

**E-mail
 management**

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**Authority
 as a market**

BY DAVID WEINBERGER

I usually think of the change in the authority of knowledge in terms of a developing ecology. Now I think there's utility in thinking of it as a market.

Traditionally, we've thought that knowledge is a reflection of reality, and reality is what it is and is not what it's not. So, we've assumed that something is knowledge or it's not. The exclusivity of that club of truths was a big part of its value. It was hard to get into the Collection of Truths, and membership was binary: You were either true or not, in or out.

Membership to the club required endorsement by the appropriate authorities. We can't all go around

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Social computing's elusive value

BY DANIEL W. RASMUS

At a conference in the fall, I presented a talk on the value of social computing to an audience of around 300. Some attendees captured the 12-foot slide images on their phones and posted them to blogs, others crafted posts to publish later, and some tweeted in real time. As I discussed the value of social computing in the enterprise, my audience was practicing the diversity of behaviors that makes capturing the value of social computing so elusive.

Would people read those blogs and tweets? Would they cross-post and re-tweet, and if so, what value would that provide to the social media pundits who published? What would it do for SharePoint sales? What pitfalls would it help the recipients avoid? What opportunities would the posts unleash?

To make matters even more confusing, a conference audience repre-

sents only one facet of the social computing phenomenon... individual people, some employees, some analysts, some journalists, creating personal brands on public platforms. Most of them weren't trying to drive their own sales. They weren't executives attempting to effect change in their organizations. They were individuals within organizations large and small, sharing what mattered to them.

When it comes to enterprise social computing, marketing is, of course, the most well known application. The use of social computing in marketing can help improve customer intimacy by creating more responsive communication with customers. Social media offers opportunities to learn about customers and about how they use products and services, and it can create a channel for new ideas that may eventually lead to innovations. Social media creates bi-

directional learning channels. In marketing, it can also contribute to more traditional measures of value such as increasing message awareness (perhaps even creating a viral "hit"), boosting existing social site traffic as sites get picked up in social media and accessing peripheral audiences with no additional investment. Those tangible results are echoed in a 2009 Mzinga (mzinga.com)/Babson Executive Education (http://execed.babson.edu) study that reports that marketing, at 57 percent, is the area most likely to employ social media for professional purposes.

Marketing focuses on the outward-facing persona of an enterprise. Many organizations continue to struggle with how to rapidly respond to problems, how to capture knowledge to ensure business quality and continuity, and

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Enterprise search—

Can't find what you need? Join the club

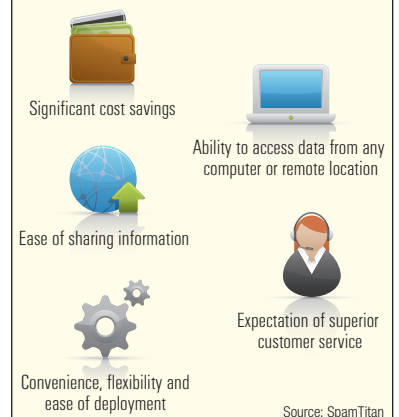
BY LESLIE OWENS

Most enterprises cope with a heterogeneous information environment, with legacy systems, new platforms, file shares and Web 2.0 tools of assorted shapes and sizes. Enterprise search technology offers a way for information workers (i-workers) to access data and information in different information management systems through a common interface. That allows i-workers to find information in the context of their work regardless of where the information is stored.

In reality, the reach of most enterprise search implementations is modest. The majority of organizations use enterprise search engines simply to access information in collaborative systems and the corporate intranet. In fact, Forrester (forrester.com) surveyed 133 technology and strategy decision makers in its December 2008 Global Role of Search in eDiscovery Strategy Online Survey, and found that less than half include enterprise content management systems or file shares in the

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**Cloud-Based E-Mail Users
 Reasons Cited for Adoption**



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how to reduce transition costs associated with everything from small process changes to the assimilation of another firm resulting from a merger or acquisition. Managers and individuals have a sense that social computing can be a component of their strategy, but they aren't sure about how.

Many of them are just experimenting as that nascent field unfolds. The Mzinga and Babson study reported that 84 percent of respondents weren't tracking the ROI of social computing. Over the course of the last decade, I have discussed why it is impossible to calculate the ROI of widely deployed horizontal communication or collaboration technology, whether it is instant messaging or unified communications. The central argument focused on the inability to anticipate outcomes. Therefore, the ROI cannot be determined. Just as I hinted at in the value derived from bloggers in a conference audience, organizations cannot foretell who will talk to whom; what they will talk about; and if they do discuss business, what the magnitude of any return might be or when the return might appear as revenue or savings. At Forrester (forrester.com), I called this the "economics of accidents." The idea behind those tools should not be to drive productivity in its most narrow sense, but to increase the number of accidental encounters, thus increasing the possibility of value-added conversations, given the increasingly distributed and fragmented nature of the work force.

But in some cases, ROI can be calculated, and the return on investment in those narrow areas may well fund the more elusive value derived from increasing social interactions.

Those more firm areas of return can be found in the chart on this page. The returns suggested in the chart will not be without their doubters. The improvement of information quality may be taken to task by anyone who has encountered errors in Wikipedia (wikipedia.com), the largest collectively edited information source in the world. Unlike Wikipedia, internal knowledge sources can have permissions restricted so that only qualified individuals have editing rights, with comments or suggestions more open.

In a project I managed at Hughes Aircraft, that approach to knowledge transfer eliminated the overhead of early reviews by providing an open platform for suggestions. The ideas that had been used were clearly differentiated from untested material. As the ideas were applied, the increased knowledge about their effectiveness

and any incremental improvements were codified by engineers responsible for a domain of knowledge. That approach permitted rapid learning from a social network, but ensured quality over time as process and technology owners evaluated and confirmed the results of suggestions.

Positive reports on value are on the rise. In the Jan. 28 edition of *The Economist*, Intel (intel.com) recruiter Don Cooper shares that the chipmaker has saved millions of dollars in recruiting costs by using business-facing social media sites rather than expensive recruiting firms. Scottrade (scottrade.com) has retired its aging content management system with a more open, social platform, reducing the costs of technology, as well as creating lighter-weight content management processes. United Airlines (united.com) is filling seats by offering last minutes "twares" to loyal customers over Twitter (twitter.com). But those anecdotal victories for social computing may be just the beginning. As social scientists better understand human networks, new ways of seeing the technology may emerge.

New perspectives

As I was researching the current state of social computing benefits, I came across the Framingham heart study and the "infectious" nature of obesity that hit headlines in 2007. In *Connected* (connectedthebook.com), Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler document their examination of the Framingham findings. It became evident to me that enterprise social computing had something profound to learn from the multi-year, longitudinal heart study conducted in Framingham, Mass., since 1948, as well as the insights of Christakis and Fowler. If obesity, smoking cessation and even happiness were socially influenced, then social computing could be considered a channel for change within organizations.

Social software makes networks and relationships explicit and, therefore, easily mined. What enterprise social computing users can do, which the Framingham researchers could not, is evaluate influence data available in near real time. Rather than looking over wide time horizons, like shifting obesity levels or smoking, the adoption of process changes or competitive threats or public relations fiascos could be effectively managed by monitoring the enterprise social environment through the lens of its conversations.

Potential Benefits of Social Computing in the Enterprise

Benefit Area	Examples
Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Savings from replacing older knowledge sharing tools with more modern tools that have lower acquisition costs, lower maintenance costs, lower deployment costs and lower integration costs. • Reduced storage costs by consolidated knowledge sharing platforms.
Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced costs related to finding information because organization-facing sites expose much of the meaningful information that might otherwise be hidden in personal e-mail. • Allows for improved safety and quality, and potential lower legal costs because information can more easily be scrutinized for compliance. Because it is more open, it also reduces the costs related to auditing. • The quality of information itself may improve because others can "fact-check" and otherwise comment and edit.
Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global sourcing of talent and capabilities. • Gathering intelligence and sensory information. • Collaborative problem solving. • Expertise location and knowledge transfer. • Employee engagement. • Rapid peer-to-peer communication. • Increased revenue (from marketing). • Decreased time-to-value for new employees and those in transition.

Enterprises may not be able to anticipate the need for change management, but they can surely understand its value historically, and how often change is poorly managed. By deploying social computing, they may be creating an improved capacity for change, the value of which will only be found if they are looking for it.

Finding value by looking

As the Mzinga/Babson study suggests, most companies aren't going to find an ROI for social computing, not because it doesn't exist, but because they aren't looking for it. Organizations that are serious about understanding the value of their investments should not be discouraged by their inability to anticipate value and returns; rather, they should practice what investments with positive ROIs still call for: observation. Every return on investment calculation is a speculation. Some have such a long track record of value that organizations barely look to see if they have achieved results once the spreadsheet populates the calculation. But in the case of social computing, those who want to understand its value, and perhaps more importantly, its effects, need to develop the capacity to document functions and

processes before the introduction of social computing, and then monitor their use and how they affect a process or function over time.

Of course, most organizations will closely observe a handful of experiments at the same time their work force is overwhelming them with the introduction of technology in places they aren't watching. And because the impetus for social computing often originates with individuals, the infiltration will be complete before it is understood. That happened with cellular phones, and it happened with instant messaging. If you look back further, the patterns of PC use followed that adoption profile as well. If you aren't comfortable with social media, either personal or from the business value perspective, you will get there eventually. The onslaught of business applications has just started, and the biggest excuse for technology adoption will ultimately catch up with you: Everybody else is doing it, so we have to in order to stay competitive. ■

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