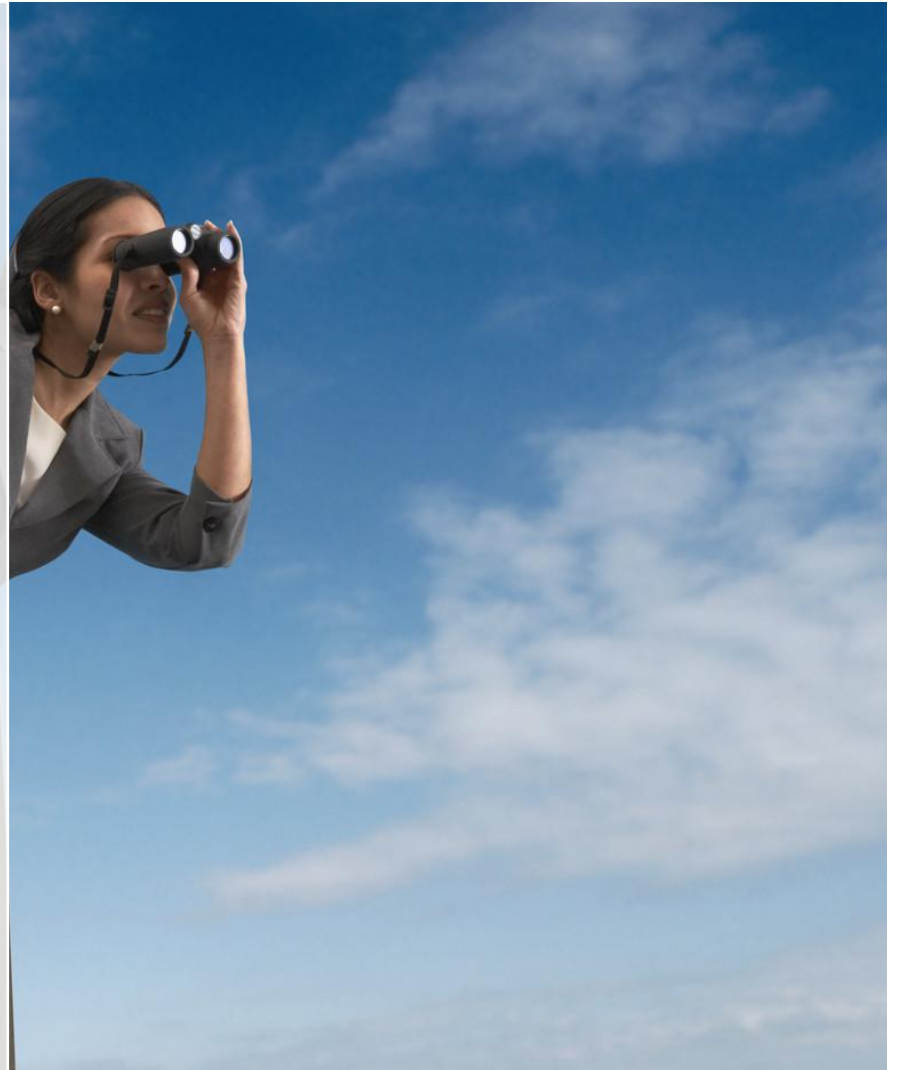


Enterprise 2.0, Just a Fad?

Z-Solutions GmbH

2007



Stephen Fry, English actor, author and broadcaster, describes Web 2.0 as "an idea in people's heads rather than a reality". But businesses are embracing the RSS-feeds, Mash-ups, Podcasts Peer-2-Peer Networks and Blogs which among other things make up what is referred to as Enterprise 2.0. But can Enterprise- and WEB 2.0 deliver real business value and competitive advantage or said a bit different, what do you really need to know about Enterprise- and WEB 2.0?

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Enterprise 2.0, Just Another Fad?

Stephen Fry, English actor, author and broadcaster, describes Web 2.0 as "an idea in people's heads rather than a reality". CRM, ERP, EAI, Virtualization, SOA, are concepts which CIO's and IT Directors already have had to deal with. Now Enterprise 2.0 can be added to the list along with Office 2.0, WEB 2.0, CRM 2.0 Collaboration 2.0 etc.

But can WEB 2.0 deliver real business value or even a competitive advantage? Many IT executives are still trying to get their head around that question.

But since these concepts rarely comes free of charge, the IT executive must invest time in understanding what is behind it and how the company can reap benefits and raw business value from implementing them.

The discussion about Enterprise 2.0 has been on for a while (It was probably there before the new kid on the block SOA turned up) and the opinions are many.

But businesses are embracing the RSS-feeds, WIKIs, Mash-ups, Podcasts, Webinars, Peer-2-Peer Networks and Blogs which among other things make up what is referred to as WEB 2.0 or Enterprise 2.0.

But can Enterprise 2.0 deliver real business value or even a competitive advantage? Many IT executives are still trying to get their head around that question. The same executives

can quickly agree that E-mail is a bad collaboration tool. The total lack of version control is a problem when sending documents or reference materials around. A centralized WIKI is a much better way of storing information and because it is real-time, the users can easily track changes and see the most resent version.

Endless discussions on e-mail have caused many inboxes to exceed the quota but most of these discussions do not necessarily include the people that could provide a solution. A better way would be to use a chat room or even better a blog, where proposals, ideas and opinions can be posted and discussed until consensus has been reached.

What you need to know

Enterprise 2.0 is not a standard which one can implement in the company. It is more of a collection of tools and ideas branded Enterprise 2.0 and for several of these tools no general standard applies.

There are different perspectives to Enterprise 2.0. There is both a company internal & external aspect as well as the technical & social aspect to it. The social elements are mainly focused on the collaborative facets such as WIKIs, Blogs and collaboration tools. The technical elements are revolving around Data Aggregation, Mash-up and the rich user experience.

The Internal Perspective

Most corporations implement WEB/ Enterprise 2.0 tools internally first to promote team work and to help geographically dispersed teams cooperate better. In many software development teams, Blogs, WIKIs and some kind of Chat application (often internal solution are based on open source Jabber for security reasons) are the standard tools of the trade.

Many companies are experiencing that WIKIs are sprouting in every corner of the cooperation. Employees are running small WEB servers off their Desktop PCs to help their co-workers or project team members be more productive. But the IT staff is working overtime to stop the "Unauthorized" applications, despite the fact that these WIKIs and blogs are adding immediate business value (Given the content is work related).

Knowledge based companies are seeing the Enterprise/WEB 2.0 technologies as a way to manage the vast amount of knowledge otherwise locked away in the heads of the employees.

Some companies on the forefront of the development are using Asynchronous JavaScript and XML, better known as AJAX. The programming method uses JavaScript within the WEB client to build applications that are much more interactive than for instance pages built with HTML. Additionally AJAX pages do not need to refresh the Web page every time a user enters or receives new data.

By using AJAX and Service Oriented Architecture (SOA) to create a data access layer, companies can pull together for instance internal proprietary information about customers and publicly available data gathered from the Internet using e.g. RSS-Feeds and other methods into a single environment. The analysis of the data in such an environment can be done by using Web 2.0 technologies, such as mashups.

A good example of such a service can be a real estate network where the house offered for sale can be plotted onto a map (Google Earth) while information about e.g. crime rates, taxes, public transportation, school system etc. are collected and analyzed by the user in a mashup with a lightweight AJAX front end.

Business value is not always created where one thinks. Many managers are makes statements like “We reward the high performers” but in reality they reward the perceived high performers. The hero on a football team is often the player shooting the goals, but with a bit of attention one often come to realize that the playmaker who places the ball in the perfect position for the team hero almost every time is rarely mentioned, but just keeps producing value.

In much the same way many companies have business value created in many places every day. By monitoring where value is created in the WEB 2.0 system and where no value is created, a company will be able to identify high value performers and also area in need of development.

The External Perspective

The Open Source has been using Blogs, WIKIs, Chat and Bulletin Boards/Forums as the primary platform for reaching both developers and end-users. Support is often provided in forums on the web and the knowledge is absorbed into WIKIs which contain a wealth of information about the product, related products and e.g. configuration examples, HOWTOs and reviews.

The Open Source society has proven that it is possible for otherwise unrelated people to utilize the WEB 2.0 technologies to develop advanced applications which can compete with commercial software products while being more feature rich and have fewer bugs.

Several companies have seen the light and are now starting to understand how WEB 2.0 technologies can help them become more aware of what their customers want and hence develop products better targeted products.

The above mentioned Real Estate Mashup example can easily be deployed by the real estate agency to their customers using a normal web site. The information can be enriched by adding other pieces of information such as utility prices for the area, average traffic situation on surrounding roads, relevant news feeds and job listings in the area.

Such services more or less already exist today. But they were often built using proprietary interfaces and custom build software. WEB 2.0 makes such solutions easier accessible to the average company which does not have millions for development. RSS feeds, XML and AJAX makes it possible for more companies to produce a rich customer experience with a smaller budget.

Thereby we reach one of the most important points with Enterprise 2.0 in our opinion. That is the possibility to put the best practice for creating rich user experiences for both internal and external users into the hands of business people and knowledge workers. People who can generate the biggest business value out of the servers, applications and data available to the company.

The second point in our opinion is that Enterprise 2.0 allows business people and knowledge workers to manipulate non-structured information to keep it up to date. As companies store more and more information, the quickly realize that keeping it up-to-date is a problem. All data has a “best before” date but determining that date is often a question of market development and subjective evaluations which the IT department cannot do.

Finally, many companies are eyeing new business opportunities through Enterprise/WEB 2.0 – the option of offering customers the rich user experiences that other companies have not yet developed are compelling to them. The chance to compete in the market place with much larger corporations appeals to them.

What you need to do

Enterprise 2.0 is still in the early adopter phase, but it is also a technological revolution. People who are not a part of it will resist it with everything they have. The arguments either silent or spoken in public will be along the lines of “The security implications are enormous, it is insecure, we are not ready for it, we do not understand it or what we have works already”.

Enterprise 2.0 technology can become one of the biggest transformations of how businesses interact with their customers and partners as well as how employees interact with each other and manage knowledge.

Mashups are excellent for collective intelligence, knowledge management and predictive market tools, but one has to be well prepared before entering into the world of Enterprise 2.0. Below are some steps to consider before getting started:

Prepare for Resistance:

In other words you have to be prepared for resistance and often the most resistance comes from the IT departments.

Do your homework

Find out who your Enterprise 2.0 users will be. Are they internal or external? A lot more thought has to go into an external Enterprise 2.0 presence incl. but not limited to Security, Rights Management, creation of interest in the service etc.

Start Small

Creating a huge mashup site for external users with data being aggregated from many sources might be too aggressive for a first project. For internal projects a corporate Blog might pave the way for more specialized WIKIs. These can then be the base of something more complex and externally focused, so get experience through small carefully selected projects.

Facilitate Feedback

Many newspapers have an “add a comment” feature on their web based news and many TV stations have their newscasters write blogs. Some of the comments seem to be totally out of context and directly nasty. It appears that there is no logical explanation for the unpleasant comment other than the anonymity of the internet. Users sometimes resolve to using their “right of free speech” to express “below the belt” points of view. Be prepared to deal with them, and be prepared to deal with the fact that so called “takes downs” can cause riot like reactions from users unless clearly stated that this can occur.

General Terms and Conditions

People have a right to “Free speech” but you also have a right to freely edit the content on your site – make it clear to the users what kind of behavior you will accept and what you are not ready to accept by issuing a code of conduct.

But be restrictive in the amount of rules and regulations you impose. Start with little and add as needed – the kind of comments you get depends a lot on the segment you aim for. Having a separate sector where people can air their dissatisfaction can also be a good way of allowing “Free speech” under controlled conditions. Make sure that you use moderators as users often have a go at each other as well as at you. Moderating the discussion is important.

The Business Case

What is the business value that you want to create? Make it clear what business value you want to achieve and define a strategy. Once the strategy and the metrics are in place, select the Enterprise/WEB 2.0 technologies and applications based on that.

Create a clear mission statement for your Enterprise 2.0 and keep updating as you learn the tools of the trade. Keep the experiences from the Enterprise 2.0 project quantified using the metrics and measure if the desired business value is being created. Adjust as appropriate (This is the main reason for keeping it small initially – it is much easier to adjust and the costs are generally speaking small).

Summary

We are convinced that we will see many innovative companies adapt elements of Enterprise 2.0 both internally and externally in the next few years. They will use it to boost their competitive advantage, customer care, knowledge management, collaboration, team work, information sharing etc.

Some will think hard and well about how to implement it in the best way to create the highest possible value for both their customers and their business. Many a small company took something someone else already did well and made it better and became a market leader.

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Jan Anker Jensen has more than 16 years of international experience as senior manager, project- & programme manager and consultant in Customer Care-, ICT-, Financial Services-, Hi-Tech-, Telecommunication- and Outsourcing industry.

In 2002 he established Z-Solutions GmbH (See-Solutions).

About Z-Solutions GmbH

Z-Solutions was established in 2002 and has since consulted large companies like o2 Mobile, Orange Business Services (Former Equant), Zurich Financial Services, and Nokia along with many others, both large enterprises and SME's worldwide.

The company is focused on helping customers in the areas of strategy, management, technology and performance as well as business acceleration.

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