

# EXPRESSO CORPORATION *DISCOVERS* EXPRESSO™

*eXpresso™ is a Web Application Community designed specifically for the 150 million business users of Excel, the most naturally collaborative application in the world. eXpresso users collaborate – securely, in real time – on Excel spreadsheets, where they can edit, share, and track content.*

## WAS THE FOREST HIDING AMONG THE TREES?

The eXpresso Beta version was unveiled in August of 2007. The run-up to launch date became a labor-intensive obsession that was unexpectedly rewarded with a major “aha!” moment and the discovery of a new eXpresso dimension.

Preparing for new product introductions can be hectic and at times, unnerving. And the smaller the organization, the more likely someone will become overloaded or an important detail will slip through the cracks. There were just eleven people on the eXpresso sales & marketing team. And like so many other companies today, the staff was scattered: six cities, five states, and one associate nine time-zones away in Asia. With just four months until roll-out, tending to details became a corporate fixation.

The eXpresso staff devised a *Master Plan* that included timelines and task lists to be divided among associates. The core control and tracking document for the Master Plan was an Excel spreadsheet. Heading the launch prep was eXpresso Marketing Director, Amber Newman. In addition to her own long list of obligations, she gathered updated spreadsheets and served as quarterback for the entire process.

*“Each week, I hosted a WebEx meeting,” Amber explains. “With the latest version of the spreadsheet displayed from my screen, the team shared details of their progress and we all confirmed assignments for the coming week.”*

While that scenario seemed like a typical Web Conference, the challenge in getting to that point was gathering individual spreadsheets and consolidating new information into the Master – every seven days.

*“It seemed there was no way around the tedium of manually updating spreadsheets. One week I even tried to email the Master so everyone could update their own sections and pass the spreadsheet to the next team member. I’m not sure what happened or where it is today, but the Master never got back to me for Wednesday’s meeting,” added Amber.*

Understandably, Amber and the rest of the group were anxious for the eXpresso roll-out. The same kind of benefits they had been touting were exactly what they needed themselves. There was a great deal of excited anticipation when the development staff invited everyone to see the first online “live” version of eXpresso. The whole team logged onto eXpresso and dialed the conference call number. By today’s standards, the application was crude, but this early model already had some impressive functionality.

## TAKING THE FIRST PEEK

The interface was beginning to shape up and the editing features were slick. Anxious to see a “live” spreadsheet on-screen, Amber uploaded the Master Plan as a sample. She keyed a few words into a cell and confirmed that everyone could see what she typed. Amber then suggested everyone update their personal “to-do” sections now. At 1:00 PM Pacific, ten different people from across the country were editing the same Excel spreadsheet – and seeing each other’s changes in real time.

eXpresso really worked – just like it was supposed to. No one would ever again have to gather emailed spreadsheets and consolidate updates manually. But the real highlight of the day would come after a *eureka!* moment: there was even more to eXpresso than anyone had realized.

## EURIKA! A NEW BUSINESS

*George Langan, eXpresso Corporation president, recognized it first. “As I watched that spreadsheet transforming before my eyes, I also listened to some of our people debating who should handle which tasks for next week. Then it hit me...we have an additional business we didn’t even consider: Web Conferencing!”*

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Conventional Web Conference vendors can broadcast a wide range of presentations and are not confined just to Excel. But Excel is a core communications platform, and by using one of the many “free” conference call services for voice, eXpresso can function like a traditional Web Conference service.

## HIDDEN GEMS

Internal eXpresso staff and companies with similar Excel-based projects can use the eXpresso service as Web Conferencing. And with a bonus: real time collaboration. But two other eXpresso roles were recently stumbled upon that could have broad appeal to other companies as well. For one, eXpresso employee expense reports have always been documented in Excel. Now, instead of submission via email attachment, expense reports are “shared” with accounting via eXpresso. No email, no attachments, no obsolete files left on hard drives.

Another *new* aspect of eXpresso is relationship management with vendors and professional associates. Example: the eXpresso PR firm regularly emailed an Excel spreadsheet with event updates and release schedules. Over the course of a month, the eXpresso marketing department might receive eight spreadsheets, each making the previous one obsolete and creating a version control problem.

*New policy: no more Excel attachments on emails! Amber explains the rationale. “We couldn’t think of one reason why anyone should ever email a spreadsheet. So now all spreadsheets – quotes from suppliers, financials from the accounting firm, and status reports from our ad agency – get to us via eXpresso. We always have one accurate, up-to-date version. And our hard drives and email in-boxes aren’t cluttered with worthless files.”*

The eXpresso team is no longer sheepish about admitting their lack of imagination when identifying all the use possibilities of their product. After having missed three examples (obvious in hindsight), they now believe new applications for eXpresso will come from real-world customer experiences, not marketing departments.

Documented for eXpresso Corp by  
Scott Conway.

For 24 years, Scott Conway has headed his own marketing communications firm helping companies align products strategically with market forces and business imperatives. In recent years he has focused on companies who use emerging technologies to cater to evolving market segments.

[sconway@conwayusa.com](mailto:sconway@conwayusa.com)