

# COLLABORATE YOUR WAY TO A STRONGER BUSINESS

## White Paper

Today’s successful small businesses embrace a collaborative work environment and understand how to use technology to foster that collaboration. Working together with colleagues, partners and customers gives companies the agility to drive innovation and success.

Collaborative work environments are taking off due to a number of trends:

- Global customers, partners and suppliers
- Increasingly sophisticated and demanding customers
- Web 2.0 or the participatory Internet
- Increasing simplicity of technology’s design and use
- Mobile teams – can work from anywhere



In fact, Gartner Group predicts that “by 2010, the average salaried worker will actively participate in at least five different ad hoc teams simultaneously.”<sup>1</sup>

The restaurant owner, realtor, or the attorney managing a small practice can leverage a collaborative environment to drive business, increase employee productivity and form new partner and vendor relationships.

Take the case of the small legal office. Having a technology like Windows SharePoint can streamline the incredible amount of documents associated with legal cases and will ensure that the entire team of attorneys and paralegals are working on the latest versions and sharing the latest information. Sharing and synchronizing email, calendars, contacts and tasks, helps to avoid wasted time and effort, providing value to the client and to the firm.

Collaboration not only brings operational efficiencies to an organization – it can redefine it.

## WORKING TOGETHER DRIVES INNOVATION

A proven approach to business success coupled with the technology tools and social networking mindset of today is taking ‘working together’ to a whole new level.

There is an instinctive move to teaming in the business environment and it’s likely driven by the recent burst in social networking among an older demographic. The majority of U.S. Facebook users are now over 25 and Facebook is seeing massive increases in adoption among users 35-65 years old <sup>2</sup>.

At the same time, the tools designed for business rather than personal communication are evolving. According to IDC, in 2003 about 75 million instant messaging (IM) accounts were active in business—but more than 50 million of those used consumer-oriented applications. Estimates are that by 2011, business use of IM will have risen to about 400 million accounts—with applications designed for business used in more than 150 million of those instances.<sup>3</sup>

And it doesn't stop there. People have rapidly adopted texting. It's not just teenagers who are using text messaging as an alternative to phone calls. A recent Warrillow study showed that not only are 39 percent of all small business owners texting, but also that this behavior extends well beyond Generation Y owners. While younger business owners almost unanimously report texting, a full 59 percent of owners aged 28 to 44, and over a third of owners aged 44 to 62 use text messages.

The small restaurant owner knows that working with his high-school and college-age wait staff and kitchen help requires a little 'Social Media 101'. Text messaging schedule changes, generating buzz on new menu items through Facebook and blogging about the daily specials helps to engage the employees and also opens up a path to a new, younger customer as well as potential employees.

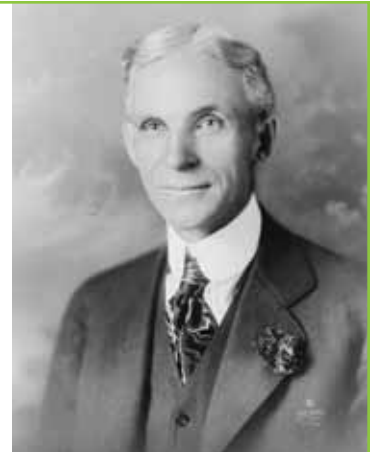
To truly drive innovation, companies must make data available to more people in the organization and then implement solutions to harness the collective knowledge, experience and communities that social networks foster. It's important to first ensure that the company culture is one of collaboration and trust.

Then implementing on-line collaboration tools – shared project planning, document management, on-line meetings, centralized task management and shared calendars and contacts – just takes that culture to the next level.



Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.”

– Henry Ford



## REAL ESTATE COMPANY – A CUSTOMER EXAMPLE



Customer service is the main reason a family-owned and operated real estate company has thrived. Another is their embrace of collaborative

technology. This thriving small business operates under the belief that their computer is their central nervous system – the backbone of their business.

Real estate is known for its mountains of paperwork and sales people that are always out of the office.

As a Comcast Business Class Internet customer, they are able to keep things moving for themselves and their clients without the need to be in the same place together.

They use document management with online storage to ensure version control and easy access for all pertinent parties; scheduling and task management so there is no confusion on who is doing what; and team discussion to have private on-line discussions and brainstorming sessions.

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## STEPPING UP YOUR COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

Many small businesses leverage Microsoft Communication Services, a productivity suite that includes Microsoft Outlook® and Windows SharePoint® as the enabler of their collaborative efforts. Small business customers of Comcast Business Class receive these valuable tools as part of their Internet package – making it simple and cost effective to operate.

Windows Sharepoint is a web-based collaboration system. In its simplest application, it allows you to set up a site to store and share files where co-workers can access them from anywhere they have Internet access (office, client site, home, hotel, airport, soccer game...). It can even automatically notify users when a file is added or updated – no more wondering if that email attachment is the latest version of the file. You don't need to worry about having to maintain expensive in-house servers and your files are automatically backed up offsite. With Microsoft Outlook your employees can send and receive e-mail, share calendars and contacts. With these tools, you can manage documents and processes, and most importantly, improve communications with co-workers, partners, vendors, and customers—on the go from anywhere you have Internet.

Enabling high productivity in today's always-on world requires a strategic approach to collaboration. Successful organizations will take the steps to streamline their operational environment and equip their employees, customers and partners with the tools to innovate.

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1. Gartner, Inc., "Products 2008: Disruptive Shifts in the High Performance Workplace," David Mario Smith and others, December 5, 2007.
  2. <http://www.insidefacebook.com>
  3. IDC, Worldwide Enterprise Instant Messaging Applications and Management Products 2007-2011 Forecast: UC Mania Puts Spotlight on EIM, December 2007.