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INNOVATING SUCCESS

SocialNET Whitepaper

The Social Web needs to be reinvented.

Social Networks have to date developed in silos, following an architecture suiting content platforms rather than Internet based messaging. Without redesign this model will become outdated, inflexible and fragmented.

This whitepaper outlines the problems and proposes new solutions to further advance this important medium.

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HISTORY OF MESSAGING

Internet messaging is more than forty years old. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Email).
Hotmail is thirteen years old (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hotmail)
Will social messaging as we see it today last as long? No is the short answer.

To gain longevity services need to become utilities, not a pastime and the current setup for social networking is not designed for this.

CENTRALISED V DISTRIBUTED MESSAGING

One key difference between Internet messaging (in all its guises) and social messaging is they are distributed. Using open standards, messaging services can be deployed by many people and organisations then linked seamlessly together. This takes advantage of the power of the network to increase the usefulness of the service; when everyone can be reached in a similar manner than the network effect is at its maximum.

Social messaging is currently dominated by a handful of single organisation platforms that do not inter-operate. By tightly controlling access these platforms sow the seeds of their own downfall, encouraging other competitors to try and 'grab' their market share, fragmenting the network effect and destroying value. A new approach is required, which needs to allow better growth but with equivalent or better functionality.

SOCIAL WEB MESSAGE TYPES

An aspect of social messaging that must be replicated is the 'types' of messages that must be supported. They can be real-time or historical (published & readable at a later time) and are grouped into three types:

- Personal
- Private Group / Friends
- World

ROLE OF NETWORK OPERATORS

Different social networks focus on different message types and different audiences, creating vertical market splits as well as horizontal ones. For example teenagers (with limited social circles and issues of trust) prefer private group messaging, while adults in business are used to a much broader but 'lighter' circle of contacts.

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A NEW MODEL FOR SOCIAL WEB DEPLOYMENTS

Currently network operators have a strong presence in Internet messaging (and for mobile operators voice and text messaging) but almost no influence or role in social messaging. All they can do is carry the data traffic to and from the social messaging services while attempting to create promotional deals to show they can provide 'better' access than other operators. This is not a convincing proposition.

By their very nature service operators are distributed and fragmented, while social messaging is currently centralised on a country by country (or language) basis. As operators cannot change their business format social messaging will have to change format in order for them to play a stronger role.

DRIVING OPEN STANDARDS

For social messaging to realise its full potential then it will need to adapt; to reach full network effect it must adopt a more inclusive model, while loosening control from single organisations. It must however provide equivalent functionality, especially in terms of ease of use and simplicity that fully distributed models can suffer from.

A new model for deployments needs to be a 'federated' one, inclusive to more service operators yet with a strong centralised function to enforce the simplicity and control. In politics a similar model would be the USA, individual state control yet federal management to benefit all. For social networking the 'states' would be service operators, with a new group providing the centralised control needed to control access.

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SERVICE OPERATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

One development that will help the new model is the emergence of open standards that support various aspects of the new order. Examples include:

Messaging based on SMTP, HTTP and XMPP
Authentication based on OAuth and openID
User access based on HTML, XML & XHTML
Application access via OpenSocial

Together with more established W3C and OSI standards the pieces are now in place technically to build the new platforms required.

In a new federated model each service operator can provide social messaging services. Aspects of such a platform will include

- Message storage
- Branding
- User Account Management
- User ID Management (optional in a federated model)
- Service Search
- Alerts & Messaging
- Local Security
- Inter-service transport
- Control of local advertising

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CENTRAL SERVICE RESPONSIBILITIES

In order for the federated model to operate with security and simplicity the new centralised function needs to provide:

- Server Directory & Authorisation
- User Profile Directory & Authentication
  - Find authentication point
  - Find resident states
- Inter-service message routing & security
- Global message search
- Transfer of user accounts between Operators
  - Move states - take functionality & history with you
- Global Advertising Contacts
- Countrywide Advertising Contacts

AUTHORISING ACCESS

The needs of the centralised services (without which equivalent usability to current services cannot be replicated) means that unlike current distributed systems simple access cannot be allowed. Each Social Web Operator needs to request approval to join, however existing telecom and Internet service providers should easily pass the required 'trusted' status needed.

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BENEFITS FOR THE MODEL

"Power of the network - the more operators that join, more users connect, the more powerful the network"
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metcalfe%27s_law)

Everyone benefits from a broader social web. Better differentiation of service, with more flexibility of access yet the power of the network to increase usefulness to all.

Service providers gain extra services of their user base, directly benefit from the functionality provided.

- Global reach yet local responsibility
- Address / branding / distribution can differentiate users
- Single ID can be used for other services too.
- Distributed for scalability of infrastructure & infrastructure
- Central admin for functionality, control & simplicity
- Operators can be easily isolated for poor behaviour
- Messaging passing stopped
- Central directory links held (redirect to holding page)

For Operators

- Provides the scalability to match the existing large guys
- Message passing control
- New monetising opportunity, from your existing user base
- Global security & monitoring
- Access to Global Search
- Extend services on top of core capabilities.

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For Users

- Stop isolated services that do not inter-operate
- Easier Message Search
- Easier People Search
- A single ID
- Easier decision on who holds accounts
- Message and History Migration
- Ease of a single service, with flexibility and self control

CONCLUSION

To get distributed access yet centralised services only a new federated model can succeed. Such a model benefits all existing service operators in the long run.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information on this whitepaper please contact the company. See contact details at http://www.ocastalabs.com

ABOUT OCASTA LABS

Ocasta Labs is a mobile Internet web development firm founded in 2009 to research and develop new and innovative solutions to emerging opportunities. Services and products available include ChatCatcher for monitoring and linking social network comments to web pages, OcastaChat for social networking and OcastaID for mobile enhanced web service access.

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