For decades, business enterprises led innovations in technology. This was largely the case because technology was still at an immature stage of development and the purchasing power of an enterprise was necessary to break down technical barriers to success.

But over the past decade, technology development has moved from the immature stage to a period of unbridled productivity as development barriers have come crashing down. Innovation is no longer limited to famous and costly proprietary development centers such as AT&T’s Bell Labs and Xerox’ PARC. With dramatic advances in computing, a disruptive technology innovation can happen anywhere, at anytime. And in fact, the business-led innovation dynamic has flipped; today, the most innovative technologies are emerging from the consumer side.

Consider for example, the explosion of popularity in social networking platforms and other forms of “new media.” The viral popularity of Facebook – which is now approaching a mind-boggling 1 billion active users – has taught enterprises that there is business value in social networking. So much value, that Jive Software, a social networking platform provider targeting enterprises, launched a successful IPO in December valuing the company at about $900 million.

Consumers are also leading the way in the communications sector. Skype launched as a free voice-over-IP service that revolutionized the manner in which family and friends could stay in touch – even when separated by thousands of miles. Skype has since added instant messaging and video conferencing, once again paving the way for similar investments on the enterprise side.

There are countless more examples; Apple’s App Store is now being replicated by businesses interested in creating a flexible development and deployment platform for mobile applications. Announced in December, MIT University’s MITx initiative is a largely free, online education platform that has the potential to do nothing short of reinvent the manner in which knowledge is created and shared.

CONSUMERS DRIVING TECHNOLOGY

It is noteworthy that Enterprise IT policies are now being influenced by the consumer uptake of technologies. Organizations are realizing the benefits of these technologies and investing in many popular consumer
In recent years, enterprise communications have evolved extensively—right from allowing the entry of employee-owned mobile devices into business premises, to enabling the seamless transfer of enterprise data through those devices. And the advent of mobile broadband has enabled employees to execute their duties from anywhere, anytime, utilizing nearly any device or communication medium of their choice. Employees often switch between their personal smart devices and those provided by their organizations for business purposes. They also use various voice and video-based applications to enhance collaboration and bring more personalization into business transactions. As per Gartner,1 by 2016, at least 50% of enterprise email users will rely primarily on a browser, tablet or mobile client instead of a desktop client.

Thierry Breton, the CEO and Chairman of ATOS Origin, an IT services company, recently created a sensation by announcing that he intends to ban internal email at the company by 2014.2 The move was based on the findings of the company that new employees joining the company after graduating from campuses were not using email. Instead they were using social tools and instant messaging to communicate. The findings also suggested that as much as 15% of employee productivity was lost to emails.

Enterprise social networks and communication channels are already thriving in a number of companies and this could be another classic example of the invasion of consumerization of technology in an enterprise set-up.

**IMPETUS FOR THE MEDIA AND TELECOM INDUSTRY**

As next generation networks and smart devices proliferate, we will see further disruptions in the value chain across various industries, and more specifically in the areas of healthcare, education, banking, retail and consumer electronics. Unified communications (UC)— including interactive real-time conversations, VoIP, instant messaging and video chats—is already a mature concept in enterprise IT. According to the Information Week 2012 Unified Communications Survey,3 36% of the respondents reported having deployed UC and 31% have deployment plans within the next 24 months.

As collaboration becomes the most important technology in a UC implementation, there is a definitive business value for UC technologies in enterprises. According to Gartner, telepresence will be in homes of senior executives in just half a decade. Telepresence, voice and video chats help people collaborate better by transcending the hurdles of geographical distances and time, offering employees a feeling of being in the same room, as they discuss policies, strategies and big ideas.

For instance, video conferencing is playing an important role in facilitating e-learning services—allowing subject-matter experts to conduct virtual classes and students from around the world to participate. Telemedicine is also experiencing a boom with the healthcare industry looking to expand services even to remote areas. The value of content that drives mindshare among consumers is also at an all-time high. Media sharing platforms and online video continues to grow giving rise to new disruptive business models such as Netflix, Hulu, and Spotify to name a few. Whether it’s a movie, game or a smartphone application – if it’s original and creates value for the user, consumers are willing to spend money on it. Services such as time-shifted television, social TV and 3D TV are also picking up fast, and adding new dimensions to the telco-media industry. Consumer cloud services such as iCloud and Amazon Cloud Drive are promoting anytime, anywhere media by bringing cloud computing to the fingertips of web users. This also opens new opportunities primarily for Media companies, but also for CSp’s that can successfully ascend the value chain.

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**TECHNOLOGY IN ENTERPRISE**

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**REACHING OUT TO THE CONSUMERS BETTER: THROUGH ADAPTIVE IT**

As discussed earlier, today’s new technologies are often adopted first by individual consumers—before they gain acceptance by the business community. This signifies that enterprises are skeptical about embracing new technologies and services. However, as the workforce becomes increasingly mobile and more businesses turn on-the-go, organizations need to be more proactive in designing and deploying telepresence suites to conduct virtual meetings and training sessions. Telepresence, voice and video chats help people collaborate better by transcending the hurdles of geographical distances and time, offering employees a feeling of being in the same room, as they discuss policies, strategies and big ideas.

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CONCLUSION

In today’s increasingly globalized world, efficient communication and collaboration tools are critical to the success of organizations. And, with more enterprises going global, the demand for more productive web collaboration, live sharing and online meeting tools will only grow. Efficient problem solving, collaborative strategizing, interactive sales presentations and skills training will call for a full suite of advanced web collaboration tools.

The benefits these next generation communication technologies offer businesses will continuously drive technology investments. These technologies will transform business models, help organizations serve customers in a new way, and enable enterprises to bring experts and customers face-to-face. A proactive and continuous drive to develop and adopt new consumer-centric technologies and processes is the way forward for businesses to stay successful in a dynamically evolving market.

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES

As devices and technology proliferate into the enterprises, the challenges are also many. The key concern remains the inherent risk of data and information security. However, careful planning and putting in place appropriate policies and systems can help overcome these challenges. Organizations must create and seamlessly provide the bandwidth for delivery to keep pace with the growing aspirations of their consumers—and employees alike. Integrating multiple devices, systems and technology can be complex, requiring extensive collaboration between many business groups. But, the rewards of improving the user experience while enhancing productivity and business success are well worth the investment.

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