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The Future of Meetings
By
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Meetings have been, and continue to be, a central part of every day business life. Unfortunately, not all meetings give those in attendance value, and many waste our time. In the mid-1990s, just after Yahoo!, eBay, Amazon.com and a host of other net-based companies started taking off, I recall reading a prediction that large face-to-face business meetings and conferences would soon be history; done in by e-meetings and videoconferencing. Our days would be spent attending virtual meetings without ever again boarding an airplane, checking into a hotel, and getting lost in a labyrinthine conference center. In addition to being wrong, the prediction was just plain silly. That's what happens when you look at the capabilities of technology without looking at human needs. The need to meet, establish relationships, share information, knowledge, and above all wisdom is not going away. No amount of high tech gadgetry is going to change that in a fundamental way.

e-Meetings or Face-To-Face

Virtual meetings or e-meetings, Web-conferencing and videoconferencing have indeed come into their own as important business tools, but face-to-face meetings are still the dominant form of meeting and extremely relevant because there is no better way to build trust, and in our increasingly global marketplace trust is the glue that creates strong, successful, and enduring business relationships. Those who anticipated the end of face-to-face meetings made the mistake of using either/or thinking, which often occurs when dazzling new technologies first appear; the new thing is seen as destined to totally supplant the old thing – except that rarely happens. Instead, the new and the old tend to coexist by doing what they do best. E-meetings, Web-conferencing and videoconferencing are superb tools for saving travel time and expense, focusing on a structured agenda, obtaining senior-level points of view in real-time, building consensus, and making announcements. They're not so good at, smoothing out contentious give-and-take, or handling emotional or sensitive issues. Fortunately both virtual meetings and face-to-face meetings are readily available. It's not either/or anymore. Both/and thinking is the new paradigm.

More Meetings

I foresee a growing need for more meetings in an interdependent world that generates increasing quantities of data, information, knowledge, and wisdom that needs to be communicated. The key is to develop guidelines for determining what type of meeting to have. To do this, you must look at the meeting's goal. One of the traps we fall into when planning a meeting, is looking at business goals instead of human/emotional goals. Think of it this way. Is your goal to inform, motivate, inspire, persuade, influence, sell, gain trust, negotiate, gain respect, establish new relationships, strengthen existing relationships, share information, share knowledge and experiences, gain credibility, change how people think, solve a problem, determine a strategy, or simply create dialog? Thinking about the goal for the meeting in this way makes it easier to decide what *type* of meeting will be best and what technology is most appropriate.

- If the goal is primarily to inform by sharing data and information, then a meeting may not even be necessary. It might be far better to use e-mail, groupware, a wiki, a blog, or an Intranet or Extranet and let people collect and absorb the information at their own rate and in their own time. **(Continued on Page 2)**

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- If you determine that sharing the information at the same time with everyone would be best, then consider audio conferencing and/or web-conferencing as an alternative to a face-to-face meeting.
- If the information delivery will primarily be one-way, then an e-conference would serve the purpose. If, however, informing involves hands-on demonstrations and/or high levels of interactivity, then a face-to-face meeting is definitely in order.
- If the goal is to influence, build on existing relationships, share knowledge and experiences, gain credibility, solve a problem, or determine a strategy, then a face-to-face meeting is best, but it is no longer the only option. Technologies such as high-end videoconferencing and satellite-broadcast services that use full-motion video could help you accomplish your goals. If all participants have access to broadband connections, and today most do, then web-conferencing offers another increasingly attractive option. Audio-conferencing could also be a viable option depending on the number of people attending and the amount of interactivity required during the meeting.
- If the goal is to gain trust and/or respect, or to inspire, motivate, persuade, establish relationships, negotiate, or change how people think, then a face-to-face meeting is a must. If this is not possible, then the next best thing would be videoconferencing.

The need to meet, share knowledge, and develop relationships will continue. Successful meetings will depend on your ability to develop guidelines that leverage both old and new tools to build trusting relationships that foster greater communication, collaboration and community.

TECHNOLOGY NEWS HIGHLIGHTS

ROAD SURFACE DE-ICES ITSELF

Engineers at Cargill have developed a new paving material called SafeLane™ that is claimed to be able to keep itself free of ice. A combination of limestone aggregate and epoxy, the substance creates a hard, porous surface that traps liquid de-icing agents so they stay on the road from four to ten times longer than on concrete or asphalt. In addition to preventing frost and ice formation, the material prolongs the life of roads by sealing the surface from moisture. Its increased traction capabilities may also serve to reduce accidents during slippery driving conditions. SafeLane translates into savings not only in terms of the total cost of de-icing chemicals needed, but in the amount of time spent applying them, and the impact of run-off into the local environment.

For information: Cargill, Inc., P. O. Box 9300, Minneapolis, MN 55440-9300; phone: 800-227-4455; Web site: www.cargill.com

TELL-TALE VOICE

A new technique called Layered Voice Analysis (LVA) may soon surpass the typical lie-detector test as a means of identifying potential criminals. By detecting small, involuntary changes in a person's speech patterns, LVA can classify brain activity as being the result of stress, excitement, or even deception. It can determine a subject's level of concentration, their willingness to talk about a particular subject, and whether or not their thoughts are the product of imagination or actual memory recall. Data for analysis is collected through a microphone and the software, running on a standard PC, maps responses to questions numerically and visually. Insurance companies are already using the technology to identify potentially fraudulent claims. Law enforcement agencies are expected to begin evaluating LVA as a possible tool for conducting investigations, security clearances, and controlling access to secure areas.

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For information: Nemesysco Ltd., P. O. Box 1183, Zuran, 42823, Israel; phone: +972-9-885-3864; fax: +972-9-885-3782; Web site: www.nemesysco.com

PRINTING SOLAR PANELS

A new development in photovoltaics may soon make solar panels more cost-effective and easier to produce than ever before. The innovation consists of semi-conductors suspended in a solution so they can be printed – like ink – onto strips of plastic as thin as photographic film. The extremely pliable solar strips could be incorporated into awnings, tents, roofs, and even clothing. The developers are targeting release of the product within two years.

For information: Alan Heeger, Konarka Technologies, Inc., 116 John Street, Suite 12, 3rd Floor, Lowell, MA 01852; phone: 978-569-1400; fax: 978-569-1401; Web site: www.konarka.com

THROUGH-THE-WALL IMAGING

A new device called the Xaver 800 may soon make it possible for police, fire and rescue teams to scan dangerous buildings and locate people or objects inside before entering them. The system uses Ultra Wide Band (UWB) signals, processing them in a way that eliminates unwanted RF noise and delivers a high quality picture. A 3-D display allows the operator to view the distance and orientation of everything – including people, furniture or other obstacles, and weapons – on the opposite side of the building's wall in real time. Xaver is capable of "seeing" through wood, brick, cement, plaster, and reinforced concrete at a range of up to 26 feet, although the manufacturer is hopeful that within five years technological advancements will enable them to increase the range to as far as 300 feet. The system costs approximately $100,000; however, the company also plans to market a shorter range, lower resolution version for about $25,000. Under current United States FCC regulations it is only available to police and rescue departments.

For information: Camero, Inc., 9 Ha'omanut Street, Park Poleg, B2, P. O. Box 8580, Netanya 42160, Israel; phone: +972-9-865-9088; fax: +972-9-865-9388; Web site: www.camero-tech.com

ROBOTIC HAND CAN TOUCH AND FEEL

Italian scientists have developed the Cyberhand – the first brain-controlled, prosthetic hand. The device connects to a telemetry system implanted in the wearer's arm, which transfers signals between the patient's central nervous system and the hand to control its movements. Sensors in the robotic device allow it to gauge pressure and force to prevent it from crushing or dropping objects. But this innovative design goes one step further by sending sensory feedback back to the user as well, so the patient can feel the hand as if it were his own.

For information: Paolo Dario, Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna, Piazza Martiri della Liberta, 33 56127 Pisa, Italy; phone: +39-050-883111; fax: +39-050-883296; Web site: www.sssup.it

CAR-TO-CAR COMMUNICATIONS

A European project is aimed at developing driver assistance systems based on vehicle-to-vehicle communications. The systems use wireless technologies that could communicate to nearby cars when a vehicle is braking or changing lanes, making it safer and easier to maneuver in traffic. The short-distance connections would be created spontaneously whenever automobiles were in range of each other, enabling them to exchange information, such as speed and proximity. The ultimate goal is to prevent accidents by using this data to facilitate the movements of everyone on the road.

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STRETCHY SILICON

Researchers at the University of Illinois inadvertently discovered a way to make silicon more flexible than ever. In the process of fashioning thin silicon strips, a rubber stamp used to apply the film to its plastic backing was accidentally stretched. When it snapped back, the ribbons of silicon formed ripples, similar to an accordion, which were ten to twenty times as stretchy as rigid silicon. In addition, the strips were capable of withstanding up to 100 cycles of stretching and compression during tests. The flexible material can be used to make devices like transistors and diodes by adding specific components. This technique could lead to the development of sensor-filled clothing that monitors the wearer's vital signs, or electronic devices that can conform to complex shapes, such as the wings of an aircraft.

For information: John Rogers, University of Illinois, F. S. Materials Research Lab, 104 S. Goodwin Avenue, MRL 2005, MC 230, Urbana, IL 61801; phone: 217-244-4979; email: jrogers@express.cites.uiuc.edu; Web site: www.uiuc.edu

BRAIN-COMPUTER INTERFACE

Several researchers have reported on the successful use of implanted electrodes for generating signals that can operate a computer, electronic and prosthetic devices. But the Laboratory for Advanced Brain Signal Processing is looking at a way to accomplish the same result without the need for invasive surgery. This new system is based on the fact that movement is accompanied by changes in brain wave activity that can be recorded using an electroencephalograph, or EEG. These signals can be used to operate a computer just by thinking about it. An array of 200 electrodes picks up signals from the surface of the scalp that are analyzed using a sophisticated software algorithm. When a user thinks about moving a specific part of his body, the unique patterns of electrical activity that are generated can be correlated to movements of a computer cursor. The result is that they can simply think about moving an arm or leg and the cursor will automatically move on the screen. In initial testing, the researchers moved the cursor in the desired direction with about a 70% success probability rate.

For information: Andrzej Cichoki, Ph.D, Riken Brain Science Institute, 2-1 Hirosawa, Wako City, Saitama 351-198, Japan; Web site: www.brain.riken.go.jp

AFFORDABLE INFORMATION SEARCH

The Google Mini is a low-cost, hardware-software appliance that does for your Web site or network what the Google search engine does for the World Wide Web. The Mini was designed to give smaller businesses the flexibility to quickly and easily search Intranets and internal documents, as well as the Internet. The original version of the device is capable of handling up to 100,000 documents with a price tag of $2,995, but two new versions have recently been released that give users the option of 200,000 or 300,000 documents at a cost of $5,995 or $8,995 respectively. All versions are easily upgradeable as a client's needs grow. The systems can be deployed in less than an hour and support all relevant file formats.

For information: Google Inc., 1600 Amphitheatre Parkway, Mountain View, CA 94043; phone: 650-253-0000; fax: 650-253-0001; Web: www.google.com/enterprise/mini/

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About Daniel Burrus

Daniel Burrus is one of the world's leading technology forecasters and business strategists, and is the author of six books, including the highly acclaimed ***Technotrends***, which has been translated into over a dozen languages. He is the founder and CEO of Burrus Research Associates, Inc., a research and consulting firm that specializes in global innovations in science and technology, their creative application, and future impact.

In 1983, Burrus became the first and only futurist to accurately identify the twenty technology categories that would drive two decades of revolutionary change. Since then, he has established a worldwide reputation for his exceptional record of predicting the future of technological change and its direct impact on the business world. He has helped hundreds of clients identify new opportunities and develop successful competitive strategies based on the creative application of leading-edge technologies,and has delivered over 2,200 keynote speeches to corporations, associations, and professional organizations worldwide.

In his presentations, Mr. Burrus blends timely and provocative knowledge with just the right amount of humor and motivation. He is a master at tailoring his presentations to his audiences as he addresses relevant trends and offers powerful, practical guidance for turning rapid change into a competitive advantage.

Burrus' client list encompasses a wide range of industries, and includes many Fortune 500 companies such as GE, IBM, Oracle, Microsoft, DuPont, Yahoo!, Toshiba, American Express, Northwestern Mutual, ExxonMobil, and Sara Lee. He has been the featured subject of a ***PBS Special***, has appeared on programs such as ***Larry King***, ***CNN***, and ***Bloomberg***, and is quoted in a variety of publications, including ***USA Today***, ***Fortune*** and ***Industry Week***.

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-- Wenda Millard, Chief Sales Officer, Yahoo!

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