
Google Nurtures Its Enterprise Services

In the last month or so, Google has taken steps to bolster its enterprise services. In an interesting move, Google, according to *Fortune Magazine's* February 2011 issue, is recruiting enterprise sales talent from Oracle. Oracle! With Google and Larry Ellison's company engaged in a high-profile legal dispute which may have far-reaching consequences for open source software the hiring of some Oracle "talent" will do little to improve relations between the two Silicon Valley rivals.

But Google is pragmatic, and Oracle is one of the best enterprise sales and marketing organizations around. Google obviously believes that its enterprise sales and marketing efforts needs help from superstars, not math wizards who can pass an IQ test. Big, big change I surmise.

A few years ago, landing a job at Google required a lengthy interview process and, for some candidates, a written examination designed to flag the type of technical talent upon which the Googleplex built its reputation. If Google is looking for individuals who can hit a sales goal, the company is taking a step to bring more traditional discipline to its enterprise initiatives.

Some marketing pizzazz is needed. One can navigate to Google's "Solutions Gallery Submission" page at <http://code.google.com/enterprise/submit.html>. The information is in text, lays out submission requirements, submission guidelines, and provides some tips. One example: "Your software must not violate any applicable laws or the rights of third parties, such as copyright." With Google engaged in numerous legal disputes which bump into copyright, the statement is interesting. I did not see any reference to malware. I find this peculiar in light of Google's alleged misstep with Android application malware. (See "Analysis: Google's Android malware problem," *Dayton Business Journal*, March 8, 2011 at <http://assets.bizjournals.com/dayton/news/2011/03/08/analysis-googles-android-malware-problem.html>.)

In one of life's painful coincidences, Google has stubbed its toe, notably with a recent glitch in Gmail affecting more than 100,000 users. (See "for 40,000 Gmail Users, Google Has to Leave the Cloud to Review the Tapes, Techcrunch, February 28, 2011, <http://techcrunch.com/2011/02/28/gmail-failure-2011/>). A number of customers lost and then some partially recovered their email. Growing pains for cloud centric services? Yes. Understandable? Yes for a high-profile, although free services. But a fault is a fault and for an enterprise looking at Google as a replacement for Microsoft or other enterprise-class email application, the broken toe can be an inhibitor for some world class organizations.

On the good news side of the ledger, Google took an important competitive step as well. The company made available a plug in that lets users of Microsoft's ubiquitous Office move documents to Google Docs, edit them, and share them with other Microsoft Office users. Google's connector works with Office 2003, 2007, and 2010. In addition to Word files, Google allows users to share Excel and PowerPoint documents within Google Docs. The method reminded me of some of the features that the disappointing Google Wave offered.

The easiest way to understand the potential of the connector is to try Google Cloud Connect. To locate the code, navigate to Google.com and enter the phrase “Google Cloud Connect.” You will need Windows XP or above. If you use XP, you will need the Dot Net framework, Version 2.0. If you want to skip the download and learn by watching, Google offers one of its YouTube videos that show the product in action. I prefer written documentation, but Google has in the last year been relying on quick-and-easy, informal video summaries. As Google pushes more deeply into the enterprise, the company may need to complement its videos with more substantive, better organized documentation in my opinion.

In ITProPortal (<http://www.itproportal.com/2011/02/18/web-future-cloud-computing-google-apps-chief/>), David Girouard, the person managing Google’s enterprise business, is reported to have said about cloud-based enterprise applications:

You have to build confidence over time. The reality is that everybody will be doing it. It's like using a telephone. You don't think twice about using a telephone for business purposes now, but it used to be considered strange,”

Google turned to its lexicon to name a software free trial “Appsperience.” The neologism is even more clumsy than the “searchology” moniker that Google trotted out for its announcement of “universal search”. Name choice aside, the trial program allows an organization to take a 90 day test drive of Google’s enterprise applications. The program also matches a company kicking tires with a Google partner. Most Google partners can set up and work around any issues that may arise. Most of those hopping on the Google enterprise application race car will find a partner’s assistance useful when working through the collaboration dashboard feature. In order to avoid the problems of sending presentations via email, the dashboard is a way to organize collaboration and keep the revisions to documents manageable. Because changes propagate across other team members documents, co-editors may be surprised to see a passage change when reviewing a page.

As significant as these innovations, Google demonstrated its willingness to move from controlled chaos to basic business common sense. Finally Google committed to an application certification process. Announced in February 2011, Google will keep track of information technology professionals who create, sell, and support Google enterprise applications. Does Google rubber stamp those who pay a fee? No. Knowledge must be demonstrated. VNU reported in “Google Launches Apps Certification Program” that the Google’s online accreditation test is charged at £90, and consists of 98 multiple-choice questions, some of which have multiple responses. The test is currently in English, but will be made available in other languages soon. One hopes that Google improves the stringency of its certification methods for Android applications in order to eliminate malware from Android mobile apps.

The suggested pre-requisites for those wanting to obtain certification are at least three years’ information technology experience. In addition, hands on experience with deploying enterprise applications involving integration is suggested. Clearly necessary is knowledge of Google’s methods.

The question some organizations will want to ask is, “Can I shift from on premises installations of certain enterprise applications to Google?”

The answer, like so many important questions, is a diplomatic , “Maybe.”

For small organizations or start ups, Google provides a reasonably priced alternative. The upside is that the cost of licensing Microsoft applications, maintaining Windows XP, Windows 7, or Windows small business servers can be reduced, possibly eliminated. The downside is that a Google glitch could leave the organization without access to documents. With some planning, these drawbacks can be eliminated.

For a large organization with a capable information technology staff, Google’s enterprise applications can be used for certain work groups and business units. I would not eliminate tired-and-true approaches to document creation across the board. The reason is that in regulated environments, prudent managers must weigh the problems lost data, inaccessible information, or inconsistent processes may create. Google does offer hardened email services based on the capabilities of its Postini acquisition. Many organizations have to work within a web of regulations about documents and information. In my opinion, I want a documented track record that organizations using Google Apps can successfully comply with regulations.

Google is maturing in its enterprise offerings. However, I am mindful of the shifts taking place with regard to the Google Search Appliance. The product line for 2011 has been trimmed to two options, the GB 7007 and GB 9009. Some organizations may find that the cost and support for the GSA collides with Google’s emphasis on cloud-delivered search. An appliance is an on premises installation. Therefore, as Google’s senior managers assert that the future is the cloud, the GSA looks increasingly like an orphan.

In order to test Google’s customer support, I placed a call to Google to inquire about its Google Search Appliance. No luck. I then placed a call to the Google Places advertising unit. Not only did I get a person eager to sell me a \$25 Place flag, I was connected to a manager when I asked how to “boost” my Places flag to a local Adwords' listing. This is not much of a test, I admit. But it does show that Google can put customers in touch with Googlers for Adwords, but not yet for Google’s enterprise services. Some day, I believe. But after 13 years in business, one would expect a human Googler to be available for a potential enterprise customer in my opinion.

Nevertheless, Google management continues to emphasize that the enterprise is important to Google. ThinkExist.com offers up this statement by Mr. Girouard:

“Enterprise search software is so clearly bereft of soul. Enterprise search has not been useful to users. It's not simple, comprehensive or reliable.”

Soul?

One issue that nags at me is the Google commitment to certain enterprise products and services. For instance, what is the roadmap for the Google Search Appliance? The GSA was

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the future for enterprise search for many years. Fast forward to 2011, the GSA looks to me like a product that could be marginalized as Google shifts to the cloud, leaving the GSA a fish out of water. I have no hard information about the future of the Google Search Appliance. As Google emphasizes the cloud, an on-premises servers adds a layer of sales, pricing, support, and security complexity in my experience.

If the GSA is marginalized, will the same type of interest shift be imposed on Google's present enterprise strategy? With pressure on Google increasing due to competitive struggles with Microsoft and legal tangles with Oracle, significant changes could be made without warning.

Enterprise-grade applications are mission critical. Organizations are often conservative. The potential for change within Google's enterprise products and services is somewhat higher than at other enterprise software vendors. Google has the enterprise in its sights and is making the right moves now.

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