

The Social Enterprise: Using Social Enterprise Applications to Enable the Next Wave of Knowledge Worker Productivity

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The Social Enterprise: Using Social Enterprise Applications to Enable the Next Wave of Knowledge Worker Productivity

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INTRODUCTION: KNOWLEDGE WORK EVOLVES

On the face of it, social software seems an unlikely example of enterprise collaboration. Aren't social networks a fad? What does sharing photos or connecting with college buddies have to do with getting work done?

One answer comes from considering how knowledge work has changed. According to a leading technology industry consultant and blogger, Stowe Boyd knowledge can be divided into three types:

- *Impersonal knowledge* is those ideas and pieces of information made explicit in documents and files.
- *Personal knowledge* is the tacit learning locked inside our heads.
- *Interpersonal knowledge* is implicit between individuals and embedded in our conversations and connections.

Historically, collaborative tools (such as e-mail, document management, and calendaring) have done a good job of supporting the first two types of knowledge. However, they have been poor at enabling the kinds of social artifacts needed to effectively capture and use interpersonal knowledge in a business environment.

The next generation of collaborative work will be defined by the shift from information handling to interaction management, or socialization.

The next generation of collaborative work will be defined by the shift from information handling to interaction management, or socialization. Social networks such as Facebook and MySpace might seem at first to be more about play than about work but, according to Boyd, it is precisely such play and the recurring stickiness it engenders that will allow people to tap into the collective knowledge of their coworkers. Social networking will succeed where earlier approaches to collaboration, such as traditional knowledge management, have failed.

What can the enterprise learn from Facebook? First is the notion that birds of a feather flock together. Communities of interest will quickly form without the need for top-down hand-holding. When people form their own groups, the connections are stronger and the interactions more frequent and long lasting. Second, with better tools, a faster rate of user adoption is evident. Enterprise users, spoiled by

the ease of consumer software, don't want to perform complex installations, remember arcane passwords, or learn something new just to be able to share with their coworkers.

To understand the impact of these factors, consider how quickly Facebook is growing. In January 2008, comScore's "2007 U.S. Internet Year in Review" rated Facebook as the fastest-growing Internet site. Facebook had 34.7 million visitors in December 2007, a year-on-year increase of 81 percent. This growth is largely attributable to viral customer acquisition, buzz, and an explosion of sticky applications within the Facebook community. Although many initial Facebook applications fall into the fun category, there is no denying the tremendous growth in collaborative communities of interest and niche networking applications—communities that formed organically and continue to thrive.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

In the last decade, business has seen the rise of collaborative enterprise technologies, from groupware to portals and team communities. Most of these innovations—virtual communities, portals, chat—became popular on the consumer Web and were later adopted by business.

Facilitating real-time communication, coordination, and collaboration among groups of people was the goal of an earlier generation of software called groupware (for example, Lotus Notes). These applications were a major leap forward, for the first time combining tools such as project management, calendaring, chat, whiteboards, and document management. But although groupware was effective in introducing task-based tools to enterprise users, it was limited to new capabilities developed by administrators; end users were not able to create more-customized solutions. Additionally, like most enterprise software, groupware was not designed to anticipate the rich collaborative, user-centric possibilities brought on by the internet.

The mid-1990s saw the arrival of portals such as AOL, Excite, and Yahoo. These Web sites provided a front door to the vast amount of information found on the Web. To expand on their role as most users' online starting point, the portals began to offer features such as news, e-mail, weather, stock quotes, and search—in a unified user experience with familiar navigation and layouts. It wasn't long before enterprises began to use the same approach on intranets, providing gateways to enterprise information. Portals not only brought together information locked away in enterprise resource planning (ERP), customer relationship management (CRM), and other legacy silos, but they also used the internet itself as a platform to allow knowledge workers to collaborate across departmental, company, and even global boundaries. Portals followed groupware as the drivers of worker collaboration and productivity. They significantly expanded the reach and accessibility provided by groupware to incorporate core enterprise resources. However, creating new pages

Portals followed groupware as the drivers of worker collaboration and productivity by expanding the reach and accessibility of groupware to incorporate core enterprise resources. However, creating new pages in an enterprise portal or updating content on existing pages was still a top-down, centralized activity—with a common result of stale content and rigid user experiences.

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While enterprises were benefiting from groupware and portals, virtual communities were growing in popularity with consumers. Virtual communities—such as Usenet, the Well, AOL chat rooms, and Yahoo! Groups—were part of the internet from its earliest days. These community experiments established their own cultures, trust systems, and even codes of ethics. They were successful not because of their features (indeed, one could do little other than exchange messages) but because they mirrored offline human interactions. Compared to today’s social networks, they look incredibly primitive. They offered minimal user profiles such as a name and e-mail address, no privacy controls, and no way of visualizing relationships with other users. But they were an important step forward in capturing basic online social interactions.

Profile pages on today’s social networks go far beyond contact information. Users can customize their profiles to show personal history and share photos, videos, and widgets. These pages update automatically each time a user adds a friend, joins a group, posts a note, or bookmarks an item within or outside the network. They are powerful forms of self-expression and the foundation for social interaction.

In addition, social networks include advanced privacy controls that let users determine who can access a profile page and what items they are allowed to see. The concept of a limited profile has proven to be useful; a user might want to share their work history with a prospective employer, but not the pictures from last night’s party.

Social networking sites have already become popular for promoting products and services. Though Facebook lacks enterprise-level security and system integration capabilities, its collaborative features are so compelling that some companies are using it for targeting customers, researching potential employees, and yes, even for enterprise collaboration.

Much of Facebook’s value comes from something not yet seen in enterprise software—the notion of a “social graph.” Social networks are defined not so much by their feature sets but by their ability to provide a connective fabric that ties people together. Once connections are made, they can be visualized and information derived from the connections. For example, users can quickly determine how many of their friends of a particular political persuasion also listen to jazz.

So with all this potential, why hasn’t there been a plethora of enterprise software offerings for social software? Although Web technologies have advanced to the point where building applications on top of a networked infrastructure is easier, building an online social graph that mirrors employees’ real-world interactions is still very hard. And what are the benefits of using a social application within the enterprise? Instead of viewing Facebook as a distraction, the savvy enterprise

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should learn what makes it so sticky—and how those capabilities could be applied to the enterprise to drive knowledge worker productivity and accelerate innovation.

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HARNESSING CONNECTIONS IN SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

Andrew McAfee of the Harvard Business School defines Enterprise 2.0 as the use of emergent social software platforms within companies or between companies and their partners or customers. Such software enables collaboration and promotes community. Emergent platforms lack a defined workflow and are indifferent to organizational identities. They contain mechanisms to let the patterns and structures inherent in people's interactions become visible over time—a good description of Facebook's news feed. One of the most powerful aspects of social networks is the ability to provide nearly instantaneous connections to people that one knows only casually. McAfee refers to this as the value of “allowing knowledge workers to maintain and exploit weak ties.”

Consider the value of a site such as LinkedIn, with its recommendation system for identifying people with similar work experience, when putting together a project team. How many people are you connected to at work? How many of those connections extend beyond the first degree? And how do you know who in your company is best qualified to answer a particular question? LinkedIn is particularly proactive in its efforts to get users to extend and establish relationships outside existing networks. In a social enterprise, people outside a department or immediate work group could be connected with what others do, the people they interact with, and the projects they are working on. They could see how each connection is relevant to their work objectives.

The social enterprise will be built on social media. Social media is about sharing and collaboration; it is what drives consumer platforms such as Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, and Wikipedia. Wikipedia, in fact, describes social media as “online tools and platforms that people use to share opinions, insights, experiences, and perspectives.” Social media types include text, images, audio, and video, and are delivered via message boards, podcasts, wikis, and text and video blogs. In contrast to traditional media such as television, radio, movies, and print, which are passive and professionally generated, these new delivery mechanisms are participatory and often consumer generated.

Regardless of media type, most successful social media sites such as Flickr, YouTube, and Wikipedia have a low barrier to entry, allowing anyone to create, share, and respond to content. Ratings, feedback forums, and user communities create additional dynamic content that drives visitors and stickiness.

The ability to apply consumer Web 2.0 trends in business via a social enterprise represents an opportunity to dramatically improve how we interact with colleagues for knowledge management, collaboration, and content creation.

Contrast this with how content is created and shared in the typical enterprise—where static content is delivered via top-down policies and centralized distribution. Traditional intranets and groupware platforms fail to serve the needs of today’s dynamic enterprise: they don’t foster end-user participation, are cumbersome to install, and are often difficult to learn. Typically, they are built on proprietary technologies that severely limit their ability to adapt to new requirements; top-down, prescriptive approaches limit adoption among those for whom the system was designed. The ability to apply consumer Web 2.0 trends in business via a social enterprise represents an opportunity to dramatically improve how we interact with colleagues for knowledge management, collaboration, and content creation.

A social enterprise is one in which communications become conversations. All employees are on an equal footing when it comes to participation in information creation, information consumption, and information sharing. To make this possible, a social enterprise requires an open environment in which people and systems across the business can work together and leverage each other’s implicit activities. Pull systems will emerge to complement the push systems over which IT exercises control. Employees will have greater control over the information they receive, the devices they use, and the applications they run. In many organizations, this will be an adjustment, particularly for IT. After putting social systems in place, IT must be willing to step aside so employees can choose the feeds, blogs, and wikis that they want to follow, as well as create their own applications in the form of mashups. Call it the consumerization of IT. It is already happening in today’s enterprise, and social applications are the next phase.

DEFINING THE ENTERPRISE SOCIAL WEB

In today’s hypercompetitive global economy, the ability to be agile and respond to change is more important than ever before. Information and the interactions around it have become the key assets of most enterprises, and making correct decisions in shrinking cycle times is the defining operating characteristic of winning companies. This market imperative to access the right information and people at the right time has led to an increased interest in building social enterprise capabilities—and the social Web is central to that quest.

What is the social Web? It is the defining construct for the social enterprise—first and foremost a workplace transition to an internet-powered, user-focused, and community-centric social fabric that ties together people, ideas, content, processes, systems, and other enterprise artifacts.

What is the social Web? It is the defining construct for the social enterprise—first and foremost a workplace transition to an Internet-powered, user-focused, and community-centric social fabric that ties together people, ideas, content, processes, systems, and other enterprise artifacts. Most important, these connections are not only explicit (such as, “let’s have a meeting” or “we are in the same department”) but also implicit and, in some cases, emergent. Another key aspect of the social Web is its participative, do-it-yourself (DIY) nature. Employees are empowered to create and publish content that is easily consumable throughout the company. The rise of wikis, blogs, social networks, and other user-provisioned collaborative tools in the workplace is a direct result of this trend toward the social enterprise.

The enterprise social Web is still evolving, but several key capabilities have been identified as core requirements:

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- **Foundational services.** The enterprise social Web is significantly different from the consumer social Web. Enterprises have many mission-critical processes and must often adhere to regulatory requirements. There is a need for foundational services related to high availability, security, and integration with existing systems and applications to support data confidentiality, system reliability, auditability, and other IT requirements. These services include user profiling, content management, presentation services, application integration, delegated management, and security. Inside the enterprise, IT must be able to deploy them in an integrated fashion, providing employees with secure access to DIY features and integration with relevant legacy systems such as CRM and e-mail.
- **Social bookmarking and tagging.** Users categorize content or people of interest with keywords or tags, effectively creating a personal taxonomy. Tags are often represented visually in tag clouds for easy navigation; they can be shared with colleagues, creating a bottom-up, dynamic collection of community knowledge.
- **User-generated content.** Tools such as wikis and blogs are critical to fostering information creation and collaboration. Wikis enable collaborative content creation and blogs allow one-to-many conversations. Both of these tools empower users to surface personal knowledge in the context of work requirements and encourage information sharing through collaboration.
- **Rich, dynamic user profiles.** Most enterprises have internal phone books (often using Microsoft Outlook or Lotus Notes) that provide useful but limited views of individual employees. Profiles like those found on Facebook or MySpace can go much further, providing rich contextual information about a person and their activities—current status, group affiliations, recent blog posts, to name a few. Translated to the enterprise, this capability could show what projects or products employees are responsible for as well as what conferences they attend. Going beyond the hierarchical view of employees provides richer opportunities for collaboration.
- **User activity streams.** Facebook’s news feed lets users dynamically keep up with others’ day-to-day activities, such as friend additions and status updates. It’s easy to see how this could be helpful in an enterprise. A user could get instant notification each time a colleague uploads a document to a content management system, schedules a meeting, or completes a project milestone. Activity streams are especially powerful in the enterprise because they are connected directly to the social graph and raise the visibility of valuable information to users.
- **Collaborative communities.** The ability for users to create like-minded communities of interest is a big draw within the Web’s social networks. In the

enterprise, these communities can also grow quickly through word of mouth; they help promote discussion and idea sharing among employees that span departmental, functional, and geographical boundaries.

- **Social search.** Just as a person can ask friends to recommend a good Thai restaurant, enterprise social search leverages the knowledge of coworkers for more-useful results. Unlike Google’s one-size-fits-all approach where relevance is a function of hyperlinks, social search determines relevance as a function of community knowledge and preference. With social search, each person’s explicit activities (such as viewing a video) and implicit activities (such as finding a document based on someone else’s tag) are weighted algorithmically and used to identify the most relevant information for a given search query. Social search leverages the advantages of being in an enterprise: Because the enterprise context is known, each search is customizable; and because community knowledge is harnessed, the results are more relevant.
- **Really Simple Syndication (RSS).** RSS is a standard that enables any Web site to automatically publish its content each time the site is updated. Through syndication, social media content is spread throughout the internet and easily found using tools such as Technorati or Google Reader. Not only can RSS be effective behind the firewall, but it can offer an easy way to tie together information from inside and outside the organization. For example, imagine if both marketing and sales were instantly made aware each time a deal closed with a customer in a particular industry. That information could be combined with press releases and industry blogs and leveraged in an upcoming sales engagement, or could become the basis for a case study that leads to new business—increasing sales velocity for the entire organization.

ORACLE’S SOLUTION FOR THE ENTERPRISE SOCIAL WEB

So how do you make the social Web a reality in today’s business? Most companies’ needs extend beyond “Facebook for the enterprise” to an array of custom social applications that improve productivity across business processes and spur innovation across the enterprise. These social applications need user experiences that encourage employee participation and are enterprise secure. What most businesses want is a flexible, enterprise-class platform for building and deploying social applications as their needs evolve.

Oracle addresses this market need with its portal and user interaction platform that provides the industry’s most complete, open, and manageable portfolio of Web 2.0 and user experience capabilities. Anchored by Oracle WebCenter Suite, the platform includes rich Web 2.0 services for communication, collaboration, content management, and social networking. These Web 2.0 services power next-generation applications that spur knowledge workers to greater productivity and innovation in the workplace. Oracle WebCenter Suite provides comprehensive enterprise-class foundational support such as native support for industry standards and out-of-the-box integration with enterprise applications, security, and administration systems.

Oracle’s portal and user interaction platform provides the industry’s broadest and most integrated Web 2.0 capabilities with Oracle WebCenter Suite.



Oracle WebCenter Suite allows businesses to leverage the power of social networks within the enterprise while maintaining enterprise standards for security and interoperability.

BUILDING ENTERPRISE 2.0 SOCIAL APPLICATIONS WITH ORACLE WEBCENTER SUITE

Oracle WebCenter Suite is the primary product line for Oracle’s user interaction solutions. Oracle WebCenter Suite is the industry’s most complete, open and manageable portal platform that enables Enterprise 2.0 business processes and maximizes collective intelligence. Organizations can deploy a broad range of solutions in heterogeneous environment with Oracle WebCenter Suite’s Web integration and interface services. These solutions include portals and composite applications with unique capabilities for Enterprise 2.0 collaborative and social applications that seamlessly combine search, publishing, and knowledge management.

Oracle WebCenter Suite is an integrated set of products used to create social applications, enterprise portals, collaborative communities, and composite applications—all built on a standards-based service-oriented architecture.

Oracle WebCenter Suite is an integrated set of products used to create social applications, enterprise portals, collaborative communities, and composite applications—all built on a standards-based service-oriented architecture. The suite combines the declarative development of JavaServer Faces; the flexibility and power of an integrated, multichannel portal framework; and a set of horizontal Web 2.0 services that provide content, collaboration, presence, and social networking capabilities. Oracle WebCenter Suite provides an open and extensible solution that allows users to interact directly with services such as instant messaging, documents and content, Voice over IP, discussion forums, and wikis directly within the context of the application—creating a more-accessible and streamlined user experience.

Together, these tools and services empower end users and IT to build and deploy next-generation, collaborative applications that improve key internal and external business processes.

ENTERPRISE 2.0 IN ACTION

Companies are deploying Enterprise 2.0-based social computing solutions such as Oracle WebCenter Suite to increase worker productivity and drive innovation in both internal-facing and external-facing business areas.

Companies are deploying Enterprise 2.0-based social computing solutions such as Oracle WebCenter Suite to increase worker productivity and drive innovation in both internal-facing and external-facing business areas. Additionally, many companies' IT departments have adopted Enterprise 2.0 technologies to improve their operations. The examples discussed below highlight how existing company functions, such as marketing, research and development, IT, human resources, and finance can be transformed through the use of social computing tools.

Marketing

Marketing can use tools such as mashups and wikis to keep track of both competitors and customers.

Mashups can bring together enterprise data from portals and CRM or ERP applications, and combine it with external data such as RSS feeds from blogs and news sites, and then blend in ad hoc content from wikis, Microsoft Word documents, and others.

Competitive analysis is often a core marketing function but staying on top of fast-moving competitors and providing timely information to salespeople is a challenge. What if everyone in your company could participate in providing competitive information? Sales, service, support and other market-facing functions all have important bits of knowledge about competitors. By creating a collaborative, wiki-based workspace that is open to all employees, marketing can tap into key competitive information, regardless of where it resides, and provide instant alerts via e-mail or RSS.

Understanding your customer base is critical for success. But finding and aggregating all relevant internal and external information is time consuming and keeping it all up to date is almost impossible. Mashups allow marketers to aggregate, synthesize, and act upon the information they need to meet their customers' needs. Mashups can bring together enterprise data from portals and CRM or ERP applications, and combine it with external data such as RSS feeds from blogs and news sites, and then blend in ad hoc content from wikis, Microsoft Word documents, and others. The result is a dynamically refreshed 360-degree view of the customer.

Research and Development

Blogs, wikis, and tagging can help researchers better gather and manage information which results in better knowledge of customer needs and less time spent on keeping researchers up-to-date on the latest trends.

Are you still using focus groups as the primary way to glean customer requirements? Now you can engage customers with highly personalized user experiences on your Web site. For example, you can gather customer comments on product blogs or on open wiki workspaces for product feedback. Many companies, particularly those that sell to consumers, are also monitoring their brand in the

blogosphere¹ to gauge customer likes and dislikes. RSS feeds from key blogs provide a way for product managers to stay on top of relevant sources of customer feedback.

Managing information overload is a big challenge for research and development organizations. Try using social bookmarking and tagging technologies to help employees better manage their information, easily share relevant content with colleagues, and quickly find experts on a given topic. Social bookmarking and tagging coupled with a social search engine can improve search results and actually improve your ability to locate information as more people and more content become part of the community.

IT

Business units that want to implement Web 2.0 technologies reach out to IT for expertise. In fact, the IT department can implement these technologies to solve its own problems such as project backlog and limited resource availability.

How do you sell the benefits of Enterprise 2.0 to management? Start small with a project that solves a current business problem. For example, look for measurable improvements to current processes or ways to boost productivity through information sharing. Also, reduce the presumption of risk surrounding Web 2.0 technologies by starting within the confines of your business, rather than with external offerings involving customers.

Lightweight mashups are quickly becoming the next generation of enterprise composite applications. How do you ensure that developer productivity is maximized and governance standards are maintained when building mashups from widgets, RSS feeds, and other content sources? Make sure you deploy an enterprise-ready mashup platform. The platform should provide access control for the underlying Web artifacts used in the mashups. Additionally, it should allow developers to build new mashup applications faster by creating a library of reusable widgets that can be shared among all Web applications—regardless of development language or runtime environment.

Enterprise 2.0 applications must be compatible with existing IT systems. How can this be ensured? Enterprise-grade social computing solutions are now available to seamlessly integrate with your existing portal framework, consume content from back-end systems, and plug into existing security models.

Are you looking to reduce your endless project backlog? It's time to deploy DIY Enterprise 2.0 tools for end users to create simple applications and collaborate without hand-holding from IT. However, in a world where users can easily expose sensitive data to group wikis, IT is still responsible for data security. So you need to strike a productive balance between the wider exposure of information and ideas

¹ Blogosphere is a collective term encompassing all blogs and their interconnections. It is the perception that blogs exist together as a connected community (or as a collection of connected communities) or as a social network. Wikipedia (accessed July 30, 2008).

from increased user participation and the need to protect the enterprise. How do you secure data without unnecessarily restricting users? One approach is to build encryption and other safeguards directly into the datasource. For example, when a user pastes revenue figures into a wiki, the data will still be protected. It seems simple enough, but solving the problem requires architectural rethinking on how you build applications to really work.

Enterprise 2.0 applications must be compatible with existing IT systems such as portals, content management, and security, but how can this be ensured? Enterprise-grade social computing solutions are now available to seamlessly integrate with your existing portal framework, consume content from back-end systems, and plug into existing security models. This enterprise sensibility is one of the big differentiators between consumer Web 2.0 and Enterprise 2.0. One integration example is tagging and social search that can sit on top of your existing portal and search infrastructure. The result is more-effective search and expertise location capabilities that improve the return on investment (ROI) of your existing IT investments.

Human Resources

Leverage your human resources department's career management knowledge with a blog on corporate career paths or use wikis to extend recruiting tools and information to all hiring managers.

How about an internal career blog that provides points of view and advice on career management at your company? The good and the bad might be revealed, but won't be anything that employees aren't already saying or e-mailing to one another. With a blog, management can track what is said and be more prepared to act on what it learns.

Think about the power of a recruiting mashup that mashes together job postings, candidate profiles, and company benefits. Your interviewers are more productive because they can more-easily answer candidates' questions or proactively provide information to them.

Finance

Personalized financial dashboards for executives mean better decision-making while wiki workspaces for financial reporting documents can make finance employees more productive and efficient at the end of the quarter.

Imagine giving all the executives in your company the ability to create their own personalized financial dashboards for the businesses they run. Rather than providing fixed reporting views that are hard to change, executives could drag and drop various reporting widgets—preconnected to datasources—onto a Web-based workspace and create custom mashup dashboards on the fly. What are the benefits of this move to user-centric financial reporting? They are improved executive decision-making and better ROI from your business intelligence investments.

With personalized financial dashboards, executives could drag and drop various reporting widgets onto a Web page and create custom mashup dashboards on the fly, resulting in improved executive decision-making and better ROI from your business intelligence investments.

The quarterly budgeting process will never be the same after implementing Web 2.0 technologies. Rather than e-mailing last quarter's budget in spreadsheet attachments to your team, you could get everyone to collaborate on the same page by simply sending out a URL to a preloaded wiki-based workspace. This workspace would allow team members to comment, edit entries, upload related documents, or collaboratively drill into individual line items—all while capturing each contributor's input and making budget planning easier, faster, and more collaborative.

CONCLUSION

The emergence of social applications in the enterprise can enable the next wave of knowledge worker productivity. Such an increase in productivity is a vital requirement for business efficiency, growth, and innovation at a time when competitive advantage in many industries evolves from superior management of information assets and interactions—with customers, partners, competitors, and employees. Interactions represent the ad hoc activities that form many of a company's most strategic processes. Capturing information about interactions and activities can both improve productivity and provide insight into how best to respond to market demand and competitive pressures.

Managing interactions via an internet-powered, user-focused, and community-centric social fabric is at the heart of the enterprise social Web. Many companies are starting to build social Webs using Enterprise 2.0 social computing solutions from vendors such as Oracle. But where can the social Web and social computing solutions eventually take business? The short-term impact is a boost to individual and team productivity as user-provisioned tools; collaborative workspaces; and flexible, connected company networks replace desktop applications, inefficient silos, and rigid hierarchical structures. A longer-term benefit of enterprise social computing is a transformation in how businesses adjust to market changes, resulting in new approaches to product development, sales, marketing, and other operations.

Businesses will compete more and more on their ability to continuously innovate, not just increase revenues or cut costs. This will mean collaborating across the value chain with partners, suppliers, customers, and even competitors to harness knowledge, target opportunities, and drive innovation. The ultimate result will be new organizational structures that are highly flexible, dynamic, and responsive to the market and employees. Free-form innovation that leverages community knowledge will become a dominant work pattern for all participants.

Enterprise social computing results in new organizational structures that are flexible, dynamic, and responsive to the market and employees. Free-form innovation that leverages community knowledge will become a dominant work pattern for all participants.



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Author: Ajay Gandhi

Oracle Corporation
World Headquarters
500 Oracle Parkway
Redwood Shores, CA 94065
U.S.A.

Worldwide Inquiries:
Phone: +1.650.506.7000
Fax: +1.650.506.7200
oracle.com

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