Intranet X.0 – Trends and Futures

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Summary

Organizations like the [WW Intranet Challenge](#) and the [Nielsen Norman Group](#) provide excellent coverage of what's happening in the intranet/portal/digital UX world, so I thought I'd take a slightly provocative view of this space to mix things up a bit and get the conversation going around what's really happening and where things are going.

Contact toddray@alumni.stanford.edu if you have comments!

Current Trends

A few notable, high level intranet trends here in mid-late 2014 from 3rd party research, customer experience and my professional opinion are listed below. This represents a synthesis of what I see happening at a broad scale right now in the world of intranets (and related technologies).

Enter the SoMo generation.

- **SoMo (Social/Mobile).** Pretty much everyone in business these days is SoMo (social/mobile) – consuming and/or interacting with information differently than 10 years ago (e.g. at different times, on different devices, in a more social manner), requiring a re-thinking of intranet sites, apps, content and usage expectations.
- **Impact of "Full-Plate Syndrome"**. Users with limited bandwidth (time) during the day are increasingly challenged when it comes to finding time to navigate to portal and social environments (at least while at work in front of their desktop).
- **Emergence of "Casual Computing"**. Evolving scenario: workers are interacting with enterprise systems more and more via external/mobile access modes during downtime (e.g., standing in line for the bus, coffee before/during work, at lunch etc.).

BYOD 2.0: Mobile becoming a reality, with renewed pressure from the consumer side.

- **Enterprise Ready**. At the top of everyone's list but perennially challenged, "Mobile" is continuing to come out of its shell, with organizations finally figuring out the right mobile strategies aligned with business and technical needs across different mobile personas, device types and intranet applications.
- **Managed Security**. Security remains a concern but technical mitigations prevalent
- **Continued CoIT Pressures**. Modes of mobile access to information continue to expand with new types of end-point devices emerging from the consumer space (see Futures)

Big Tent Social

- **Imbedded Social**. Social is moving out of the "hype" state and into a more reasoned part of the communication and collaboration portfolio – as standalone enterprise social networks (ESNs) continue to search for a purpose, social stays valid via pervasive incorporation into various content, communication, collaboration and application environments.
- **Balanced governance**. Organizations continue to grapple with and mitigate concerns over open communication vs. compliance risk.
- **Social Moves On**. Organizations continue to leverage learnings from past failures and are re-thinking their social strategies as we start gravitating towards a "post-social" world (see Futures section).

Emergence of data visualization and analytics

- **Real-time data-viz**. User expectations about access to real-time data in their intranet environments is on the rise, putting demand on corresponding publishing, integration and delivery systems. For users, information about the environments they're working in (e.g. who's there and what are they doing?) will become increasingly important. (See Futures section).
- **Data -> Information…Insights?** Increased emphasis on information rich infographics and data visualization appeal to those looking for the summary view but have the potential downside of dumbing down complex information sets required for proper decision making.
- **Evolution through analytics**. For administrators, analytics will start playing more of a role in understanding internal usage patterns and adjusting information worker (IW)-focused capabilities accordingly.

Enterprise ADHD, Information Overload, Application and Content Dynamics

- **Minimalist Apps and Content.** Organizations continue to grapple with how to adjust their application and content strategies to increasingly short attention span behaviors coupled with information overload, i.e., adjusting application and content strategies to workers accustomed to numerous, minimalist, small-function applications on their consumer mobile devices, as well as to pre-digested sound bites, top 10 lists, infotainment, etc.
- **New content experiences via aggregation and personalization**. Net new content, delivery vehicles and interactive expectations continue to overwhelm certain subsets of the user base, potentially resulting in avoidance behavior altogether unless creative ways are utilized to target information to different user types.

  Past visions for personalization and aggregation (driven by information overload and end-user fragmentation) are now becoming reality as the role of search changes to that of a content provider/aggregator.

  Search evolves to more of a suggestion-engine and content-surfacing function. Moving into 2015, for example, Office 365 will be providing the Delve social/content aggregation function.

Adapting to "Modern Workstyles" Through "Responsive Listening"

- **Modern Workstyles**. Organizations will need to double down on their end-user focus and adapt their solutions to new workstyles (and the other dynamics listed above), as users of enterprise applications will increasingly have choices as to where, when and on which device they interact with information provided to them (or by them).
- **Responsive Listening**. Providers of devices, applications and services will need to maintain an even closer connection to the user base as well as technology trends over time and use real-time feedback and analytics to assess efficacy, constantly tuning what's provided to improve productivity, increase innovation and drive value. *(if they don't, expect pervasive "switching behavior" to other providers)*

Futures
Enter the "Hyper-interactive", "Post-Social" world.

- **The UX Dilemma**. Capturing the limited mindshare of a "full plate syndrome" user base will remain a challenge, requiring (on one hand) renewed investment in highly interactive, even

"Hyper-Interactive" applications driven by social and other streams of new content, data and insights balanced with (on the other hand) minimalist UX designs and alternative access modes (responsive designs for mobile, as well as native applications).

- **Contextual Awareness**. More will be going on within interfaces that provide: (a) information about what's going on in the environment (e.g. who's there and what are they doing, top posts, top contributors, etc.); and (b) alerts as to what users need to focus on next.
  - o Note: (a) will require higher degrees of integration and state reflection than typically provided today in intranet (and other IW-focused) applications.
- **"Post Social"**. In the meantime, the hype around the term "social" will subside in the next few years, and a "Post-Social" world will result, whereby dynamic information about people and their relationships with other people (and the information they interact with) will be commonplace and just expected, vs. being called out explicitly as "social features".

Broad-field C3SC[1] innovation through NUI[2] and gesture-based computing

Hardware/software innovation drives new collaboration scenarios – e.g. larger, multi-function, sensory screen (e.g. Microsoft's Perceptive Pixel + Kinect technologies), device pairings (e.g. Microsoft's Surface 3 and Lumia 830), etc. For the foreseeable future, usage scenarios and applications playing catch-up to the hardware and native device software. Niche players rule the application ecosystem.

Near-field C3SC innovation via wearables and IoT

"Internet of Things" (IoT)-driven decentralization of collaborative signals, functions and inputs (i.e. information inputs and outputs increase reach to the periphery (i.e. beyond phones) into wearables, etc. (watches, glasses, etc.), with (again) scenarios and applications needing to play catch-up to the hardware. Niche players rule the application ecosystem.

So that's our list of some of the present and future dynamics we're looking at here in mid-late 2014 – let us know what you think, and please contact toddray@alumni.stanford.edu if you have questions.

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[1] Communication, Collaboration, Content and Social Computing
[2] Natural User Interfaces