Google Enterprise Apps: Forcing Competitors to React

Three years ago—August 13, 2008—eWeek published "Google Gmail, Google Apps Are Not Enterprise Ready." Shock headlines have become a signal that the publication wants to generate traffic to the Web site.

The article by Clint Boulton, however, makes several valid points about Google's enterprise products and services. There was a reference to Google's problems in 2008 with keeping its Gmail service online and accessible. Mr. Boulton referenced a number of industry analysts who echoed a single theme: When a cloud service goes offline, users cannot access their data, email, or applications.

In November 2010, Google made available a number of new products and services to Google Apps customers. To control these applications, Google created a dashboard-style interface. The shift to the new interface will probably be completed by the time you read this column.

Among the applications available are Google Voice (a Skype-influenced telephony service), Picasa (an image manager and search application), and a somewhat daunting three score more.

According to Google's blog posts and public announcements, Google wants the enterprise to be "consumerized". To make the point crystal clear, Google has included its CheckOut service (an online payments system similar to eBay's PayPal) and AdWords (Google's online advertising system).

Google modified its nomenclature for its expanded service. Of interest to me are Google Apps for Business and Google Apps for Government. Google continues to land high-profile commercial accounts, including Genentech, Motorola Mobile Devices Division, and Capgemini, among others. Perhaps Google's biggest win in late 2010 was a deal to provide Google Apps to the US Government's General Services Administration. Google lost out on a similar deal for the US Department of Interior and seems to be pursuing legal action against that US government agency. When a company sues a unit of the US, that company is definitely serious about winning enterprise accounts. On a recent trip to Washington, DC, I asked several government executives about their view of Google's alleged legal maneuverings at Interior. The answer? "No comment." In my experience, a procurement team becoming involved in legal hassles has negative mojo.

Google has been working over the last two years to enhance its enterprise products and services. Among the notable milestones are enhancements to security. Web sites and trade publications have focused on Google's certification for the US government. FISMA is an acronym for Federal Information Security Management Act. (For details about FISMA, point your browser to http://csrc.nist.gov/groups/SMA/fisma/index.html.

However, the more interesting security capabilities appear in a 2010 white paper *Security Whitepaper: Google Apps Messaging and Collaboration Products*. You can download a copy of this 14 page document from

http://www.google.com/a/help/intl/en/admins/pdf/ds_gsa_apps_whitepaper_0207.pdf

Google acquired Postini September 2007. Postini, at the time, offered security and corporate compliance solutions for email, instant messaging, and other Web-based communications. Postini had at the time of the deal more than 35,000 business customers and supported 10 million customers. Postini's capabilities embraced inbound and outbound policy management, spam and virus protection, content filtering, message archiving, encryption, and specialized services to ensure that email is not changed.

The question I often hear when I express my confidence in Google's Postini-centric security methods is, "What's a Postini? Why have I never heard about these security services?" I don't have an answer to these questions. My view is that Google's marketing may not be reaching some audiences. The company's main Web site for its enterprise apps is located at http://www.google.com/enterprise/. A newcomer to Google's service will find that each of the links reveals increasing levels of detail.

A good example is the link to Google Apps, which Google says, "Foster stronger communication and collaboration between employees." The subsite for Google Apps explains the benefits that have earned the company more than "three million businesses" as customers. These include Google's cost savings compared to on-premises solutions, synchronization of mobile email and calendars, data security, and Google's "reliability guarantee" for 99.9 percent uptime.

Of particular importance is Google's highlighting 24/7 customer support. Google relies on email, frequently asked questions, and Google Groups' participants. One criticism I have heard is that Google can be elusive when some customers try to contact the firm. In early 2010, the widely-read TechDirt.com blog ran "Once Again, Google's customer Service Is Becoming an Issue." See http://www.techdirt.com/articles/20100112/2044117719.shtml. In my experience, customer service is an issue for many vendors. Google does not provide on its main Google Apps's Web pages a telephone number, preferring to direct inquiries to an Apps team member via email. However, you can locate Google telephone numbers via a Google search for "Google customer service." If resellers or partners are a licensees main point of contact, service and support inquiries go to that organization. TMCNet.com published on December 2, 2010, "Google to Pay More Attention to CRM". http://www.tmcnet.com/channels/contact-center-software/articles/122943-google-pay-more-attention-crm.htm The write up asserts, "…It's definitely a good thing that Google is taking customer relationship management more seriously. It's just a plain fact that you only get lasting business from taking the utmost care of your customers."

When I shift my attention from Google's security and customer service to developing for Google Apps, I had to run a Google query "Google apps enterprise developers." Google maintains separate mini-Web sites for developers. I could not locate a direct link from the basic information about Google Apps for the Enterprise to the Apps Enterprise Developer information. I located useful information at http://code.google.com/googleapps/. In order to dig into the substantive information, you will need to obtain a free Google account. General information is available without registering, but the code examples and access to developer functions requires registration. Fees may be involved, but details of the programs can change.

I recommend that you register and contact Google via email to discuss what you want to build. The Google Apps marketplace makes it possible to generate revenue. You can find this information at http://code.google.com/googleapps/marketplace/. There is one inconsistency in the information presented. Google refers to "two million businesses" in the Apps Marketplace and in the main Apps splash page as "three million businesses." This is a detail, and a large one. I would like to know how many Google Enterprise Apps customers Google really has.

Microsoft probably questions the millions of customers count as well. Google and Microsoft have been less and less reluctant to criticize one another's enterprise products and services. The rhetorical heat rose in the spring of 2010. One Microsoft-centric blog reported "Microsoft Blogger Slams Google Apps." I dismissed the allegations as routine marketing. However, in December 2010, Microsoft made evident its view of Google's enterprise ambitions. According to DiTii.com, a senior manager at Microsoft's online services unit allegedly said:

> *"There's no doubt that businesses are talking to Google, and hearing their pitch, but despite all the talk, Google can't avoid the fact that often times they can't meet basic requirements." "Constraints such as inadequate product support, failure to provide a roadmap, poor interoperability with other line of business apps and limited functionality are all reasons why public sector organizations such the State of Minnesota and New York City have said 'no thanks' to what Google is offering." […]Regardless of how organizations are thinking about the cloud, Microsoft provides a choice for their productivity needs; on premises, in the cloud or as a hosted solution. Google doesn't offer any such choice."*

The sentiment was noted by the Wall Street Journal and dozens of other information services, including the UK publication Channel Register.
http://www.channelregister.co.uk/2010/12/02/microsoft_blasts_google_apps/

If tensions are rising between Google and Microsoft, the companies are behaving in a manner familiar to anyone watching the tussle among Hewlett Packard, Oracle, and SAP. The battle for the enterprise is indeed serious. Litigation is, in my opinion, replacing innovation. And the stakes are high. Enterprise vendors realize that the "shelf space" in companies for software and services is getting smaller. I have noticed that some lobbying activities are underway. Large vendors are using the resources at their disposal to gain an edge in a tough market.

Is Google ready for the enterprise? Microsoft thinks so. And Brussels-based Initiative for a Competitive Online Marketplace (ICOMP) appears to be focusing some of its attention on Google. Coincidence? Possibly. I am fence sitting on this imminent border clash. When big armies fight, the grass gets trampled. Pile the bodies high and all that.

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