White Paper:

Why microblogging and activity streams will overtake email for enterprise communications and collaboration.

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Introduction:

Despite the growing use of intranets, wikis, Instant Messaging and content management tools like SharePoint, email remains the dominant communication and collaboration tool of enterprises. Email's ability to convey anything and everything is a powerful enabler. Yet that enabler has resulted in email being overused and misused. Email usage has grown to the point that email inboxes fill faster than they can be handled. More and more of a corporate worker's time is spent dealing with the onslaught of email, while the ratio of useful email-to-junk email has fallen.

In the consumer space, Facebook and Twitter have shown how friends and family can stay connected and communicate frequently and richly without email. Pockets of employees have started to use Facebook and Twitter to share with and follow their co-workers. Enterprises are now looking for ways to bring social network communication paradigms to the workplace in a way that provides for privacy and security of proprietary information for a "social network" that is comprised of their employees. Although social networking has enabled explosive growth in communication and entertainment in the consumer space, it has un-tapped potential to increase productivity in the work place in a way that email never can.

Micro-blogging and social network activity streams have recently gained some adoption in the workplace. However, current products supplement email as a new and isolated channel of communication and collaboration within a subset of co-workers, and they provide little or no integration with other enterprise tools. Many also fail to provide features that allow an enterprise to realize the full potential of a vibrant, open microblogging/activity stream product.

This paper explains the benefits of microblogging and activity streams for enterprises and why enterprise communication and collaboration will migrate away from email and toward microblogging. This paper also describes attributes of a microblogging product that is structured for the enterprise.

By 2014, social networking services will replace e-mail as the primary vehicle for interpersonal communications for 20 percent of business users.

"The rigid distinction between e-mail and social networks will erode. E-mail will take on many social attributes, such as contact brokering while social networks will develop richer e-mail capabilities,"

By 2012, over 50 percent of enterprises will use activity streams that include microblogging, but stand-alone enterprise microblogging will have less than 5 percent penetration.

The huge popularity of the consumer-microblogging service Twitter, has led many organizations to look for an "enterprise Twitter," that provides microblogging functionality with more control and security features to support internal use between employees. Enterprise users want to use microblogging for many of the same reasons that consumers do to share quick insights, to keep up with what colleagues are doing, to get quick answers to questions and so on.

-Gartner, Feb 2010

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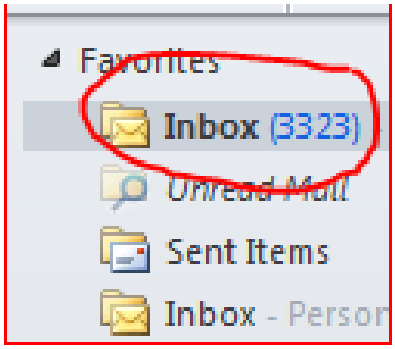
Email: used and abused

Email is used within a company for everything from information requests, status reports, task assignments, communications with customers and suppliers, meeting invites, document distribution, notices from HR on benefits to birthday wishes. In 2009, Radicati reported that the average corporate worker spends 25% of his/her work day on various email-related tasks. In comparison, the time spent in personal meetings accounts for about 14% of the typical work day, and office and phone conversations occupy only 9% of the typical work day. Email usage has grown to surpass face-to-face and telephone modes of communication and collaboration. Radicati predicts that in 2010 the average business email user will send/receive 110 emails per day.[1]



In reality, only a fraction of the email that hits our inbox deserves our immediate attention. We filter out the important email by sender or subject. The rest are best deferred for another time, or saved and never read until we need to search for it. Worse yet, many emails we receive are not relevant to us. As we apply this method of deferring reading email, we let the count of unread emails grow to the thousands at the risk of missing an important task, request or information gem.

Employees and corporations attempt to deal with the growing email inbox by using email inbox rules, filters, folders, Outlook's ignore feature or Gmails' mute feature. However, these may result in unintentionally deleting useful emails or hiding future emails that may be important. These are simply workarounds and they do not address the real problem.

Some corporations have recognized that part of the problem is cultural. Too many workers feel the need to get noticed by adding their voice with a REPLY All. Some companies like Nielson have reacted to this behavior by disabling the REPLY All button in their corporate email clients. Other companies have declared email-free days. Even with these measures, some workers declare Email bankruptcy by deleting the contents of their email inboxes and starting afresh. Another response is self-censorship - many workers are choosing to withhold useful information for fear of having their email judged as SPAM by the recipients. None of these "remedies" help to increase information flow, increase collaboration or creativity.

[1] "Email Statistics Report, 2010", The Radicati Group, Inc.

What's really going on with many of those unread emails is that email is often misused for content that should be shared with those who want access to it in a "Pull" paradigm. What may be a valuable email to one person may be noise to another. The recipient should have the ability to "Pull" this content on demand (or not) instead of having it "Pushed" at them.

Email and "Push" vs. "Pull"

The email user paradigm has the following basic characteristics for the sender:

1. The sender authors a message and addresses it directly to one or more people with their known email address.
2. The sender expects that their message will appear in the inboxes of the recipients and be viewed by them.
3. The sender expects that their email will be read and that the reader will reply, take action or digest the content in some way.
4. The sender expects that the message is only seen by the addressed recipients, although it is possible that the message could be forwarded to others,

The email recipient paradigm has the following characteristics:

1. The recipient does not expect an incoming message unless it is follow-up from another communication (voice, fax, IM or email) …i.e. messages are "Pushed" to the reader.
2. The recipient knows that the sender expects them to read the message and to either digest the information of take some action (reply, do a task, attend an event, write a document etc.)

SPAM exemplifies the main problem with this paradigm. Email is a Push channel that provides direct access to our attention by anyone with our email address. We give our email address to people, companies and to web sites in trust that they should only send us messages that are important to us. An unwanted email from an unknown source about Viagra is a clear abuse of this channel. SPAM filters can help with some of that. But we also get a flood of email from known sources that is either useless or that we would prefer to see if and when we need access to it ("Pull"). The shift from subscribing to delivery of e-zines, blog post updates and news through email to subscribing to RSS feeds is an example of moving from a Push paradigm to a Pull paradigm. We are already segregating our information flows into Push and Pull to manage our email inboxes while increasing our access to information.

The bigger problem with email when used within the enterprise is that it traps knowledge in the email inboxes of the sender and receiver. Knowledge is the key asset of a company. There are some email use cases that should remain confidential. But much of the information exchanged between employees should be open. Discoveries shared between two researchers could be used by a marketer to come up

with a new product. Success stories of one sales rep could benefit other sales reps. Problems faced by one software engineer working on Project A could be solved by another software engineer working on Project B.

Social Networking, the Pull Paradigm and the Enterprise

Facebook and Twitter have introduced new communication paradigms that have been wildly successful. Facebook now has over 400 million active users and 50% of them log in every day. The average user has 130 friends and creates 70 pieces of content each month. As of April 2010, Twitter has over 100 million registered users.[2] Twitter users are, in total, tweeting an average of 55 million tweets a day and 37% of active users tweet from their mobile phone. As users of these services, we follow the updates and news feeds from our friends and networks. Our friends and networks are free to update and tweet about anything and everything, and weare able to manage it better. Social networking has revealed that there is a better way than email to stay connected with more people and to know more about them. How is this increased connectivity and increased sharing possible, even enjoyable, without being a burden? The key is in the how people connect with each other and how people share content. The core paradigms of these consumer applications are directly relevant to the work place as well. These core paradigms are:

1. **Microblogging** - publishing short status messages or updates of two to three sentences. Objects like documents, photos, videos, or links may be attached.
2. **Following** - the ability to subscribe to the Activity Streams of people or things.
3. **Activity Streams** - Flows of messages concerning a person or object of interest like "Mary created a Task in Project Marketing". There may be many Activity Streams for a person or things. For example there may be separate Activity Steams for an employee such as status updates, tasks, documents, events, comments to other people's messages, profile updates, new followers, new people following or location.

These three paradigms can be used to create a powerful Pull environment for information sharing, communication and collaboration in an enterprise context.

The immediate benefits of a product that uses these paradigms over email are:

1. Microblogging encourages short, one-topic, terse messages. Attachments can accompany a microblog message. But if there is an attachment, the message conveys the context so that the interest level can be quickly determined.

[2] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/04/14/twitter-user-statistics-r_n_537992.html

2. The Follow/Follower model lets an employee opt-in to receive the Activity Feeds from another employee. In email speak, this is analogous to an employee being able to put their name on a CC: list or take their name off of a CC: list in an email thread.
3. Activity Steams provide segregated categories of information that a reader can subscribe to. One employee may be interested in document and event activities of a peer but not care about status updates, tasks, or activities associated with specific projects.

This is just the beginning of the benefits of Pull environment based on microblogging and activity streams. An enterprise microblogging/activity stream product is about creating an open, vibrant network of information sharing. It is about:

- Providing access to the people, knowledge and resources when needed.
- Enabling and increasing the rate of discovery of people, knowledge and resources that support the goals of the individual and the organization.
- Providing work spaces where teams can share, collaborate and create.

In Facebook, we can discover shared interests with friends and friends of friends. In the enterprise, we need to learn about ideas, discoveries and skills of the colleagues we know and the colleagues we should know. In Facebook, we can browse the photo albums from a friend's vacation. In the enterprise, we need to able to browse the documents of a colleague who works on problems related to our work. In Facebook, we can read the profile and wall of a newly friended person in our network to see where they grew up and what movies they like. In the enterprise need to be able to search for and read the LinkedIn profile of all our colleagues to locate people with background and skills with whom we can collaborate. In Facebook we can follow Fan pages of celebrities, companies and events related to our personal interests. In the enterprise, we need to follow leaders, teams, projects and events related to our work goals.

"… PULL, the ability to draw out people and resources as needed to address opportunities and challenges. Pull gives us unprecedented access to what we need, when we need it, even if we're not quite sure what "it" is. Pull allows us to harness and unleash the forces of attraction, influence and serendipity. Using pull, we can create the conditions by which individuals, teams and even institutions can achieve their potential in less time and with more impact than has ever been possible."

-Hagel, John III, Brown, J.S. Davison, L. "The Power of Pull, How Small Moves, Smartly Made Can set Big Things in Motion", Basic Books, 2010, p2.

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An enterprise microblogging product will enable and encourage:

- Convenient sharing of status updates, documents, knowledge and ideas among individuals and work groups.
- Building relationships across disparate locations and time zones.
- More visibility across the organization.
- Discovery of people, knowledge and resources.
- Dissemination of information and building collective intelligence.
- Increased speed of problem solving and creativity.

What to look for in an Enterprise Microblogging/Activity Stream Product

Here is a list of features to look for in an enterprise Microblogging/Activity Stream product.

Feature	Description/Benefits
Intuitive Microblog Publishing Widget.	This is the essential tool for sharing. It should support text and attachments. It could also support creating other content like tasks and events. It should also allow the user to specify an open share (to all followers) or a share targeted to followers of Activity Streams for a project, en event, an organization etc.
Activity Streams	Views of activity streams of people, projects, events, etc.
Search	All content shared within the enterprise (unless subject to privacy or other restrictions) must be searchable. The ability to search for status updates, ideas, tasks, event, documents, IM sessions etc.
Integration with an enterprise employee directory through LDAP	Enables all employees to be included in the "social network", searchable and identifiable by their name, email ID or other enterprise identifier.
Intuitive interface to find and follow colleagues	Employees should be able to find each other by name, ID, organization, picture, email address, etc. The tool should allow selection of Activity Streams for subscription.
Rich Employee profiles – import from LinkedIn	Employee profiles that describe professional and personal skills, background (work, education) and interests allow employees to learn about each other as people as well as resources.
Privacy and security	Access to the product should secure to protect proprietary data
Access on the PC desktop and mobile	Access should be possible from any PC Internet browser while in the office or elsewhere. Access on popular mobile devices like the iPhone and Android devices extends access. Desktop clients provide more convenience.
Support for project or group sites	A work space for information sharing, document sharing, and discussion threads, related to a project or topic of common interest, supports how employees work and create. Members of the project follow the project and see information shared within the project appear in their Activity Steams just like individual open shared information. Project Activity Steams allow segregation of information.
Support for shared tasks and events	These common work structures can be supported as a content type to share and be followed in Activity Streams

Document sharing	Docs should be sharable through all Activity Steams. In the context of a project, Document work flows may be implemented. The follow model may be applied to documents so followers will see updates and workflow events.
Presence enabled Instant Messaging (1-on-1 or group)	Presence of the author associated with content in an Activity Feed with the ability to start an IM session enables real-time interaction.
Contact colleagues by SMS, voice or conference conferencing	If the author of content in an Activity Feed is not online, alternate communication methods enable real-time interaction.
Social Applications	Social applications to recognize each other, reward each other, challenge each other, learn about each other, foster relationships and encourage sharing and openness.
Administrative Interface to manage employees, content and features	Tools to manage features, users, content, security and performance are essential.
Ability to involve people outside the company in limited groups or activity streams	The ability to extend access to Activity Steams to involve customers, suppliers and other parties. The product should allow selectivity in exposing Activity Steams, project and work spaces externally.
Integration with SharePoint and other Document management tools	Many enterprises use SharePoint or other Document Management tools. Integration with existing document management tools enhances the microblogging product work spaces and adds social features to the document management tool.
Support for Blogs and Wikis (optional)	Blogs and wikis function as collaboration tools, and as such, they have uses mainly in sharing "unstructured" information associated with *ad hoc* or ongoing projects and processes

Conclusion

Microblogging and Activity Steams allow information sharing and collaboration in a Pull paradigm. The Pull paradigm offers tremendous benefits over the Push paradigm of email. As products are developed that deliver enterprise-grade Microblogging and Activity Steams are developed and adopted by Enterprises, employees will see the benefits and naturally migrate their communication and collaboration toward microblogging and away from email just as we have seen in the consumer space.

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.
WSJ.com

OCTOBER 12, 2009

Why Email No Longer Rules...

And what that means for the way we communicate

By JESSICA E. VASCELLARO

Email has had a good run as king of communications. But its reign is over.

In its place, a new generation of services is starting to take hold—services like Twitter and Facebook and countless others vying for a piece of the new world. And just as email did more than a decade ago, this shift promises to profoundly rewrite the way we communicate—in ways we can only begin to imagine.

We all still use email, of course. But email was better suited to the way we *used* to use the Internet—logging off and on, checking our messages in bursts. Now, we are always connected, whether we are sitting at a desk or on a mobile phone. The always-on connection, in turn, has created a host of new ways to communicate that are much faster than email, and more fun.

Learn about MangoSuite

MangoSpring offers MangoSuite, a business communication and collaboration product built around enterprise grade microblogging and activity streams. Visit www.mangospring.com to learn more.