Editorial: Web-based technology — A lifeline for managing information overload

Not too long ago, the prevailing thinking was that the internet and other New Economy communications technologies were going to make companies lean, mean, productive machines. The World Wide Web and e-mail were expected to provide decision makers with easy access to more of the information they need to make better decisions faster. The modern office would be the model of efficiency, both well organised and cost effective.

Despite these predictions, technology has in many ways acted to increase workloads rather than reduce them. With the massive amount of information connected to the internet and exploding levels being added every day, efficient and effective use of information has become a critical issue. We are inundated with e-mails, online documents, images and videos. It is like trying to drink from a fire hose; we are less efficient simply because we cannot digest it all.

While technological advances have made retrieving, producing and distributing information easier, learning to manage the flood of information remains a challenge. Real productivity improvements depend not only on being able to absorb information that has been filtered or structured for easier consumption, but also on freeing up time for other, more valuable activities and on helping people to work faster and be smarter in their time-pressed environment.

A tidal wave in financial services

The volume of data available in the financial industry continues to grow at an incredible pace; market reports, financial statements, earnings calls, SEC filings, webcasts and industry conferences must all be studied and mined for information. And while this information is crucial to making sound investment choices, managing data can be a difficult and time-consuming task, particularly at critical earnings time.

Increasingly, the investment and analyst community is finding that in an attempt to use this information to stay ahead of market trends — and the competition — their efficiency and productivity can suffer. This comes at a time when slowing market volumes have sharpened the financial industry's focus on more traditional growth drivers such as internal cost reduction, improved efficiencies and increased productivity.

Adding to the complexities of this barrage of information is the multitude of delivery vehicles investors must use to access it. On top of e-mails, faxes and phone calls, investors today have multiple access points for gathering information and a variety of market data applications, each fulfilling different needs.

To manage this ever-increasing amount of data, investors need a combination of new technology and information-processing skills. The ongoing demand for more information and quick dissemination of it means that traditional access to information will become

increasingly unmanageable, and investors will need to find new sources and communication channels to get the information they need in the most efficient way possible.

Technology throws investors a lifeline

Investors are drowning in a sea of corporate information — they need resources to help them efficiently gather and track information about their portfolio companies. Taming this flow of information requires making it more digestible for investors by organising and presenting it in a usable fashion. Pulling this information together and delivering it to investors is a value added benefit made easier with the advent of the web.

To address these challenges, firms like UK-based Morley Fund Management are turning to custom reporting solutions such as CCBN's StreetEvents service. These types of web-based tools capture and organise investment-related event information, including dial-in numbers and passcodes to conference calls, webcasts, real-time verbatim transcripts, conference call summaries, SEC filings, press releases and industry conferences. Combining these distinct services into a single source helps professional investors focus on market moving information for the industries and companies they follow.

Morley's equity analysts use this customised web-based reporting solution to help gather and manage corporate investment information more efficiently, while the application offers the equity researchers access to a complete database of disclosure information — covering both the European and US markets — delivered online directly to their desktops.

This solution has enabled the firm to increase the work capacity of its research team while reducing costs with a

solution designed for increased efficiency and productivity. 'The web-based application has offered Morley a global solution that enables us to provide our investment professionals with an efficient way to track, analyze and manage financial events and news quickly and effectively,' says Sophie Blanpain, head of equities research at Morley. 'Our analysts and investment managers benefit from having access to comprehensive investment information sourced directly from the company.'

Web-based tools can dramatically increase the speed of operations by replacing much of the slow, labour-intensive research process, allowing analysts to cover more conference calls and review more statements in a shorter period of time and remain focused on the investment decisions critical to their jobs.

Conclusion

In the quest for efficiency, today's web-based technologies provide great opportunities for operational improvements. Companies that think strategically about information management will be able to leverage solutions which are carefully targeted at real business needs, show ROI in well-defined, measurable ways, and be able to scale their solution to fit future needs.

Forward-thinking firms view web-based tools as a true time saving which actually reduces costs by assuming the burden of collecting and managing corporate investment information.

The time these new technologies save can allow investors to focus on more mission critical projects such as building client relationships, carrying out additional research or keeping up with industry news. And the productivity improvements allow investors to

complete important tasks — executing trades, creating reports and financial models, and making investment decisions.

The bottom line is that, as companies look at making themselves more efficient, controlling information time and costs can be an important way of saving money. And although effective

information management solutions may require an upfront investment, they can lead to lower costs and savings over time.

Greg Radner
VP of Marketing
Corporate Communications Broadcast
Network