

## From Old School to Off the Hook

### *Thoughts on How Communication Became Convergence & the Resulting Opportunities*

by Alastair Behenna

It's 6 a.m. and here I am sitting on my normal train whistling a happy tune as I wind my way to the office to earn a crust or two. The only other sound in the car is the rustle of disapproving newspapers. Well ... that was then.

This is now: Same train and same newspapers rustling, but I've changed. I am Gangsta CIO—blinged up and getting down with my peeps. My iPod is pumpin' tunes and I'm looking mean, moody and downright bad.

Alright then, a little fantasy is harmless, isn't it? But, I am plugged into my iPod, and instead of hip hop I'm listening to yesterday's Prime Minister's Question Time, an update from Newsweek on rebuilding New Orleans, some tech commentary from CNET and a BBC report on CeBit. Later on, it'll be an interview with Angela Merkel on her view of the state of Europe and the audio version of the New York Times' front page. I don't know about you, but I don't have time to access all this content first hand. I need it when I want it so the ability to grab these audio files at will helps me keep up with the inexorable pull of global change. I downloaded it all from an online aggregator while I was getting 'suited up' for work.

While I'm doing this, I'm also flicking through my BlackBerry to get updates on what's happening with my part of the business. I have project updates from traveling teams who from the brightness of a Denver day or a cozy hotel room in the middle of a cold German evening have made posts via our corporate Web portal. I learn that there's an office move starting in Geneva, and I'm also keen to find out if our landlords in Paris managed to repair the circuit that keeps tripping out when the coffee pot is switched on and wiping out half the IT capability of the office.

I'm also doing a quick e-mail update to the IS&T news blog about a new virus hitting the Middle East and spreading across Europe. I've just heard about it on a CNN update captured at 3 a.m. this morning while I was sleeping. I can also see I'm booked into an online meeting with a key supplier this morning to discuss telecom provision in Vietnam. I've also just set myself a couple of tasks to get some figures together and complete my Board report on time.

And that's just the tip of the technology convergence iceberg.

Now none of the technologies I use are particularly new, but the way we see them and the way we use them today is. For example, I know from past experience that the e-mail from the supplier will contain a 'presence tag' that will indicate if he is offline, away from his desk or online and available to 'chat' via secure Instant Messenger (which is a great tool for getting quick answers to questions and a smart way to avoid the black hole of voicemail).

The speed and reach of these engagement technologies is pervasive and they are at work all around you and me. It is endemic and is changing the way we do business and create business opportunities. Some people are calling elements of this Web 2.0. If that's a handy descriptor for the convergence and 'mashup' of both existing and emerging technologies, then so be it.

Don't be thrown by the lexicon of Web 2.0. Phrases like 'mashup,' 'online communities' etc. They are merely highfalutin descriptions for good old fashioned concepts like integration and client base. IT people love a good catchphrase that creates mystique or sense of the arcane. (You get paid a lot more for the arcane than you do for the mundane.)

In Sir Tim Berners-Lee's (father of the World Wide Web) work on the "Semantic Web," the forerunner of Web 2.0, he describes the Web as such: "The Web was designed as an information space with the goal that it should be useful not only for human-human communication, but also that machines would be able to participate and help."

The Web and the communication platform it has created are evolving in front of our eyes more rapidly than we realize. People are using communication technologies in all sorts of joined up ways, quite naturally and without even thinking about it.

For instance, the other day I jumped into a cab in London and the driver told me about a whale that had been spotted swimming up the Thames. He had received an alert from the satellite system fitted to his vehicle as a dispatch console, warning him of traffic buildup by Parliament Square. Being a naturally curious chap (inside all of us there is a little rubber-necker struggling to be elevated to the status of 'Observer') he made his way to Westminster Bridge only to find the whale had swum on.

This whale-tracking cabby then picked up a fare who was tracking the progress of the whale on his smartphone via videofeed from a news helicopter. Together they set off to find the whale, eventually tracking it down to the Chelsea area. He took a couple of pictures and a short video on his own mobile phone and uploaded these via an e-mail to his sister in Sydney, Australia, some 11,000 miles away. She posted the pictures on their family blog immediately. The family blog advised him of the update by a notification to his phone while I was still in the cab. All of this was managed quite naturally and easily and not by someone who is particularly deep into IT... just an average Joe.

Now here is some rich food for thought: How would you choose to communicate with this cab driver if he was a target customer whose business you wanted to win or retain?

As you think about the many possibilities, let me take you back in time for a moment to that fateful day of May 24, 1844, when Samuel F. B. Morse dispatched the first telegraphic message over an experimental line from Washington, D.C. The message he sent, "What Hath God Wrought," was as prescient then in describing the communications genesis as it is today in regard to its gigantic offspring, the Internet. The world has continued to shrink in distance but has blossomed immeasurably in terms of the addressable, reachable marketplace. And the evolution continues.

Fast forward now to January 27 of this year when Western Union discontinued all telegram and commercial messaging services. In 2005, only 20,000 telegrams were sent compared with 20 million in 1929. Today 11% of the U.S. population reads blogs and over 6 million Americans are getting their news and information from RSS aggregators. The world is changing and converging...trust me on this. Or, take a moment to Google Web 2.0 and learn more. And, if you don't know how to Google, just ask your next cab driver.

As I come to the end of this convergence discussion, my inner Snoop Dogg, is coming out. (Although I've been told, rather hurtfully, that the closest I can get to the Rap Maestro is the fact my first name defaults to Alsatian in the mighty spellchecker of Microsoft Word.) Here's Gangsta CIO signing off with a final, rhythmic thought:

*Yo Yo...Cee Aye Oh  
If you wanna get though it  
You gotta Web 2 it  
You're gonna have to take it  
You're gonna have to shake it  
MASH IT UP YA'LL!!*

**To learn more about Harvey Nash, call 800.286.9574 or visit [www.harveynashusa.com](http://www.harveynashusa.com).**