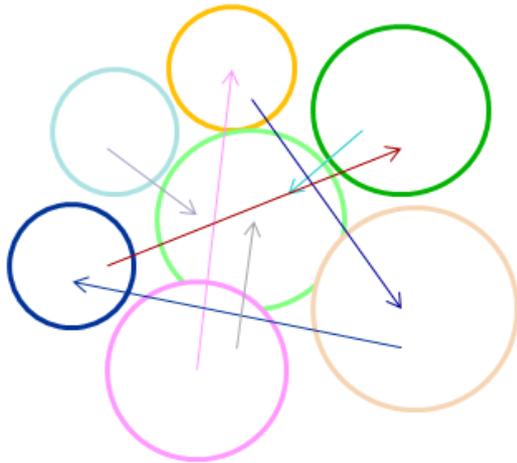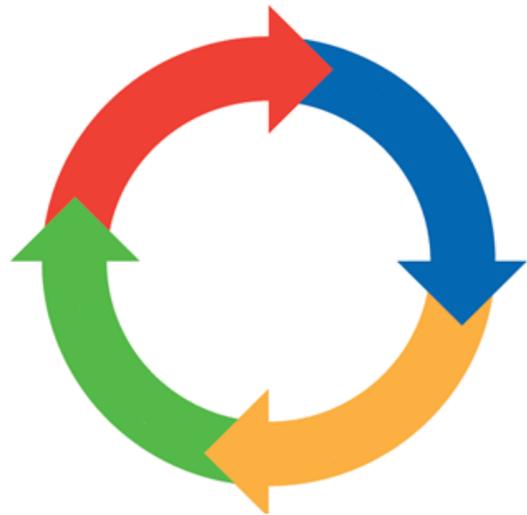# Collaboration or Chaos?

*Before you put cloud based software to work for you, should you stop a moment to ponder?*

OR

??

The hazard of unplanned implementation – SaaS sprawl

With the world thrown open to us SMBs thanks to the cloud, we can't help but act like kids in a candy shop. Expensive enterprise software is ours for the taking for a low monthly cost. We can use any system to solve any business problem literally within minutes without the bother of implementation and IT experts. We can access data, IT systems and talent from any nook of the world.

But in our excitement, we soon find we are burdened by dozens of cloud software for everything – scheduling meetings, storing files, coordinating projects, managing leads, managing partners, recruiting, or billing. A new state of disorder! Getting to the right data now means logging into multiple screens, digging deep, and manually moving data between applications. Surely this isn't what we signed up for!
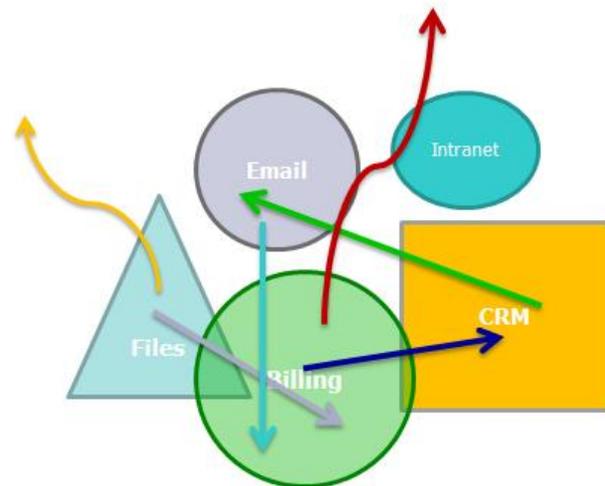
As the cloud market matures, it has to contend with the problem of "integration". How does the multiplicity of new cloud systems work together and contribute to company goals? Data is locked away or duplicated in scores of application silos; users have to learn multiple user interfaces and manage multiple logins; and data has to be moved manually between applications. As a result, the cloud actually becomes counterproductive. It is for this exact reason that a new breed of companies which specialize in "integration" are thriving – Boomi, Informatica, IBM Cast Iron.

> **THE INTEGRATION PROBLEM**
>
> *How does a multiplicity of new cloud systems work together and contribute to company goals?*

The problem is especially acute where systems frequently interact and are a part of daily work. A prime example is collaboration. Scores of "point" solutions have entered the market which go by as "collaboration software", but serve a very specific part of collaboration – email, document management, project management etc. We have to switch back and forth between these tools so often that it cripples processes.

A smart business owner looks beyond the next step

While getting "a solution per problem" is tempting, it is obviously counter-productive in the long run. A "strategic" view is to envision the needs of the team as it grows a year, 2 years, 3 years down the line. So while at the moment we just need to share documents with an offshore team, but as the team expands, and involves more people across the company, these needs will likely grow to tools for coordination (calendars, project management), team building (intranet spaces, announcements, polls) and beyond. Rather than patching tools as we go along, it is more intelligent to opt for "integrated" collaboration suites, which are developed on the basis of intensive experience with common business collaboration needs.

# What are the benefits of an integrated collaboration suite?

Improves adoption and productivity

Never underestimate the power of inertia in a business. Employees are naturally resistant to using new tools. From their point of view, it means going through the entire grind of learning yet another software and making it part of their daily schedule. It is for this exact reason that lots of new solutions released with much fanfare end up in the dump.

Having a single solution saves workers the effort of learning multiple tools, and switching back and forth for different needs. Ideally, a collaboration suite is the "home" for employees where they can quickly access all the tools and information they need for work in a single, consistent interface. This has a positive impact on adoption as well as worker productivity.

Seamless sharing of information between applications improves productivity

As mentioned before, collaboration tools need to share information with each other – documents are associated with projects which are further related to calendar schedules and so on. Disconnected tools lead to confusion, duplication, data that has to be manually moved, and people simply falling back upon email to get things done. However, if information can be seamlessly be exchanged between tools with just a few clicks, each tool performs its function better, and results in improved productivity. You can find specific examples in the next section.
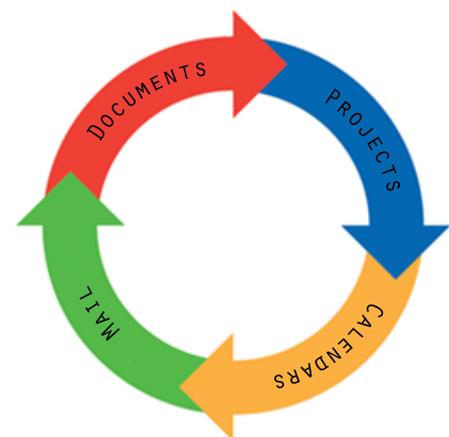
Improved security

Multiple systems can be likened to multiple joints in a company's IT infrastructure and a greater chance of information leakage, especially when data is moved over the internet. Having a unified system means users have just one set of credentials to manage, which leaves less room for error. From an administrator's point of view, a single system easier to administer, track activity on and control.

Lower Total Cost of Ownership

With one vendor to buy services from, one vendor accountable for quality of service and support, one system to deploy and train on, cost savings automatically result. With multiple vendors, not only do the license costs add up, you have to bear the entire lifecycle costs of software for each implementation.

It is for this reason we have developed HyperOffice as a "suite" of collaboration tools which seamlessly integrates tools in a single interacting whole. We offer a list of scenarios highlighting the drawbacks of point collaboration software, and the benefits of having them integrated with other collaboration tools.

Since we can't kill email, why not make the most of it?

Pundits for years have grown hoarse predicting the death of email, but email survives. However, the growing adoption of collaboration software suggests that companies have started shifting the burden. As we have argued in detail elsewhere (refer to "[from email bankruptcy to business productivity](#)"), email is inefficiently used for many things which are more suited for collaborative tools. For example we use email to send documents back and forth to collaborate on them, to delegate tasks and receive task requests, schedule meetings and so on. Collaboration tools are vastly more efficient in performing these tasks.

But the fact remains, email still has important roles to perform and is an integral part of how any business operates. The ideal solution, then, is to have email and collaboration tools integrated in a single seamless solution. This approach leverages email's popularity, and through cross linkages and contextual integration, provides workers access to appropriate tools right from the email console.

> *Determining the right (email) vendor….depends on the breadth of its offering — and if that offering meets your current and future needs. Many companies aren't looking at moving just their email; they're considering other collaboration applications and services, such as team workspaces, that are required to support them in their environments. Because of the integration between email, business applications, supporting services, and other collaboration tools, there can be significant cost savings when they're bundled together.*
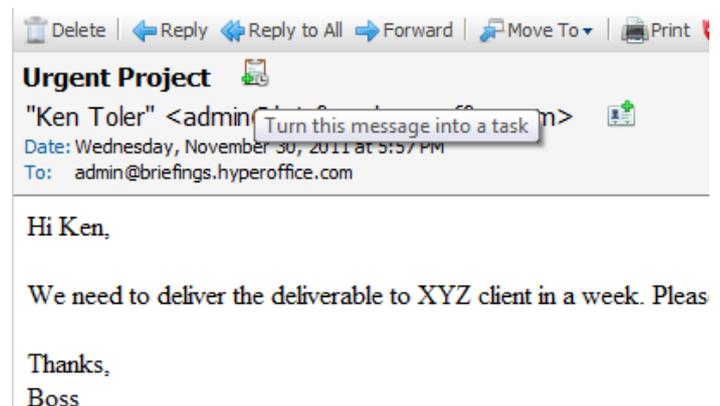>
> **Christopher Voce,**
> Market Overview: Cloud-Based Email Vendors
> FORRESTER

Firstly, having everything in the same console as email encourages employees to use all of their business tools. Secondly, data in email which needs to be passed elsewhere, or vice versa, can be done within a few clicks, rather than having to manually move information all the time.

For example, in HyperOffice, you can transfer document attachments to shared document libraries with a single click. So if a customer sends you an invoice, you can move it to the billing document library with a single click to ensure the billing team has access to it.

Another example of such integration is the email-to-tasks feature in HyperOffice. If you are assigned a task through email, which requires input from others, you can convert it into a task with a single click, and manage and track it through the projects section like any other task.

> Delete | Reply | Reply to All | Forward | Move To | Print
>
> **Urgent Project**
> "Ken Toler" <admin... Turn this message into a task ...n>
> Date: Wednesday, November 30, 2011 at 5:57 PM
> To: admin@briefings.hyperoffice.com
>
> Hi Ken,
>
> We need to deliver the deliverable to XYZ client in a week. Pleas
>
> Thanks,
> Boss

Document management - Don't jump from box to box – break out of the box!

Box.com is a popular document-collaboration-software-which-goes-by-the-name-of-collaboration-software. It allows users to store and share documents online, and keeps documents in sync across devices. Neat. But think a moment, documents are the most important information unit in businesses, but do they exist in isolation?

Here's an illustration. We all have to send or receive document attachments some time or the other. Consider the steps if documents and email are disjoint systems, and the possibility of breakdown at every step.

Login to email application → **download document to desktop** → **login to document management application** → **upload document to shared folders**

Now if this has to be done over and over, the employee is temptated to simply let the document sit in email, or the desktop, or never upload it to the shared documents system is overwhelming. That's one document off the company's grid, and likely only one of hundreds of such mini silos. No wonder we can't find files when we need them!

Now consider an integrated document management and email system (HyperOffice screenshots under).

Login to integrated application for email → **save document directly to shared team folder**
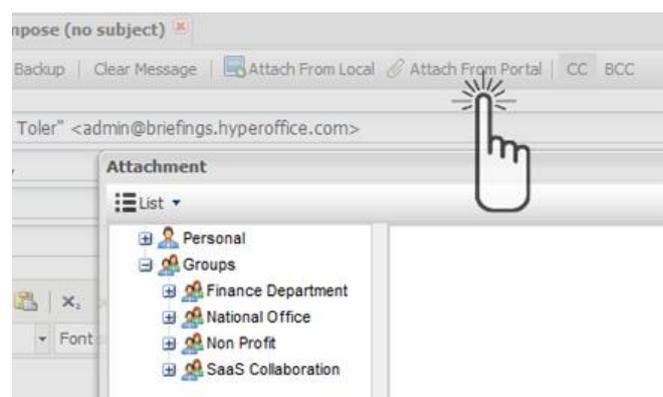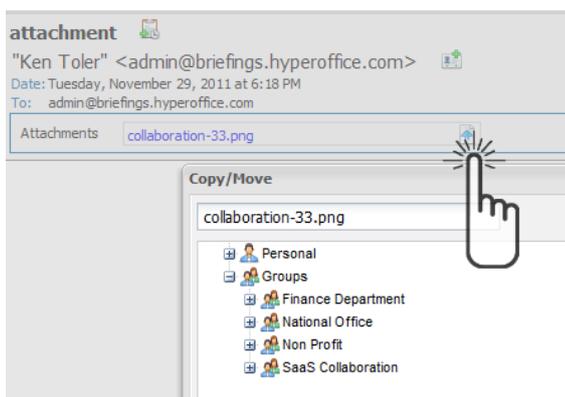
The process is now cut down to just two steps and has a reduced possibility of breakage. The entire thing also holds true of the reverse process (sending documents as attachments). Employees are also more likely to use the shared document management system since it is part of the same console as their beloved email.

Similarly, documents are related to almost every IT application in the organization. Another example of this is the interaction between document management and project management, which is the next example.

Project management - A cloud camp has no base

An almost axiomatic truth of projects is – every project requires working together on documents, or might solely be about working together on documents!! (drafting a proposal for example). Now imagine two disjoint projects and documents systems.

Even as you use the project management system to schedule and coordinate project effort, you have to manage the document sharing/collaboration part with a totally different system which has no linkage with projects. How do you track which document relates to which milestone, and who worked on it? God save you. It's back to pen and paper.

In all fairness, most project management systems realize this and have light documents capabilities. But that, rather than helping, actually creates two problems:

1) Users are able to access documents attached to tasks and milestones but when they actually want to work together on documents, they have to fall back upon email or other document management systems. Also everyone downloading and working off documents on their own computers creates the classical problem of multiple confusing versions of the same document floating around.

2) The same documents being managed through the light documents part of your project management tools (BaseCamp?), and your full blown document management system (Box?), you get the classical outcome of Saas sprawl – silos, redundancy, chaos.

That's why you need integrated document management system and a project management.

It all comes together

The above scenarios are just a few examples of how processes break down and information is lost with disjoint systems. In real business situations, however, nearly every business transaction interacts with a multiplicity of systems. A client deal will consist of email communication, contract and specifications documents, meetings and events, projects to be undertaken, contacts from both organizations and so on. To create context around each transaction, you really need all of these bits and pieces together.

As an illustration, HyperOffice's "interlinking" feature allows for any piece of data to be linked to any other piece - a project may be linked to documents, calendar events, email records, forum discussions, or even surveys. Thus, interlinking allows users to create context around every client, project and transaction.
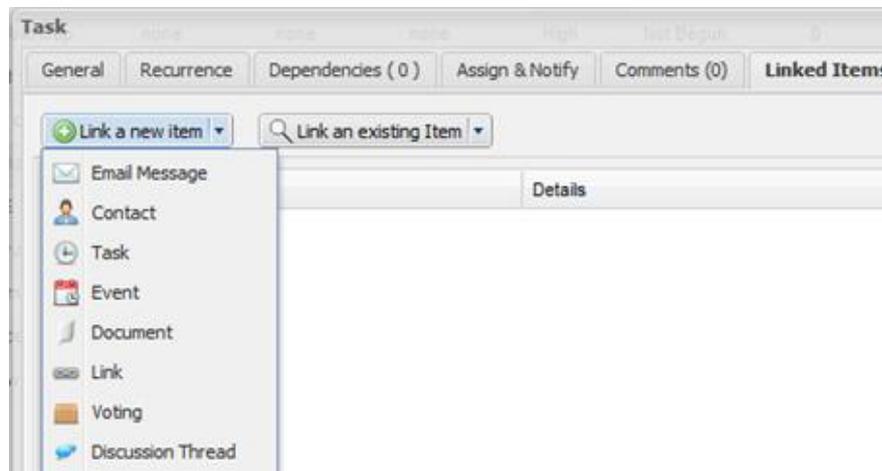
Conclusion

It will not be apt for the purposes of the current whitepaper to discuss all possible scenarios where disjoint tools are detrimental to organizational information management. But be sure there are many more!

Collaboration Software as Strategy

Collaboration software is really a strategic investment. It goes beyond simply allowing you to share a document, or scheduling a task. It is the backbone of your organization which ensures the smooth information flow within the organization and beyond its boundaries. It has strategic potential in terms of freeing up trapped employee knowledge, making the business faster and more responsive, and making for more engaged customers and partners. It also allows companies to "operate beyond scale" as this "virtual backbone" allows them to access talent from across the globe without physical restrictions. This great promise needs a strategic outlook as to "how it all works together".

HyperOffice takes a 360 degree view

We take this 360 degree view in our development of HyperOffice . It is designed to be an important part of a company's day to day operations, and is equipped with all the information tools that workers need to manage information, work together and coordinate effort. Importantly, we have taken special pains to make everything work together to facilitate information flows in the organization.

At the core are our integrated communication and collaboration tools. They are held together by our intranet and cutting edge social tools. And we are great believers in device freedom, and the ability to

connect irrespective of device. **Communication, collaboration, sociability and mobility** are therefore the cornerstones of HyperOffice.