Can applying Web 2.0 to an organization make it faster, better? It's certainly making for more collaboration and knowledge sharing.

A sea change appears to be underway across companies, small to large. It's about sharing information, tools, and knowledge via the application of Web 2.0-like tools within the enterprise, often bringing these tools inside firewalls. It's called Enterprise 2.0 and all its accoutrements have the potential to be razor sharp in their ability to bring individuals together to get their work done, actually excel in what they do while keeping an organization far ahead of their lesser-endowed colleagues.

Snake oil? No, not if applied right, suggest the Enterprise 2.0 AIIM Advisory Panel members we polled for this article. So what is Enterprise 2.0 anyway? Backing up, let's start with the definition of Web 2.0. Roughly, Web 2.0 covers a range of Web-based tools and technologies like social networking sites, wikis, and blogs that allow for the sharing of information, ideas, and collaboration.
People will adapt to Enterprise 2.0 and embrace its tools because it helps them get their work done.

AllIM Advisory Panel member David Weinberger, fellow with the Harvard Berkman Center for Internet & Society, says Web 2.0 contains these elements:

1. applications can interoperate or use each other for services and data;
2. acts as a tool for user expression and connection; and
3. allows for a network effect, that is, it causes the application to have a value to people dependent upon the number of users already using that service.

“You can get a large-scale phenomenon that emerges unexpectedly just because there are so many people linked together, and in some ways, the collaborative projects we’ve seen like the popularity of Wikipedia were unpredictable,” Weinberger says, adding, “The notion of Web 2.0 leads people to think that, say prior to 2005 before Web 2.0 became known, people only put up brochures on their websites or didn’t have a way to express themselves. That’s not true.” That ability to express and share information was always there with the Internet, Weinberger says, it’s just that now the tools and technology are much easier to use.

So Web 2.0-like tools that foster community-driven content are now coming inside firewalls, allowing participants to collaborate and share information inside their far-flung networks, including with customers, vendors, alliance partners, and so forth. “Enterprise 2.0 is really about adopting Web 2.0 technology and values. The hard part is to figure out what Web technology and values to adopt,” Weinberger says.

AllIM Advisory Panel member Andrew McAfee, associate professor at Harvard Business School, coined the Enterprise 2.0 term and uses this definition: Enterprise 2.0 is the use of emergent social software platforms within companies, or between companies and their partners or customers. Emergent means that the software is freeform, and it contains mechanisms to let the patterns and structure inherent in people’s interactions become visible over time. Freeform software typically accepts many types of data, is free of up-front workflow, usually optional and is indifferent to formal organizational identities.*

As McAfee noted in his 2006 Sloan Management Review article, “Enterprise 2.0: The Dawn of Emergent Collaboration,” Enterprise 2.0 stands to supplant other communication and knowledge management systems because of its ability to capture tacit knowledge, best practices, and relevant experiences throughout a company, making this information readily available to more users. The benefits? A highly productive and highly collaborative environment as knowledge is shared and outputs become more visible.

An example of Enterprise 2.0 is found in the enterprise- or project-based wikis that project managers, software developers, and any other employees use and contribute to while working on a particular project or product rollout. Those wikis may use folksonomy, that is, collaborative tagging to annotate and categorize content, linking to internal or external blogs and wikis, intranets, or even content management systems. Or, a company may enhance its business intelligence repository by using software that integrates Web 2.0-like features such as blogs or comment forums to supplement historical company data.

Knowledge Management for the People

The business of knowledge management thus becomes decentralized and egalitarian. “Centralized control goes away with Enterprise 2.0,” Weinberger says, noting old-school methods of
Got Enterprise 2.0?
Based on the experts polled for this article, here are some attributes of Enterprise 2.0:

- Open sharing of information and ideas in appropriate settings
- Bringing Web 2.0 applications such as social networking tools and wikis inside the firewall
- Transparency of knowledge
- Open systems and applications that allow users to easily and directly contribute
- Collaboration, collaboration, collaboration

Enterprise 2.0 is:

- Internal company wikis
- Enterprise tagging (such as del.icio.us type applications as a business server product)
- Employee blogs
- Enterprise social networks

Got Web 2.0 and traditional ECM structure?
Your organization might use Web 2.0 tools and make good use of enterprise content management systems but you still may not have Enterprise 2.0.

Enterprise 2.0 isn’t:

- Taxonomy controlled by one person or department, limited or no taxonomy of information
- Keeping data and information to yourself
- Working in a vacuum without sharing information and ideas
- Closed systems and applications

Examples of what’s not Enterprise 2.0

- Traditional document management and content management systems
- Email and most forms of instant messaging
- Intranets, groupware, and information portals
- Wikipedia, YouTube, Facebook, etc. (these are for individuals, not companies)
- Viral and stealth marketing activities that use social networking like YouTube and social tags on press releases

a centralized repositories or even company libraries managed by librarians have the potential to be jettisoned. “The old way doesn’t scale. The only way to scale it is to distribute the tasks and change the nature of authority.” Another example, sharing knowledge 2.0 style, Weinberger says, is an employee in one part of the world discovering an external Web page of interest and tagging the page to automatically share with others within the organization with a similar interest.

In short, Enterprise 2.0 is far messier than many of today’s self-contained document management and content management systems, Weinberger says. “It’s messy but far richer. It means things are being classified within ways that makes sense to the readers.” Classification or taxonomy of company information, under the premise of Enterprise 2.0, isn’t limited to strict business rules and document management systems. It certainly isn’t limited to one person or department. “Things get linked according to things readers see. Messier sorts of systems have more information through links to each piece, making them easier to find.”

So what does Enterprise 2.0 and its adoption mean for the ECM industry? First up, the attitude of some software providers serving the ECM industry will have to change, suggests Weinberger. “It does require a change of attitude. Content management system providers have sudden new ground.” Some smart providers, he says, have already seen the light and have gone away from locked repositories toward publishing tools that spread documents. “Certainly there are classes for information you want to keep under control, but at the same time there’s an entire worldwide Web of relevant information that business have to keep up with.”

Taxonomy comes with the territory of Enterprise 2.0. Organizations will need to consider a dynamic content management system combined with a strong taxonomy capability. As Tom Reamey of Kaps Group noted in the November/December 2007 issue of this magazine, “Taxonomy Development Advice,” research shows combining content management systems with taxonomies delivers far greater value.

Patti Anklam, a knowledge management consultant, says big software providers like Microsoft and IBM are doing a good job at integrating Web 2.0-tools in their collaboration platforms. Microsoft SharePoint, for instance, provides capabilities like blogs as well as publishing and receiving RSS feeds.

The adoption of Enterprise 2.0 isn’t a revolution but an evolution, says Carl Frappajo, vice president of market intelligence for AIIM, and both the business and technology sides of organizations are examining. “It’s very nascent. People are experimenting with Enterprise 2.0 tools in an attempt to learn exactly what their value is and how they are different from previous technical attempts to collaboration and integration,” Frappajo says, noting infrastructures need to catch-up.

Currently many in-house Enterprise 2.0 applications are hard-coded applications that do not leverage Web-based func-
Enterprice 2.0 is really about adopting Web 2.0 technology and values. The hard part is to figure out what Web technology and values to adopt. – David Weinberger

...tionality and standards, so a push may come toward adoption of service-oriented architecture-based solutions. Frappalo says, “That involves creating more standardized calls to routines and functionality so there is less code to write.”

Not only do IT infrastructure hurdles abound around these tools, but so do cultural and policy issues. Frappalo says, “At the front end, culture needs to support and reward openness and collaboration.” Companies will have to develop policies and procedures, for example, around types of content they’ll allow, and most haven’t thought through these issues yet. And companies are still mulling if they even want to use Enterprise 2.0 tools.

Power to the People

Still, the ubiquitous electronic world isn’t going away. “Now in a digital world, everything is metadata. It improves our ability to locate the information and enriches it,” Weinberger says, noting each user discovers different relevance in material. And because information is shared, each person can find completely different meaning in something that’s relevant to their job or a project.

Indeed, the emphasis is on the individual and not the individual as part of a company-ordained user group, for example. The individual’s outfit to others as well as its own dominion of sorts is the point behind Enterprise 2.0 tools, says Stowe Boyd, a Web consultant, “The individual becomes the center. The individual is the new group.”

Anklam says putting “people” into content and context is the point behind Enterprise 2.0. “There are barriers inside organizations of having that social network, in referencing open book marks of people and information. People may not be afraid of that transparency, thinking ‘if I share this I’m not going to get the reward.’ The more social tools you have can be perceived as more threatening to some people.”

On the other hand, Anklam acknowledges that the knowledge-management paradigm is dissolving. She sees a lot of “innovation on the edges,” with companies first having used Web 2.0 tools publicly on the Web are now developing their own applications. One example is a company that heavily used collaborative or social tags like del.icio.us. “They don’t want the world to know they’re researching a topic so they’ll use an open source tool and do the development inside to make it a supportive tool within their own infrastructure.”

Another example is a company that has recognized the value of social networking sites outside the enterprise so it developed its own interactive phone book of sorts creating an online directory of employees, incorporating internal social bookmarks. “You see a link to the person and their role in the organization and link to their phone book page,” Anklam says, noting that once enough people adopt these tools in an organization the network effect can happen to benefit individuals and the company.

Boyd says people will adapt to Enterprise 2.0 and embrace its tools because it helps them get their work done. “Enterprise 2.0 is really about moving into a setting where the Web supports you in a better way of doing the day-to-day minutia of personal interactions with people,” he says, adding, “People are merely trying to get by most of the time and these tools help you coordinate your daily affairs with 30 to 40 people in the company you have interactions with.”

Shifts Happen

What’s it going to take for Enterprise 2.0 to take hold inside firewalls? As McAfee noted in his Enterprise 2.0 article, managerial support and leadership of Enterprise 2.0 initiatives is crucial. Anklam agrees. “Transformation doesn’t happen until you get to the place where leadership is using it and participating and when the tools are actually used to help manage the business.”

She says the sharing of content in this regard certainly distributes power and authority through the enterprise though it’s far too early in the game to signal any significant changes yet from the organizational perspective.

Stowe says expect to see blogging becoming “traditional” to the enterprise in a few years and many ECM software providers may go by the wayside, morph into consultancies, or otherwise go away as new companies come in to serve the market with new solutions. Similar in fashion to today’s Twitter “tweets” (text-based posts) or FaceBook’s mini feeds, Boyd says “life streaming” providers will likely pop up in a world of convergence where people want and get all their information, social network and blog updates, etc. all in one place, and work-related content will flow, part and parcel, into the stream.

AIIM is currently running a large survey to the business and technical enterprise community on all things Enterprise 2.0 and will report on findings in a future issue (for preliminary data, turn to page 10). Stay tuned.

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