



# **Another legacy from the IT industry that needs to be fixed**

## **Business Commentary**

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Within the business community and society at large, users are expressing an increasing frustration with both IT and the IT industry. Many users can recall waiting up to 40 minutes on the phone for customer service and having to wait in line for service from the “gods in white coats”. The need to continually upgrade, frustration with software applications, IT solutions that do not work and do not integrate into the business and more. All of these are common experiences and complaints.

Well if you are fed up with the IT industry and their continuing changing trends, wait till you see the real legacy that the “gods in white coats” have bestowed upon us. The legacy is the impairment of the development, expansion, application and management of knowledge. To see the impacts of this legacy look no further than your everyday activity. How long do you spend trying to find things? How frustrated do you get when you can't find the information your looking for? How much information is locked away on a PC that you can not get at or know nothing about? How often do you recreate things only to be told that it already exists on a colleague's computer? Whilst the hidden costs of these may be important, the real impact is upon the inability to share knowledge and collaborate.

So how did this legacy come about? Those of us who can remember the days of the mainframe recall the unattractive interfaces, the slow centralised systems, the non-responsiveness of mainframe suppliers to the evolving demands of business and the secret society of the “gods in white coats” who made you feel inferior as you stood in line.

Frustrated mainframe users saw the PC as liberating and rapidly adopted them. The PC brought responsive systems, increased computing power (distributive computing power), flexibility and an attractive interface. The business computing environment moved from the mainframe to the PC for two major reasons: firstly the use of distributive computing power and secondly because the user was empowered.

The benefits of the mainframe were not widely discussed in the migration to the PC. These benefits included the consolidated storage of data, use of task management systems and work-flow. Furthermore, raw numbers and text (unformatted data) were entered into billing applications or accounting systems. A report type and style was selected and auto-populated with the required information and delivered to a variety of terminals and printers around an organisation - single sourcing of information and its delivery to any device, anywhere any time.

As time has gone on, a new generation of IT people have come along who see the PC as the be all and end all. It is seen as acceptable to have service outages, just turn machines on/off, don't worry about backups etc. Many of these PC advocates see the conservative mainframe views as out of date and either do not see the benefits of the mainframe or do not want to accept the discipline imposed by a mainframe environment. The IT industry is known for expounding the opinion that “users should just get over their issues and accept IT the way it is” and that “IT is the driver and it is right”. The fact that IT has repeatedly shown its short-comings and has ignored the business issues is conveniently overlooked.

This approach of “IT knows best” was epitomised by the e-kiddies in the Dot Com boom. Users again queued up to the “gods in white coats” (gods in jeans with coloured hair) to have Web sites built but this time, the “gods in white coats” were telling them that they had to totally change the way they did business.

Yet as we all know, not only did the Dot Com approach go Dot Collapse and Dot Crash but Dot Com practices have significantly increased hidden costs and the duplication of effort. The disregarding of existing infrastructure, the use of disparate point solutions, the ignoring of proven business

Consolidated data storage  
Raw text (not tied to format)  
Work-flow  
Unified presentation



**Mainframe**

Centralised  
Non-responsive  
Unattractive interface  
White coat society



procedures, the use of manual processes to cover for disparate systems and the replication of information in multiple formats are just part of the Dot Com legacy that business now needs to address.

The Dot Coms and the e-kiddies were the latest manifestation of the “gods in white coats” and just as with much of the IT industry, the e-kiddie legacy is the perpetuation and intensification of the knowledge management problem (the stifling of the development, expansion, management and application of knowledge).

The shift from the mainframe to the PC and the rapid adoption of the Internet has seen a loss in the consolidated storage of data/information. This makes access to information difficult which increases costs, increases the duplication of effort and more importantly leads to a loss in collaboration. A stifling of the development, expansion, management and application of knowledge is not only bad for business but is also to the detriment of society. Until this knowledge management issue is addressed, businesses will continue to endure increasing hidden costs and the development of business and society will be stifled. **Distributive computing power is good but distributed data storage is bad.**

Over the years, the business issues, demands and drivers have changed little, if at all. The need for managed accessible information has only increased. Yet the current trends and strategies of the IT industry and of those who provide professional services in support of them is to perpetuate the stifling of knowledge and collaboration.

Users have endured poor customer service from the IT industry, they have tolerated the ever changing trends in IT, users have been told how to run their businesses and made to feel stupid by the “gods in white coats” and users have been shamed into upgrade cycles and more. The IT industry is now bestowing upon us their most dangerous legacy. No doubt the user will be expected to endure it and eventually have to fix it.

Resolving the knowledge management legacy will require action by the IT industry and it will require a re-alignment of their values. Yet what is the role of the user in all of this?

- When you build a manufacturing assembly line you design the product and then the assembly line that makes the product. So why is it that IT solutions are just implemented with the expectation that the right product will be made accordingly?
- When is the discipline imposed upon all other aspects of the business going to be applied to IT?
- When is the performance of IT going to appear in audits and in annual reports?
- When is business going to stand up and drive IT instead of having IT drive their business?
- When is business going to stop handing over control of their operations to people just because they speak a foreign language and you don't understand what they do?
- What level of shame will business and users endure before they stand up and act?

Global communication  
Rapid access  
User empowerment  
Low barrier of entry



Internet

Loss of consolidated data  
Information overload  
Little business process  
Poor business integration

