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Seven Reasons for Your Company to Start an Internal Blog
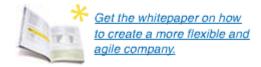
– C.G. Lynch, CIO

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If your existing e-mail system makes it nearly impossible to find what you need or effectively manage many documents, you might be ready for enterprise blogging on your corporate intranet, according to analysts and vendors at the Enterprise 2.0 conference in Boston. Here are seven signs that you might be ready:

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1. Your enterprise e-mail applications are not easy to search. This prevents people from getting key information that might be buried in a colleague's inbox. Even recent improvements and offerings in enterprise search might not allow you to get critical pieces of information you need from an e-mail that someone failed to include you as a recipient in. "KM [Knowledge Management] fails often because the benefit was for the company, not the individual," says Suw Charman, a blog consultant. "Wouldn't it just be easy to keep information about one subject in one place—a blog?"

2. Your e-mail is lost in the eye of the "cc storm." With e-mail, information sharing is haphazard, disorganized. The information that gets passed along to anyone largely relies on the prerogative of the sender. Did he put you in the "to" or "cc" (carbon copy) field or the politically charged "bc" (for blind copy)? Sometimes, people merely forget to include key players, or worse, sometimes the omission is intentional (see more about e-mail cattiness below, under the section on openness and accountability). "If there is information in a cc storm and you're not on it, then you don't have any idea about what's going on," says Chris Alden, executive vice president with Six Apart, an enterprise blogging vendor. With blogs, information about specific topics lives on the intranet, and critical information can be broadcasted to all who want to see it and who have permission to see it.

3. Ex-employees *can* take it with them. When someone leaves, odds are the e-mail account becomes dissolved and all the valuable information that lived in that person's account disappears into a data wasteland. "It's forever lost," says Anil Dash, chief evangelist for Six Apart. "If it's in a blog, it doesn't disappear when that person leaves."

4. Too much wasted time checking in with colleagues. If you know the movie *Office Space*, think of Lumbergh pestering his direct report—about nothing much of import, with a recurring, "Hello, Peter, what's happening?" It's a truism that people waste a ton of time "checking in" with one another either in person, via e-mail or phone. A blog provides a method of logging that information without the cumbersome process of constantly sending "what have you been working on lately" types of e-mails. If your boss or direct report reads your blog, he already knows.

5. With blogs, the humble and the egotist both win. Though you can set access controls, most blogs can be an internal platform to communicate about ongoing projects and what your big business wins and losses are. Hence, the egotist can show all the great work she's done and have it displayed publicly (remembering that people can choose to read about it, whereas with e-mail that jerk invades your e-mail whether you like it or not). "Those people like others to discover what they know," Dash says. It's another medium for them to fuel their vanity (and colleagues can access valuable information they possess).

Meanwhile, Dash adds, the humble worker who just wants to make sure people have the proper information to help others do their jobs effectively also wins by displaying her work publicly, on an as-needed basis.

6. Organizational openness and accountability. There is a fair amount of catty behavior that occurs over e-mail, and petty politics play a part sometimes about who gets an e-mail. Who is on the "to" field? Who is on the "cc" field? Did theyreally spinelessly include their boss in a "bc" field to humiliate a colleague? With blogs, it encourages open information, communication and debate without alienating certain people or encouraging bickering between colleagues before an e-mail thread is escalated to the boss.

7. People might already be using them. Odds are, shadow IT users have already brought things like a blogspot account into the enterprise and are blogging with or without your knowledge. As such, being able to set a company policy and giving them an outlet in which their blogging skills can help the whole enterprise makes sense. "The tools they use are the ones they use at home that work so well you can't stop them from bringing them into work," Dash says.