The Rich Internet Application Empowers The User

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Abstract

Companies must continuously incorporate cutting-edge technologies to grow competitively. A relative newcomer to the stage, the Rich Internet Application (RIA), makes this process rewarding because of its user-friendly and versatile features, as well as the tangible results it produces. From ease of implementation, to features that make dull tasks fast and fun, to dramatically enhanced modes of communication and data presentation, RIA facilitates growth internally and therefore more efficiently. This innovative approach is rapidly gaining the loyalty of users among IT groups in diverse businesses, as they see both results and future possibilities stemming from RIA.

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Within the next two years, the Rich Internet Application (RIA) will make possible a new phenomenon: IT-generated growth in businesses from diverse industries. Using built-in browser functionality, RIA replaces full-featured desktop applications like graphic consoles and operation support systems. RIA has the network "in its blood," allowing for a wide variety of innovative design features that make usage enjoyable and effective. This creates bonds with users that translate rapidly into loyalty-based purchases of products and services. Put simply, RIA is easier to use, more versatile, and more fun than its predecessors, qualities that contribute to growth for its providers and users alike.

Innovative Features

Not only is RIA easy to use and makes tasks less burdensome, making it attractive to users, it also enables users to access and share complex information more creatively and efficiently, leading to better decision-making.

Easy to set up and maintain. Unlike a conventional windows desktop application, RIA requires no installation or distribution channels. Servers can centrally manage access so no license keys need be distributed. Upgrades are automatic and support of multiple software versions becomes obsolete.

Easy and enjoyable to use. RIA takes the drudgery out of mundane tasks such as data entry, document management and the organization of information. For example, sophisticated mouse-based gestures automate repeatable steps. Additionally, by allowing users to enter formatted text as well as plain text, RIA makes possible a variety of new document management approaches. It is difficult to lose track of important information with RIA; stateful functionality and push technology allow applications to become real-time alerts that provide constant job support.

Enhances the typical office application. Fast-growing firms like Google and Yahoo are using RIA to bring word processors and the spreadsheets to the Internet. This takes the user beyond simple access to the Internet's vast communications reach and sources of raw data; through RIA the user can put the information right to work online, without transferring it into separate programs first. At the same time, when further enabled with functionality such as Adobe Air technology, RIA safely interfaces with local peripherals on a PC, such as a hard drive. As hardware changes, this approach will increasingly allow the office application to work on handheld devices like the Blackberry or iPhone.

Improves communications. This technology provides attractive alternatives for verbal communications. Threaded discussion forums and chat allow remote, including cross-cultural, interactions that in some cases can be more efficient and satisfying than face-to-face discussion. With

common lexicons of terms and procedures being used in real-time between people, as well as the added benefit of thoughtful responses that written communications allow, the potential for misunderstanding is greatly minimized.

Improves presentation of and access to information. RIA provides creative venues for accessing and displaying complex data and graphics. Mashups enable a user to combine data and see decision factors that have been previously unavailable outside of the back office. Several prominent market analysis firms have estimated that the market for mashup software alone will exceed one-half billion dollars by 2012, with the vast majority of that total applying to internal applications rather than highly visible public sites (Gartner 2008). Much of this growth occurs as RIA replaces web portal technologies; the old approach did not meet IT demands as successfully because it did not leverage new client technologies as does RIA.

In the financial industry, RIA provides a window into real data analytics that would otherwise be cumbersome or left untried in a traditional approach. RIA enables the syndication of multiple data sources such as financials and real time updates into comparative tables and charts. Barrons, for example, uses the personalization of its mashup as a rationale for purchasing a subscription. Major League Baseball now sells clickable ads online within what was once only a viewable stream with static ads.

Furthermore, RIA makes access to multimedia data such as maps and medical imagery commonplace. The analysis allowed by these new data manipulation and display capabilities informs decisions beyond what any monolithic system could.

Applications

RIA has taken hold in recent years, gathering loyal users from increasingly diverse businesses whose distinct needs are met by this versatile technology.

Current successes. Financial institutions increasingly provide sophisticated tools through RIA and in many cases associate their availability to a service level or fee. RIA product vendors are growing and planning large staff increases for the coming year despite the tide of economic contraction. Vendors such as Backbase have become so proficient with RIA that they are converting entire feature-rich Windows applications into RIA for some of their customers. Business partnerships between Internet companies and established data-oriented businesses in other industries already abound; companies like Google and Yahoo are beginning to enter into brick and mortar industries such as airlines, banks, and automobile companies, who are using mashups and other technologies to partner with complementary businesses. It defies traditional bits and bytes thinking to claim that RIA alone resulted in these changes. Yet empirical evidence clearly shows that as

RIA has emerged, so has the progressive transformation of very competitive companies using this technology.

Future possibilities. In the near future, co-browsing will increasingly allow support engineers to remotely work a system while their customer watches online. Businesses will leverage RIA to supply Software as a Service (SAAS) as part of a subscription. Perhaps this valuable creativity may even someday allow an IT group to indirectly sell services. For example, where an enterprise application has so radically improved a system, it seems possible that those best practices would market well through a professional services arm.

Conclusion

These are only some examples of the numerous innovations that can be developed as RIA evolves and users continue finding practical and creative ways to leverage its capabilities. The appeal of this technology to an IT organization is its worth to the customer in terms of usability and revenue potential. This value derives from advanced capabilities that open up possibilities far beyond the old world of pure HTML. Exciting, progressive ideas that previously existed mostly in the back-end world of databases, integrations and networks are now bearing fruit in front-end technology development through RIA. The results for growth-seeking companies who have adopted RIA are very encouraging. Look for more businesses to

convert to RIA as they discover the variety of ways to put this smart new technology to work for them.

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