

Whose site is it anyway?

The question of website ownership is crucial. The business user has the vision, but the delivery of it – the actual creation and deployment of the web application – is in the hands of the IT department. This separation leads to the inevitable frustrations of remotely delivered projects for both sides. This paper discusses a new approach to this problem – a solution which both enables the business user to fully participate in the design, creation and management of the website and which satisfies the scalability, reliability and manageability demanded by IT.

The internet – the promise and the reality

The web has been hugely successful for business - or has it? We are all well aware that it has transformed the world and the way in which businesses operate. The number of homes and businesses now with high-speed, reliable internet access makes it one of the most efficient communication tools, able to reach almost any audience. With millions of websites now online, we know that it is a tremendous potential business asset. But as the internet matures, has it really delivered the benefits businesses were expecting?

The over-hyped expectations of the “dot-com” boom are, with but a few notable exceptions, never likely to be realized. Businesses should no longer measure the effectiveness of the web initiatives against past expectations. Instead, they should set much more realistic goals. But why do they frequently remain disappointed at the outcome?

The scale conundrum

The very strength of the web - its global reach and huge scale - works both for and against a business seeking to exploit it. Business users naturally want access to the valuable community the web offers, but in so doing they must plan for a potentially significant external load on their web applications. This takes them deep into the realm of today's Information Technology (IT) department competence.

Any successful web property must, therefore, be built on a strong, scalable technology platform. It must also offer the flexibility to adapt to meet the challenges of large consumer usage at the same time as being capable of managing huge volumes of rapidly changing content. Such concerns are normally in the domain of the IT department. To realize their objectives, business users are consequently highly dependent on technologies and even a language they do not readily understand or control. They are similarly dependent on skilled and expensive personnel to deliver these applications.

Brochureware is not enough

Today's business web property requirements are not typified by straightforward “brochureware” sites publishing static HTML pages. Such sites have largely disappointed, as businesses usually find a significant proportion of the content they are publishing is not actually static; the consequent web content management burden is time consuming and costly. The result is out-of-date sites that in many cases can do the corporate image more harm than good.

Furthermore, these web applications often do not achieve much more for the business than ensuring they can be found through the common search engines.

Ambitious businesses must achieve much more than this. They must leverage all of their internal and external content – from flat text documents to data held in a range of corporate applications – to power fully functional web applications. And they must deliver them to many ✚

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He who pays the piper calls the tune

Delivering real value

digital channels, such as interactive digital television and mobile devices, not just the web. But this type of application is not easily created or managed by the typical business user. They are more commonly controlled by the IT department, typically addressing these applications as full project lifecycles – to design, build, deploy and then hand over to the business user for subsequent management.

Simply, this is not in tune with the business need. Solutions to these requirements must mould to the style of the user, creating a technology that fits and adapts to the business rather than changing the business to fit the technology. Such applications need to be living and dynamic, and must constantly develop to remain valuable. However, these complex applications are typically difficult to change and inflexible without considerable skilled resource.

We have started to see these needs being addressed by a plethora of single-user, off-the-shelf website creation tools. These address only part of the problem, however, offering individual business users more control but crucially lacking the sophisticated dynamic, multi-user, multi-channel capabilities of the larger web and content management applications.

The question of application ownership is crucial. The business user has the vision, but the delivery of it – the actual creation and deployment of these applications – is in the hands of IT departments. This leads to the inevitable frustrations of remotely delivered projects with potential cost and time overruns. Much rework can be required, as the business user's specification is either not of sufficient accuracy in the first instance or, more commonly, changes during the course of the project.

Business users commonly feel powerless during the project lifecycle, as they are excluded from real involvement or understanding by their lack of the technical skills and language necessary to engage. To date, no real business tools have enabled the business user to fully participate in the design, creation, presentation and management of enterprise strength web applications or their subsequent evolution to meet ever-changing business requirements.

The realization of significant web applications is expensive. The absence of high level, business-focused tools means that large numbers of highly skilled and expensive technical resources are required, not just to create and deploy the web applications, but also to manage them. To date, the only businesses that have been able to afford to develop these web applications are those for which the web is of critical importance – for whom it is a major sales channel, for example – or those organizations of sufficient size and scale. The next tier of organization, perhaps best categorized as “small to medium-sized enterprises” (SMEs), have the same business requirements but simply cannot afford to undertake the projects. Ironically, the cost of managing their content relative to their turnover is in fact greater.

The combination of the factors discussed above inhibits the business from optimizing the value inherent in their web applications. They demand more - all organizations of every size have a responsibility to seek greater value from less investment. Exploiting the mass of knowledge and data (their web content) held within an organization – reusing rather than recreating, delivering too many channels instead of just the web – can provide the business with significant competitive advantage.

The key to unlocking this value is to ensure that both the business user and the technical professional are empowered with the appropriate tools to match their relative skills. Tools that allow the true business owner of the application to fully participate in the lifecycle of building and running a resource critical to their success, yet adhere to the requirements for standards, reliability and scalability demanded by the technologist.

Getting this right is the first step towards internet reality meeting internet vision.



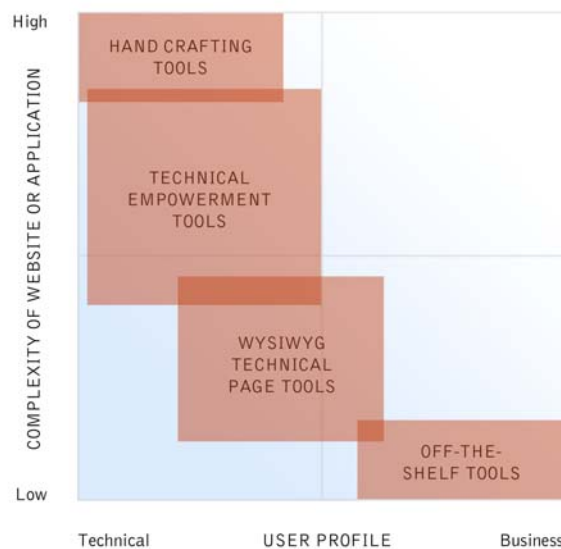
Consumer confusion

Let's examine the assistance available to an organization that wants to build and run a customer-focused, business-centric property – internet, intranet or extranet.

Effective web content management is no longer an area that any business can afford to ignore. But successfully harnessing it – meeting the needs of cost control, faster response times, risk mitigation and realization of real value – requires a longer term strategic approach and careful planning.

Depending on the needs of the business, the challenge is to find an application solution to fit. This is by no means an easy task: there are many solutions often only differentiated by minor technical features.

In order to make some sense of the current marketplace, it is useful to assess each solution in two important dimensions: who is the principal user in realizing the web solution, and the complexity of the web application, which can be created and managed with the tool. On this basis all solutions can be plotted on a two-axis graph. Based on such an analysis, four principal groups of solution emerge (see market quadrant diagram below).



Hand-crafting tools

Everything is possible with this route – at a price. Teams of highly-skilled external or internal developers working with project consultants can build a highly complex application from scratch. It is likely to be a highly tailored solution, which can also only be managed or modified using the same technical skills. The organization would have exactly what it wanted but at the cost of lengthy development, a significant budget, and lack of future agility.

Off-the-shelf tools

At the other end of the spectrum the business user can always do it themselves. By creating a formatted document in a standard office application like Microsoft Word and then saving this document as a web page, a simple web presence can be built. The problem with this is just that simplicity. The result is not a sophisticated web application: it is unsophisticated, completely static, not scalable to large numbers of editorial users, and is unlikely to meet the business objectives. The business user is in total control but the output is lightweight.

Technical page design tools

Moving up the scale of complexity there are now many superficially attractive applications that allow for the easy creation and layout of simple web pages. However, as soon as information that is stored in a company database is to be included, these applications become more technically difficult to use, and the creation process lengthens. Eventually HTML programming, client-side or server-side scripting skills will be required in order to make the application truly dynamic, and the solution crosses the border into the next category – turning them into technical tools again. +

Technical empowerment tools

A new breed of application

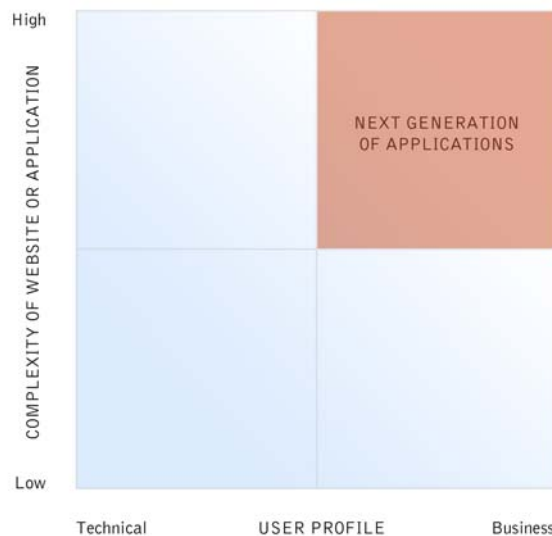
There is now a broad selection of tools that give the technical user a head start. These provide enough capabilities as standard to enable the technology professional to build the level of sophistication required. Each with their own heritage, they bring a subtly different set of specializations and capabilities to the fore.

Portals are often the choice for intranets and extranets, organizing access to content and applications in pursuit of that user's daily goals. The web functionality of Document Management Systems, often grafted as an evolutionary afterthought onto first generation tools, may be appropriate for an organization where standard documents are the primary source of all content. Particular branding requirements and the need to combine a complex set of content sources might point to a pure-play web content management system.

But these tools have one thing in common: they still only assist the technical user; they do nothing for the business. The implementation projects are still potentially too lengthy, too prescriptive and too costly.

Across the spectrum from the complexity and customization of hand-crafting tools to the rigidity and ease of use of the off-the-shelf tools, no single application yet satisfies the breadth of characteristics demanded to successfully realize business objectives.

If we take this analysis a stage further, and extrapolate into the upper right sector of the quadrant, we can envision the next generation of applications. If we successfully transition into that quadrant, we have a solution that is as easy to use as Microsoft PowerPoint but which can achieve results as technically powerful as those of the hand crafting backroom programming team.



The new paradigm

Build from strength

Although the goal is easily expressed – a tool which offers unprecedented ease of use but is capable of meeting the most functionally demanding of web visions – a product is harder to come by. A tool which could offer all this would truly represent a step change in the market; it would be a sector-defining product.

From where will this innovation come?

To enter this next generation of web tools, application vendors will need a secure foundation from which to start. Vendors who are to succeed in this next generation will already have server products that can deploy scalable and secure web applications. Unless they have a deep understanding of the server side challenges inherent in such applications they will be unable

True user empowerment

Hello Morello

to deliver their capabilities through new tools. They will leave users stranded in the worst of all worlds with under-performing, non-scalable web applications driven by unfriendly, non-functional tools.

Such server strength already exists, of course, at Mediasurface and other content management vendors. Today, businesses of all sizes, in all industries, can combine multi-source content with both application logic and transactional data to build, manage and publish websites that are content-rich and that their users – employees, customers and suppliers – will love.

But this is not enough. Right now, the stumbling block is who gets to control and enact this. Today it is only those with the right mix and quantity of technical skills. The new world requires it to be every business user.

Business users are accustomed to tools that relate to their needs in everyday working. They are familiar, understandable, and accessible. You need only think of the Microsoft Office applications to appreciate this.

The next generation of applications are highly visual and targeted at the specific task at hand, harnessing the power of the desktop environment and combining it with the reach of the internet to provide immediate response and functionality to the business user.

These tools will need to be graphical, immediate, powerful and flexible just as in the Microsoft Office example but uniquely will have to be fully multi-user. They should be no more difficult to use than, for example, Microsoft PowerPoint, yet capable of being deployed to tens or hundreds of users working simultaneously on one web application. They should be more task and audience focused – pushing technological boundaries and lifting restrictions imposed by the previous generation of tools.

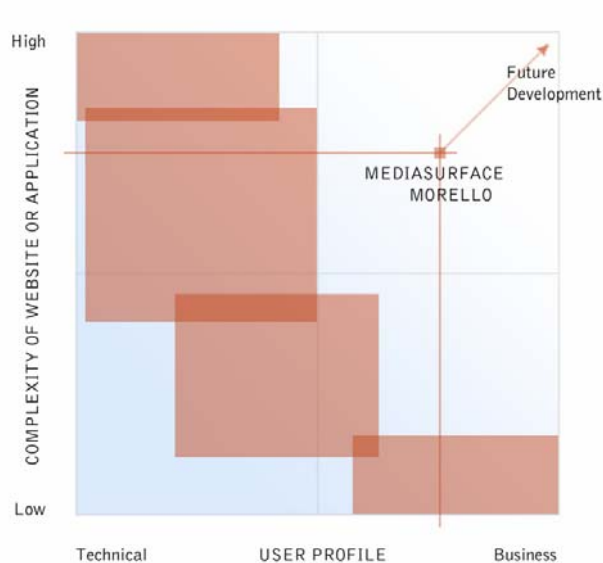
Morello is uniquely positioned to deliver against this objective of bank-vault quality content management combined with business user empowering management tools.

Firstly, it has the server side strength, evidenced through many successful years providing core content management server technology to power industrial-strength web applications for some of the world's largest and most demanding organizations – from Prudential to Oxford University Press, from AEGON to NATO, from Cancer Research UK to EMI.

Secondly, and uniquely, with Morello the power of these web applications is available to the business user. Morello meets the business user requirement with its graphical, immediate, powerful yet flexible multi-user application. Business users are able to build and run complex web applications with the need for only minimal external technical resource.

Using Morello, the business user is in control, presented with a familiar interface they can readily relate to. If they think of their site in terms of pages and want to edit the page directly, they can. If they think in terms of pure content, wanting to prepare and manage content without concern for the site, they can. In fact, they can use both approaches simultaneously.

The business user has complete control of the navigation, presentation and content of the web application, as well as being provided with world class contribution tools. The user has the choice of editing content in context, as it appears in the final page, or through simple yet powerful forms, or using commonplace desktop applications like Microsoft Word and Outlook. +



They have become uniquely empowered – but with no loss of control. The application owner can be confident the whole environment is secure and managed, through workflow, versioning, and all the other traditional content management pre-requisites.

This creates a new category of solution, allowing for highly complex web applications to be produced but now with the business user in charge.

This firmly moves Morello into the top right sector of the quadrant described earlier (see above).

Changing the game

Through Morello, the business user can now drive serious, business websites delivering real value against business objectives. Moreover, these are websites which IT love, because the solution fits naturally into corporate technology standards and architectures, delivering headache-free scalability and reliability.

By building such a tool, Mediasurface has uniquely addressed the factors of scale, complexity, ownership and cost that are currently holding back the mass realization of true business value through the web.

Gone are the limitations of scalability and complexity implicit with a tool that was understandable to the non-technical user. Gone are the limits of ownership inherent in highly technical development tools. Ultimately, gone are the limits of cost, opening up sophisticated web applications to a much wider audience.

Morello has changed the game, enabling its customers to move into the next age of web achievement – the era of business empowerment. With its thought leadership, Mediasurface leads this charge and, with continued product investment and innovation, will provide the technician with a standards-based, robust platform and the business user with ever increasing power and control.

MS-MO-BF0015-EN-2.2

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