



*Business Drivers
Behind the*

ONLINE SPREADSHEET BOOM

*Key Criteria for Secure
Business Community
Management*



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Last night, a factory manager in Singapore stared at his Dell Latitude waiting for his master inventory to be updated by his supplier in Korea. Meantime in Seoul, emails are frantically exchanged among inventory clerks at three factories to produce a final document.

Yesterday afternoon a CFO submitted financials for the Quarterly Board report. This morning his admin found out the most current HR data was on HRversion5.xls, not on HRversion4.xls that he used.

The National Sales Manager finally received monthly forecast spreadsheets from six Regional Managers, who each collected spreadsheets from their respective sales teams. Even though it took two hours to painstakingly combine all the data, cut & paste errors produced an overage of more than \$1 million in forecast revenue.

BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION 101

How can events like these keep recurring? Don't companies spend billions of dollars each year in IT infrastructure to coordinate such things? Don't core business systems include applications to control manufacturing, inventories, sales activity, and finance?

Of course they do. And the open secret is this: they don't work. They can't. The makers of ERP, Supply Chain Management, CRM systems and the like have focused on management of the internal functions of the enterprise. In many cases, they're just not applicable to the way business is done today. Tom Friedman helped describe a new borderless globe in *The World is Flat*. There is now little dispute that the primary locale of business conduct is outside the four walls of the mother corporation and disconnected from the infrastructure meant to manage it.

Employees in home offices, vendors based overseas, and field sales teams scattered over five continents must function and interact while disconnected from their respective corporate IT assets. By necessity, they improvise. They use the tools they know and the tools they have in common.

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SO WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Excel was designed as a personal productivity tool, but is now relied on as an enterprise-class application performing as the lynchpin to the "flat world". Every week, millions of Excel spreadsheets circle the globe launched from Starbucks, airline lounges, and office cubicles. For internal applications and data, Corporate IT enforces security, version control, user rights, backup and permissions. But Excel is *out there*. It's on nearly every computer worldwide and can be created, edited – *and thanks to email* – exchanged wherever, and whenever, there's a WiFi connection.

Email can be a double-edged sword. Over the past 15 years, it has become an indispensable, universal communications tool. It's the number one method for file transfers – whether a daily cartoon, pdf, *YouTube* movie, or Excel file. It's convenient, universal, and instantaneous. And although it's a key component of the Excel workaround, while helping solve one problem, it creates a host of others.

CONTROL Once you click *send*, the file is no longer under your control. What could be (and probably is) sensitive corporate data is in the hands of people you can only hope are trustworthy.



TIME Email is sequential. If you need input from multiple people, you are dependent on them opening, contributing, and resending the document in a timely manner. Which person in the chain has it now? How are they progressing? When will I get the file back?

RESPONSIBILITY So who changed what, why, and when? Are you working with the latest version or is someone else out there making further edits? And with the looming presence of Sarbanes Oxley, tracking the formation of the work product is now a corporate imperative.

SAFETY There are good reasons a company spends millions of dollars on security for its servers and its data. In the wrong hands, company secrets can be divulged or employee information can be compromised.

Email and Office applications have come a long way in the last 20 years. But business imperative notwithstanding and despite the dependence on these technologies, by themselves in their current state, they represent a band-aid, not a breakthrough.

COMMUNITY

The concept of “community” is not new. The idea of two or more people bound by a common interest can be traced to man’s earliest endeavors. More recently, and thanks to the growth of the Web, thousands of “communities” have sprung up to serve people with specific hobbies, interests, or political leanings.

The advent of Web 2.0 technology has led to *hosted* communities where members can interact with people of mutual interests. Sites like *My Space* and *Facebook* were among the first to exploit the Internet community concept. For the most part, these sites are geared toward consumers and individuals who interact in their personal time. But what about business? Is the concept of community relevant to them? Absolutely – in spades!

The supplier in Singapore that ships product to the factory manager in Omaha is, along with the COO at New York headquarters, members of a *community*. Their common bond is the mission of producing a product on time and on budget. Their communication link includes telephone, fax, and email. These kinds of ad hoc relationships may not feature the formal label, but they are *communities* none the less. By necessity and custom, communities are a fact of business life. As they continue to proliferate, the challenge of exerting control and maximizing productivity becomes a primary pursuit.

MANAGING COMMUNITIES

Managing the concept of *community* is emerging as the Holy Grail for taking command of the new business paradigm. The billions of dollars invested in traditional IT infrastructure – the sophisticated application suites, bullet-proof security, and armies of IT professionals – are impotent in extending benefit and control to the dispersed workforce and communities.

The prescription for a breakthrough in online business community management must focus on several key issues.

SECURITY Once you email a file / document, you no longer control its distribution. It is permanently in the possession of the receiver who can do with it what they will; today, tomorrow, or next year. Your company’s intellectual property is now one click away from being in the public domain.

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Innovation: Communities have different needs than their cubicle-based predecessors. Ideally, the community structure would not only accommodate, it would provide productivity features not currently available either in native Excel or in corporate applications.

COLLABORATION Often, many people are needed to contribute to a given project. This is especially true for spreadsheets. Waiting for a response from a sequentially forwarded email to 12 people is not collaboration; it's more of a *chain letter*.

CONFORMANCE Collaboration, communication, and productivity are unlikely results if a community works from different tools or applications. Microsoft Office products are on more than 400 million computers around the globe. Excel is the gold standard of spreadsheets and is used by 9 of every 10 businesspeople in the world.

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DEFENSIVE PROACTIVITY On the surface, an oxymoron; but regulations and accountability are realities to be faced head-on. Where is the documentation of who changed which cells, and when? A solid, auditable paper trail is an absolute necessity.

SAAS Why do people need *Software As a Service*? Because they want instant real-time applications. The SaaS concept is the keystone to delivering online communities. Security and always-available information are managed for community members with centralized control.

ONLINE SECURE STORAGE The only way to have one current version of the truth is to have one current document everyone accesses. And without the file residing on any one personal computer, the data will never be compromised or lost.

EXPRESSO

eXpresso™ is software infrastructure that adds a shareable dimension. It is a Web 2.0 hosted workspace for Microsoft Office applications. The first offering is for Excel spreadsheet management and collaboration in secure, structured business communities. eXpresso was developed on the principles and criteria mentioned earlier in this document.

eXpresso users include small workgroups, cross-enterprise project members, and dispersed sales teams. Corporate financial departments and compliance experts use eXpresso to control the gathering and reporting of accounting documents.

There is no attempt here to detail all eXpresso features or contrast it with alternatives. An interactive product tour is available at eXpressoCorp.com and interested parties can try eXpresso for free. Sample highlights:

- *Create or edit Excel spreadsheets online in real time*
- *Store Excel spreadsheets in a secure, encrypted central repository*
- *Collaborate & share spreadsheets with individuals & groups*
- *Assign or revoke View, Edit, Download, or Copy privileges*
- *Compare cell & formula differences between spreadsheets with one-click*



WHY EXCEL?

One of the conspicuous differences between eXpresso spreadsheet management and online alternatives is the eXpresso support for Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. Many of these other products promote an online alternative to Excel. Competing with Microsoft for a share of the office application market is certainly ambitious. But there's little evidence people want a new spreadsheet; what they want is a shareable dimension to the one they already use.

Today's mobile, dispersed workforce faces communication and productivity challenges (as described earlier) that have little to do with merits of specific spreadsheet applications. The real problem is a lack of structure to serve the millions of communities that already have a spreadsheet they like: Excel. Offering a generic spreadsheet with reduced functionality does nothing to improve collaboration or support business communities.

The commitment to support Excel users is grounded in three tenets at the forefront of eXpresso philosophy.

1. There's nothing wrong with Excel. In fact, it is arguably one of the most reliable applications in the world. And, a spreadsheet application can't be *instant* if it isn't Excel – if you have to learn something new, it isn't instant.
2. The second reason can be described with a number: 150 million. That's the global estimate of Excel business users who are prime candidates to become immediate eXpresso users.
3. Beyond the raw numbers, Excel has been entrenched as the spreadsheet business standard for many years. People know it, like it, and use it.

CONCLUSION

The traditional structure of business is rapidly becoming obsolete – driven by fundamental shifts in the way people work, the way organizations interact, and the disappearance of conventional constraints of borders and time zones.

One of the ways to accommodate change is to formalize and apply structure to naturally occurring communities of like-minded businesspeople. The Web 2.0 concept is a vital foundation and enabler for using the Internet to deliver community management and specialized application services. Offerings in the online services arena will continue to grow. In the spreadsheet market specifically, potential users will gravitate toward the service that delivers universally valuable features.

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For more information about eXpresso Spreadsheet Communities or eXpresso Corp, visit www.eXpressoCorp.com or email at info@eXpressoCorp.com.

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