KnowldgWORKS News Number 25 December 16, 1999

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KnowBits

a. Holiday Wishes

With the holidays and the turn of the millennia one’s thoughts go to wishes for this time of year. As top 10 lists are in vogue (at least in this millennia), here are my wishes for the the holidays and coming year.

1. That we reach peace and harmony around what it means when we say, “knowledge management.”
2. That Microsoft does not buy every company making a knowledge management product.
3. That knowledge management software becomes reasonably priced so that real people can acquire these tools.
4. That XML actually finds a significant problem to solve.
5. That all mention of the Y2K problem disappears at the turn of the millennium.
6. That someone invents a true personal knowledge appliance.
7. That we all have too many knowledge management engagements to handle.
8. That we begin to evolve software technologies as rapidly as hardware technologies.

9. That all knowledge and information is available to all people all over the world.
10. That all of your personal and family knowledge needs and desires are met in the new millennia.

I extend warm wishes to you and yours in the holiday season. Thanks for your support and a wonderful Year 2000 to you.

b. Speaking on the Net

Languages Spoken on the Web

Interesting factoid about what languages are used on the World Wide Web from CIO Magazine.

English	57.4
Japanese	8.8
German	6.2
Chinese	4.4
Spanish	4.3
French	4.2

KnowSite

a. www.fatbrain.com

FatBrain has started a new kind of bookselling business: eMatter.com. Authors can publish to a special web site and collect royalties for the work.

b. www.semio.com

Semio makes products for creating content indices. There are lots of interesting white papers, and descriptions of methodologies, not to mention their product line. No eval downloads though.

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Microsoft’s Digital Dashboard Technology

Some History

COMDEX 1997. Las Vegas, NV. Jim Barksdale in Netscape’s hey day. One of the high points of this COMDEX

and well attended was Barksdale's keynote. After all Netscape created a significant challenge to Microsoft at that time. Barksdale demonstrates new Netscape technology where the desktop becomes a window to information. He demonstrates access to corporate information, alerts when significant mail arrives, and the availability of other knowledge worker information. In my opinion it was the first showing of the computer desktop to become a portal to information and thus becoming a more ubiquitous business tool. In 1997 this was quite impressive as the Netscape vision became a single common view into all information a person would need to do their job. Unfortunately actual implementations of this never seemed to materialize.

1999, Microsoft, and Knowledge Management

As with most things Microsoft they seem to have discovered knowledge management in the past few months and have begun to articulate their vision of knowledge management, which, as you might imagine, is based completely on Microsoft-grown technology.

A part of Microsoft's entrance into knowledge management, Bill Gates gave a presentation to Corporate senior executives outlining his (Microsoft's) vision of the knowledge rich future. At this presentation Mr. Gates introduced the concept of the Digital Dashboard. Looking at the concept closely we see a substantial resemblance between the 1997 Netscape version of a seamless desktop and Microsoft's 1999 version of the dashboard.

Dashboards

For a moment, think about one of the best-evolved examples of human interface engineering – the automobile dashboard. Automobile dashboards provide a significant amount of data about the current state of the automobile. Typically what is presented is exactly what is needed and at a glance it is possible to see the state of the automobile. The other function of the dashboard is to provide for control of the automobile. Dashboards facilitate almost attention-less (once learned) control of the automobile.

Digital Dashboard

The notion of an automobile dashboard is directly applicable to the concept of a digital dashboard--provide the information needed and the controls to operate the “machine.” In this case, the “machine” is the business. If the metaphor were completely applicable it would actually be possible to control a business from the digital dashboard. In reality the “out” communication may be very limited.

Microsoft’s Digital Dashboard is based on Office 2000 technology. They currently have available a Digital Dashboard Starter Kit which allows experimentation with some sample Digital Dashboards. In order to install the starter kit, you will need to have Office 2000 installed.

The dashboard interface is built on Internet technology. The dashboard window consists of a number of frames, and each frame contains a particular “information nugget.” An “information nugget” is the term used by Microsoft to discuss pieces of valuable information. Each frame contains a different “information nugget.” The “container” for the frames that make up the digital dashboard is Microsoft’s messaging interface, Outlook.

Other Digital Dashboard Products

A digital dashboard can be built with any browser technology. Three ingredients are needed. These are the source of information, the conveyance to the interface (how the information gets from the source to the interface), and the actual display of the information.

The Lotus Note R5 has an interesting feature. You can custom configure the interface to provide the information you want to look at. Although the formats are limited and the information resources must be expressed in terms of HTML this capability looks quite a bit like the Microsoft Digital Dashboard capability.

Digital Dashboard Challenges

The fundamental challenge is in building the pipelines from the source of information to the dashboard. For example, suppose you wanted to have a dashboard element that monitored your company’s sales on a real time basis. You wanted this information displayed in a bar graph by product line, and you also want an alarm to go off if

product sales levels drop below certain preset levels. What has to be done to create this?

Chances are this information will have to be derived from current data stores and then supplied to a web server that communicates with a small Java client that lives on the dashboard to display the information and produce the alarms. Since none of this is canned, it will have to be developed. One could envision that basic business fundamentals will eventually become available as pre-canned products but until that happens, the programming staff will be busy creating nugget pipelines. In the case of the Microsoft version of this technology, programmers will be busy creating Active-X controls.

Digital Dashboards in the Knowledge Management Architecture

The digital dashboard should be thought of as a kind of interface that provides the knowledge worker with the information they need to carry out their jobs. By providing all of the information on a configurable desktop, we enhance a knowledge worker’s ability to easily get at the information they need to get at. So the dashboard is a portal to knowledge worker information. To me, the digital dashboard can be built in a number of different ways but does not necessarily depend on Microsoft technology.

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