



ThinkTank

ISSUE 5 COLLABORATION

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DOMINO EFFECT HELPS SMEs

IBM Lotus Domino Express is a set of IBM messaging and collaboration offerings for companies with up to 1,000 employees. Allowing you to acquire, deploy, and use the capabilities of Lotus Domino most applicable to the needs of small and mid-size businesses. This software helps streamline processes and enhance information sharing to help save time and money. It is packaged and priced to provide cost-effective functionality with simplified licensing and reduced administration requirements. For more information visit ibm.com/businesscenter/uk/thinktank

FAST TRACK TO BUILDING WEB 2.0 APPLICATIONS

IBM has developed a new platform to allow non-technical users to create simple applications that include Web 2.0 attributes in minutes.

The IBM Mashup Starter Kit can combine information from databases, departmental information, personal information and information from the web. Using the kit, a user can rapidly blend information and web services, such as real-time weather reports or maps, with content and services from their business, and 'mash' them together to generate fast, flexible applications.

For example, highway construction planners tendering for a new project could use mashup technology to combine weather data feeds with information from engineering and estimating software to bid more accurately, predicting how many days to allot for rain or snow.

The IBM Mashup Starter Kit is available for you to download on alphaWorks (www.alphaworks.ibm.com), IBM's online community for early adopters.

WELCOME

Welcome to the fifth edition of Think Tank, the newsletter that takes a fresh and pragmatic approach to real business debates.

To improve productivity and customer service, mid-sized companies need to communicate and collaborate with people inside and outside their organisations. Yet this is becoming increasingly difficult with working practices becoming more flexible and remote. However, IBM has built collaborative software and added tools to products like Lotus Notes that enable businesses to store, manage and schedule projects quickly and simply.

This issue shows you how IBM can help your business collaborate more efficiently and effectively. To talk about the subject further or discuss any other IT-related business issues, please contact your IBM Client Manager.

Marcus Austin
Editor

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COLLABORATING IN THREE DIMENSIONS

IBM is working with Second Life creators Linden Lab to enable businesses to be able to take collaboration an extra step by adding 3D.

In Second Life, users are able to experience an alternative virtual world, and are represented by 3D screen characters known as avatars.

The work should enable users to build and inhabit spaces within Second Life and bring together workgroups in the same space in the virtual world regardless of where they are in the real world.

Features of the solution include:

- 'Universal' avatars – Exploring technology and standards for users of the new 3D world to seamlessly travel between different virtual environments. Users

could maintain the same avatar name, appearance and other important attributes (digital assets, identity certificates and more) for multiple worlds.

- Security-rich transactions – Creating standards-based software that is designed to allow users to perform purchases or sales with other people in virtual worlds for digital assets, such as 3D models, music and media.
- Integration with existing web and business processes – Allowing current business applications and data repositories to function in virtual worlds, regardless of their source.

These are expected to be key characteristics facing organisations that want to take advantage of virtual worlds for commerce, collaboration, education and other business applications.

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Pulling together

The growing trend of home working combined with the increasing ability for employees to work away from the office have created new, more flexible ways for people to do their jobs. However, new problems have also arisen with regard to staff collaborating on projects

In the past, working with fellow employees on a project involved many face-to-face meetings, regular team briefings and lots of conversations across the office. Everyone knew their role in the project and how it was progressing because they could see it all on the big wall chart in the office. However, when you try to apply that model to a modern

business, everything collapses, especially when many of the team are working from home or are out on the road using laptops, smartphones and BlackBerry devices.

In a modern project, face-to-face meetings and regular briefings are frequently omitted because it's impossible to schedule diaries when everyone is out and about, files are shared by email and no one knows who has what, or which file is the most up-to-date version.

Half of the team can't read the files as their laptop or smartphone won't let them, and no one knows if the project is behind, or what their role is within it.

It's no surprise, therefore, that research recently published by PriceWaterHouseCoopers found that 50 percent of projects are either late or over budget, 25 percent fail completely, and only

25 percent are carried through and actually succeed.

COLLABORATION TECHNOLOGY

However, it is possible to get back on track using some of the wealth of collaborative tools and technologies that are now available.

With tools such as Lotus' Sametime and Quickr, it's possible to bring back all the communication networks associated with the old way of working, which are so important when it comes to managing all the elements of important projects.

Instant messaging replaces conversations across the office, which is a clear improvement because it allows an accurate record of such interactions to be stored rather than simply relying on people to remember what was said. What's more, these can be accessed by anyone, even those who weren't there at the time.

Web conferencing combined with shared diaries allows you to easily schedule virtual 'face-to-face' meetings no matter where you are in the world. Files are shared, while any comments made are logged, making it impossible to receive the wrong file.

Creating duplication and losing information is also another real problem when a business is unable to collaborate efficiently. Research from Gartner shows that locating information quickly is an area of

THE KEY BENEFITS OF COLLABORATION

Collaborative tools such as voice, video, database, web conferencing, interactive remote white boarding, blogs, wikis, document and knowledge repositories allow you to:

- Eliminate the duplication of both IT infrastructure and data
- Centrally store schedules where everyone involved is able to access the updated status of a project
- Deliver real-time alerts to a geographically dispersed team, organisation and external party
- Structure workflow so that, as certain tasks are performed, the work moves forward to the next appropriate person
- Record all this activity so that it can be used later and converted into organised corporate intelligence
- Speed up search capabilities



significant cost, both in terms of time spent searching, and in terms of consequential damage as a result of dealing with dated and/or inaccurate information. Survey results show that in a non-collaborative environment only 25 percent of workers can find the information they require in 10 minutes or less, another 25 percent must reproduce information because they can't find it at all, while nearly 50 percent make decisions based on out-of-date information.

Collaboration technology not only helps you create repositories for important information that can be quickly indexed and searched, but also helps employees easily tag information and store revisions. This results in a more managed, up to date knowledge base overall.

In the rest of this article, we will look at the different techniques that enable businesses to be able to collaborate effectively, no matter where they are or what device they use:

INSTANT MESSAGING

This is the computing equivalent of a text message, passed note, or tap on the shoulder. There are certain occasions where it's not appropriate to use email or the phone; you might just want to grab someone's attention to start a meeting, or you need to ask a quick question. This is where instant messaging (IM) comes into its own.

With IM it's possible to see who is currently logged on, and then send

them a quick message, or have a brief text conversation. Many businesses don't use IM because of the lack of standards, problems with security and the fact that it can be difficult to track and save messages. However, Lotus Sametime contains an enterprise-friendly application that allows you to audit IM conversations, while adding levels of security. It will also interoperate with AOL, Yahoo and Google's IM applications.

WEB CONFERENCING

Video conferencing has proved its effectiveness at helping businesses to collaborate over a distance. However, most video conferencing systems are expensive, require proprietary equipment and are eminently suitable for many-to-many conversations, but are a little over the top for one-to-one or one-to-many type situations.

With web conferencing, you can setup virtual meetings quickly and simply, and all the equipment you need is a web browser and connection, microphone and speaker. You can then share your computer's desktop, applications and data, as well as work together as if you were both working on the same PC.

All that's needed to instigate a web conference is a quick IM saying: "Let's meet," and that's it – and all it costs is the price of the web connection. Plus, if you have access to a webcam you can see and talk to each other at the same time. Lotus Sametime mixes web conferencing and IM in one

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EXTRA HELP...

Gartner Collaboration Webcast

In this free webcast, advisors from Gartner and IBM, break down the collaboration and communication challenges companies face and, more importantly, focus on solutions they can use to overcome these challenges. You'll also learn how IBM helps thousands of companies boost productivity and lower costs with simple solutions that are easy to purchase, install, manage and use.

For access to the webcast, go to ibm.com/businesscenter/uk/thinktank

Get collaborating now

If your business is having problems sharing, managing and organising information efficiently, then the Lotus Complete Collaboration Express Starter pack is for you. It contains everything your business needs to collaborate and communicate by fusing IBM Lotus Notes and IBM Lotus Sametime in one easy to use package.

To learn more, view the flashfile on ibm.com/businesscenter/uk/thinktank

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application and allows you to move seamlessly between the two.

FILE SHARING

Email is inefficient when it comes to collaboration and frequently causes more problems than it solves. With email, it's very easy to lose track of who has a file, each one is duplicated tens of times causing all sorts of archiving and data management headaches, and it's impossible to know which is the most up-to-date version.

The best collaborative systems allow you to share files without any of the above problems. A single copy is held (also reducing storage problems), it's possible to track who has the file and who has added to it, and you can see how you are progressing within a project. What's more, you can set security on the files, so that only certain users can see or change them.

SHARING DIARIES

One of the most frustrating things about having users all over the world is coordinating and scheduling meetings.

Countless hours are wasted while users send out emails to find out if people are free on a certain date. With a shared diary, it's possible to schedule meetings quickly and easily. You can see when people are free, when resources are available, and match them all together in seconds.

VOICE OVER IP

While Voice Over IP (VoIP) and unified communications aren't central to collaboration, building them into a collaborative system allows you to move to a voice conversation from an email or an IM and back again to IM from voice. Plus, VoIP is central to many web conferencing solutions. It also helps reduce costs, particularly for remote users, and VoIP can make setting up conference calls simply a matter of just a few mouse clicks.

SOCIAL NETWORKING/WEB 2.0

Social networking sites like Facebook and LinkedIn seem to be constantly in

the media. While many people regard them as just a way of wasting time in the office, they can be incredibly useful when applied to individual projects. By using the same techniques and functions that you find in sites like Facebook, it's easy to see the hierarchy of a project and for the people involved to meet through setting up discussion groups.

THE FUNDAMENTALS

Collaboration through IT won't happen over night. Before you can collaborate, you need a team that's comfortable and used to using the technology. Plus, it needs buy-in from everyone involved, and, in particular, requires people to work as a team.

IT won't make a bad project manager, good, nor will it make a flawed project work. Before you start you need all the fundamentals of a good project to be in place. Then – and only then – should you contemplate collaborating using the tools and techniques that have been described above.

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