



Not invented here



The Xpragmatic View #88
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For every change or evolution, there is always a group of people who fully embrace the new possibilities that are given. On the other hand, there is also a group of people who pull out, who think that it is not needed, that they can live without it. The second group is often the more important one.

Internet for dummies

Last week, we received our copy of the latest edition of the magazine of the alumni association of our former business school. Apart from the magazine itself, there was also a separate flyer included.

This is not unusual. In general, these flyers are announcements for new events, seminars or training programs. Adding this as a separate paper is just a way to raise awareness and facilitates the distribution of this information. Also business schools have to do their marketing.

However this time, the flyer was about the alumni database.

As with most alumni associations, the contact information of the members is somewhere stored in a database that members can access over the Internet. In our case, this information is also printed once a year as a book that is sent to all members, providing an easy reference for networking purposes. However, as said, this information is also available over the Internet.

Unfortunately, the members do not seem to be aware of this possibility or do not use it very often since the flyer was explicitly an attempt to raise awareness for this option.

And this was done in a very elaborate and detailed way, explaining how you could access the database, how you had to login, what to do in case you forgot your password, how to search for the details of a specific person, etc. All sort of things the normal Internet user is aware of or is able to find out himself. However here, this was meticulously presented in a step-by-step guide with screenshots and the like. Internet for dummies.

Why? Were they thinking that all members were Internet illiterates?

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At first sight, it is strange. This target group only consists of higher educated people who hold middle and senior management positions in their organisations. All of them have certainly the skills and should have had ample opportunity to become familiar with this medium.

However, did they really do so?

For most of us, the Internet has become an essential part of our daily life. It is even hard to imagine how it would be like without it. However, do all people think the same way?

Of course, there is the so-called "digital divide", the gap between those with regular, effective access to information technology, and those without this access. In general, differences in socio-economic conditions are the main reason for this.

However, such "digital divide" not only exists at the "lower" end of society, it also exists at the opposite, higher end of society. Of course, the reasons are different. At the high end, poorer socio-economic conditions are of course not the reason. Instead, a lack of interest, sometimes a lack of time and certainly, a lack of need are the main drivers.

Indeed, these upper layers of society have ample access to alternatives for managing their business, getting the information they need and making new contacts. Very few of them will show up in the emerging Web 2.0 social networks, because they can rely on other and more convenient networking mechanisms without the privacy issues that are often associated with Internet usage. The same goes for other parts of their business and their life.

Therefore, not interested in and not needed.

OK, this might be true for these individuals, but what about the organisations they work for? Today, no single company still has the luxury running their business while not being aware of these new evolutions.

However, with a management team that has no interest for these matters and certainly is not familiar with it, how will they manage? How will they make decisions? How can they evaluate the potential of opportunities? Bring in the consultants.

The bearer of the message

Will it be of any use? Now and then, we also read some papers written by other consultants on subjects such as "the importance of corporate blogging for the business".

We do not criticise the ideas of these consultants here. However, how will they manage bringing the right message to an audience that is not interested?

Don't tell us. We know the answer. We've been there already years ago while still working for IT companies. Also in those days, there were brilliant presentations on how technology would transform the business of a company. Breakthrough technology. Enabling technology. Also in those days, most of these business managers had that somewhat surprised, somewhat compassionate look while listening to the bearer of the message. Probably not understanding. Most likely already thinking about the game of golf they would play in the afternoon with the account manager of their traditional supplier, IBM.

Transformation is not the thing managers are looking for.

We fear little has changed since. Some say that things will change once the present younger generation will take over these management positions. At least, this younger generation has grown up in the new cyber society, so they will be familiar with it. They will understand.

It will make no difference. Same as the present management generation, they also will be disconnected from other evolutions that have emerged since. In evolution, there is never a standstill. There is only a continuous breaking of the rules.


Once an adult, you've always grown up in the wrong period.

About the author



Marc Buyens is analyst, management consultant and owner of Xpragma. Marc started Xpragma in 1999 after a 20+ years career in the IT sector. Today, he provides advice, training and mentoring services focusing on the intersection of technological evolution, organisational change and business strategy: a messy world of unfulfilled promises.

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