IDC TECHNOLOGY SPOTLIGHT

Improving Collaboration by Adding Social Capabilities to Email

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Email remains the primary mode of communication in business today. While there is prevalent speculation that social software and other real-time communications applications will replace email, email nevertheless remains a stalwart in business operations. However, as relationships across all business communication channels continue to be redefined, innovative modes and methods of communication are emerging. As a result, locating the right data and information at the right time — while still critical — becomes increasingly complex. IDC expects that organizations will use social software to complement existing tools like email for the foreseeable future. This trend will underpin how organizations can make many small changes that add up to larger, more significant operational and strategic changes. IDC expects worldwide revenue for enterprise social software will grow from $1 billion in 2012 to $2.7 billion by 2017, representing a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 22.3%. In addition, IDC expects worldwide revenue for enterprise email will reach $4.7 billion in 2017, for a healthy 5.5% CAGR (see Figure 1). This Technology Spotlight explores the changing dynamics in the way organizations collaborate and the impact of these dynamics on the collaboration market as well as the role that IBM plays in this.

Figure 1

Worldwide Collaborative Applications Revenue and CAGR by Functional Market

Legend:
- 2012 revenue ($B)
- 2017 revenue ($B)
- 2012–2017 CAGR (%)

Source: IDC, 2014

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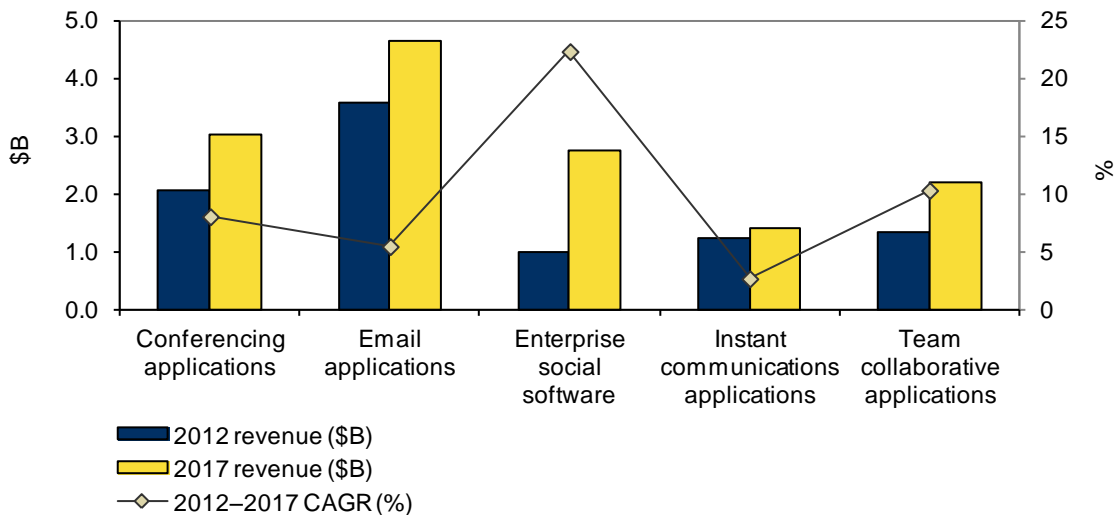
Introduction

Businesses are under increasing pressure to find new ways of operating to meet changing employee, customer, and partner expectations. In addition, businesses need to leverage available data and information for competitive advantage. As the impact of social workflow penetrates through organizations, social will become inextricably linked to where and how employees are getting work done and where business decisions are made.

The market for email applications remains healthy, although there is a broad transition taking place from on-premises applications to hosted or SaaS-based services. The reliance of businesses on email remains bound to hierarchy and bureaucracy associated with organizational structures. In the near term, organizations will not divest from large investments made in email. However, the nature of communication within email is changing dynamically, and organizations increasingly look to mobile and social solutions that complement traditional email functionality.

Over and above investment in email, social software is quickly becoming a critical decision support and worker productivity tool, with strong solution adoption worldwide. IDC expects continued strong growth in enterprise social software as new features are defined and incorporated to meet emerging business needs, with solutions changing rapidly to meet demand.

Social technologies are becoming business critical, and more companies are embracing social across their business. However, this adoption needs to be coupled with existing collaboration tools and processes — particularly email — in order to deliver to users a seamless transition into a new working environment. Companies will need to bring expertise, a strategic focus, and a broad plan to drive real value from the deep change that these technologies and processes are bringing. In particular, organizations need to consider the following:

- Integration is critical for social initiatives to succeed.

- Social must be embedded in work processes.

- Changing behavior and culture takes time and a conscious effort.

- Changing expectations force change across the business.

- Getting outside help will be necessary for most businesses, but make sure those providing that help have real-world experience.

Definition

Enterprise social networks (ESNs) and collaborative technologies connect people to information systems. Such technologies involve a number of technologies including email, conferencing, team collaboration applications, and enterprise social networks that facilitate communities and support innovation management.

Benefits

As more enterprise processes are automated, the need to support ad hoc decisions becomes increasingly critical. Companies will look to social workflow to support these decisions inside specific lines of business and use cases.

Decision Support: Right Data, Right People, Right Time – in Context

The increasing productivity gap is forcing companies, employees, and partners to continue to do more with less so the need to deliver seamless personal productivity applications is heightened.

Conferencing and messaging are becoming a more multimodal experience and are being built into social workflow to meet the needs of the new enterprise workspace. In addition, as companies start to capture influence and relevance in new communication channels and become more comfortable with using social capabilities, they will focus their energy on driving awareness of products and services. This focus on awareness brings a number of benefits to organizations by enabling the following capabilities:

- Creating an ongoing conversation with customers, partners, and suppliers

- Identifying future potential communication touch points

- Understanding processes shared inside the organization

- Understanding processes shared with partners and suppliers

Market Trends

Social business is maturing, which is causing organizations to examine their current enterprise social technology strategies. Among the issues organizations are looking to address are:

- Network sprawl where organizations are looking to consolidate investment in multiple social software tools

- Finding skilled resources to help develop and deliver enterprise social network and customer experience (CX) implementations

- New views of customer experience and bringing all the future potential touch points into the communication and collaboration process

The ESN has become a clear replacement to a static intranet as companies move from the one-direction style of communication that was an accepted standard in earlier ages. IDC's *Social Business Survey* shows that 79% of organizations have deployed an enterprise social network.

In light of wanting to increase access to information and data on the behavior of customers, partners, and suppliers, a number of companies (24%) are considering other options for the ESN. This may be due to the current solution's lack of integration with other business applications and systems. This also may simply be a case where the current solution is a communication silo.

Connectors from a proprietary or standalone ESN may be able to push and parse elements like contacts, group information, content from activity streams, and specific topic discussions. However, the ability for a solution to be embedded in the business process workflow rather than providing a prebuilt connector or open API that is able to be called on a programmatic basis means that the ESN can be present in very complex business operations and processes.

There will be an increased focus on this embedded approach for highly used and complex business transaction systems. By embedding a solution, organizations can deliver an increased level of systematic support to ad hoc decisions from the ESN that complements traditional communication channels.

Specific technologies that support the ESN include:

- **Email.** The reliance on email will continue, but companies will look to mobile and social solutions that complement traditional email functionality. A changing workforce will demand a way of working that more closely matches their personal lives, even though large investments in email will persist in the near term.

- **Conferencing.** The nature of business communication has changed in recent years. Communications have become much more informal and incent a new set of behaviors for organizations to communicate with employees and other business constituents. There is a deep-seeded convergence taking place in the market for conferencing applications. Web conferencing in particular is becoming an increasingly multimodal experience.

- **Instant communications.** Standalone instant communications have quickly become embedded in broader suite solutions that enable office productivity, social workflow, or unified communications. IDC believes instant communications applications will continue to converge, with large vendors divesting from standalone solutions.

Customer Needs/Strategies

The combination of increasing pressure for businesses to meet the changing needs of customers in real time and in context as well as to meet productivity expectations imposed on employees will continue to drive growth in the collaborative applications market. Enabling an enterprise social network requires a solution that is open, extensible, and easily integrated with existing networks. Consolidation of internal applications will become essential where redundant processes start to occur. This will be the common approach for the foreseeable future, until all applications are built to be inherently social and other applications are replaced.

The handoff between technology and organizational silos needs to be integrated. The ultimate success of an enterprise social network depends on how the needs of each business unit are met and how users can intelligently filter information to make data-driven decisions and efficiently perform ad hoc tasks.

Social workflow is being built and architected directly into applications (and in some cases PaaS) and in turn put into business workflow processes and communications applications. Companies will begin to prioritize the key social workflow processes that will have a continued impact on the business; supporting the growing number of social capabilities and workflow in ad hoc scenarios will become impractical. Vendors need to offer support for this transition through APIs as well as additional business services.

Considering IBM

IBM has recognized that enabling social workflow doesn't require a set of new applications. Instead, IBM is focused on providing enhanced social capabilities that allow an organization to evaluate market factors, social outcomes, and social outputs that are driving business change. One of the significant side effects of increased engaged social behavior in the enterprise is that it generates large volumes of linked semantic data that describes the interrelationships between people and content. IBM recognizes that the new way of working is focused on data-driven decisions made by empowered employees. Furthermore, such decisions are in real time or near real time. This approach involves the ability to systematically bring the "right" people and the relevant data together around the event or issue — an approach that has great promise but is challenging organizations both technically and culturally.

In support of enabling social workflow, IBM Notes and Domino 9.0 Social Edition is designed to create a more effective workforce with social email and integrated social applications. The new release provides organizations with an all-inclusive solution for integrating social into the context of specific business processes by weaving together various collaboration capabilities in a single interface.

Among the features and capabilities are the following:

- Mobile collaboration support with full-featured messaging for smartphones and tablets, allowing for adherence to corporate policies and the safeguarding of sensitive corporate data via IBM Notes Traveler software

- Flexible deployment models that let organizations choose delivery models that best fit specific business needs, budget, and IT strategy: on premises, in the cloud, or in a hybrid environment

- Rapid development and integration of social, mobile, and workflow-driven applications, built on a document-driven, NoSQL, and open standards–based architecture, that can help any organization capitalize on emerging business opportunities

- Ready for business, with security-rich features, policy and management support, and customizable features that conform to specific business needs

Challenges

Organizations will use social workflow where work is being done. Primarily, this work happens inside other applications. With email such a stalwart of operations, there is significant reliance on the core function of email as well as any associated business processes that may have been built into the email application server; in effect, email is a significant productivity tool. However, the impact of personal productivity applications is such that future investment in email needs to be tempered with meeting the need for dynamic, elastic, mobile, global, and virtual software deployment and usage. The handoff between technology solutions and organizational silos needs to be integrated; however, this handoff is not easy to execute, either from a process perspective or a systems perspective.

Conclusion

With the changing nature of work comes the ability for organizations to use social business tools to bridge the gap from traditional business processes to processes enabled by the new workspace ecosystem. IDC believes social software initiatives have a varied impact depending on how valuable it is for an organization to connect the decision-making process. This impact is influenced by industry as it is based on the level of decision-making automation, the complexity of the organization, and the number of ad hoc decisions that need to be made.

Some key themes to consider when building a business case for a social business strategy are:

- With social workflow, a more social organization can increase business effectiveness by improving relationships. Social workflow and enterprise social networks can improve organizational effectiveness by facilitating better relationships among employees, customers, partners, and suppliers through communications, community, and collaboration. The focus must go beyond the technology itself.

- The role of enterprise applications in the workplace is changing, and organizations must have a clear picture of how social solutions will complement existing architecture. Organizations should begin to prioritize the key social workflow processes that will have a continued impact on the business because supporting the growing number of social capabilities and ad hoc workflow will become impractical.

- As information assets are increasingly exposed via APIs, managing risks associated with security, governance, compliance, and IP protection will be increasingly complex but essential.

■ Meeting changing employee, customer, and partner expectations will become the differentiator of companies that remain competitive. Companies need to find new ways to meet and serve these needs through delivering a highly responsive and intuitive user experience to all constituents.