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## Dynamic Content Software Strategies Consulting Service

June 17, 2005

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### Keys to Efficient Collaboration between Organizations

Collaboration among and between teams, and especially between different organizations, can be excessively manual, unorganized, and ultimately inefficient. Bring documents and other content types and deliverables into the mix, and the situation gets that much more complex. InfoTrends/CAP Ventures coined the term “content-centric collaboration” (CCC) as processes that require two or more people to create or use information contained within content or documents to accomplish a business objective. By this definition, we could be talking about anything from advertising campaigns to technical RFPs and everything in between.

With such a wealth of business activities requiring collaboration, it is no wonder that the topic is getting more attention. In InfoTrends/CAP Ventures’ aptly titled research report *Content-Centric Collaboration*, 42% of people surveyed indicated that the issue had executive-level (“C-level”) visibility, with under 5% saying that CCC is “not recognized as a focus.” That being said, many organizations and teams struggle with how to best solve problems with collaboration. This is witnessed by the fact that almost 25% of respondents indicated that their organization had not implemented content-centric collaboration technologies at any level of the company. So, if your organization hasn’t started dealing with its collaboration you are not alone, and it is not too late.

As with any complex problem, breaking it down into some important, easy to digest parts can make it easier to deal with. The first part of this report aims to provide the reader with some specific keys for improving content-centric collaboration. These keys include: collaborating across organizations; why e-mail alone cannot solve the problem; and improving business processes.

Once these important areas have been presented, we will look how collaboration technology can help. Specifically, we will visit some critical points in ensuring the success of technology solutions. These areas include user-friendliness, cost control, and compliance. By the end of this analysis, the reader should have a more solid grasp of both the problems with, and potential solutions for, efficient content-centric collaboration.

## Key Collaboration Issues

The examples are almost endless. A marketing team is getting ready to launch a new product and is under deadline to finalize a new joint advertising campaign based on input from multiple parties. Unfortunately the document is now in multiple versions as it has been e-mailed to the respective parties who electronically commented and edited it, leading to a versioning nightmare and a near impossible task of reconciling comments. The same document collaboration challenges present themselves in a variety of situations: putting together a response to a complex request for proposal (RFP), designing a new product, supporting a new information system installation, or demonstrating compliance with laws and internal policies covering document handling and privacy.

While it is difficult to boil down the myriad of issues, there are three that seem to be almost ubiquitous with many of our *Content-Centric Collaboration* respondents:

- Collaborating across organizations and teams
- The problems with e-mail as a solution
- Process improvements are at the center of many inefficient interactions

### Key: Collaboration Across Organizations

Think it's hard to get everyone on the same page when they are in the same room? Imagine what it's like when they are scattered across time zones, divisions, and even companies. Instead of increasing productivity, the nature of distributed teams can just as easily result in projects that miss deadlines, come in over budget, experience content versioning issues, and result in inefficient and inaccurate supply chains.

In these days of working from home and the mobile office, teams, even small ones, are often composed of people who do not work in the same physical location. It is not uncommon for a project leader to rely on experts situated all over the world and have team members from Boston to Bombay, while she primarily operates from her home in Bakersfield. Furthermore, the strictly hierarchical organizational structure – i.e. worker reports to boss – is often a thing of the past. Today's worker is a member of multiple teams, which are likewise often located in many different places.

Additional complications arise from the continuous establishment and disbanding of teams based on current company needs and projects. This presents issues from networking and connectivity, to simple time-zone effects, to larger-scale project management and reporting. For example, a project may start as a response to an RFP for custom product development. This team would require people from engineering to develop the solution to pitch, sales to write and present the proposal, and possibly other areas like human resources and marketing. When the company wins the project, the sales and marketing personnel would transition off the team, and those implementing the solution – more engineers, project managers, and administrators – would transition on to the team. This can cause the team to grow or shrink dramatically, as well as introduce new client locations.

Further complicating matters is the fact that many business operations involve at least some degree of involvement from resources outside the company. In our example above, it could take the form of people from the client team that provide content or expertise for the solution. It can take many forms though, including a reliance on outside consultants, coordinating with business partners, or working with a supplier to make sure the correct number of the correct parts are delivered at the correct time. All these outside influences, or the "extended enterprise," need to be considered and included in collaboration efforts to maximize efficiency and productivity.

In fact, in our content-centric collaboration research only 8% of organizations indicated that their collaboration needs are focused entirely inside the firewall. While situations utilizing outside contributors allow for more complete final products, they can present project management nightmares. Not

surprisingly, collaboration among and between teams and organizations can be greatly improved through technology solutions.

### **Key: e-Mail is not the Sole Solution**

No doubt, when people hear the terms “collaboration” or “content-centric collaboration” one term comes to mind: e-mail. It is a sad fact that many people consider e-mail to be their technology solution for complex collaboration. *Content-Centric Collaboration* found that on average, over 65% of respondents’ collaboration utilizes e-mail. Not surprisingly, respondents also indicated that over 30% of their collaboration problems are “caused by using incorrect versions of information.” This research passes the real-world test as who among us has never finalized a piece of content, only to find a newer version somewhere in their e-mail inbox or a web of file folders? Not many.

Teams are getting the message that e-mail is not enough. By the end of 2005, the percentage of respondents’ collaboration that is expected to be done over e-mail drops. Respondents also expect to improve versioning problems. This will be accomplished by investing in additional collaboration solutions.

Nobody is arguing e-mail is not a valuable business tool. We have seen through our other research, however, that it is miscast as a tool for advanced collaboration. Any real content-centric collaboration solution must take e-mail into account, but not solely rely on it. Our research on content-centric collaboration showed that “integration with e-mail” was chosen as “critical” or “very important” by approximately 60% of respondents, the most for any available feature. So, leveraging e-mail in a greater technology solution is a critical consideration, but e-mail alone just doesn’t cut it.

### **Key: Process Improvements**

To truly gain a competitive edge by speeding and monitoring critical business processes, tracking progress, and replicating best practices, organizations absolutely must define structured processes. When we think of improving business processes, we often equate it only to defining the explicit steps that the process must follow.

Nevertheless, not all processes and communications can be structured. A significant amount of ad-hoc communication to support special needs and cases will always be a part of doing business. For example, a company may not define a standard structured process and may rely on an ad-hoc process to share information on a new product launch. Launch components can significantly change from launch to launch based on the type of product or level of marketing budget. A company, however, may require a strict adherence to a process when designing a new store location or product to ensure the appropriate reviews, approvals, and documentation are completed. These exceptions and new processes can disrupt an organization that relies too heavily on transaction-based technologies.

The bottom line is: an organization that is prepared for almost anything (an agile organization) needs a complete solution that spans structured and unstructured processes. Existing solutions, such as process or transaction automation technologies, are simply not enough. Content-centric collaboration technologies that integrate with these systems are an integral part of the solution.

## Now What? How Document Collaboration Tools Can Help

InfoTrends/CAP Ventures' research has found that the key areas presented in the previous sections are some of the most critical collaboration issues facing organizations today. We feel this way not just because they are the most problematic areas, but also because they are among the most solvable.

The key problem areas focused on in this report, including improving collaboration inside and outside the firewall, pursuing solutions other than e-mail, and improving processes, offer an organization large productivity and efficiency improvements for a relatively low solution investment. Our research also points to the fact that many companies are thinking about these issues, so take heart, you are not alone. With so many organizations wrestling with these problems, implementing a solution can be a real competitive advantage.

Of course, ensuring the success of a solution is no small feat. In the next section we will identify some critical factors that can make or break your efforts at implementing collaboration tools:

- Keeping installation and maintenance costs low
- Making sure people use the system
- Compliance issues

Acknowledging these factors and incorporating them into solution decisions will go a long way towards making any collaboration efforts successful.

### ***You are not alone! (Part 1)***

In the first part of this report, we saw that many organizations are facing similar issues regarding collaboration. The CCC found:

*Only 8% of organizations* indicate that their collaboration needs are focused entirely inside the firewall...

*Over 65% of respondents'* collaboration takes place via e-mail...

*Over 30% of collaboration problems* are caused by using incorrect versions of information...

## Making Collaboration Succeed in Your Organization

Now that we have seen some key areas where a content-centric collaboration solution can improve business, let us look at some practical aspects of choosing a solution.

### Reducing the Barriers to Moving Forward - the Software-as-a-Service Option

Although the economy continues to improve, many companies are still somewhat wary of incurring extra expenses. InfoTrends/CAP Ventures' content-centric collaboration research reflected this phenomenon in a couple of areas:

- Companies are budgeting for relatively few externally provided professional services. Content-centric collaboration research revealed that respondents, on average, were budgeting only about 2/3 as much for professional services as they were for software.
- Companies still have a requirement for a fairly quick ROI on collaboration projects. Our research indicated that the mean expected payback time for content-centric collaboration projects was just under a year (11.73 months).

Due to these and other factors, teams may find that their budgets for collaboration solutions are not as large as they would like. Therefore, many organizations are choosing to tackle the implementation of content-centric collaboration solutions, at least in part, within the organization. The *Content-Centric Collaboration* report showed over 50% of respondents indicated that they were turning inside their own organization to "provide professional services to install, integrate, or develop technology to support collaboration solutions." With so much responsibility focused internally, there is the real issue of finding dedicated resources to install and manage solutions.

Teams that find themselves in this position need a reliable solution that is fairly easy to set-up and manage and is not prone to down-time. With teams constantly changing personnel and scope, and growing and shrinking in size, it is crucial that any collaboration tool be scalable and customizable. As most projects and teams work with a variety of systems including CRM, ERP, and home grown solutions, it is critical that any collaboration software integrates easily with many other software types. This is especially true if the collaboration solution is used across workgroups or the entire enterprise. Balanced with all these requirements is the absolute necessity that the solution has robust security features.

These requirements may seem daunting to many, but there is no doubt that each one is important in its own way. It may seem unlikely that any solution can balance the robust feature set with the low cost demands. There is one option, however, that is worth considering – Software-as-a-Service.

A Software-as-a-Service or hosted model, where the software is housed on a secure, scalable provider server not at the customer site, can address all the requirements mentioned earlier in this section. This solution also offers some other benefits that should not be overlooked. With costs being an issue, a hosted model can offer cost certainty through subscription pricing (Software-as-a-Service) and can scale to meet the changing needs of your organization. Also, with the software hosted by the vendor, version upgrades are generally automatic without any configuration required by the customer's IT organization. Another benefit with a hosted model is that since it exists outside the owning organizations, the solution already has to address security and other issues outside the firewall that are incumbent when a company tries to give an outside vendor access to information from within its firewall. Therefore, some issues that may come up with inter-company collaboration have already been addressed.

These benefits come without sacrificing features such as configurable security levels and integration with other in-house software applications. Thus, it should come as no surprise that organizations are finally waking up to the fact that hosted solutions can be a smart option. In fact, *Content-Centric Collaboration* found that almost 65% of respondents would now at least consider a hosted option for their collaboration software needs. This continues a trend that InfoTrends/CAP Ventures believes is taking place towards an acceptance of this solution purchasing method.

## User Adoption

No matter what purchasing method is selected, the money used to buy the solution is wasted if users aren't going to use the technology. In other words, the user-friendliness of a solution should not be taken lightly. There is a real challenge in persuading end-users to change their ways of doing things and adopt new technology. Almost everyone has some personal experience with this, and when respondents to the *Content-Centric Collaboration* study were asked to choose up to three of the most difficult aspects of supporting content-centric collaboration, the two most selected responses were "convincing users to take advantage of the capabilities" and "encouraging users to contribute information into the system."

On the positive side, statistics from the report also show that users are becoming more open to using technology to aid in collaboration. The percentage of respondents that expect to use document or content management solutions to collaborate at the end of 2004 was under 40%. When asked to speculate to the end of 2005, that percentage rose to almost 55%.

Given these encouraging findings, now may be the time to present users and teams with new collaboration technologies. These solutions must, however, be user-friendly to ensure rapid adoption. Even seemingly simple concepts like the ability to access the collaboration technology through familiar interfaces such as a Web browser and useful help functionality can go a long way towards easing users' concerns. Further, the software solution selected should complement the way in which teams collaborate through both ad-hoc and structured processes. Lastly, attention should be paid to ensure users have the training or other reference resources available to help become familiar with the tool's capabilities.

## Compliance

Up to this point, compliance has been the unmentioned elephant in the room. It is an important topic to detail because it looms over almost every technology purchase decision, yet in *Content-Centric Collaboration* only a small percentage of all respondents indicated that either compliance or risk management were the primary drivers pushing them to content-centric collaboration technology. Part of the reason for this is that “compliance” is such a wide-ranging and little understood concept.

For many, when the word compliance is mentioned, the first thing that comes to mind is Sarbanes-Oxley. Compliance, however, is much more than “SOX.” There are many technology features that will help with almost any compliance efforts. Some specific ones that are important in a collaboration solution are support for and integration with common e-mail tools like Microsoft Outlook and Lotus Notes, and audit history.

Compliance issues involving e-mail should not be new to anyone. An e-mail improperly deleted or saved too long can cause major problems. For examples, one needs to look back no further than the Enron events, or any of the others that have been in the news in past years. A solution that supports common e-mail platforms can only serve to make management and organization of these e-mails/records more efficient.

Likewise, audit history is an especially important feature of a collaboration solution. Complete audit history involves an easily managed and reviewed record of all actions and changes performed in the system, when they occurred, and who made them. This not only saves time and money with formal discovery processes, but with less formal efforts as well.

So while it is not often the primary driver, compliance should at least be a consideration when selecting a collaboration solution. This seems to be the case for many, as over 45% of *Content-Centric Collaboration* respondents indicated that content-centric collaboration is very important or critical towards their compliance initiatives. There also seems to be some room for improvement based on the results of *Content-Centric Collaboration*, as under 30% of respondents said that “legal and/or compliance” has “a critical need to improve CCC now and in the next 18 months.” So, using collaboration technology to improve compliance efforts can really provide an advantage over less enlightened competitors.

## An Example

Now that we have presented key areas for collaboration improvement and solution success, it makes sense to look at a specific solution offered by one of the collaboration solution market leaders. Citadon is a good example of a collaboration solutions provider that understands this myriad of collaboration, content, and user issues. The company’s hosted solution model offers cost certainty and automatic upgrades for a package that solves a wealth of collaboration needs.

Citadon Collaboration Workspaces (CW) is the company’s flagship product. It is perfectly suited for the types of situations discussed in this report - often complex, large-scale, enterprise-wide projects involving multiple teams from both inside and outside the firewall.

Given the solution's name, it is not surprising that at the center of Citadon CW is a multifunctional collaboration workspace. It provides users with a secure, online, on-demand environment in which project team members can share and collaborate on documents and participate in business processes. As mentioned in this report, the product allows for participation from users no matter their location or organization.

To be a complete collaboration solution, a product must combine features seen in many other disparate solutions. Citadon CW's functionalities accomplish this by including:

- Document management - ensures accurate, updated information is available to the right people (and only the right people).
- Collaboration - a rich collaborative technology platform that integrates with in-house enterprise systems. Team collaborative tools to help users view, share, and annotate over 250 file formats without requiring the specific software application to be installed on a user's computer.
- Security - manages information access at the user or group level with a combination of physical, application, and functional controls.
- Business Process Management - Standard business process templates out-of-box. Can be customized or redesigned using Citadon BPD visual development environment.
- Reporting and Analytics - My Citadon knowledge portals give team leaders, managers, and executives a comprehensive view of information. Flexible, ad-hoc reporting enables development of custom reports using any reporting or business analysis environment that supports Excel or CSV formatted data sources.

To speed adoption, users can interact with Citadon CW through a Web browser (no installation required on client) or a robust, installed Windows-based client. With an optional extension, users can collaborate directly through Windows Files Explorer, giving the look and feel of the information simply being on another hard drive. It also supports many common desktop applications like Microsoft Outlook, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Lotus Notes.

As many of the situations in this report refer to situations that apply to small teams, it is also interesting to note Citadon's ProjectNet STE solution. It provides document sharing and collaboration that is designed specifically for small-scale projects and small teams within departments or organizations. The solution has a low cost of entry and maintenance, and provides project collaboration features tailored with small teams in mind.

## Conclusion

As we have seen throughout this report, collaboration issues affect workers and teams in companies of all sizes. They range from seemingly simple things like getting everyone in a team on the same page, to complex workflows. Without a collaboration solution, teams can get bogged down in inefficient and ineffective processes. By implementing a content-centric collaboration solution, however, these issues can be dealt with, and collaboration can become a strength amongst teams and organizations that a company interacts with.

### **Critical Solution Features**

*Ease of use* - It is inconvenient or impossible for many remote users to attend in-office training. Therefore, a solution must be user-friendly with little ramp-up or training time for geographically dispersed team members.

*Automatic notifications* - Keeping people on the same page is a major challenge. Automatic notifications on project deadlines and status are a straightforward way to make sure that necessary team members know where the project stands.

*Audit trails* - With many people from different places contributing to a project, it can be difficult, if not impossible to keep changes straight and to be sure that everyone is working with the latest version. Audit trails can prevent common versioning errors, as well as keep track of who saw a piece of content and when.

*Security* - With many people having access to a system from both inside and outside a company's firewall, and teams constantly evolving, security is crucial. Features such as defined user and group roles, and more enhanced security considerations are needed.

In this report we identified three categories for improving content-centric collaboration across organizations, and then three practical considerations towards implementing a successful solution. In no way are we saying that these 6 factors are the only ones that merit consideration. Nevertheless, the groupings presented in this report should give anybody considering improving their collaboration processes some important reasons to do so, as well as a base from which to choose a solution.

To review, it has probably become obvious in this analysis that we feel the importance of collaboration amongst and between teams cannot be over stated. This is how many people have the majority of their day-to-day interactions. The critical considerations sited in efficiently dealing with this type of collaboration included: collaboration inside and outside the firewall, changing team size and make-up, and overall management and reporting issues. This analysis also focused on the complex issue of ad-hoc and structured processes. Efficiently managing both is a critical aspect of a successful business, and each has its own set of requirements.

Many companies may think that they already have an acceptable collaboration solution in e-mail, but when we looked at the considerations we saw that it takes much more than e-mail to enact efficient content-centric collaboration. e-Mail's liabilities are exposed when dealing with dispersed teams, creating too many versions of content and potential audit tracking disasters. It is also worth noting that the process of storing common documents on a shared drive is not sufficient either. While these technologies pass the "will users use them" test, they can actually do more harm than good when relied on as the sole collaboration technologies on an organizational or even team level.

With the considerations and potential problem areas exposed, it is possible to identify solutions. One way to solve collaboration issues is through software-as-a-service. As described in this document, a hosted model offers all the comforts of relatively low entry costs, fixed maintenance costs, and automatic upgrades, with all the features discussed in this article. By virtue of being hosted outside the firewall, it has a natural ease in facilitating collaboration for teams and organizations that are geographically dispersed or are not part of the same network infrastructure.

As potential buyers continue to understand more about the benefits of a hosted solution, the model should continue to gain converts. InfoTrends/CAP Ventures sees the market for software-as-a-service solutions expanding in the next few years as solutions continue to improve and users continue to become more educated about them. If your company has not been inclined to check hosted solutions out in the past, it may be time to reconsider.

*Jon Franke, Mike Maziarka*

*The statistics in this document are based on the research report entitled "Content-Centric Collaboration."*

*For additional information, please refer to:*

<https://store.infotrendsresearch.com/ProductDetails.asp?ProductCode=56597>.

### ***You are not alone! (Part 2)***

In the second part of this report, we went over some critical areas that organizations should consider in a collaboration solution. The CCC found:

*Almost 65% of respondents would at least consider a hosted option...*

*"Convincing users to take advantage of the capabilities" (46.6%) and "encouraging users to contribute information into the system" (44.2%) were identified most frequently as difficult aspects towards supporting CCC solutions...*

*Over 45% of respondents indicated that content-centric collaboration is very important or critical towards compliance initiatives.*