

Comment Article

Information Management – let's be sociable, not confuse things

By Clive Longbottom, Service Director, Quocirca Ltd

Social networking is all the rage. The mainstream press coverage is widespread, but the press seems bored with "old technology" stories on instant messaging, Skype, MySpace, Facebook, SecondLife and Flickr. Blogs and wikis were hot topics, and the idea of Tweeting appears to have caught on.

Organizations, although tending to lag in the uptake of such technologies, do see that the idea of providing employees with a far less rigid means of interacting both internally and externally can provide massive benefits – if applied with care. However, completely open, uncontrolled communications can lead to major problems, as has been seen by brand issues faced by many organizations through the posting of comments by employees on some social networking sites. Vendors such as Microsoft and IBM Lotus are bringing more corporate style solutions to the market, and a lot of independent vendors are trying to capture the market before it implodes. The big problem is that we have a raft of technologies that all attempt to make collaboration and social networking easier for us. The noise level of information is getting louder, but our capability to truly deal with all of this information is actually decreasing. Any capabilities to monitor and apply control are not there yet, and any interlinks between different technologies are minimal - leading to, far too many silos of information to keep in check.

We are rapidly getting to a position where someone will get a message along the lines of "I'm Tweeting you to make sure that you received the voicemail about the email I sent you telling you to look out for a fax. Why didn't you IM me as soon as you got it? Please poke me on Facebook as soon as you can." With so little linkage between systems, we're running the risk of getting it all completely wrong - messing up the corporate decision-making capability in the process and impacting brand equity.

However, by taking a balanced approach, we should be able to make the most from this explosion of technologies and ensure that a sufficient degree of monitoring and control is in place. Each person within an organization will have their own preferences for how to deal with communication and collaboration. Some will prefer face-to-face meetings, others the phone. Some may want less real-time pressure preferring email, while others want to be able to use instant messaging. Received wisdom points toward this being a generational issue, with the younger members of an organization tending to go for the newer technologies - particularly the ones that are less formal and require less time focus (e.g., Twitter or IM). However, I have found that this is not necessarily the case. The use of social networking sites such as Facebook, YouTube and MySpace is spread out over the generations; and Twitter, blogging and wikis are by no means reserved for the new intake in an organization. We cannot use broad brush approaches to how communication and collaboration are used – we have to consider the individual within the context of the team and the overall organization.

With each person having a set of preferred communication and collaboration tools, the trick becomes how ensuring that the organization gains the most out of these preferences. In most cases, people will be fine in using three or four different tools, will accept occasional use of an additional two or three, and will do anything they can to avoid several others. The trick then is to ensure that an organization keeps as many of their constituents as happy as possible while gaining as many of the benefits of social networking as possible.

The biggest key is to use contextual presence. Whenever anyone's name appears on a computer screen, clicking on it allows interaction with this user. By interlinking as many of the technologies as possible, each person should be able to prioritize their own preferences,

indicating their availability at the same time. For example, one person within an organization could see a supplier's name and click on it. The supplier may only want to receive telephone calls from external people, in which case this will be the only option shown. Clicking on the name will initiate a voice-over Internet protocol call. A customer may have defined his or her preferences as IM, then phone, then email. If the customer is available at his or her PC, the user will be provided with IM as being the best option. If the customer is away from his or her PC and it has timed out, then phone may be shown as the main means of contact. If the customer has set their immediate contactability as "not available," then email could be used.

By giving each person the capability to define their preferences, any two people wanting to interact can hopefully find a common means that suits the pair of them. Even when greater numbers of people need to be brought together, the choice of Web, video or telephone conferencing, multi-instant messaging or specific team spaces should enable as option that suits everyone.

By pulling everything together through a common central directory in this way, a further benefit is gained. By initiating a single point of any communication or collaboration, a full audit log can be maintained. Interaction timelines can be maintained, and records can be aggregated and pushed in to customer relationship management or other management systems. Even when using public systems, such centralized control can ensure that content is passed through a filter before it goes to the public environment, blocking anything that is deemed inappropriate.

As we move forward, this problem will disappear. Many of today's social networking technologies will be temporary aberrations and die away. Others will become mainstream and be absorbed into other communication and collaboration systems. By 2012, Quocirca does not expect that anyone will be blogging, Tweeting, wiki-ing or poking. Not because these technologies have completely disappeared, just that they will all be part of a cohesive and coherent communication and collaboration platform that enables users to choose how they interact with the rest of the world.

And it can't happen soon enough.

Oh - and you can email me at clive.longbottom@quocirca.com, follow my Tweets at [clivel_98](#), Skype me at [clivel_98](#), call me at ... okay - you get the picture

About Quocirca

Quocirca is a primary research and analysis company specialising in the business impact of information technology and communications (ITC). With world-wide, native language reach, Quocirca provides in-depth insights into the views of buyers and influencers in large, mid-sized and small organisations. Its analyst team is made up of real-world practitioners with first hand experience of ITC delivery who continuously research and track the industry and its real usage in the markets.

Through researching perceptions, Quocirca uncovers the real hurdles to technology adoption – the personal and political aspects of an organisation's environment and the pressures of the need for demonstrable business value in any implementation. This capability to uncover and report back on the end-user perceptions in the market enables Quocirca to advise on the realities of technology adoption, not the promises.

Quocirca research is always pragmatic, business orientated and conducted in the context of the bigger picture. ITC has the ability to transform businesses and the processes that drive them, but often fails to do so. Quocirca's mission is to help organisations improve their success rate in process enablement through better levels of understanding and the adoption of the correct technologies at the correct time.

Quocirca has a pro-active primary research programme, regularly surveying users, purchasers and resellers of ITC products and services on emerging, evolving and maturing technologies. Over time, Quocirca has built a picture of long term investment trends, providing invaluable information for the whole of the ITC community.

Quocirca works with global and local providers of ITC products and services to help them deliver on the promise that ITC holds for business. Quocirca's clients include Oracle, Microsoft, IBM, O2, T-Mobile, HP, Xerox, EMC, Symantec and Cisco, along with other large and medium sized vendors, service providers and more specialist firms.

Details of Quocirca's work and the services it offers can be found at

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