



## Why Can't a Business Work More Like the Web?

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The public Internet has quickly developed a new generation infrastructure that encompasses: weblogs, wikis, content search engines and a newer constellation of syndication feeds, readers, notification and aggregation engines. If you can easily find what you want, and stay informed about what matters to you across a network as large and chaotic as the World Wide Web, why should you settle for less in your business? I don't think you will.

The value of actually knowing what's happening in your business (and what your business knows) has driven large enterprises to write large checks for top down Knowledge Management systems with generally disappointing results.

The new generation Internet can provide a model that makes everyday working communication simpler, while keeping everyone with an active (and valid) interest well informed. It can provide much better awareness but cut non-productive reporting overhead. The same web and syndication infrastructure can work for dissemination of information from line of business systems as well as from people - e.g. an RSS feed of sales wins from your CRM system makes a lot of sense.

Enterprise communication has some characteristics that differ from the public – or outside the firewall - communication functions that have been the focus of many "business blogging" conferences.

Here are two characteristics I believe are challenging but important for use at the extended enterprise level – for networks of thousands to millions of participants within and across organizations. I'd like to learn what Supernova attendees believe should be added to (or removed from) the list:

- 1) Address selected Audiences - Create weblogs, wikis and syndication feeds that encompass a selected audience of internal and external stakeholders. For example: include customers, contractors, consultants, and resellers as members of an extended product development team.
- 2) Support global identity and local permissions - Your globally known identity and role within an enterprise should be sufficient gain direct - or indirect - access to any *locally permissioned* weblog, wiki or syndication feed owned by that enterprise. Indirect access includes use of network scale permissioned

alerting, syndication and search services across all of the content you have permission to read.

### **Address Selected Audiences**

I think it's a *good thing* for all employees have access to almost all weblogs and wikis that their own enterprise 'owns' but can think of practical exceptions, for example:

- Privacy policy – Limiting health claim discussion to HR staff and the stakeholders involved;
- Team discussion – Providing more private spaces to meet a natural desire for internal discussion and debate, as well as a more outwardly facing space.

But, I certainly would want to be very selective in opening up enterprise owned web spaces to important stakeholders outside the firewall.

For example, the product team for a new cell phone might include:

- 1) A core team from corporate marketing, engineering and management;
- 2) Corporate stakeholders from finance, legal, sales, manufacturing, purchasing and customer support.
- 3) External stakeholders including key customers, key component suppliers, expert consultants, distributors and advertising firms.

The core team uses the weblog component of the project space to keep track of their own research, discussion, debate, decisions and follow-up actions, and associated wiki pages to document their plans and specifications. Although the core team may be in the same location, it's common for them to be juggling several projects at once. They want to stay on the same page internally, keep external stakeholders engaged, keep interested internal stakeholders informed, and cut corporate reporting overhead.

Corporate and external stakeholders can tune in for updates and issues that hit their particular interest, and respond when the core team identifies an issue where stakeholder action would help.

Corporate stakeholders would typically have access to tens, hundreds or thousands of projects spaces in many different weblog or wiki servers, and need to quickly come up to speed to when they respond to a local problem or recognize a global opportunity.

External stakeholders are often in a different time zone (or country). External stakeholders typically would have access to a relatively small number of the spaces

within a single customer's enterprise, but would often provide key technology or services to many different enterprises simultaneously.

In summary, the cast of characters changes frequently, and it's important to be able to bring a core team, corporate or external stakeholder up to speed quickly by giving them permissioned access to working communication in context.

The project space makes it easier to understand the dynamics of the project and team as well as track the discussion linked to formal plans, specifications and budget that might be stored in a content management system or CAD repository. This is a subtle but important point - the weblog and wiki links pointing to analytic, ERP and other line of business systems make significant items in those costly and specialized systems discoverable and actionable. Network scale alerting, syndication and search are weak signal amplifiers based on human interest and discussion of what's significant and linked to in context.

Without a rich selection of more private and more public spaces, a lot of important discussion will simply take place outside the system and lose its direct and indirect value. The network record should include the messy but critical tradeoffs, debates, discussions and decisions - right or wrong - for the *enterprise's* long-term benefit as well as those of the core team.

At the extended enterprise level, network scale alerting, syndication and search functions that cross permissioned spaces make it possible for people to stay informed about any topic or discussion which they care about and have permission to read without relying on manually authored reports or email in the middle – if network scale permissioned access works.

### **Support global identity and local permissions**

Your globally authenticated identity and role within an enterprise should be sufficient to gain access to any weblog, wiki, syndication channel or notification channel owned by that enterprise. Any web source within the enterprise should be able to autonomously set permissions for any global or locally defined group, role, or set of individuals.

For example, if I had were a transmission engineer at General Motors, my role based permission should be sufficient for me to gain access to any GM engineering weblog or wiki worldwide, except for a limited number of skunk works projects or subspaces reserved for private discussion. Just as on the public Internet, I would rely on sites I already know plus content and syndication feeds to find other sites, subscribing to those I find particularly interesting or useful. I'd want to subscribe to group weblogs or notification channels connected to a particular project or business purpose – and use social tagging or other mechanisms to learn about new channels of interest. I would comment directly or indirectly (trackback) on those weblogs, as well as post what I learn in the in the group weblogs, wikis and personal weblog I use every day.

Sue, an engineer working for a transmission subcontractor might likewise be given a GM network identity, and access to large number of weblogs or wikis open to non-GM employees who are development and technology partners containing information that would not be released to the general public. Sue could be granted access to specific project sites in which her employer is a GM development partner under non-disclosure, but excluded from project sites (or segments of project sites) where GM has partnered with a competing transmission subcontractor.

The key point is that any new shared weblog or wiki space deployed within GM's network would set its own permissioned access expressed in terms of globally defined roles, groups or sets of individuals - including authorized external stakeholders - without requiring central IT to explicitly connect every space.

The same rules for global identity and local permission can be applied to extended enterprise agents such as search engine, link analysis and discovery spiders. Central IT spidering and other agents could be notified of the new source and respond to content pings, or discover new sources as links to them appear, just as on the public Internet.

### **Striking a Balance**

Striking a balance between locally specified permissions and network scale alerting, syndication and search is the greatest architectural challenge, but I believe it can be addressed. For example, a spider with the appropriate credentials could be granted 'god's eye' access to content owned by the enterprise if the results are protected by a search engine which knows the access rules of the content it collects, and delivers permission filtered results – at network scale – or by an analysis engine which mediates introductions rather than disclosing results.

With a solid global identity and local permission model in place it should be possible for the extended enterprise to open up selected spaces for secure permissioned access, syndication and commentary, and make the boundary between the permissioned spaces defined by the enterprise and the public spaces of the Web as seamless as possible.

With these two principles place, I think it is possible to create a new working communication infrastructure that is:

- Simple to deploy and use
- Secure
- Scales like the web to handle the largest enterprise

Unlike broadcast email  
Unlike Lotus Notes  
Unlike anything else

## About Traction Software

Traction® Software provides business and government organizations with enterprise software that allows groups and teams to communicate more effectively. Traction's easy to use TeamPage™ software creates a secure communications hub for business information and working communications that collects, organizes, links and shares sources of information in context over time. TeamPage is used for business applications ranging from product development and project management to marketing field communication, competitive intelligence, and sales. Traction Software has been named one of the 100 Companies that Matter by KMWorld and is a winner of the RedHerring 100 and EContent 100 awards. Traction TeamPage was named *InfoWorld Magazine's 2007 Technology of the Year* award winner for *Best Enterprise Wiki*. The company distributes its products directly and through global partners. Based in Providence, Rhode Island, Traction Software is a privately held corporation with financing from investors including In-Q-Tel and Slater Interactive. For additional information, visit Traction at [www.tractionsoftware.com](http://www.tractionsoftware.com).

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