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## Why IT departments will survive Web 2.0

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The rise of Web 2.0 and social networking tools means IT managers will be more involved in business strategy, not less, according to PricewaterhouseCooper's Canadian director of emerging technologies.

Dr. David Jacobson, who is based in Toronto, said he has been discussing with PwC clients the notion of an "enterprise IT centre," which would in theory encompass much more than the data centre which has traditionally been the purview of technology professionals.

An enterprise IT centre would not just focus on back end systems such as ERP and Web servers but technologies that allow customers, partners and employees to collaborate and communicate with each other.

"It means data, as such, is just one aspect of what has to be provided to the end user," Jacobson said. "Applications will have to be more comprehensive. It's not just a marketing application anymore. It's not just a financial application anymore. It's not that you're sitting in marketing or financial, but it's a particular task that you're trying to enable."

The relative ease of use of Web 2.0 tools has led some companies to allow line-of-business personnel to manage their own applications, suggesting IT departments may take a back seat on some projects. Jacobson believes otherwise, because unless they think in terms of an enterprise IT centre, companies are going to have a hard time dealing with the management and security of those applications.

"The horizons for IT personnel have been broadened but also deepened," he said. "As recently as five or six years ago, the notion of a CIO wasn't even properly defined. The CIO as a C-suite executive is now fully accepted. They often serve on the board of the company. They're in on all the business meetings. There's a need to capture the role of IT as part of the business and not merely a service division that gets told, 'We need this sort of application, take a look at it.'"

Not everyone sees things the same way. Some companies, like Toronto's DNA13, are focused on creating applications that companies can use to track how they respond to what's being said about them on Facebook, MySpace or on blogs.

DNA13 CEO Chris Johnson said this is not a case of monitoring software but online workspaces, where various parts of the business could discuss a topic and provide an online paper trail of sorts. Johnson, who refers to this concept as a "stakeholder networking system," said IT managers are not typically the ones leading such projects.

"We're tending to talk with the corporate communications people," he said, adding that IT departments usually only get involved in the technical due diligence. "They might want to make sure the data is being hosted by a tier-one data centre."

Jacobson said there's nothing wrong with companies taking a less siloed approach to managing data. PwC uses the term ubiquitous participation to refer to bottom-up approaches to content generation and sharing. It just means the enterprise IT centre has to meet a richer set of expectations, he said.

PwC is studying social networking through its Global Technology Centre. Jacobson said the group has been dabbling in a variety of technologies, including participating in Second Life.

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