

Forward Thinking

By Marta Bright, Caroline Kvitka, Fred Sandsmark, Rich Schwerin, and Patricia Waddington

Instant Messaging or Instant Mess?

Instant messaging (IM) is poised to do for business communications today what e-mail did in the 1990s. Once a tool for home users, IM has crept into corporate life – in a big way. According to Black Diamond, Washington-based market research firm Osterman Research, IM software is present in 92 percent of enterprises in North America and is used by 23 percent of enterprise e-mail users. Osterman expects usage to reach 80 percent of e-mail users by 2007.

IM can be a huge productivity boost. Rather than phoning or e-mailing a colleague, you can get your question answered in seconds. Can't get your phone calls returned? The "presence" capability of IM tells you when your "buddies" are online – which makes it hard for them to ignore the pesky blink of your message (and vice versa).

But introducing IM involves a cultural shift, says Lena West, CEO of xynoMedia Technology, a technology strategy firm in Yonkers, New York. One client who recently introduced IM reports that it has made the office less stuffy and streamlined processes. "The normal 10-minute trip to ask a coworker a question has been cleaved by almost 75 percent," West says. "You can ask a quick question without losing your focus." But IM has its downside. Employees complain about misunderstandings and added stress, because IM has created another "bell" to which workers must respond.

Another concern about IM is security. In most companies, IM started with individuals deploying consumer-grade clients from the likes of AOL and Yahoo!. These clients don't provide encryption, local routing, or other security capabilities and can often penetrate corporate firewalls. This opens the door to viruses, worms, and other malicious content, and does not protect sensitive content transmitted by IM. They also lack auditing and logging capabilities, presenting significant problems for companies that archive employees' electronic communication. And IM clients can be a bandwidth drain, especially since IT hasn't allocated server space for them.

The bottom line? If you want IM and secure communications, you need an enterprise IM solution that provides security, manageability, and auditing capabilities. Some enterprise solutions feature transaction logging and document collaboration as well. With encryption, you'll protect traffic that crosses public data links. Enterprise solutions also offer features to control users and privileges, and let users share a central contact list. Administrators can also manage a central archive of messages, providing the auditing necessary to ensure regulatory compliance.

Ready to try IM? West recommends setting guidelines, such as logging off rather than ignoring messages if you don't want to be disturbed, keeping messages short and to the point, and avoiding inappropriate content.

Better Intelligence Better Integration

A host of enhancements, along with new product offerings, is coming to Oracle E-Business Suite this fall. With an emphasis on even better integration and information, Oracle E-Business Suite 11i.10 broadens horizontal functionality, delivers better industry-specific capabilities, and further lowers costs.

Oracle is advancing its integration capabilities to provide companies that run Oracle with other applications the ability to automate business processes across the enterprise. The enhanced integration capabilities provide comprehensive support for business-to-business, enterprise application, and process integration.

Oracle also provides a single view of a company's customers with the Oracle Customer Data Hub, a fully integrated customer data management solution that centralizes, de-duplicates, and enriches customer data, continuously synchronizing with all data sources.

Significant enhancements to Oracle E-Business Suite's intelligence capabilities are in store, with a huge increase in the number of reports, dashboards, and key performance indicators available through Oracle Daily Business Intelligence. In addition, a new Enterprise Planning and Budgeting module streamlines the planning, budgeting, and analysis process.

Oracle E-Business Suite 11i.10 also works harder to meet the needs of industry-specific and horizontal business processes. New enhancements aim to increase the automation of internal processes, expand integration between sales and marketing, promote margin growth, and support compliance and risk management efforts. High-tech manufacturing, engineering and construction, financial services, healthcare, pharmaceuticals, public sector, telecommunications, and many other industries all benefit from enhanced functionality. Notable enhancements include functionality to facilitate Basel II compliance for the financial services industry, radio frequency identification (RFID), clinical trial management for the pharmaceuticals industry, and provisioning automation functionality for the telecommunications industry.

"Oracle E-Business Suite 11i.10 is a major milestone for Oracle and offers a significant expansion of industry-specific and core business process functionality," says Ron Wohl, executive vice president, Oracle Applications Development. "Customers now can use the sophisticated integration capabilities of Oracle E-Business Suite 11i.10 to reduce the time and cost associated with integration projects."

For information on new Oracle E-Business Suite 11i products, rapid implementation services, consulting, product support, and more, visit oracle.com/applications.

Special Events

October 1-7, Grapevine, Texas

www.afsmi.org

The S-Business Education Summit and Expo brings together service professionals from throughout the world. This year's conference includes sessions covering business operations, strategic and future trends, and technology solutions.

October 11-15, Atlanta, Georgia

www.swift.com/index.cfm?item_id=40406

Sibos is the world's premier financial services event, attracting more than 5,000 attendees and 200 of the industry's leading application and middleware vendors, systems integrators, financial institutions, consultants, and central clearing systems from around the world.

October 13-15, Chicago, Illinois

www.hrtechconference.com

HR Technology Conference and Exposition is the world's leading business conference on technology for HR executives and professionals. Sessions will offer case studies, industry experts, vendor competitions, industry analysts, and much more.

October 24-26, Palm Desert, California

elaonline.com/events/2004call.cfm

Featuring keynote speaker Lawrence J. Ellison, the ELA Annual Convention is the largest annual gathering of professionals in the equipment leasing and finance industry.

Sailing the Seven Seas

You may not be a billionaire, but this elegant book allows you to watch them at play. *Legendary Yacht Races* (Abbeville Press, US\$55) brings together 200 photographs from the great races. Some photos are serene, others show the drama of the battle between boat and sea. Likewise, you might find the book motivational – or you might be grateful that your work involves nothing more hazardous than tripping on the way to the coffee pot.

Corporate Drum Circles All Together Now

As you enter the departmental meeting, you brace yourself for another ritual in miscommunication. At times, it seems no one is playing in tune – or even playing the same song. You've tried development seminars, offsites – even a ropes course – to no avail. Everyone's marching to the beat of a different drummer.

But have you tried guiding your drummers toward a common beat? Playing music together creates synergy and camaraderie. As teams play music – the theory goes – individuals develop a common language.

With 30 years of drum circle facilitation experience, Arthur Hull, founder of Village Music Circles, is considered the father of the modern drum circle movement. "When I first started Village Music Circles, drumming was either the study of culturally specific rhythms or a free-form 'hippie-thunder-drumming-in-the-park' event," says Hull. "I created ways to make rhythm expression an accessible tool for creating community in many populations, including schools, kids at risk, the elderly, business meetings, and gatherings for almost any purpose."

Before you dismiss Village Music Circles as some remnant of the '60s, consider the who's who list of Fortune 1,000 clients for whom Hull has facilitated drum circles over the years. It includes corporations ranging from Apple and Bank of America to General Electric and the Wall Street Journal. "Motorola SPS Division brought me in for a test program, and it was the most conservative business organization we've ever worked with," says Hull. "So I was surprised to find myself in their leadership training program for the next four years."

Corporate drum circles, it would seem, got rhythm. But where did the modern movement begin?

"[Grateful] Dead shows have the concept of 'in the moment' music-making with drums. I've developed programs that deliver that same experience but serve specific agendas for specific populations," says Hull. "The melting of corporate physiology in group drumming creates a kinesthetic vibration that acts as a massage. That massage permeates the hearts, minds, and bodies of the participants and literally melts the physiology of separateness. The result is a level of camaraderie and group synergy in two hours you'd normally see after a three-day offsite."

Some of the other benefits include team-building, stress reduction, and message delivery. "Not only do we demonstrate the functional elements of how a team works together successfully, but the experience actually builds a team out of the participants in a very short time," says Hull. "Plus, the act of playing in a rhythm-based event is not only fun and exciting, it's also stress reducing. You just feel better after you bang on a drum."

To learn more, contact Village Music Circles in Santa Cruz, California, at +1.831.458.1946 or www.drumcircle.com.