

BLOGGED DOWN

THE CANADIAN IT MANAGER'S BLOG

"As the skills shortage deepens, there will be pressure to increase immigration to resolve the issue. This may be inevitable and desirable. However, there are many underrepresented groups in our society that must be given the opportunity to engage more fully."

— Stu MacKay
Dean
Yukon College

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Don't get caught up in trends

Organizations should avoid adopting technologies because they're the hottest things to come down the pipelines. Instead, they should focus on what they've already got

The beginning of a new year and the end of an old usually means it's time for magazines, tech pundits and vendors to start talking about what's hot in terms of technology for the coming year (virtualization, apparently). Such discussions have always seemed rather misplaced to me.

While it's important to always stay on top of the latest technical trends and to keep a close eye on what others are doing with emerging technologies, discussions about what's hot and what's not should be the domain of gamers (who are lining up for Nintendo's Wii and Sony's PS3), not the enterprise world.

Such discussions imply that companies adopt new technologies because it's the cool thing to do, not because it makes business sense. But in reality, this is all too often the case.



Poonam Khanna

It's easy to understand how someone can get caught up in the cool factor of new technologies. For many in the industry, it's part of what drew them into their chosen career. It's also important for them to stay on top of the latest technologies in order to remain marketable in the workforce.

And sometimes adopting a new technology because of the cool factor does make business sense — especially when the technology is customer facing. At a Chinese takeout place I went to recent-

ly, for example, I was taken aback to hear an old-fashioned analogue phone ring. It worked for the place — an organization that had been in the neighbourhood for about 30 years and hadn't changed much. But for most places, it's important to keep up with the times. Customers walking into most businesses might raise eyebrows at such archaic technology.

However, adopting a new technology just because it's the latest thing out there and because there's a lot of buzz around it rarely makes business sense.

Unused potential

This is especially true when you consider that most enterprise-wide applications go only partly used. For example, the enterprise resource planning and customer relationship management packages that companies shell out big

bucks for can usually do much more than most organizations actually tap into.

But before they delve deeper into the applications they've already invested so much time and effort into, many companies are off to the next new thing in hopes that it'll cure all that ails them. They quickly forget that the solutions they implemented a couple of years ago were supposed to do precisely that.

The tech industry is fast-paced, but in their hurry to keep up with the changes, companies might be missing out on the benefits of the applications they've already implemented. Instead of hopping from one application to the next, companies should sometimes stop to explore what's already in place.

VIEWPOINT

Spam filters can catch more than just spam messages

When the message has to get through, pick up the phone instead of assuming the recipient got it

SEAN CORNER WAS PLAYING RUGBY for the Hamilton Hornets in Port Colborne in early September when a member of the opposing team ran into him. The other guy was bigger, and he hit Sean hard. Sean's back was broken. He is not expected to walk again.

Games like rugby can be dangerous, and people who play them know that. Sad as the story is, it wouldn't be terribly unusual — and it certainly wouldn't have any place in *Computing Canada* — if it weren't for this: When Sean Corner took the field that day, he



GRANT BUCKLER

believed he was covered by catastrophic injury insurance.

He wasn't. The insurance, provided through Rugby Canada, had been cancelled. An e-mail had been sent to the

Hamilton Hornets the day before the game in which Sean was injured, advising the team that the insurance was gone.

A spam filter deleted the e-mail.

Whether Sean Corner or any of his teammates would have chosen not to play had they known their insurance had lapsed is anyone's guess. We do know they would have been offered the choice — Chris Gilks, president of the Hamilton Hornets, told *The*

Globe and Mail that had he seen the e-mail about the insurance cancellation before the game, he would have told his players and given them the option of skipping the game. This incident serves to illustrate the dark side of spam filtering. Stopping junk mail is all very well, but what about the false positives — the legitimate e-mail that doesn't get through? There is plenty of it. I use spam-filtering software on my PCs. I check the mailbox into which it places what it thinks is spam regularly. I get at least one false positive a day. Most of them are bulk-mailed press releases, so missing one wouldn't be the end of the world. But I also don't know what legitimate e-mail my ISP's e-mail filters are stopping.

When I read Sean Corner's story, my first thought was that this might be the trigger for a lawsuit that could throw the whole notion of spam filtering into question. Who is liable when the mistaken blocking of an e-mail has this sort of effect on someone's life? That's hard

to say, according to Bradley Freedman, head of the Vancouver office technology group at national law firm Borden Ladner Gervais. It depends on contracts. If the spam filtering provider's contract specifies that it isn't responsible for false positives, if the Internet service provider's contract disclaims responsibility for lost e-mails, it's doubtful whether you could successfully sue either of them.

Someone hurt by the failure of an e-mail to arrive might have better luck going after the sender for not using a more reliable means of communication, Freedman suggests.

What people should do is insist that spam-filtering technology provide a way of checking what is being blocked — and use that capability. And press their ISPs to provide ways of reviewing blocked messages. And, when the message absolutely, positively has to get through — pick up the phone.

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