

Collaboration Savvy – Virtually Essential to Tec'xcellence

By Elizabeth McLean

Working virtually is both living the dream and a tremendously demanding way to generate income. Forget, for a moment, the anxious times of cash flow and QuickBooks™. Today I'm referring to the sometimes overwhelming job of staying updated on skill sets and the emerging technologies. What to spend time on and which ones are the most meaningful to what you do? Where IS that cloning wand?

Know and grow

So here is a big tip for Virtual Business Owners: if you don't already know something about collaborative technologies, give this one your attention.

In spite of the formidable label, service providers deliver turnkey suites to consumers that are industry acclaimed, highly affordable and feature delightfully friendly user interfaces (UI).

Consider collaborative elements to be an area that you are not only able to understand but can also recommend basic elements to your clients. Apply this understanding not as mere enhancement, but as a competitive essential tool to maintaining excellence in virtual operations.

If that seems like too tall an order, develop a relationship with an expert who can make those recommendations for you. This will allow you to continue to concentrate on your specialty while equipping your clients with the competitive virtual advantages.

Still not sure how all this fits in to your strategy? Consider this: your strategic practice area is your art. Imagine daily operational tools (operating system, virus and spyware software, mail) for virtual practices to be elements on your palette. In your virtual work world, collaboration savvy is just as essential and elemental as other ops tools for technical and competitive success. How you choose to apply will be as a brush to the canvas.

Talking tech

First, demystify the terms. Here are some general industry terms for items that fall into the same category:

- Groupware
- Wiki sites, blogs
- Video-conferencing, VoIP
- Intranets, Extranets, Portals
- Real Time Collaboration (RTC) – Synchronous = same place/ same time
- Team Collaborative Applications (TCAs) – Asynchronous = same place/different time

As a virtual business owner, you work the web. Many of these tools are web-based applications. Now utilities previously only available to larger corporations with enormous infrastructures along with warehouse-sized budgets are available at rates that small businesses can enjoy!

What problem do TCAs solve?

TCAs solve the problem of joining dispersed teams or individuals working on separate networks together into one shared, secure web address location for collaboration of data and resources.

Typical group features

Security, single point of access, combining stand-alone utilities like e-mail, documents, databases, calendars, full text index search capabilities, web conferencing:

- schedule meetings without telephone tag
- collaborate on shared, protected documents over any dispersed geographic area
- web conference w/audio, record for future
- immediately have redundant file security and file transfer protocol for authenticated group members
- have live, dynamic snapshots of where the project is at any given point in time

Get creative

So where does that leave you and your usage? Great question. Ask yourself this regarding yourself or your clients: Do I want to make recommendations for myself and my clients, or do I want an expert to advise me? and What areas can

I optimize access and collaboration for myself, my clients and my virtual operations?

Successful deployment examples

Problem to solve: Five separate calendars to coordinate for weekly meetings, five different networks.

Solution: The calendar feature was such a hit that we moved from there to sharing the documents.

Results: I landed a Fortune 15 Client! The calendar would synchronize to all of their Blackberrys and to their office calendar clients so it was a win-win-win situation!

Problem to solve: Ensure daily updates to a database of dispersed consultants, no common network.

Solution: Twenty to 25 advocacy consultants were gathering data around the globe and needed to combine information to make decisions on next day's strategies. Deployed intranet and customized database with different input and reporting views and sorts. Teams stayed informed on changes so advocacy all over the globe stayed relevant and strategy was able to stay on target based on the knowledge management resources mined.

Work this way

A lot to consider here. Don't let the terms scare you away.

Develop a comfort level that collaboration is simply about finding applications that bring dispersed members of a dedicated function group into a secure, single point of access to share a group of utilities and those features and utilities vary based on the service provider. Choosing services and features should be based specifically on the type of data sharing solution that the client/group needs to solve.

Get an informal group together to take a trial with you and see what it's really like. Learn by doing!

© 2006 Elizabeth McLean,
Concerto Intranets

www.ConcertoIntranets.net

30-day trials available.

Questions about this information may be forwarded to:
emclean@concertointranets.net