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## Google Wave Splashes into the Enterprise

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Google Wave has its supporters and its detractors. The supporters strike me as the technically adept. The detractors cover a broader spectrum of humanity. Like many of Google's services, Wave is a trial, what Google calls a beta. Wave is a mash up of email, documents, and collaboration. The Wave is virtual box so that information in the box is accessible to authorized users of a particular Wave. Information in a Wave can be searched and manipulated without the all-too-familiar Easter Egg Hunt in use daily at most organizations.

Google's Wave may build to become whopper. The Google Wave beta makes it possible for users to interact in real-time. Participants in a Wave can create structured conversations. The conversations in the Wave are not limited to text. Wave users can insert video, images, and gadgets (small programs). The system supports automatic notifications. Users can edit simultaneously the Wave conversations. Google's system allows a Wave to tap into such Google services as maps, translation, and spell checking. Depending on one's point of view, Wave is email with elements of wikis and Web logs.

Despite the beta label on Wave, some high profile enterprise software companies have been quick to embrace Wave. One example is the German software giant, SAP. The company has been struggling to regain its revenue momentum. Its third quarter report for 2009 revealed a 30 percent decline in top line sales compared to 2008. Necessity is, my grandmother used to say, the mother of invention.

Google described Wave as an HTML 5 application. Its application programming interfaces allow developers to hook in other Web services.

The technology strikes me as a digital envelope. Users no longer have to go to different applications to get information pertinent to a project. Instead of looking at an email and then trying to locate a comment in discussion group, Wave puts everything in one place. When I heard about Wave, I thought about my habit of collecting my children's inflatable toys and putting them in the plastic wading pool I put in our backyard during the summer. The small oasis was an easy way to keep the colorful stuff in one place for easy access.

SAP's research unit has made available a demonstration named Gravity. (Watch the video of the demonstration at <http://www.wikio.com/video/1731595>.) SAP's engineers have blended some of SAP's business process modeling technology (what SAP calls "BPM") with Google's Wave technology. The result is a digital basket in which comments, information objects, and other types of data can be exchanged, modified, and organized. The idea of Gravity is to allow individuals working with an SAP BPM task to have the benefits of a virtual meeting and a virtual library.

According to SAP:

*"The idea is to describe a process that allows a homeowner or business to come online as a micro generator within a township and the various steps (human and automated) that are required. Sustainability gets better over time, the more neighborhoods choose to generate power from green sources to supply the very power this neighborhood consumes - and in pretty much the same timeframe. This also reduces the losses of transporting power over longer distances. Thus, power companies will more and more become brokers, and less actual suppliers of power... You are in a contract with the 'virtual power plant' and you can either be within the parameters of the contract and receive the good rates, or go above your contracted power consumption and must pay additional fees. (This can be due to a couple of things, you have bad weather and do not produce enough power and now must consume power at a higher rate. Or for certain reasons you must consume more power than previously contracted, because you have guests in town and must run your a/c on high). At this point, you can continue your contract, or go back and re-contract your plan. (Similar to a cell phone company where you can re-adjust your plan after several months of going over your minutes)"*

Could SAP have used Lotus Notes or another collaborative platform? Yes. My view is that SAP is looking for an angle that will give the company an edge. With Google Wave, SAP's engineers have embraced Google's mature collaboration and communication platform. The demonstration sends signals to SAP customers that the company is innovating. SAP also gets a media boost as trade publications report on SAP's early and aggressive experimentation with Wave.

Wave combines a number of services, features, and functions in one digital location. I use the word "dataspace" to refer to a Wave environment for the SAP BPM demonstration. Authorized participants in the SAP BPM space can send email, comment on documents, search for information, and review which participant contributed which piece of information.

Google's Wave technology unlike Lotus Notes or Microsoft SharePoint can span multiple servers. Everyone participating in a Wave dataspace has his or her own server. Wave uses the XMPP protocol to weave together the dataspace. XMPP is an acronym for Extensible Messaging and Presence Protocol (<http://xmpp.org/>). Unlike some groupware systems, Google Wave is "open". XMPP does the heavy lifting by synchronizing and distributing changes across the Google Wave servers via peer-to-peer connections.

A participant in the SAP Gravity dataspace can edit the content, which exists as XML with lipstick and a fancy dress. Individuals working in the Gravity dataspace have the graphics and user friendly interfaces that SAP users expect. SAP's engineers have mashed up Wave, SAP BPM, and SAP NetWeaver technology.

Other companies exploring Wave include Novell. You can explore the Novell Pulse service at <http://www.novell.com/products/pulse/>. The Pulse-Wave product delivers "real time

communication, authoring, and social messaging--for you, your enterprise...well, anyone." Novell is making use of Wave's federation function. A "federated Wave" allows Novell's servers to host the Wave components, which reduces some of the security and privacy concerns that seem to be like a spaniel dogging at Google's heels.

The Google Wave technology is a metaplatfrom. Organizations do not have to abandon existing technologies to benefit from Wave. A Google Wave like the SAP demonstration serves as a way to bundle information objects and features together. The principal pay off may be the reduction in the amount of effort that often goes into the information treasure hunt. In most organizations, users have to look for needed information. No one system integrates across and among separate systems.

Is Google delivering a new invention? No. Google does not invent in the manner of Bernard Riemann OR Nikola Tesla. Google is closer to Thomas Edison in approach, method, and intent. Google assembles in creative, innovative ways. Google Wave, therefore, looks like existing groupware with a greater emphasis on assembling existing components into a highly scalable, extensible network-centric system. Scale is the Google innovation, not the already familiar, individual components of a Wave.

The notion of a running conversation inside of other information objects is interesting, but it is an extension of what I used to do with sticky notes and phone calls.

Google has not been a front runner in the social network space. The company's Orkut service (<http://www.orkut.com>) is not at Facebook.com stature in the US. With the company's recent announcement that it would index Facebook.com and Twitter.com "tweets", Google is responding to front-runners in the social content space. Wave may become Google's principal social tool for its enterprise unit. On the other hand, Google's "beta" label is no guarantee that Google will commercialize the product.

The success of Wave is not a certainty. Powerful incumbents like Microsoft and IBM will respond to Google Wave. Furthermore inertia in organizations remains a significant barrier. Change is expensive, and not even a low cost Google tool comes without direct and indirect costs no matter how compelling the demos.

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November 9, 2010

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