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InfoX Showcase to debut in New York

Information Today, Inc., KM-World's parent company, will present InfoX Showcase (infox-ny.com), a vendor exhibition and industry gathering place for corporate information professionals and IT managers, Sept. 27-28 at the Hilton New York.

The InfoX Showcase will be held alongside five intensive, two-day educational events where attendees can acquire crucial knowledge, strategies and tools that will enable them to increase the information ROI in their organizations. Those events are: Business Intelligence, Buying Digital, C2: Connect and Collaborate, Innovations in Search, and Taxonomy Boot Camp.

People attending the events receive free admission to the InfoX Showcase. Those not attending any of the conferences may register for the Showcase only. The five conferences are:

The high cost of interruptions

BY JONATHAN B. SPIRA

The phones (both desk and mobile) rang, several instant messages popped up on one of my monitors, a colleague dashed into my office to ask a question, and I probably have e-mail but I turned off the chime years ago (when it became a continuous noise rather than an occasional chime). All while I'm writing this article on attention management and interruptions.

Interruptions are costly. In fact, unnecessary interruptions consume about 28 percent of the knowledge worker's day, which translates to 28 billion lost hours to companies in the United States alone ("The Cost of Not Paying Attention: How Interruptions Impact Knowledge Worker Productivity," Jonathan B. Spira and Joshua B. Feintuch, Basex, 2005). At an average cost per hour of $21 (U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics June 2005), that costs U.S. companies $588 billion per annum.

It turns out that getting work done today may require finding a place without landline phones, mobile phone reception, Wi-Fi and possibly even people. In the past, a seat in an aircraft would do (other passengers notwithstanding), but that too is changing as more airlines add broadband connectivity to their menu of on-board amenities.

Whether sitting at a desk in the office, a conference room, a home office or a client's office, the likelihood of being able to complete a task without interruption is nil. Not all work is created equal, nor are all interruptions. Many believe interruptions fall into two categories:

✦ when I interrupt someone (a "good" interruption) and
✦ when someone interrupts me (a "bad" interruption).

An interruption for the interruptee is not necessarily an interruption for the interrupter. Plus, many people have difficulty determining whether a matter is important, urgent, both or neither. A question may be important, but it could also wait. Someone might have a great sense of urgency to address a matter, but it mightn't be important.

Further, there are relative degrees of importance:
✦ Personal importance: How important is this issue to me?
✦ Group importance: If other people are involved in the process, how important is the issue to them?

Alfresco tries to repeat history

BY TONY BYRNE

Fifteen years ago, John Newton co-founded Documentum (documentum.com) on the premise that a document management system was best realized on the then novel approach of object-oriented programming with C++. Now with a gaggle of other ex-Documentum developers, Newton is trying it again. Their new open-source enterprise content management (ECM) platform, Alfresco (alfresco.org), is built atop the bleeding-edge Java Server Faces (JSF) framework using Aspect-Oriented Programming (AOP) principles.
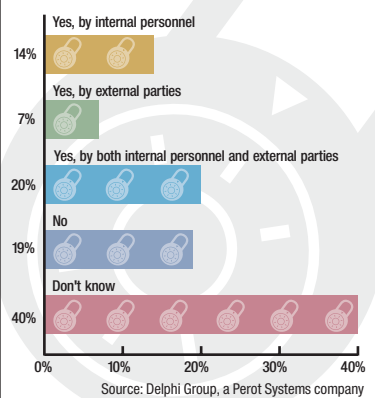
Much like with Documentum, when the Alfresco team talks about ECM, it means a highly scalable repository that can support a variety of content types and services. In its preview release, however, the package more modestly targets simple document collaboration a la Microsoft (microsoft.com) SharePoint.

Newton politely dismisses other open-source content management

Content Security

Within the past two years, has content been accessed by an unauthorized individual either deliberately or accidentally?

Yes, by internal personnel	14%
Yes, by external parties	7%
Yes, by both internal personnel and external parties	20%
No	19%
Don't know	40%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40%

Source: Delphi Group, a Perot Systems company

✦ Organizational importance: How important is the issue to the problems with which the organization is dealing?

Interruptions are not the only interference in the workplace. Distractions cause less interference and may not occupy the full extent of a knowledge worker's attention, but they do prevent work from proceeding at the usual pace. With many interruptions following in rapid succession, paying 100% attention to a single task seems impossible.

We can categorize such interruptive events as follows:

✦ Total interruptions, which completely occupy the conscious mind and disallow any thought relevant to the original task. Example: actively participating in a phone conversation.
✦ Dominant interruptions, which largely occupy the mind, leaving thought about the original task to slowly develop in the back of the mind. Example: taking a walk.
✦ Partial distractions, which do not stop people from consciously working on the original task but

do draw attention away from it so that it proceeds more slowly or less accurately. Example: instant messaging with friends or colleagues while working.
✦ Background activities, which may not be as obvious but may divert some portion of attention away from the original task, slightly reducing speed and/or accuracy. Example: listening to music.

In some respects, technology has heightened the problem of interruptions. Even as recently as 20 years ago, only two of the five distractions I mentioned in the first paragraph were technically feasible, and taking steps to counter them was easier (we could forward the phone to voicemail or set it on do-not-disturb, and we could close the door and post a do-not-disturb sign. Today we are bombarded by myriad devices (Palm, smartphone, pager, in addition to those previously listed), and prospects for relief seem poor.

Over the past decade, we have seen tremendous changes in the ways people work, and further change is expected. E-mail, closely followed by instant messaging in some circles, has become a staple

of communication both internally and externally. By 2006, 40% of the knowledge worker population will work from non-traditional environments, ranging from home offices to hotel rooms, and from airport lounges to customer sites. That figure will grow steadily over the next decade.

Co-workers can be located across time zones and national borders, not always in the next cubicle. While companies struggle to integrate cultures with different languages and customs, knowledge workers know that the next interruption may come from 10 time zones away and outside the normal workday, upsetting a delicate work/life balance.

Knowledge workers can, however, turn the tables and use technology to their advantage. Basex has a corporate culture that relies on IBM (ibm.com) instant messaging (née Lotus Sametime) to tell colleagues if we are busy (we use "do not disturb"), away from the office (we indicate in our away message where we are), and where we are when we are working (we indicate location information, e.g. "Munich in hotel room now"). That tends to limit interrup-

tions because we know how interruptible someone is prior to interrupting. Other systems, such as Siemens (siemens.com) OpenScape, expand on that; they not only indicate presence awareness but can provide a different message to a manager vs. an underling.

Ninety percent of the knowledge workers who participated in our survey found that simple tactics—such as closing the door and allowing the phone to go to voicemail—were from somewhat to very effective in combating interruptions.

Still, knowledge workers can be their own worst enemy. In the same survey, when asked how quickly they respond to a new e-mail notification, 55% said immediately or shortly thereafter. Only 35% said when convenient. Because 45% of respondents received 50 or more e-mail messages per day, we still have a lot of work to do in managing the knowledge worker's attention in order to achieve greater productivity. ∎

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