



## Productivity

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### **The Next Wave in Productivity Tools – Web Office**

**It's not what you know, or who you know... it's how many people you can reach**

They are young. They are smart. And they are better connected than anyone you have ever met. This summer, twenty-somethings will be busting out of graduate school powered by a brand new set of productivity tools. Think about the jump from typewriters to word processors. Think about how, in the 1980s, our parents had to struggle to learn to use spreadsheets like Lotus 1-2-3. We are on the verge of experiencing a jump in the capabilities of office tools that is just as significant as the jump that occurred when the first PCs landed on people's desks. Why is this jump so big, and what does it have to do with today's graduates? What are these people capable of? Well, to begin with, for most of them, the internet has been around since before they started high school.

The average MBA graduates are not just knowledge workers. They are capable of being highly networked internal entrepreneurs and innovation creators. Their ability to connect is not just about email, BlackBerries, text messages and voice-mails. They are intimately familiar with all those tools, but ultimately, expertise with those one-to-one connectivity tools is just the price of admission.

What makes them so effective is their ability to work efficiently with large virtual teams and their amazing ability to maximize the power of their personal networks. Here's what this new generation of knowledge workers uses to get their work done:

**Blogs:** With 10 minutes of effort a day, they use blogs (which are web pages that are easy to edit) to reach a massive audience. They can develop a worldwide reputation as an expert in their field. These MBAs don't blog about parties or their dog. They blog business topics like marketing or financial derivatives. Even with traffic of only 5 to 10 people a day, that quickly translates into over 1,000 people who know who they are, and respect their knowledge and opinions.

**Wikis:** If you are working on an MBA and you do not leverage [Wikipedia](#) to do your research, you should. Some schools have started to set up course related Wikis as a medium for students to share information, answers, and ultimately develop a deeper understanding. Wikis are a collection of web pages that are just as easy to edit as blogs. Wikis are organized by topic like an encyclopedia, and are designed to help large teams share information.

**Social Networks:** Many of today's grads are part of [Facebook](#), which is part blog, part social networking tool. The grads know that Facebook will be an invaluable tool for keeping connected with their fellow alumni over the years. In the business world, they will join a similar social network called [LinkedIn](#).

**Project Coordination:** They have different schedules and different classes, yet they have no trouble working together. It isn't rocket science. They use online project management tools such as [Basecamp.com](http://Basecamp.com) or [Backpack.com](http://Backpack.com).

### **A new phase in the web means a new phase on your intranet**

The movement that is powering all these new technologies is loosely called Web 2.0. For the business world, Web 2.0 means three things.

**Read / Write Web.** [Richard MacManus](#) calls his blog "The Read/Write Web". The name perfectly sums up the new philosophy about the web. People now believe that instead of just surfing the web, users should contribute as much content as they consume. The results are blogs and Wikis. This is fundamentally different from simply using a web-based application to sell something, find a job or find a mate. The difference is that blogs and Wikis support the distribution of ideas and innovations. Today's MBA grads are going to expect to be able to continue using blogs and Wikis within the enterprise, just as they did at grad school.

Web Office solutions are going to use this new philosophical approach (that the web should be both readable and writable) to redefine how knowledge workers share information. With enterprise blogs and enterprise Wikis, knowledge workers will now have the ability to efficiently communicate with a large audience to share their skills, track clients, co-ordinate projects and discuss areas of special interest to them and their colleagues.

**Write Once / Use Often.** With enterprise blogs and enterprise Wikis, when you write an article or a post, that information is captured in a structured format. That means it can be turned into many things. For example, most blogging systems, including MovableType and WordPress, will turn your blog posts into a feed. This means that people who use news readers to gather information from the feeds of multiple blogs and sites like the New York Times, can also get a feed from your project.

But why stop with news readers? Today's office tools could be described as write once, search often and cut & paste even more. Web Office is going to change that. People won't set out to write searchable text when they post to an enterprise blog or Wiki, but the Web Office technology will produce searchable text that can be easily hyper-linked and searched almost as a kind of side benefit. And what an amazing positive externality it is.

Throughout Web Office, information will become efficiently reusable. For example, random project blog and Wiki posts from one employee can be combined into a full HR report on that person's performance. Every post, comment and email about a client can be combined into a simple comprehensive report on the state of the company's relationship with that client. Basic technology such as feeds are already making this possible.

**DIY Micro-solutions - aka Mash-ups, Widgets and Badges.** Before the spreadsheet came along, if business professionals wanted to do analysis, they either broke out the slide-ruler or turned to the IT department for help. Today, a business professional wanting to combine information in two web systems to create a new piece of functionality has to do it manually with cut & paste, or turn to the IT department for help.

Web Office is going to change that. Housingmaps.com is a perfect example of what can be made with this new technology. Paul Rademacher built housingmaps by combining the houses listed for sale on Craigslist with the Google mapping tool. Housingmaps was built with a little AJAX, which is about as complicated as VBA. Today's graduates are expert at building Excel macros using VBA. Just imagine what they will be capable of doing with an enterprise platform that is designed for building little AJAX tools such as housingmaps.com.

The technology isn't the key thing here. Instead, it is the idea that business professionals would want to be able to build their own web based applications. What an amazing notion! The implication is that IT should stop building end solutions that often frustrate. Instead, IT should build tools that empower knowledge workers to build their own solutions. Here are some examples of how the web is being turned into conceptual Lego:

- [CalendarHub.com](http://CalendarHub.com) has created something called Badges. Go to their site and fill in an online calendar. Then, they give you a piece of code that you can cut and paste into your blog or Wiki posts. The little snippet gets automatically updated every time you change your calendar.
- [Basecamp.com](http://Basecamp.com) is a platform for creating simple new applications from combinations of online lists and polls. Tools like Basecamp are doing for the web what spreadsheets did for analysis. They are empowering business professionals in whole new ways, allowing lists to be turned into feeds. Ismael Ghalimi, the founder and CEO of Intalio, and author of [IT|Redux](#), has released a Badge like script that helps you to include Basecamp lists in your blog. Add something to a Basecamp list, and it shows up on your blog.

### **Web 2.0 in the Workplace – What tools are needed?**

When MBA graduates show up for work, here's the components of Web Office they'll expect to find, because this is the list of tools they are already using:

**Web Based Enterprise Email:** Zimbra is a perfect example - think gMail on steroids. Click on a name and you get the person's contact information. It does the same for dates in your calendar.

**Enterprise Wiki:** Google and Yahoo! Make great use of enterprise Wikis. SocialText and JotSpot are among several enterprise class vendors.

**Social Network Tool Integration:** LinkedIn shows you how your friends can introduce you to people in high places. Companies will want to verify who belongs to their LinkedIn group using an enterprise gateway.

**Web 2.0 Project Management:** The best example is basecamp.com. Its power is its simplicity. Share editable to-do lists on a web page. Voting and Tagging Tools Think Enterprise Digg. People can vote on good ideas. If 100 people in the company like your idea, the CEO has to pay attention. Tagging, like del.icio.us will also help organize content.

**Enterprise Podcasting:** Podcasting is a method of delivering multimedia such as audio and video. Web Office is not just about words.

**Web Based Integrated Feed Readers:** In a large company, with potentially hundreds of blogs, feed readers will be critical tools for managers. See Netvibes.com.

**Widget / Badging Platform:** Widgets and AJAX badges give non-technical users the power to drop highly interactive tools into their blog posts and Wiki articles.

**Enterprise Search:** Today, internal enterprise search does not work well because it is hard to rank order information. Hyperlinks through out Web Office will fix that. For ideas, check out Technorati.com.

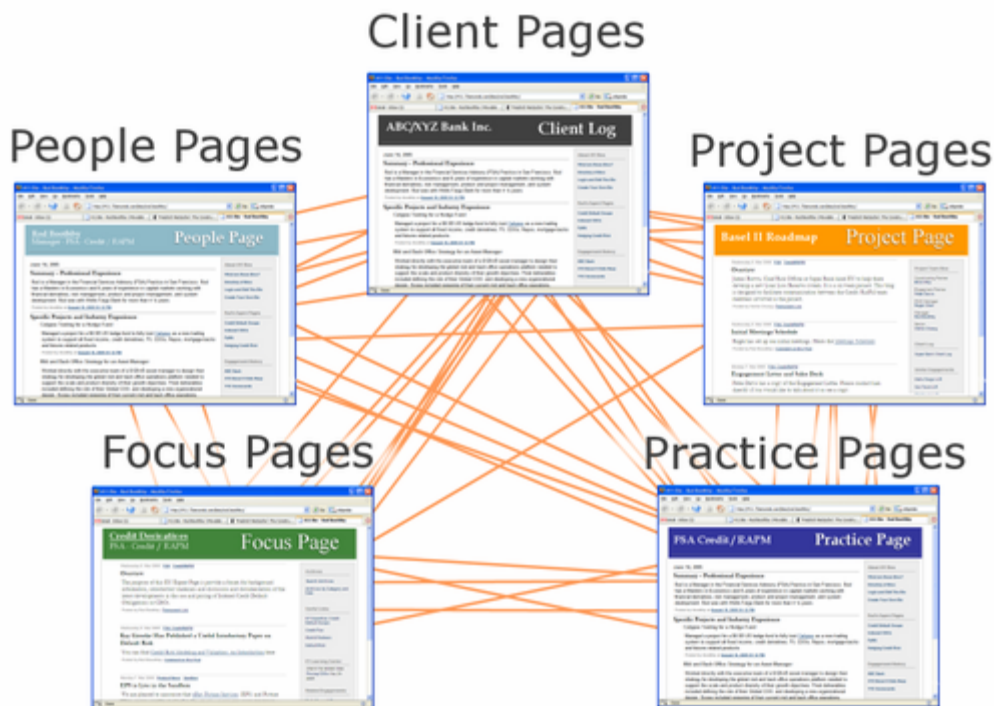
**IM based Presence Information:** Hover over a person's name and you can see if that person is online and available for an immediate dialog.

**Integrated IP Telephony:** Turn your conference calls into internal podcasts and then use Podzinger.com to convert the podcasts into searchable text. Or, apply Podzinger to voicemail.

### What will these solutions actually look like?

**An example of enterprise blogging:** Imagine if everyone in your organization had a blog that described them, included their resume, a list of all their skills, and was automatically kept up to date with a list of all the projects they were working on. You could call these types of blogs “People Pages”. That is the beginning of an enterprise blogging solution.

Here’s what my team is building for our firm of 130,000 auditors and consultants.



We are starting with 5 types of blogs. Each has a fairly narrow focus. Except for the People Pages, each type of blog is designed to be written by a group of people. We are creating an automatic cross-linking script. Add someone to the list of people working on a project and the script automatically updates their People Page. We are also setting up automatically generated directories. When someone creates a Project Page, that project will be added to the directory of all projects. By adding this minimal amount of structure, we are going to be able to help people find the information they need when they need it.

### Web Office can reduce email overload

Today, many knowledge workers feel overloaded because they are forced to react to a constant stream of email, phone calls and instant messages. Email, the phone and instant messaging have one thing in common - they all push work flows. In other words, they interrupt what you are doing. Theoretically, people can ignore all three, but generally, socially, it is difficult to get away with ignoring all three when you are at the office. Web Office will change that. With Web Office, knowledge workers can pull the information they need when they need it. They can use directories to go straight to the right People Page or Project Page. If that doesn’t work, they can use enterprise search tools. Knowledge workers can also post information, and know that their colleagues will find it when they need it. Gone is the need

to blast out an email to everyone in a large group, providing them with information they might need in the future.

### **So, how do you manage workers in this type of environment?**

Web Office is going to present a significant challenge for many managers. No longer will they gain power from control of information. Instead, power will go to managers who can cultivate an environment that encourages employees to make the most out of these new tools. Internal entrepreneurs should thrive in this kind of work place.

It also requires managers to trust their employees. Today, everyone in a large company could send an email to every single other person in the firm. That does not happen very often. However, with enterprise blogs and Wikis, people can and will write pages that everyone in the company could see. Managers will have to trust that their employees will do the right thing when working with Web Office tools, just as they trust today that people will use email professionally. And, obviously, there will always be exceptions.

Scott K. Wilder is Intuit's QuickBooks Group Manager in charge of Community and Collaboration. Scott runs a program at Intuit that sets up any Intuit employee to blog publicly about their job and the products that Intuit builds. Intuit's approach to trust is truly impressive. Scott K. Wilder told me that when he talked with Intuit's CEO, Steve Bennett, about setting up the program, Bennett's response was to say that if Intuit trusts people enough to hire them, and then to require that those employees literally follow customers home to see how the customers use the product, then Intuit certainly can trust those employees enough to blog about the company and its products in a professional way.

Such a public approach to Web Office technology makes a great deal of sense for a software company like Intuit that focuses on encouraging employees to know the customer. For other types of organizations, such as hospitals or banks, Web Office tools can help to facilitate internal communication, but there will be far less need to create public forums.

Beyond issues of trust, creating an environment that fosters innovation and encourages employees to make the most out of Web Office technology requires a different approach to motivation.

Dave Thomas, one of the original signatories to the Manifesto for Agile Software Development has some great advice: Managers should not treat their employees as equals. Instead, treat them as suppliers. Don't tell them how to do what you want. Instead, challenge them to provide you with better work products and innovative solutions.

Dave calls it management by intentions. This approach presents an amazing opportunity for a company to increase the pace of internal innovation and to get every member of the organization to focus on the company's key strategic objectives.

### **Training and Rollout of Web Office**

Training and rollout of any Web Office solutions is an important phase, and often will prove to be tougher than actually setting up the system. Intuit's Scott K. Wilder offers some great advice:

1. **People will be interested, but nervous.** People want to participate, but they also do not want to look stupid or make a mistake. People realize that Web Office's internal blogs and Wikis can be used as a great personal reputation management tool; everyone sees your work, so they know how good you are. But that same connectivity and broad internal exposure can form a double edged sword.

2. **Managers will need to learn to trust.** Any company considering allowing internal or external blogging is going to face some concern from senior management. Senior managers will need to learn to trust their employees. However, this shouldn't be too hard. Managers will quickly see that the quality of their people will not fall apart just because they are now using a new technology. However, if management does not start by trusting, and instead requires something like formal approval for every internal blog and Wiki post, then the system will never take off and the promises of Web Office will go unrealized. The self motivated, innovative and emergent teams simply won't show up.
3. **Roll-out of Web Office requires extensive training.** For many current bloggers the technology might seem obvious. However this is not necessarily true for most mid to late adapters. For example, people need to be trained on how to use the blogging system, what to blog about and just as importantly, what not to blog about. At Intuit, about 50% of the training focuses on legal issues. This may sound onerous, but actually, it helps people get comfortable with how they can avoid looking stupid or making a mistake. Taking the time to give people a solid background on these issues is critical to getting them comfortable with the technology.
4. **Senior management has to buy-in and support the effort.** It doesn't take much to get people excited about using this technology. Management will need to provide public recognition for useful internal blogs, great Wiki posts, and most importantly, for the successful efforts of internal entrepreneurs who have leveraged the Web Office system to produce tangible results. Senior management will also need to lead by example. This means they will have to participate. Even the CEO will need to run a blog.
5. **Keep and publish Web Office metrics.** Scott K. Wilder suggests that it is also important to provide on going support for the enterprise blogging initiative, through things like updates and results published on an internal blog. He suggests tracking the progress of the system. Tactically, this means designing a system to capture and report on the number of posts, cross links, page views, comments, track backs, key-words, searches and clicked on search results. And most important, pay attention to what users are saying in their comments and in their own blogs.

### **Impact on Technology companies**

The advent of Web Office is going to produce big waves in the software business. Web Office is the most serious challenge ever mounted to Microsoft's monopoly. People do not use Windows because they are emotionally attached to the operating system. Instead, they feel compelled to use Windows because so much of the business world has standardized on Microsoft Office. Today, you have to submit a resume in a Word doc format.

Web Office threatens Microsoft because it challenges the need for programs like Word. If you do all your writing on emails and searchable blogs and Wikis, why would you need Microsoft Word? Further, Gmail has already conclusively shown that working with old word files is easy on a web setting. Gmail instantly converts Word docs into HTML pages. Web Office means that you only need a browser to do your work.

Microsoft has already reacted to this situation by announcing Office Live. However, from the somewhat psychedelic diagrams used to announce the effort, and the allusions to ad supported software, it's not exactly clear they have thought through all the issues. Most large organizations will not want to have their internal blogs and Wikis littered with advertising.

At the moment, there is only one large player in the Web Office space: SalesForce.com. However, while SalesForce.com has opened up its platform with API's that encourage other developers, it

appears that they are focused on trying to provide end solutions rather than providing simple, but extremely powerful tools like internal enterprise blogs and Wikis.

The other current players in this space are very small. Examples include Sixapart, SocialText, Zimbra, JotSpot, 37 Signals and Zoho. None currently offer anything like a complete Web Office solution. But, they have all made a very interesting beginning. One of them could easily be the next Google. The company that wins this space will most likely lead with something that is not already available. An enterprise blog or enterprise Wiki provider is my best guess. The winner will quickly follow this with a widget / badging platform that will give non-technical users the power to quickly and easily create robust highly interactive web based applications.

## **Conclusion**

There are five reasons why any senior executive needs to start thinking about Web Office now:

1. Web Office technology will make partnering and out-sourcing more efficient by creating a platform that can seamlessly support virtual ad-hoc teams. Thus, it will quickly reduce costs.
2. If you have any competitors using Web Office technology, they are going to have a significant productivity lead. Web Office will be as big and important as email, and you wouldn't imagine running a business today without email.
3. Your new hires are already using this technology. Today's graduates have lived and breathed the web since they were in high school. If you don't provide company endorsed solutions, they will end up using tools that are available on the open Internet until you do.
4. Web Office will help you to increase the pace of innovation within your organization. Constant innovation is the only business strategy capable of producing a stream of above average profits. To achieve constant innovation, senior executives need to bring everyone into the effort. Web Office is the ideal tool to help achieve that goal.
5. Web Office is cheap. You will get a lot of bang for your buck.

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