

Will Web 2.0 create strategic account management 2.0?



web 2.0 (web tū pōint ō) *n.*

1. a perceived second generation of Web-based communities and hosted services – such as social networking sites, wikis and folksonomies – that aim to facilitate collaboration and sharing between users.

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Rick steers his car out of his driveway heading for work while a podcast from one of his information technology suppliers plays from the car speakers. Listening to a work-related podcast had never been Rick's idea of a pleasant morning commute, but this is different. Always "live" from an interesting location with interviews of industry leaders, the weekly show is a source of amusement and learning. The host of the program, "Slammin'" Sammy Savage, always keeps the casts engaging and even fun. "Finally a supplier that finds a way to add value and a smile to my face during my long drive," Rick thinks as his car grinds to another crawl in the busy freeway traffic.

Upon arriving at his desk an e-mail reminds him about the 8:30 a.m. project meeting in Second Life with the same supplier. Rick straps on his headset and logs on as Rick Starboy, moving his muscular cyber-self avatar around a sandy beach using the arrow keys on his keyboard. Rick thought it was

a brilliant move by his supplier to turn its office into a tropical paradise instead of a boring building.

Feeling a little out of place with his avatar wearing a biker jacket, Rick slips the three-dimensional model into a Hawaiian T-shirt before his project team arrives from the ocean where the team killed a few minutes before the meeting by surfing the waves. Rick reminisces about the drudgery of talking to disembodied voices on a conference telephone line while playing solitaire and answering e-mail on his computer in the dark ages of 2006. The virtual world is different. "Seeing" the meeting in an immersive 3-D environment, as opposed to hearing the meeting, keeps him completely focused on the task at hand. Besides, now if he drifts to other desktop activities, his avatar would quickly slump over and fall asleep, an embarrassing reminder to everyone that his mind and fingers have wandered off.



podcast (pād•kast) *n.*

1. a digital media file or related collection of such files distributed over the Internet using syndication feeds for playback on portable media players and personal computers.



av•a•tar (a-ve-tär) *n.*

1. an Internet user's representation of himself, whether in the form of a three-dimensional model used in computer games, a two-dimensional icon / picture used in Internet forums and other communities or a text construct found on early systems.

The supplier's strategic account manager shows up and starts the meeting with an update, and both she and Rick's team chime in during a rapid-fire discussion. Green waves radiate from whichever avatar speaks at any given moment. Being able to see who is talking gives a sense of team participation. Rick is mesmerized, feeling as if he is actually sitting on the beach with his team. And should the meeting venture off-track, Rick can pull his virtual pet elephant from his inventory, leap on top of it and march about while giving direction—his signature move to bring order to virtual meetings.

Two hours after the meeting Rick receives a feed with meeting notes from the joint wiki project page. He reads and compares them to his own notes and adds a couple of items before heading out for a lunch meeting.

Rick arrives to his lunch meeting 10 minutes early—a perfect opportunity to catch up on his supplier's latest video on demand, or vodcast, with his BlackBerry. The short video demonstrates a new product in action and includes a report from an industry trade show Rick was unable to attend. "Check this out," he says, pointing at the video, when his lunch companion arrives. "Here's a supplier that's putting both productivity and fun back in the client-supplier relationship."

second life (se-kend•lif) *n.*

1. an Internet-based virtual world launched in 2003 and developed by Linden Research Inc. that came to international attention via mainstream news media in late 2006 and early 2007.

The Web 2.0-powered business revolution

If that scenario sounded like science fiction, it's time for a reality check. Consider these examples:

- Computer storage leader EMC Corp. cranks out five to 10 audio podcasts a week and two or three vodcasts.
- IBM Corp. has 25 Second Life islands dedicated to meeting and learning, and some 5,000 employees already have Second Life accounts. Gartner Inc. estimates that 80 percent of active Internet users will be in non-gaming virtual worlds like Second Life by the end of 2011.
- Intel Corp.'s internal wiki, "Intelpedia," has amassed 5,000 pages of content and garnered 13.5 million page views in a little more than a year.
- Sales representatives at Ericsson role-play their way through customized virtual scenarios with full-motion video, professional acting and story-centered, character-rich dramatizations that help them



sell consultatively to real customers.

Let's take a closer look at a couple of the collaboration platforms changing business forever: podcasting and Second Life.

Podcasting

A podcast is a digital audio or video file distributed online. People can listen to or watch a podcast from their computers, BlackBerrys, iPods, smart phones or any other media-playing device. They can subscribe to new programs using an RSS feed, which is shorthand for really simple syndication feed—an alert system that notifies users of new shows. iTunes and other content aggregators can automatically make the newly downloaded episodes available to a user's portable media player.

The benefits of podcasting are substantial: Clients don't have to stop working to learn; the format's time-shift capability enables more productive load balancing during the workday; and the ability to listen on the go, from while driving a car to even walking a dog and running on a treadmill, transforms downtime into constructive time. With the growing popularity of video iPods and video-enabled cell phones, vodcasting is taking off, as well.

However, the success of mobile training programs hinges on using the technology appropriately. The inherent strengths of these media are subverted when they're used simply to time- and site-shift the traditional lecture format. Instead, the most successful podcasters sound more like radio shows than classrooms. Clients



feed (fēd) *n.*

1. a general term for the electronic distribution of text, audio or video. This may refer to a syndicated radio or TV program transmitted on a regular basis or to a text and graphics feed available on a Web site or blog.

respond enthusiastically to the natural, conversational tone of fast-paced and engaging "theater of the mind," which can incorporate everything from field reports, exotic imaginary locales and inspirational vignettes to running themes, jokes and cliffhangers that hook employees into future programs.

Most successful podcasts are hosted on a blog, and the integration of mobile training programs with an active blog is a critical step in the process of building an engaging online community and transforming the podcast format into a two-way, listener-driven medium.

Second Life

While the podcast is the killer application for mobile communication in business, Second Life is the savior of desktop collaboration. You just need to attend one session in the emerging virtual world to understand why IBM heralds it as the replacement of webinar, video conferencing and e-learning drone-a-thons. It's the Internet in 3-D. And with the recent launch of voice capability in Second Life, you can talk straight to your computer via a headset. As you move around, the sound seems to change directions and at a high sound quality. You can also chat or instant message, gesture and change appearance. IBM already uses virtual worlds to train new sales reps in China to connect with colleagues and role-play sales conversations. And Intel uses Second Life to collaborate with third-party developers.

If you don't yet have your own avatar, you can visit www.secondlife.com to

sign up for a free account and download the client software to create your own virtual alter ego. Don't let the video game look deceive you. There's no pre-arranged purpose, no score, no winners and no levels of difficulty. Second Life isn't a first-person shooter game but a first-person thinker game. The ability



wiki (wikē) *n.*


1. a collaborative Web site whose content can be edited by anyone with access to it.

to visualize objects in 3-D is perhaps the most obvious appeal of Second Life training. Automotive companies let dealers kick the tires and drive new vehicles. Pharmaceutical companies take doctors on journeys through the human body's veins to explain a new cardiovascular medication. Computer companies magnify a chip or minimize a city to clarify the flow of information or people. Participants walk or fly around and inside all these 3-D objects.

But for all the razzle-dazzle of its

3-D modeling capabilities, Second Life is ultimately about social networking. The real appeal of this and other virtual worlds is the ability to get together remotely to talk, role-play, interact with experts and peers and share experiences. Just speak straight into your headset, and other participants in your avatar's surroundings will hear your voice in 3-D.

Conclusion

Podcasting and Second Life are only two aspects of the new suite of emerging electronic technologies reinventing business. The next-generation SAM toolbox also includes game-based simulations, blogs, performance support systems on smart phones, supplemental text-messaging business wisdom programs, mobilization of the sales support library, wikis, widgets and social network sites. 

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Additional resources

For more information on this subject in SAM's library, the editors recommend: John Aiello, Drew Larsen and Ed Wertzberger, "How technology can align SAM and marketing teams and drive revenue," 39th Annual Conference, May 4, 2003, www.strategicaccounts.org.