

The Web Wins Whether or Not Google Wave Succeeds

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Google Wave demonstrates substantial innovation in product, platform and protocol. This initiative will take many years to affect the enterprise but will change competition and opportunities in the workplace IT market.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Event

On 28 May 2009, Google previewed Google Wave, a Web-based service that combines aspects of e-mail, instant messaging, real-time collaboration and document processing into a unified user experience. Google invited developers to add functions to Wave but did not say when it will make Wave generally available.

Analysis

With Wave, Google seeks to change fundamentally the way people communicate by turning the Web into an integrated, real-time, multiway medium. Thus, Google has undertaken a complex challenge, which earlier distributed collaboration systems, from Internet newsgroups to Lotus Notes and Groove, have addressed with varying degrees of success. Wave combines a broad suite of applications, a protocol that independent developers can use to build interoperable Wave servers, and a platform that allows developers to add new processing logic to Wave content and to embed Wave functions in external Web sites. Implementing the full Wave vision requires innovations in distributed-computing algorithms, in scalable keystroke-level "push" communications, in protocol design, and in server infrastructure and data repositories.

Google will release major portions of Wave, including the protocol and a reference implementation, under the "most liberal" open-source license to drive adoption of Wave by independent developers and make it part of the Internet infrastructure. Wave also includes innovations in technology, user experience and business model, which can drive adoption by individual consumers. However, several inhibitors will keep Wave from affecting the enterprise soon:

- The large aggregation of features, which can daunt users
- Dependence on the latest Web browser technologies
- Likely overlap with multiple areas in an enterprise's IT environment

Wave will not challenge Lotus Notes, Microsoft Exchange or Microsoft Office SharePoint Server for five to 10 years, if it ever does. Nevertheless, Wave will create both competition and opportunity for other players in the market. Wave shows that workplace offerings will eventually have to combine Internet standards and a decentralized, federated architecture. Whether or not Wave ultimately succeeds, the Web will win.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Developers:** If you are exploring the Google platform, explore Wave's application programming interfaces and protocols as a means to enhance collaboration among users.
- **Enterprises:** When users demand to use consumer Wave services for work activities, do a risk/reward analysis to determine if and when to embrace Wave. Look at some of Wave's innovations as well as features in the more mature Google Docs, such as real-time collaborative editing, to appreciate the impact of this vision on business.
- **Vendors:** View Wave as both a future competitor and a collaborator with an enabling technology.

RECOMMENDED READING

- "Google Talk: Is It Ready for the Enterprise?" — We do not expect Talk to displace entrenched infrastructures from Microsoft or IBM in large enterprises, but this could change if prices from IBM and Microsoft continue to rise. **By David Mario Smith and James Lundy**
- "Open Source at Google, 2008" — Business models emerging around cloud computing and linked to open source will be a major disruptive force in the IT industry. **By Brian Prentice**

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