

Web 2.0 Pressures IT, Shows Benefits

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Business today relies heavily on e-mail. Maybe too much so. Users make e-mail work for everything from a collaboration tool and knowledge repository to a filing cabinet. It has largely replaced the telephone and fax.

But new forms of communication also have emerged with Web 2.0 tools, like blogs, wikis, podcasts and RSS (Really Simple Syndication). Users are applying those technologies and seeing business benefits often without any formal guidelines or policies from IT.

With this deluge of information sources, there is rich content and corporate memory that, sliced in the right way, could benefit the organization significantly. So why haven't KM and collaboration tools that can organize and leverage this content caught on like wildfire?

"Users and IT administrators hate them," says Jeffrey Mann, VP of research at [Gartner](#). "Sophisticated KM products put the burden of management on the users, who must take additional steps to access documents and register them with the system."

David Gilmour, president and CEO of [Fact Software](#), says, "The perennial arrogance of most KM software is that its proponents believe it can change culture and user habits, but it can't. KM has to be easy to use to be successful."

A recent study by [Butler Group](#) on the document collaboration segment of the enterprise content management (ECM) market covered 10 leading collaboration tools. It included major vendors like EMC, IBM, Microsoft, Open Text and Oracle. Each vendor was asked to use its own software to create and review the report. But eight of the 10 vendor participants gave up and resorted to using e-mail!

"E-mail remains overused within enterprises," Gartner's Mann continues. "The main reason for this derives from its success and ubiquity. If I want someone else to see something, the best way is to send them e-mail, because you know that pretty much everyone in business reads their e-mail every day. You cannot count on that for most alternatives. They *might* look at a wiki or team space, but they might not. This creates a tremendous advantage to e-mail over any of the possible alternatives."

A new report by [Forrester](#), "Web 2.0 Social Computing Dresses Up for Business," supports the contention that although corporate IT departments have seen the benefits of Web 2.0 technologies, the vast majority have made limited investments in a formal implementation of them.

The combination of the volume of e-mail and lack of user friendliness of collaboration tools has created an opportunity for a new wave of smaller, lighter and less expensive tools that leverage Web 2.0 technologies but are less obtrusive and demanding of users.

Taking from successful Web 2.0 ideas, like blogging, social networking and wikis, newer options—like [Tacit Software's Illumio](#) and [Awareness](#), on-demand enterprise social media platform—help companies maximize the use of content locked in corporate memory without forcing additional work or structure on collaborators.

Tacit's Illumio is designed to leverage the expertise, social network and unpublished information of every employee. It "crawls" user e-mail, blogs and other sources, and builds interest profiles. It then alerts users when a colleague is searching for knowledge or contacts they may have, and gives them the option to connect and share that knowledge. But it is up to them, and their interest profile information isn't blasted out to the entire organization.

Awareness is a managed, hosted solution that leverages the power of user-generated content to create online communities that connect employees, customers, prospects and partners. That improves employee collaboration and can drive new forms of revenue and channels, and it is seamlessly integrated into intranets and Web sites. Its users include McDonald's, Kodak, *The New York Times* and Northwestern Mutual.

So it seems that Web 2.0 innovations like [blogger.com](#) and [myspace.com](#) are beginning, in fact, to be applied to the new Enterprise 2.0, and they are demonstrating real business benefits.