

Enterprise Social Software

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Enterprise social software, also known as Enterprise 2.0, is a term describing social software used in "enterprise" (business) contexts. It includes social and networked modifications to company intranets and other classic software platforms used by large companies to organize their communication. In contrast to traditional enterprise software, which imposes structure prior to use, this generation of software tends to encourage use prior to providing structure.

Terminology

The term 'enterprise social software' is a general term for describing this class of tools. As of 2006, Enterprise 2.0 is a catchier term sometimes used to describe social and networked changes to enterprise, which often includes social software (but is not limited to it, nor to either social collaboration or software); and Enterprise Web 2.0 sometimes describes the introduction and implementation of Web 2.0 technologies within the enterprise including those rich internet applications, providing software as a service, and using the web as a general platform.

Applications of enterprise social software

Software examples

Specific social software tools that have been adapted for enterprise use include hypertext and unstructured search tools, wikis, weblogs for storytelling, social bookmarking for tagging and building organizational folksonomies, RSS for signaling, collaborative planning software for peer-based project planning and management, ideas banks for ideation (idea generation), social networking tools, mashups for visualization, and even prediction markets for forecasting and identifying risks.

Social networking capabilities can help organizations capture unstructured tacit knowledge. The challenge then becomes how to distill meaningful, re-usable knowledge from other content also captured in tools such as blogs, online communities, and wikis. In 2008, companies that provide Enterprise Social Software, started introducing profile pages to their products, to integrate the functionality of public online communities, within the enterprise. This enables knowledge workers to find others with the knowledge they may need. This is especially useful in large organizations.

Specific uses

Blogs and wikis are collaboration tools, and as such, they are useful mainly for sharing unstructured information associated with ad hoc or ongoing projects and processes, but not for structured informational retrieval. However, Shell is converting its official documentation to wiki's, because this enables the company to make documentation updates available in real time. And enable non-editors to contribute to the documentation. In this process they restructure the paper documents to a set of on line wiki pages.

Business processes often rely on access to structured data. This may be spread across many applications, databases, and directories. Social technologies work to address such complexities.

The unstructured information provided by social technologies is particularly useful in business processes that are not rigidly pre-defined, but where people work together in an adaptive way to innovate solutions. The theory of such processes is human interaction management, and there is an associated type of software known as a Human Interaction Management System (HIMS). A HIMS can be used to provide management control over the use of social software.

Ironically Law, which many view as a field where professionals are highly un-collaborative, may prove to be among the first places to embrace Web 2.0 in the enterprise, because lawyers manage intensive document collaboration, and sit in both large legal departments in corporations and outside law firms.