

A White Paper: Building an Enterprise Strategy for Digital Collaboration



Executive Summary

- Digital collaboration can immediately cut costs while improving top-line performance
- Digital collaboration in your organization will take many forms beyond online meetings
- Your digital collaboration strategy should be focused on maximizing total business return – engaging senior business, IT and HR management in its design

Introduction

There are few areas in technology strategy today that are as important, and as challenging to understand, as “collaboration.” The word means simply “to work together on a joint effort,” but this simple definition encompasses the full scope of “work” in today’s enterprises. Just as there is more than a single form of “work” in your organization, technology-assisted collaboration will also take many different forms. The three primary objectives of this white paper are to provide an overview of the evolution of digital collaboration technology, communicate the business value of digital collaboration, and recommend an approach for developing an enterprise collaboration strategy that will optimize the benefits of this technology for your organization.

I. Communication vs. Collaboration

The telephone, fax and email are ubiquitous and essential tools of enterprise communication today. It is difficult to conceive of a business that could operate successfully without them. Yet the limitations of these media are clear and it seems we spend as much time in face-to-face meetings and events as we ever have. A new generation of real-time, Web-based tools and systems has emerged over the past five years that has enabled richer interpersonal interaction and the potential for integrating interpersonal interactions into broader business processes and systems.

The analyst firm Collaborative Strategies makes the case that there is an important distinction to be made between communication and true collaboration. They declare that collaboration is focused on achieving a mutually identified, explicit goal...to achieve an outcome that couldn’t be reached through independent action ...whereas communicators may share useful information, but they don’t use it for an easily identified common purpose. Any communications technology can support both communications and collaboration activities but, in practice, the telephone, fax, email and even videoconferencing are primarily used as communications tools that are only loosely integrated, at best, into business processes as a transport for single media (voice, text or video) communication.

Through the 1990's, corporations focused on implementing core communications infrastructure for messaging, calendaring, asynchronous discussion, and document sharing. The first generation of true digital collaboration technologies has only emerged in the past five years, enabled by the Internet. The terminology used to describe these technologies remains very fluid, reflecting the rapid evolution of new combinations of capabilities for new applications. Dataconferencing, teamware, meetingware, eLearning, and real-time conferencing are some of the labels used to describe capabilities within the broad definition of digital collaboration.

By definition, collaboration is interaction between people. This interaction is often complex and subtle, requiring an understanding of social roles and the ability to provide non-verbal social cues. User expectations of ease-of-use and reliability are very high, indeed higher than many early products were able to deliver. Research on usage of Microsoft's NetMeeting® and Lotus' SameTime® meetingware tools has shown that fewer than one out of fifty users possessing the software use it on an ongoing basis. These first-generation digital collaboration technologies have lacked the technical mechanisms and application context to successfully invite people to, and keep them engaged in, these new online experiences. Collaboration technology can be ubiquitous and free but still fail to achieve user adoption – implementing the technology is only the first step in an overall change management strategy to integrate digital collaboration into an organization's business processes.

Digital collaboration technologies that have had the most early success have been those that most successfully translate the collaboration and event design metaphors of the physical world into the virtual world: seminars and conferences, classrooms, and projects teams. At one level this could be seen as a disappointment because we are simply “paving the cow path” without significant innovation. Yet this observation reveals a key insight – that the primary barrier to increased use of digital collaboration is often not the capability of the technology, but the process of motivating and managing change in user behavior. By mimicking the process and experience of a specific type of physical collaboration, online users face a shorter learning curve for the virtual technology and embrace it more rapidly.

If one looks across the most common real-time collaboration formats in the physical world (meetings, presentations, classes) one can notice significant differences in the following areas:

- **Invitation.** Is the event spontaneous or scheduled? Is it a one-time experience or part of an ongoing program? Is it assigned to you or created by you?
- **Interpersonal Interaction.** Is there a strong role hierarchy such as expert/listener, teacher/student or is participation more open and peer-to-peer?
- **Content.** If a learning event, can it support specialized learning content such as simulations or Web-based training? Different domains have different content needs.
- **Content Interaction.** Do you expect to receive information passively from an expert, interact with shared content or applications to build competencies, or actually create new or revised content through collaborative discussion?
- **Outcomes.** Does the event create information to be tracked and acted upon after the event such as team decisions, test results, amended product specifications or revised sales forecasts?

- **Integration.** Is the event freestanding or does it need to be integrated into a broader IT or business process application context?

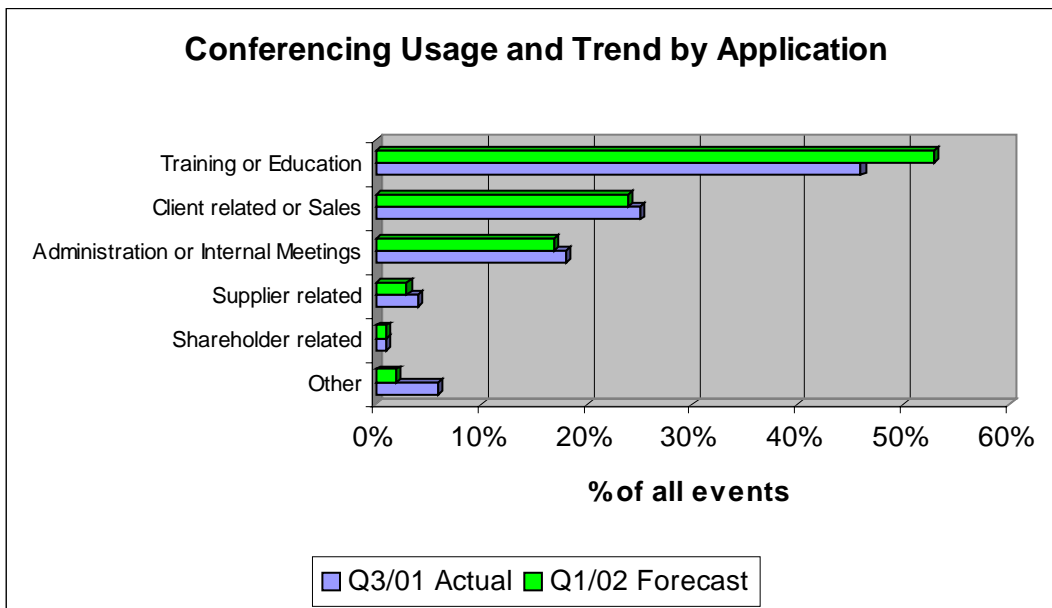
Because of these differences, the most successful collaboration vendors have tuned their products and services to provide the “whole product” required for specific collaboration applications. Users will embrace the technologies that best support their business objectives and the way they want to work, at the lowest “cost” in terms of changes in their skills or behavior. While there is no one generic collaboration experience that is appropriate for all applications, enterprise collaboration platforms have recently emerged that support multiple collaboration experiences and lower costs of ownership with shared core technology.

Where Digital Collaboration is Successful Today

In August 2001, the International Data Corporation conducted a survey of conferencing administrators in nearly 600 corporations on their use of dataconferencing products and services¹. This survey revealed that dataconferencing was rapidly entering the mainstream with broad use across organizations of all sizes and all industries. On average, these corporations projected a better than 100% annual rate of increase in conferencing use for 2002. A follow-up survey after September 11, 2001 indicated that this growth rate was further accelerated by new pressure to reduce travel and lower costs.

This research (Figure 1) also highlighted the dominant role played by online training, or live eLearning, in the growth of digital collaboration usage in corporations, with over 50% of all collaborative events being used for formal knowledge transfer by either business units (e.g. product launches, sales training), IT (e.g. application deployments), or training functions (e.g. new hire training, management development).

Figure 1



Source: IDC #25971, November 2001

¹ *Five Strategies for Conferencing Vendors: Select Results from IDC’s 2001 Conferencing Survey*, IDC #25971, November 2001

Customer research has shown that the key reasons for the lead role played by training or “eLearning” in dataconferencing adoption are a) there are immediate and compelling cost savings relative to physical classroom training, and b) there is a professional staff able to both create compelling content and motivate user participation. Technically advanced organizations report that 30-50% of their managed knowledge transfer programs are now being delivered using virtual classrooms or similar digital collaboration technology.

First Consulting Group

First Consulting Group initially acquired digital collaboration technology to reduce delays and costs associated with training new consultants. This first application proved the effectiveness of the technology, generated immediate cost savings, and exposed a large population within the firm to the benefits of digital collaboration. Consultants were not only better skilled, but given up to 2% more time each year to bill their services.

Within months of its adoption by the training function, digital collaboration began to be used for more informal information sharing on industry and technology trends as well as for client collaboration and support. Training remains the largest application within the firm, but non-training applications with both internal and external audiences are rapidly gaining ground as digital collaboration gets accepted as a “way of life” in this knowledge economy business.

The value of digital collaboration within the Sales function is also obvious. Field sales forces are geographically distributed yet need to interact intensively during the sales cycle with their prospects, resellers, service providers and distributors. Sales management’s laser focus on “making the number” has made them open to innovations that improve sales productivity and effectiveness. Digital collaboration has enabled them to shorten sales cycles by moving sales presentations and demonstrations online while improving effectiveness through more efficient use of remote experts.

The finding that only 1 of 6 events in the corporations surveyed were classified as general meetings may surprise IT professionals who initially approach digital collaboration as another utility communication service like telephony or e-mail. Digital collaboration has not achieved widespread use as a utility service, but as an integral part of corporate business processes such as sales, training and services. As touched on

above, the simplest explanation of this behavior is that this technology is still new enough to require an investment in change management that is more than casual meeting users are willing to make. The applications yielding the highest business return from digital collaboration are generally those managed by departments with a major “pain,” or opportunity, that must be addressed in order for them to meet their primary goals. These applications are most likely to obtain the management focus, people and financial resources required to motivate users to embrace the new capabilities of digital collaboration.

Enterprise Collaboration Tomorrow

As has been true in many other technical domains, the transition from analog to digital technologies has enabled radical leaps in functionality. Relative to traditional analog communication, digital collaboration has enabled the integration of media, enhanced process integration, and improved the overall quality of the user experience. Here are some of the attributes of this new generation of collaborative technology:

Next Generation Digital Collaboration

Solution-specific content and experiences	The integration and delivery of virtually any static or dynamic content type necessary for the collaboration goal: audio, video, graphics, animation, applications, simulations, Web content, specialized content (e.g. CAD)
“Omnisynchronous” capability	Support of both asynchronous and live or synchronous forms of knowledge sharing and interaction as well as easy transitions between these modes
Event tools and social “choreography”	Easy-to-use digital mechanisms to coordinate interaction within an event and substitute for the visual cues of face-to-face interaction: electronic hand raises, icons communicating emotion such as laughter or applause, approval/disapproval, rights to speak or manipulate shared content
Event Management	Users can create and schedule single or multiple events, manage invitations and attendance, assemble and modify shared content
Process Management	Organizations can define collaborative processes and apply security policy and business rules to achieve a specific business outcome encompassing live and self-paced content
Community	Facilitation of informal and unstructured interaction by a community of shared interests in support of the collaborative objective
Actionable Output	Content created in the collaboration session such as votes, test results, or document mark-ups can be easily and securely captured, managed and acted upon by systems or people outside the live event
Persistence and Reuse	Content, with or without its context of interpersonal discussion, can be reused in future live sessions or accessed for playback subsequent to the live collaboration session
Application Integration	APIs and content type support for specific business systems such as Learning, CRM, ERM, and ERP
Infrastructure Integration	Leverage of existing directory, messaging, security, database, content management and calendaring services to facilitate ease-of-use and ease-of-management

This next generation of digital collaboration solutions is beginning to emerge in support of the firm’s core business processes, including product design, sales, distribution, service, marketing and learning. The early implementations of collaborative design and support solutions have emphasized asynchronous collaboration models whereas collaborative learning, sales and marketing solutions have focused on live collaboration formats because of their need for rich interactive knowledge transfer and behavioral change. However, all the solutions are moving quickly to support both modes of collaboration.

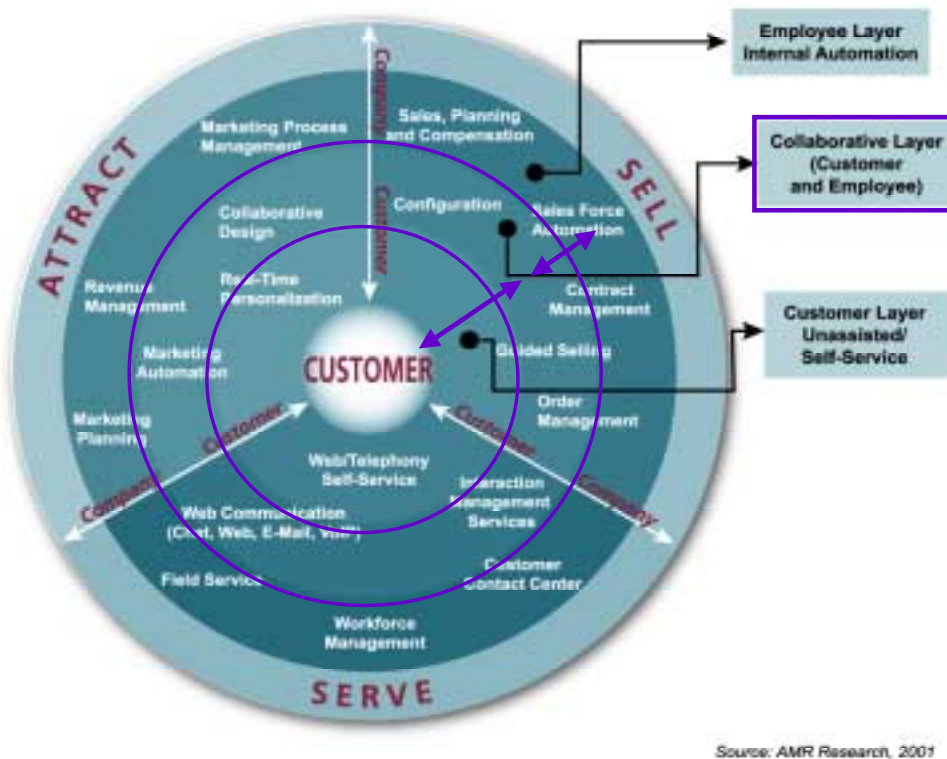
As discussed, Learning has been the lead application of digital collaboration and provides a good example of this evolution in action. The most successful collaborative learning solutions currently available already demonstrate substantial specialization for the learning process:

Next Generation Digital Collaboration Example: Collaborative eLearning

Solution-specific content and experiences	Viable “cLearning” solutions must support more than simple “page turning” content. Support is required for animations, simulations, small group collaborative exercises, and other highly interactive formats. Purchased content is being offered in an industry-specific standard format (SCORM)
“Omnisynchronous” capability	The strongest movement within the Learning industry is toward the concept of “blended learning” – the integration of traditional classroom, self-paced and live virtual learning experiences into unified learning programs. Leading Learning vendors offer integrated blended learning experiences directly or with partners.
Event tools and social “choreography”	The learning process has a well-established social structure (teacher, mentor/coach, administrator, learner) that is reflected in collaboration roles and interaction mechanisms in live events. Because an experienced teacher can be assumed, advanced tools and processes are offered in areas such as online laboratories and examinations.
Event Management	Learners can be assigned learning activities, be guided based upon competency assessments, or self-enroll from catalogs. They may have multiple courses or learning activities that need to be tracked at both the individual and organizational level.
Process Management	Learners can be assigned learning activities, be guided based upon competency assessments or self-enroll from catalogs. They may have a multiple courses of learning activities that need to be tracked at both the individual and organizational level.
Community	Organizations have found that learning can be made more relevant and current with active support of peer-to-peer knowledge exchange in both informal (e.g. discussion forums, email) and formal (e.g. expert authored content) formats. Leading “cLearning” systems provide support for the creation of community spaces aligned with organizational or team interests.
Actionable Output	Completion reports and test results are the most obvious actionable output of the learning process. These results are used to personalize learning programs dynamically, trigger management actions, and offer certifications.
Persistence and Reuse	One of the most important innovations enabled by “cLearning” is the ability of both business and learning professionals to author multimedia content easily and rapidly. This content can be edited, rearranged, and reused in different contexts.
Application Integration	Learning systems can be integrated with Employee Relationship Management (ERM) systems, Learning Management Systems (LMS), and Human Resource Information Systems (HRIS).
Infrastructure Integration	All enterprise-capable digital collaboration solutions need to integrate with the organization’s underlying messaging, calendaring, directory, security and management infrastructure to minimize burdens on both the user and IT communities.

Similar specialization can be seen across these dimensions by all third-generation collaboration solutions. In Figure 2, AMR Research presents a model of the Customer Relationship Management process that highlights the critical importance of collaborative processes in attracting, selling and servicing customers. While many organizations have implemented their internal CRM automation systems, this middle collaborative ring in their model is generally the least developed and may present the best opportunities for achieving competitive advantage in the future.

Figure 2



Collaboration is also permeating the Supply Chain as buyers and suppliers improve the timeliness and breadth of information exchange in order to support design, specification, procurement, and inventory management functions. This form of supply chain “collaborative commerce” has had its early focus on simple messaging and file-sharing communication but is rapidly evolving to support richer real-time collaborative activities.

The common theme across all of these applications is that the next frontier in exploiting information technology for competitive advantage will not come from automation of transactions, but from reducing the time and expense of people working together on a common task. This active integration of collaboration with business processes is proving to provide the highest and most measurable business returns and represents the most successful path to rapid user adoption. However, horizontal collaboration will continue to have a place as these third-generation systems evolve. Just as email remains an essential tool of the enterprise, meetingware will evolve into being an extension of the organization’s messaging

and telecommunications utility services. Both models have their place in an enterprise digital collaboration strategy.

II. The Business Value of Digital Collaboration

The reason why Digital Collaboration has experienced explosive growth, even in a negative economic environment, is because it is one of the few investments an organization can make that immediately reduces current expenses while improving top-line performance. As illustrated in Figure 3, when used in client-facing applications the magnitude of the potential benefits are generally many times the cost of the collaborative product or service.

Figure 3

Sales Collaboration Example



Sales Representative
• \$1M Sales Target

Collaboration Application	Cost Savings*	Incremental Revenue**
Sales Teleconferences – Replace 6 Hrs./Mo (VoIP)	\$720	-
Sales Training - Shift 50% (1 week) Online	\$1250	\$6250
Shorten Sales Cycle - Online Prospect Demos, Mtgs	\$250/ avoided sales call	\$10000/ 1% sales cycle reduction
Higher Win Rate - Superior training, support access	-	~\$20000/ 1% win rate

* Annualized

** 50% of time saved applied to selling activities

In this example, the benefits obtained per sales representative can range from \$720 per year in avoided conference call expenses when using collaboration products with integrated voice capability, to more than \$7,000 year in benefits from its application to sales training, to over \$30,000 when it is fully integrated in the sales process. In contrast, a perpetual software license for a quality collaboration product typically costs \$200 per user and ASP services are typically in the \$1,000-2,000 per user, per year price range. Employees who are not client-facing or geographically distributed will see lower, but still significant, savings in employee time (salary) and expense reduction.

When there is such a large difference between benefit and cost, the appropriate business focus is on selecting the product and associated services that deliver the maximum utilization with the *lowest risk*, rather than the lowest acquisition cost. If, in the example above, we assume a total annual benefit of \$10,000 per sales representative, even a 1% increase in risk is a larger “cost” than the software license itself². When we observe adoption rates as low as 2% with

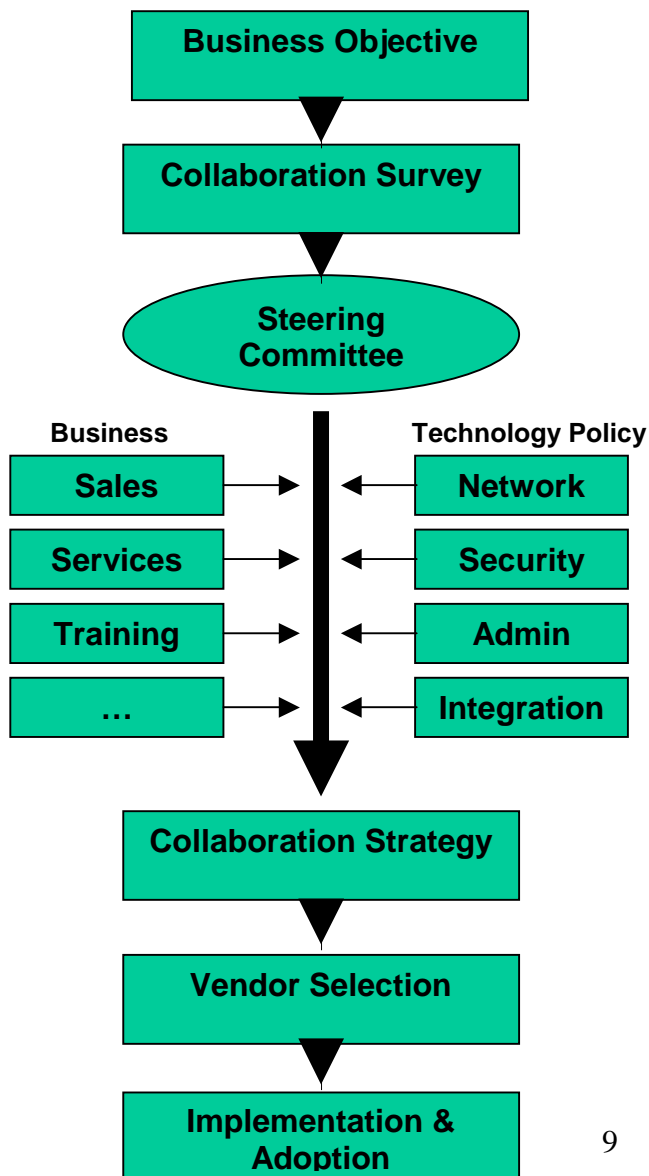
² 1% X \$10000 > \$200/3 (3 yr amortization of perpetual license cost)

meetingware products, it becomes clear that the critical issues driving the value of collaboration to an organization are maximization of user adoption through high-value integration into their core business processes. As is generally true with enterprise application software, the correct business approach is to focus on the optimization of value-creating business processes and supporting change management, rather than on technology and price.

III. Building your Enterprise Collaboration Strategy

If you probe your organization today, you are likely to find many different digital collaboration systems in use. Sales may be using a Web meeting service to conduct client meetings, and a virtual classroom for sales and partner training. Marketing may be purchasing Web event services. Development may be using a project collaboration system. Services may own software for online customer forums and product certification. Is this diversity in the organization's interest? Can one collaboration platform or service meet all of the organization's needs at lower cost?

The optimal technical and business strategy for most organizations is likely to lie between the extremes of no central policy and the specification of a single collaboration technology standard for the enterprise. This diagram proposes a process to arrive at the optimal strategy for your organization.



Determine Business Objective

The first step in any business strategy is to select the program manager and obtain executive buy-in to the overall business objective of the initiative. The program manager can be a senior business or IT executive that can solicit participation from across the organization and integrate business and IT requirements. This paper argues that the business objective of the program should be the maximization of total business return from what will be a significant and strategic investment in technology and change management.

Collaboration Survey

The next step is generally to conduct a census of collaboration technology use within your organization. The organizational units should be asked how they are using these products, the price and utilization rate for the collaboration capacity they have purchased, the business benefits they have achieved, and the capabilities that are most important to realizing these benefits.

Organize a Steering Committee

IT, together with the organizational units with the strongest needs and most experience with digital collaboration, should have a seat on the steering committee to insure the full range of corporate interests are represented and “bought-in” to the team recommendations.

Requirements Definition

Assuming digital collaboration technologies are already in use within different business and functional units of your organization, an appropriate place for the steering committee to start is with a review of the experience of your organization with incumbent technologies. The business units should review how they are using the technologies selected, the quantification of business results achieved, obstacles faced and specific requirements they have to support their business processes. Vendors can be invited to participate in the briefing so the committee is current on each vendor’s capabilities. The IT representatives should probe the business unit on its experience with user adoption issues, quality of vendor support and the vendor’s ability to support enterprise requirements.

Infrastructure Impact

IT must be a partner with the business units in developing the strategy. Early adopters have found that collaborative products can, within a year of introduction, be the largest single consumer of network bandwidth in the enterprise. Network configuration and performance problems can become painfully apparent in real-time collaboration environments. Different collaboration technologies have very different impacts on the organization’s IT infrastructure and perceptions of user reliability depending on whether they are hosted inside or outside the firewall, or are audio-graphic or video-centric in their design.

Audience Planning

The highest value use of digital collaboration can be with audiences reached over the public Internet: distributed employees, customers, partners and suppliers. Even if your initial applications are internally focused it is important that you anticipate requirements for external collaboration where the technology you select must be tolerant of highly variable network connectivity and diverse desktop configurations.

Cost-of-Ownership

The dominant components of administrative cost for collaboration are the initial deployment expense and any ongoing end-user support expense. Leading vendors have virtually eliminated software installation expenses through the adoption of thin-client technologies. Any product requiring physical software installation or an end-user reboot in today’s market should be viewed skeptically. Well-designed, reliable, products will require no formal end-user training and little end-user support. Determine the actual experience of any product or service you are considering. You will have the most insight with products currently in use within the enterprise since reliability and usability are different across organizations with different network and IT infrastructures.

Collaboration Platforms vs. Point Services

There are clear economies from eliminating redundant products and sharing a common back-end infrastructure across multiple applications and departments. Platforms supporting

multiple collaborative experiences, but sharing a common back-end management infrastructure, can offer the “right” capabilities for the business while minimizing administration overhead. These systems can also reduce end-user training and support burdens by offering compatible interfaces across collaboration experiences. However, these benefits will only be delivered if the platform selected can scale sufficiently to meet the full demands of your enterprise.

Integration

Your digital collaboration IT strategy is not complete without a phased plan for integrating your collaboration technologies with your existing IT and enterprise application infrastructure. This integration is critical to short-term cost savings and maximization of long-term business value from your investment. Your digital collaboration technologies need to complement and leverage your messaging, directory, content management and desktop application standards. Equally important is that they integrate with the appropriate business process systems and process-specific standards in the areas where digital collaboration is expected to be strategic to the company – at a minimum this is generally Sales, Service and Training. Using Training as an example, support for the XML-based AICC application integration and the SCORM content packaging standards are mandatory for low cost, high functionality integration with LMS, HRIS or ERM systems.

Professional Services

Potential vendors will have widely varying professional service capabilities. Determine what assistance you will require in implementation, integration, application development, project and change management to achieve your business objectives.

Develop Your Collaboration Strategy

With this analysis complete, you have the data and context to design your strategy. If your organization is typical, a majority of the following statements are likely apply to you:

- Several business units will have independent service contracts with different, but functionally interchangeable, ASP meetingware providers at high retail subscription rates
- Some deployments of digital collaboration will be wildly successful, some will be moribund, even if the same technology is in use for similar functions
- Business units will have made vendor selections and will be reluctant to change them
- Collaboration tools will be used sub-optimally – e.g. using meetingware for training
- Sensitive organizational data is being transmitted in the clear over the Internet daily
- Most existing vendor selections will have been made tactically without adequate consideration of future integration capabilities or cost-of-ownership issues

In line with the team’s charter of maximizing business return to the organization, the steering committee should focus first on the technologies currently demonstrating the highest business return in the organization today and then validate that they can meet the necessary IT requirements today and over a two to three year horizon.

To Standardize or Not

In the early stages of a technology like digital collaboration, building experience with multiple applications and vendors can be accomplished at low cost and give the organization valuable insight into the true acceptance rate of different technologies in your social and technology environment. With project ROIs well in excess of 100% per year, a policy of encouraging innovation can make immediate business sense and provide important knowledge on the true fit between your organization and specific vendors and technologies. Early adopters of digital collaboration now have three or more years experience in multiple functions and the knowledge to triage their experiments. However, organizations in production for less than two years, or with only a few pockets of use, should be sure that they have enough experience to pick wisely for the full range of their needs.

If the steering committee believes it has the requisite experience to set standards for the organization, there is a spectrum of policy options available from voluntary guidance to mandatory standardization.

Technical Standards

The first level of policy to be adopted should be a set of vendor-independent technical standards that protect your organization's assets, minimize costs, and reduce switching costs should you standardize on a different vendor in the future. Business units would then be provided the flexibility to independently source collaboration solutions that conformed to these standards. The common standards candidates are:

- **Security.** Corporate information assets must be protected with minimum standards for user authentication, secure content storage and communications protocol encryption. These policies may drive a product vs. ASP-based deployment model.
- **Cost-of-Ownership.** Since deployment and end-user support costs can be significantly higher than the purchase cost of these solutions, minimum standards should be set for software deployment ease-of-use, reliability, and manageability.
- **Network Compatibility.** The performance and reliability of any digital collaboration solution is dependent upon the characteristics of your network infrastructure including firewall and proxy server configurations, available LAN and WAN bandwidth. Any preferred collaboration vendor should be certified on your specific network.
- **Corporate Identity.** Collaboration solutions used with internal and external audiences should support your corporate identity rather than that of the collaboration vendor.
- **Scalability.** Authorized solutions should be candidates for later corporate standardization and thus be able to scale to meet future corporate needs.
- **Reach.** Any candidate for future enterprise standardization must be able to work successfully across corporate firewalls to desktops without installed software in order to support collaboration with customers, demand and supply chain partners.
- **Integration/Standards Support.** Depending upon the scope of the deployment, it will be appropriate to set minimum requirements for integration with your IT infrastructure (e.g. directory, calendar, messaging interfaces) and enterprise applications systems (e.g. enterprise portals, learning management systems.)
- **Financial Viability.** There is a high level of vendor consolidation and business failure in the collaboration market. Vendors should be required to demonstrate their long-term financial viability.

Contract Consolidation

Significant pricing economies can be achieved from consolidating independent business unit contracts in each of the major digital collaboration formats (meetings, presentations, classrooms). Greater economies can be achieved if the vendor(s) selected can offer a common platform supporting all of these formats without compromising on the functionality required by the business units.

The single most important economic decision to make is whether the organization will favor an ASP or internally hosted deployment model. The retail rates paid by business units for ASP meetingware can be as high as \$2,000 per seat, per year. A perpetual license for meetingware software as part of a large enterprise-wide commitment can be under \$100 per user. At the enterprise level, all three core collaboration experiences can be licensed from collaboration platform providers for well under \$200 per user in volume. Breadth or intensity of use, security concerns and integration needs are factors that make the internally hosted system solution the best, most economic choice. Sporadic (e.g. marketing events) or low volume usage, or constraints on internally IT resources can make the low fixed costs of ASP services more attractive. Either approach can provide a high quality of service for both internal and external users.

Vendor Standardization

The decision to select a mandatory collaboration platform for the enterprise should be approached with care and a full understanding of the unique needs of the business units. Collaboration technologies and vendors will continue to evolve quickly over the next few years. As we observed in the discussion of the business value of collaboration, focus should be maintained on maximizing the business return from your investment in collaboration rather than the acquisition price of the collaboration technology. Premature selection of a collaboration tool or service that restricts the business unit's ability to meet their needs can actually damage the organization's competitiveness.

If the decision is made to select preferred collaboration vendor(s), the team should explicitly evaluate vendors on their ability to support the three major digital collaboration formats: meetings, presentations and classrooms. As the IDC research reported in the first section of this paper, the dominant use of digital collaboration in many corporations is in support of training or education, not self-service meetings. If this is where a majority of the business benefit will be derived, the selection of an effective virtual classroom capability is more strategic than the selection of a generic meetingware service.

There are enterprise collaboration vendors who can support the full spectrum of an enterprise's internal and external digital collaboration needs with the economic benefits of a common technology platform. Several of these vendors give you the flexibility of either ASP or on-site deployment of digital collaboration.

Summary

- Digital collaboration has emerged as one of the fastest and highest impact strategies available to enterprises for improving employee productivity and increasing revenue generation while simultaneously reducing costs.
- The application of digital collaboration in your organization will take many forms ranging from an enterprise meetingware utility to integrated extensions of core business, learning and knowledge systems.
- Coordination and consolidation of digital collaboration initiatives is important to maximize business return and securely manage corporate assets, but this coordination must be accomplished with an understanding of the diverse models by which collaboration will be used in the business.
- Your digital collaboration strategy needs to be focused on maximizing total return for the enterprise from clearly identifiable top-line and bottom-line benefits. In this way, it resembles an enterprise software infrastructure decision more than a telecommunications services purchase.

About the Author

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Chris Reed has been part of the Centra management team since 1998 and often represents the company at learning and investment forums, discussing how eLearning can create business value. Reed has over 20 years of product development, marketing, consulting, and sales experience in the IT industry with companies as diverse as IBM, Digital, Lotus and software start-ups. Prior to Centra, he served as Director of Market Development for Lotus Notes where he led the re-positioning, product and solutions marketing programs, and channel initiatives characterized by the high technology strategist Geoffrey Moore as “one of the most extraordinary marketing achievements in recent years.”

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