



Convergence of Enterprise Information Portals & Social Networking

By

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Wikipedia defines an Enterprise Portal, also known as an Enterprise Information Portal (EIP) or Corporate Portal as a framework for integrating information, people and processes across organizational boundaries. It provides a secure unified access point, often in the form of a web-based user interface, and is designed to aggregate and personalize information through application-specific Portlets. One hallmark of enterprise portals is the de-centralized content contribution and content management, which keeps the information always updated.

Enterprise Information Portals usually fall under one of two categories: internal portals (employees and/or contractors) and external portals (customers, vendors, partners, dealers, etc.). Such portals are either mono-directional (interaction is one-sided from organization to the user) or bi-directional (includes limited feedback from user to organization).

Although EIP deliver a great amount of information to their users, the collaboration is often performed via email. In addition, most EIP have yet to implement a mobile component to keep their users engaged when they're off-line. Most portals do not provide any tools for inter-user communication.

In 2009, however, the first generation of Internet savvy kids (kids who were born after popularity of the Internet) graduate from high school. This group will join the workforce over the next 1-6 years. This is a generation that constantly utilizes social networking sites such as Face Book, MySpace, and Bebo; Utilizes IM, Text Message, Twitter (Micro-blogging) more often than email; Has a shorter span of attention; and is very mobile device savvy.

Members of this generation will be employees, customers, vendors, and partners of all organizations. In order to embrace this generation, organizations will have no choice but to adapt to such behavior. I often use the analogy of companies adapting to email because their workforce would consider snail-mail a backward step.

Tomorrow's enterprise information portals will embrace social networking components that will facilitate their metamorphosis into online communities. They will still fit the definition of an EIP, but will enhance the status of their 'users' to 'members' because members now can steer the direction of the site. Internal and External communities alike will allow for easy collaboration and communication amongst its members and will expand to allow for Omni-



directional communications by providing the typical social networking components such as groups, blogs, bulletin boards, etc.

Mobile component and interaction will be an essential part of tomorrow's EIP. Members want to be engaged while away from their computers and need to have access to latest information.

Use of email will be reduced accordingly to a mode of notification and not collaboration. In tomorrow's EIP, members join workgroups to collaborate on specific set of documents. Rather than continuous emailing of the document after review by each member, the document will reside on the EIP and members will post their comments directly and collaborate on its enhancement.

Online training will be enhanced utilizing tomorrow's EIP. The new training model will allow for snippets of lessons to be delivered to members at the members' convenience. Members will be allowed to complete a lesson - potentially in a game format - within an agreed upon timeframe.

In a couple of years, widgets will be utilized more prevalently within the enterprise information portals. Such widgets - utilizing the organization's service oriented architecture model - will deliver and perform a variety of tasks, from providing the latest weather forecast to performing analytics for a specific question, instantly.

Social networking tools in the meanwhile should evolve to become enterprise class ready. In order to be embraced by EIP and corporate IT departments, such tools should be:

- Scalable and expandable;
- Provide compatibility with enterprise security products and processes;
- Integrable with other applications and data sources;
- Easily maintainable by organization's internal and external IT teams;
- Provide detailed reporting;

In conclusion, the convergence of enterprise information portals and social networks is immanent. A number of organizations have started to enhance their portals to take advantage of these tools. Adaptation rate will increase within the next few years as the new generation will join the workforce.



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Mr. Abai coauthored "Data Strategy", a book published by Addison-Wesley in 2005 to provide a comprehensive roadmap in building a sound data strategy for organizations. He has also developed and taught classes at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), has published several articles for various online and print publications, and is invited to speak at technical and leadership conferences globally.

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