer as simple as following the perceived market leader.

The driving force behind just about every aspect of Enterprise 2.0 is the user and his or her community, something that has not always ranked highly on the list of priorities for corporate IT managers. And so the challenge for all forward-looking organisations is to refocus on this aspect of their IT strategies, and to do so with an open mind when it comes to equipping and empowering these groups and individuals for the new world of work.

► WHY ENTERPRISE 2.0?

Corporate employees spend a great deal of time collaborating via e-mails and documents such as word-processing, spreadsheets, and presentations, all of which have to be stored, managed, shared, and protected across various repositories. However, the two things missing from most corporate collaboration platforms are the social network that ties all of this 'stuff' together and the real-time communication infrastructure that enables an immediate response. With an uncertain economy and fierce competition across all markets and sectors, organisations must now ensure that their enterprise collaboration facilities are up to scratch, and that employees have a place to deposit the hitherto tacit information, knowledge, and know-how that they possess and process, and that they have a way to more readily access that information and the people behind it.

In terms of information-processing productivity gains, most businesses and institutions have now captured and automated core business processes that are capable of being instantiated in computer software, and these organisations are now looking for additional ways to differentiate their products, services, and business models through smarter use of user-oriented information technologies. Moreover, because many CEOs are looking to reduce staffing and travel costs while increasing productivity, organisations are starting to take a closer look at 'talent management', enterprise social software, and real-time collaboration solutions.

The collaboration tools and technologies that are put to use by organisations are like the lubrication in a big machine in that they are seldom responsible for the breakdown of any major business process, but they are most definitely a contributing factor to the efficiency of the machine as a whole. This is why Enterprise 2.0 technologies are starting to have an impact on enterprise IT as an increasing number of business professionals recognise the 'lubrication' qualities of the tools and technologies that they are using in their consumer lives.

The last couple of years have seen some forward-looking organisations experimenting with Web-native real-time social software such as instant messaging, blogs, wikis, and communities. However, only now is there beginning to be real choice for the IT manager looking for business-ready enterprise social software that can add business value without overly increasing IT operational costs.

Why Enterprise 2.0? There are many business reasons relating to business social networking software. Some of the most significant are:

- A need to improve communication and collaboration in a practical and reliable way across an increasingly distributed workforce separated by geography, time zone, and culture.
- A need to find, access, and share information, and find, reach, and collaborate in a secure and reliable way with colleagues, partners, and stakeholders.
- A desire to maximise the value of contacts and business relationships by understanding their context, relevance, and appropriateness.
- A need to improve employee satisfaction and loyalty with a view to retaining the organisation's most important asset: its people.
- A need to improve the productivity of information workers given that in excess of 70% of salaries are now allocated to such work.
- A need to reduce expenses and the cost of doing business. Reducing the 'sales, general, and administration' line of the business by working smarter can only improve competitiveness.

Furthermore, the Web 2.0 'at-home' user experience is driving employees to expect:

- A set of real-time social networking tools that integrate with existing personal productivity applications.
- A communication and collaboration experience that works across a broad range of devices.
- Accessible rich productivity applications that work through any Web browser.

A number of challenges face organisations that wish to utilise the power of real-time social networking services in the enterprise. These include:

- Control: Conventional wisdom has always dictated that controlling information is better than sharing it. However, businesses and institutions need to share more information, and yet maintain control over how and when it is shared.
- Security: Organisations are concerned about the exposure of line-of-business applications to external parties because information that should be under tight control might be accidentally or intentionally exposed.
- Trust and Privacy: By its very nature, real-time collaboration and social software exposes that which has been hidden, and so senior management are rightly concerned and uneasy with new methods for user-to-user interaction.
- Integration: Out-of-the-box integration between enterprise social software and other tools and applications used by the workforce is extremely important. The days of costly integration projects are over as far as commodity end-user software is concerned.

Choosing the most appropriate Enterprise 2.0 tools and services brings with it some difficult choices. Organisations have huge investments in corporate e-mail systems, such as Microsoft Exchange and IBM Lotus Notes Domino, and these are not going to disappear overnight. Similarly, Microsoft Office on the desktop and SharePoint on the intranet are likely to remain for the foreseeable future. Therefore, the challenge for business decision-makers is to encourage innovation and modernisation in the digital workplace without overburdening an already beleaguered IT department.

► ENTERPRISE 2.0 CAPABILITIES

According to Andrew McAfee¹, Associate Professor, Harvard Business School, social software must offer the following functionality if it is to work well within the enterprise:

- **Search:** allowing users to search for other users or content
- **Links:** grouping similar users or content together
- **Authoring:** including blogs and wikis
- **Tags:** allowing users to tag content
- **Extensions:** recommendations of users; or content based on profile
- **Signals:** allowing people to subscribe to users or content with RSS feeds
- **Sharing:** allowing people to share files and other documents outside of e-mail

Ovum would add to his list of requirements the need to incorporate:

- **Presence:** knowing whether a person is on line or off line.
- **State:** knowing what task or activity someone is engaged in and what tool or device they are using.
 - **Proximity:** geographic location status, time zone, and other location data that opens opportunities for 'chance encounters' or serendipity.
 - **Unified Communications:** combining rich text messaging, audio, and video communications.
 - **Virtual Meetings:** screen or application sharing, group chats, audio or video broadcasts, etc.

► LOTUS CONNECTIONS, LOTUS QUICKR, AND LOTUS SAMETIME: IBM'S ENTERPRISE 2.0 OFFERINGS

IBM's Enterprise 2.0 offering comes in the guise of three key Lotus offerings: Lotus Connections, Lotus Quickr, and Lotus Sametime. By empowering individuals and teams these products are designed to help organisations 'work smarter' and more effectively. The capabilities offered by Lotus can enable those within a business or institution to keep track of and instantly reach out to people, ideas, and their know-how.

Lotus Connections presents a suite of social software capabilities pre-integrated to work together in a corporate setting. For example, the Home Page aggregates in one location social data from across the other services to provide users with quick access to information that has been shared within their network and among the communities they are interested in.

Lotus Quickr is collaboration software that enables teams to access and interact with one another. IBM's alternative to Windows SharePoint Services, Lotus Quickr offers a rich set of features that are centred on content libraries, team discussion, and wikis. Through the use of connectors, Lotus Quickr can connect to Lotus Notes, Lotus Sametime, Lotus Symphony, Microsoft Office, Windows Explorer, and Microsoft Outlook.

¹ McAfee 2006

Lotus Sametime is IBM's unified communications and real-time collaboration solution. It provides a single software-based platform for providing rich chat (IM, audio, video), online meetings, and real-time group collaboration, as well as integrating with telephony infrastructures from multiple vendors, e-mail systems, social software, workspaces, and enterprise applications, whether rich-client or web-based.

Like it or not, success in the enterprise collaboration software market will undoubtedly be linked to the extent to which a vendor supports Microsoft technology, and here IBM scores top marks. Lotus Connections allows users to access social data from applications they use on a daily basis, including Microsoft applications, such as Outlook and the Office Suite, as well as Microsoft Windows Explorer. Lotus Connections can also be integrated with SharePoint. Of course, Lotus Connections works well with Lotus Notes, Lotus Sametime, and WebSphere Portal. Similarly, Lotus Sametime users can see the presence of colleagues from their e-mails, or Live-Text enabled documents (or SharePoint pages) and without leaving that application can bring up contextual menus to 'click-to-chat', 'click-to-call', 'click-to-conference', or even rich profile information.

Lotus Quickr integrates with Microsoft Office 2003 and 2007 (including Microsoft Outlook), Microsoft Windows Explorer on Windows XP, and Windows Vista, Lotus Notes, and Lotus Sametime. As a Web-based collaboration facility, users can access Lotus Quickr using Microsoft Internet Explorer, Firefox, and Safari browsers. This enables users with Windows, Linux, and Macintosh computers to collaborate easily and consistently. IBM has incorporated Web 2.0 technologies such as Ajax (Asynchronous JavaScript and XML) into Lotus Quickr to deliver a rich Web-based user interface. Quickr's slick user interface provides the user with an intuitive experience similar to that of a traditional 'thick-client' Windows application. Right-click context-sensitive menus and drag-and-drop facilities are all supported.

The look and feel of Lotus Connections is clearly influenced by consumer-oriented social software sites, and because all corporate employees are consumers, Ovum thinks that this is not a bad thing. Although fully featured, Lotus Connections is not the most sophisticated enterprise social-networking product on the market, but the range of functionality offered will more than satisfy the needs of most organisations.

Competition in the enterprise social software market is starting to build. Microsoft's own offering, based on SharePoint, is gaining attention, and offerings from EMC Document, Jive Software, Oracle, Social Text, Telligent, and others continue to grow market share.

Unlike other offerings on the market that tend to be document-centric, Lotus Connections, Quickr, and Sametime revolve around people: their communications, their activities and their communities. Accomplishing a business objective usually requires more than posting a document for others to view and edit, and Lotus recognises this. For example, Connections allows individual users and team members to consolidate in an online workspace the e-mails, chat sessions, tasks, notes, files, and links needed to accomplish a business objective. Moreover, these elements can be grouped in a way that closely mirrors the way people actually work to enable employees to build social relationships via digital assets in a controlled and governed fashion across the corporate boundary.

Lotus Connections 2.5 shipped in August 2009 and offers the following facilities and services:

- **Homepage** – This is a personal portal site that can federate information from many sources, saving the user time and effort when it comes to locating important and relevant information.
- **Profiles** – The Profiles service provides a directory of the people in (and potentially beyond) the organisation, including the information needed to form and encourage effective social networks. Profiles are all about 'visibility'. They enable those with access to Lotus Connections to see who their colleagues are, what they do, what projects they are working on, their skills and experience, the tools and technologies they are using, the problems they are currently trying to solve, and what they are reading or writing. A person's contact details can also be exported as a vCard.
- **Communities** – The Communities module provides a Web site where people who share a common interest can interact with one another and share resources. Communities can also be used to focus the discussions of a group of like-minded individuals who share expertise. Access to Communities is set up in three ways. Users can join any public community that has been designated as public access. Some public communities have moderated access, which means that users must request access and be granted membership. This process is managed by a community owner. Private communities restrict membership to a specified group, and users are added by the community owner.

- **Blogs** – Blogs are online personal journals that can be used to deliver timely information within the context of the individual for the rest of the enterprise. The Blogs home page is the user's entry point for creating and participating in blogs. From the home page, a user can browse for blogs, read recent entries, see what others are viewing or recommending, and even start their own blog. Users can customise the way information is presented by sorting the display on the home page, e.g., by date, title, most recommended, most commented, or most visited. A blog can have a single author or allow for multiple contributors. Users can invite colleagues to provide feedback comments on what they post.
- **Wikis** – The newly added wiki feature allows teams to collaboratively enter, edit, and publish Web-page content. In true social style, the wiki owner can control access to the wiki and assign read access, write access, or manager access privileges. Manager access allows the addition of new members, changing access for existing members, or deleting members.
- **Activities** – The Activities service is a tool for collaborating, collecting, organising, sharing, and reusing work related to a project or goal. Activities allows the user to bring together different types of information and tools, such as e-mails, instant messages, people, to-dos, dates, files, and more, in a single area where information can be shared with relevant people and acted on. Users can save a completed Activity as a template to share within the organisation as a best practice and to create new Activities.
- **Bookmarks** – The Bookmarks social bookmarking service is a tool similar to that found at Delicious.com. This service allows users to save, organise, and share their Internet and Intranet bookmarks. From the Bookmarks homepage users are provided with instructions to add the "Bookmark this!" button to their Web browser. Once users have created a bookmark they can then import bookmarks from their Web browser using the toolbar button. Bookmarks can also be exported to Microsoft Internet Explorer and Mozilla Firefox.
- **Files** – This facility provides a convenient way to share documents, spreadsheets, presentations, and other types of files with people, without the need to send large files through e-mail. It also opens documents to be shared and reshared via links, reducing version control and duplication issues and e-mail database storage requirements.

All aspects of Lotus Connections can be displayed on a home page, and by using the social software features, Ovum believes that organisations increase their potential to become more innovative and more likely to execute business activities quickly and dynamically. We can see from the Web that the commercial value of social software increases proportionally with the size of the user community, and so Ovum maintains that the business value of enterprise social software will increase with widespread adoption among information workers. Moreover, extending access throughout and beyond the enterprise to partners and to customers is also likely to increase ROI.

Available on AIX, Linux, and Microsoft Windows, Lotus Connections works with a range of IBM products including: Lotus Sametime, Lotus Notes, Lotus Quickr, and WebSphere Portal. Moreover, Lotus Connections integrates out-of-the-box with Microsoft Office and Outlook, and Windows Explorer.

Unlike other offerings on the market such as Microsoft SharePoint, Lotus Connections' task-management capabilities are organised around an activity-centric approach as opposed to a document-centric approach. Accomplishing a business objective usually requires more than posting a document for others to view and edit, and so the Activities service allows individual users and team members to consolidate in an online workspace the e-mails, chat sessions, tasks, notes, files, and links needed to accomplish a business objective. These elements can be grouped into a structured hierarchy that closely mirrors the way people work.

Lotus Connections supports heterogeneous IT environments by accommodating a variety of operating systems, databases, browsers, and other clients. Lotus Connections is built on a service-oriented architecture that can scale to meet the demands of large enterprises and their communities. Lotus Connections' scalability has been demonstrated by extensive use in IBM's production environment.

Lotus Sametime is designed so that end users' mobility does not reduce their productivity, including features such as mobile device integration, roaming/single-number access, presence awareness, and geographical location services. Seamless integration is another key capability, with the functionality able to be assimilated into a wide variety of clients and software including productivity and enterprise applications as well as the ability to utilise multiple telecommunication infrastructures. Sametime presence and chat is enabled across the entire Lotus collaboration portfolio and Microsoft Office products. Sametime 8.5 will further extend these reach and integration options by adding new Ajax-based, Web browser-based clients and APIs.

Lotus Quickr includes out-of-the-box business templates for a range of activities. These templates are customisable to enable organisations to tailor the look and feel of the system. Document and application templates allow users to share ideas as they collaborate, tracking changes as they take place. Lotus Quickr's wiki technology provides an in-line Web-editing option that allows a user to revert back to an earlier version of a page.

Future planned enhancements to Lotus Quickr include integration with IBM's enterprise content management (ECM) systems. Integration with FileNet and IBM Content Manager is available in these flavours: Quickr connectors can access FileNet and CM directly, and therefore work with both Quickr Domino and Quickr services for WebSphere Portal (Java Enterprise Edition). Quickr Web UI access to FileNet and CM is available for Quickr Java Enterprise Edition only, with plans to make it available for Quickr Domino.

► SUMMARY

Lotus provides organisations with a suite of enterprise social software and real-time communications functions that have been pre-integrated to work well together. The product allows users to access their social data from applications they already use including Lotus Notes, Lotus Connections, Lotus Sametime, Lotus Quickr, and some Microsoft Office applications such as Outlook. Although offered through a Web browser, Lotus Connections can be delivered through a variety of methods including Lotus Notes, Lotus Sametime, Atom feeds, WebSphere Portal, Microsoft Office, and RIM BlackBerry.

Lotus Connections compares favourably to other offerings on the market. IBM's closest competitor, Microsoft, has its SharePoint-based offering, but this does not yet offer the features and level of integration displayed by Lotus Connections. IBM has demonstrated levels of integration with Microsoft SharePoint and Live Communications Server.

Lotus Connections is a well-engineered and well-supported enterprise social networking solution. In terms of business social software, this product does not present anything that is particularly new, original, or novel, but it does provide a well-integrated set of premises-based, enterprise-ready, social-networking services that will immediately bring value to an organisation. IBM has plucked a range of social-networking applications that will be familiar to an increasing percentage of corporate employees, and delivers these in a manner that is well suited to business use.

Lotus Connections can be accessed through a Web browser, productivity applications, an e-mail client, or a smartphone, and incorporates features that will increase the productivity and efficacy of any socially motivated workforce. Lotus Connections is a general solution, and IBM has seen demand for the product across a broad spectrum of industries including financial services, banking, government, telecommunications, insurance, and retail. Lotus Connections is sold directly by IBM and through IBM Business partners, and is destined to appear in an online guise through IBM's LotusLive brand. Lotus Connections puts IBM in a strong position in this increasingly important market.

IBM's target market for Lotus Connections is the social-software market for businesses, government, and education. It is sold to existing Lotus and IBM customers, and has attracted a significant number of new customers.

Lotus Connections presents many opportunities for third-party developers and systems integrators, and IBM is partnering with vendors such as RIM (BlackBerry client for Lotus Connections), LinkedIn, SuccessFactors, and CorasWorks (for SharePoint data integration). Ovum expects this list to grow rapidly over the coming months as the popularity of Lotus Connections increases.

Lotus Sametime can be accessed through a rich client, web browser, productivity applications, e-mail clients, or smartphones, and incorporates all the real-time communications features that IM-savvy workers expect.

In addition to integration with the rest of the Lotus portfolio of offerings, through open and standards-based APIs Lotus Sametime presents opportunities for third-party developers and systems integrators, particularly for telephony applications and systems. IBM Sametime partners with over 400 network equipment providers, ISVs, and other technology partners, including Avaya, Cisco, ShoreTel, Siemens, Genesys, and RIM.

Sametime is targeted at the enterprise, regardless of industry vertical, though Lotus Sametime has been particularly successful in the financial services, banking, insurance, government, and healthcare sectors. Companies with a mobile virtual workforce will find the solution useful to reduce costs, enhance enterprise collaboration, and increase user productivity. IBM sells Lotus Sametime through the channel and also through its IBM Global Business Services and IBM Global Technology Services arms.

IBM's Enterprise 2.0 solution offerings are among the most mature and sophisticated on the market, and although some products are more developed than others, IBM generally has all aspects of this market covered. Compared to other offerings on the market, IBM's solutions are better integrated and more capable.

IBM's information worker strategy has lacked cohesion and direction in recent years, but the company is now back on track with a strong portfolio of products. After losing customer mind share and confidence during the middle part of the decade, IBM is starting to regain momentum and impetus. Although not yet fully developed, IBM's online services look set to offer organisations a real alternative to on-premise applications, and in so doing will provide strong competition for Microsoft's dominant position in the enterprise market.

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