

ITAnalysis – Does innovation happen in the centre or at the edge?

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Technology innovation is often hard to demonstrate to those in senior decision making roles in most organisations, and generally for very straightforward reasons. Many vendors pitch their products or services as being full of benefits, but often these are simply features dressed up with a few marketing buzzwords ending in 'ability'.

The answer to the question 'what will it do?' is generally 'anything' as those flogging the idea, either from outside or with the help of internal IT champions typically ignore the unspoken part of the question '...for me, our company, against the competition, etc'.

It is an issue of putting the innovation into specific context.

In October 1993 the then Anderson Consulting created a dramatic way of doing this for their retail prospects in Europe, through a 'blue sky thinking' experience called 'Smart Store', built at its office in Windsor, which aimed to transport senior retail executives into the distant future of 2010. The multi-room showcased the impact of technology in a context that would grab and sometimes shock retail executives into action. Many of the concepts, such as self scanning, logistics tagging and tracking, are now pretty much the norm, so it must have been a successful, if rather expensive investment.

While Smart Store showcased other company's technology innovation to help Anderson Consulting sell services, other centres of innovation and executive briefing centres have been built by technology companies keen to show off their thought leadership. Both IBM and Sun Microsystems developed these sorts of facilities and have tried as hard as possible to justify the generally hidden back end 'big tin' with applications and services set in the context of real business.

Although the theatrics rarely meet the impressive standards of Anderson Consulting, some effort still goes into filling the

demonstrations with props. It might seem trivial, but there is merit in demonstrating real world examples and doing some sort of scene setting. After all, how many business leaders or managers seeking solutions to specific business problems want to be faced simply by banks of (expensive) IBM and Sun servers?

From a recent visit to Motorola's innovation centre in Basingstoke it is clear that money had not been frittered away on superfluous theatrics.

The markets being targeted and applications shown address down to earth everyday business needs not blue sky concepts. The main room is filled with many diverse communications devices from simple two way radios to smart consoles for forklift trucks; all great examples of Motorola's innovation and technical prowess, but how do they connect to business?

Rather than looking for props or theatrics, the clues come from Motorola's recent changes in corporate structure, in particular the decision to spin off the phones division earlier in 2010 and the acquisition of Symbol in 2006.

As the spinoff of the consumer oriented mobile phone part of the company concludes in 2011, what remains is business and public sector organisation focused, covering wireless LAN, drop in cellular networks and mobile devices.

Rather than having the generic devices that might be picked up as consumer friendly phones by the average office worker, the new Motorola has large ranges of more specialised devices, some offering voice communications, some mobile data, others converging both. Why? It allows Motorola to provide different devices to target the specific working needs of different groups of workers, with tools that are sometimes rugged, often just robust, but always designed and dedicated to do a particular job – hence the reason there are so many in the innovation centre.

That is all well and good and to be honest what you might expect from a large technically driven company with over seventy years of innovation, but while the hiving off is bringing much needed focus, it is the acquisition and subsequent slow absorption of Symbol that turns that focus into revenue. Symbol not only brought smart small IT devices to the radio company, it also introduced an ecosystem of applications, application developers and channel partners.

This has become the driver for much activity and is where the business innovation is happening; developing a mobile application to meet the business process need of an individual worker, blending small robust hardware with the right interface options to fit their role and adding the spice of well engineered radio technology.

If Motorola can stay partner friendly and avoid the arrogance that so often surrounds long term industry players who think they can do it all themselves, this sounds like a recipe for success for all parties involved.

Mobile applications that address business needs rather than massage egos or satisfy gadget lovers will appeal to the business decision makers. That should put Motorola's mobile innovation into context, and while its innovation centre is not overly theatrical in its presentation, this is not an issue for the practical business needs being addressed.

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.

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