



Google 'waves' at Web collaboration

Are you spending more time in meetings than actually working? Has your fax machine started to memorize certain documents that get passed back and forth with your customers? Does editing a contract feel like a game of hot potato passing changes back and forth?

Well, you may be suffering from collaboration overload. It's a common problem within organizations that rely on committees for everything. But this month, I have good news for you.

Google recently released a new beta product called Google Wave, a revolutionary product that represents the next generation of online collaboration tools. A cross between e-mail, instant messaging and online wiki, it provides a new way to interact with your employees and business partners by creating what are called waves. Creating a wave allows multiple people to simultaneously edit documents, hold online meetings and coordinate projects with ease, all in real time.

Like e-mail, Google Wave has a familiar inbox where you can see new and existing waves from others. But unlike e-mail, all replies and forwards occur within the same wave, which makes it easy to track the entire ongoing discussion in one place. You can edit comments, reply and even have private side discussions all from the same wave window.

That might seem a bit confusing at first, but Google Wave also allows you to see changes to a

wave as they occurred over time by using an innovative playback feature. Using playback, you can watch who made changes in the wave as if you were reversing back in time to watch from the beginning. Playback is a useful feature for understanding how people arrived at certain conclusions.

I've been playing with Google Wave for several months now and have concluded there are effective uses for this new tool. Google Wave comes with an ability to add interactive functionality into your waves through the use of extensions also known as gadgets.

For example, if you're planning the next company barbecue, you can include the weather forecast using the Accuweather.com extension. You also might include an interactive map gadget to give the address and directions, as well as an interactive yes/no/maybe gadget to determine a firm count of the guest list.

The real power of Google Wave comes from its ability to quickly bring all the power of e-mail, instant messaging and interactive Web pages together into one central location.

But there's a downside to this powerful technology. With all the speed that comes with using Google Wave, it can be a productivity drain. There's something about watching others type that's quite hypnotic, and, if left unchecked, you might find yourself collaborating the day away. The best practice is to limit the number of people you're collaborating with by limiting the topic of each wave. Use the tool to plan the barbecue not rewrite the company business plan.

While online collaboration tools have been around for years, Google has a great new solution that may finally bring collaboration to the masses. As with Gutenberg's moveable type printing press, Bell's telephone and the rise of Internet, history has shown decreasing the lag in communication has increased the speed of innovation.

Google Wave has the potential to usher in a new set of communication tools and fundamentally change the speed of business. So buckle up. We're in for quite a ride.



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