

Cheaper, Faster, Better.

New technologies to move organizations

The Future

What does the future hold? We can never know for certain, but we can definitely catch trends as they emerge. By being at the front of new thinking we can be in a position to get the most value for our time and money. We can also expect to learn much more rapidly than our competition

The Death of IT

The IT Department has been around as long as the career of most of today's workers. It has long been the benevolent dictator and purveyor of software within organizations of almost any size.

With the advent of new, Software-As-A-Service (SaaS) applications however, the traditional role of the IT Department is no longer as obvious as it once was.

The Browser to the Rescue

One gift we have all received from our IT Department, and a tool that comes on almost every computer, is the Web Browser. Internet Explorer, Opera, Firefox, Safari are all well known web browsers and competition in the browser market is focused around providing a better product to the end user, for free.

“Software delivered as a service to the enterprise has created a new dichotomy between software and the enterprise.”

This reality really is a miracle for the modern day internet user. Without the competition we are seeing in the marketplace, we would almost certainly be in a much

worse position with vendor lock-in and major incompatibilities across the internet.

Instead, we have the swiss army knife on our desktop, and it has opened up an entire new world to us.

The age of the Browser has just begun.

Browser as Platform

The web-browser is now more than just a viewing application, it is a doorway to 2-way communication, Office Publishing suites, Application development platforms, Enterprise collaboration platforms and even our email now often resides in the browser.

Expense with the Technology

Software delivered as a service to the enterprise has created a new dichotomy between software and the enterprise. In the old model, executives, board members, employees, everyone had to write a proposal, push through procurement channels, seek approvals and rearrange budgets.

Most new web based software is billed on a low, monthly, cycle. This means that acquiring a new technology, or deploying a sophisticated platform within your department or group can be as simple as typing in your credit card number and printing a receipt.

Trends in Strategy and Thinking

Andrew McAfee of Harvard Business School identified three underlying trends in this new world of software, which he calls Enterprise 2.0 (http://blog.hbs.edu/faculty/amcafee/index.php/faculty_amcafee_v3/the_three_trends_underlying_enterprise_20/)

These are three consumer trends that are now making their way inside the enterprise

Simple, Free Platforms for Self Expression

The cost of the tools and spaces for self expression have fallen to zero. You can now, for not cost, establish a weblog, photo album, personal website, newsletter or email group within a matter of minutes

Tools of Expression

- www.blogger.com - Blog Publishing
- groups.google.com - Collaborative Groups
- www.google.com/a/ - Email, Messenger, Websites
- www.flickr.com - Photo Community
- www.typepad.com - Fee based premium blogs

The implications of this for the individual are staggering, we are now seeing a generation of citizens who expect to be hyper-informed and connected at all times, and they also expect to be heard, and listened to closely.

Emergent Structures rather than Improvised Ones

Almost everyone knows about Wikipedia today. Even if you haven't visited the site yourself, it is now cited on CNN, CBC, MSNBC, and CBS regularly as a source of information in news reports and in stories. How has a non-profit encyclopedia become the primary go-to source of information for everyone with an internet account?

Are you an amateur gardener? Then you can go write the article on Squash. Oh, that has been written in detail, well, the article on Mesocarp is not fleshed out very well, so you can help there.

The catch with Wikipedia isn't that it is just a non-profit encyclopedia, but it is entirely written by it's readers. There are no staff writers at Wikipedia, there is no editor-in-chief. There are simply, readers. Only, they are readers who also write the very content they are using.

The truth is, there is no direct answer as to why it is so successful. Simply put Wikipedia is an emergent organization built on an entirely free set of tools. The advent of cheap, versatile and reliable platforms, such a "MediaWiki" on which Wikipedia is built, has allowed a new type of organizational thinking to come to life.

Now, instead of implementing a well-planned and central solution, Vice Presidents, Managers, Employees and Customers can all create the right solution, at the right time, in almost no time at all.

Order from Chaos

What if we have a company full of Vice Presidents, Managers and employees who are all creating their own applications, subscribing to their own services and contributing content to hundreds of destinations? Is chaos not inevitable?

Andrew McAfee contends, and we are seeing more and more, that this is not true. As individuals become more and more accustomed to creating their own content, they also become proficient at categorizing and storing it in what are now called Folksonomies. They are taxonomies of categorization created on the fly by readers, writers and owners.

Other Trends

Just Do It

The Just Do It strategy is enabled by the new world of cheaper and easier tools. Without encountering the typical hurdles and structures, new initiatives can be piloted very cheaply. Projects that work can be nurtured, projects that do not work can be dropped without the need for formal process.

Radical Transparency

Transparency in business is not a new concept, but only now through the tools of self expression and creation can those who are inside the enterprise effectively communicate with their stakeholders.

Students are already doing this through communities such as Facebook (www.facebook.com) where friends provide each-other with updates on their current status, relationships, social events and interests. The idea of "keeping in touch" with someone has transformed radically in just the last few years for individuals, those same people now expect to "keep in touch" with their organizations, such as Universities, schools, employers, radio stations, etc in a much different way than we have previously imagined.

Right Now?

Massive Availability

The last year has seen incredible growth in the availability of these new technologies and platforms. To give you an idea of the reach and depth of these tools, we will take a look at some of the major categories of desktop applications and their new equivalent web-based competitors.

Office Tools

Calendars

30 Boxes (www.30boxes.com)

Scrybe (www.scrybe.com)

Contact Management

Linked-In (<http://www.linkedin.com>)

Big Contacts (<http://www.bigcontacts.com/>)

Databases

Caspio Bridge (www.caspio.com)

DabbleDB (www.dabbledb.com)

Zoho Creator (www.zohocreator.com)

Build Your Own

The following tools allow normal people, with limited understand of development, to build their own completely custom applications. This can be anything from a simple Contact Form or Sign-Up site to a fully feature community of employees, students or friends.

Teqlo (www.teqlo.com)

ning (www.ning.com)

Coghead (www.coghead.com)

Document Management

Koral (www.koral.com)

EchoSign (www.echosign.com)

Email

GMail (www.gmail.com)

Zimbra (www.zimbra.com)

Zimbra is a fully featured Email, Calendar and Document Management platform and is used by major enterprises.

Expenses

billQ (www.mybillq.com)

OneStatement (www.onestatement.com)

Presentations

Thumbstacks (www.thumbstacks.com)

Zoho Show (www.zohoshow.com)

Communities

The following tools let you build large scale communities of users within an organization, and then out to customers, suppliers and partners.

Drupal (www.drupal.org)

CollectiveX (www.collectiveX.com)

Firestoker (www.firestoker.com)