

THE DO'S AND DONT'S OF COLLABORATION SOFTWARE

Smart companies are embracing collaboration and that's a great thing. Teams, projects, work and information can now be better organised than ever.

But online office conversations are pretty old fashioned. There's lots of discussion going on about various projects and more often than not when using a messaging or communication app, finding a crucial piece of information can become very difficult as it gets buried under layers of newer messages.

We decided to look at how we are communicating, working and sharing information as companies, and how we could enhance our own experience without losing connectivity.

What we found is that there are 6 key areas where the perfect collaboration software HAS to deliver.



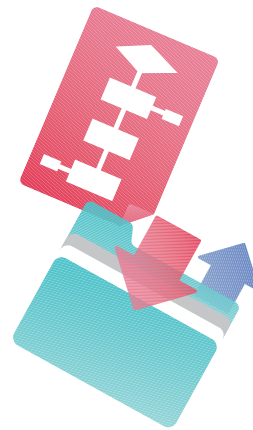
1. Documents and files



Document and file management are often overlooked when collaborating. But because collaborating is often about creating, sharing and managing information, it really needs serious consideration.

Yet what we found is that the majority of collaboration platforms conveniently ignore document management.

Why? Because it's a completely different skill set.



We're already losing the information battle. So simply attaching documents to messages, walls or folder based cloud storage apps isn't smart. In fact, it is just another silo where information can get lost or be shared with the wrong people. Beyond sharing a file or two, these apps have become yet another uncontrolled silo for information to be lost – so we really need to reconsider an information strategy for collaboration.

You've tried document management software in the past and but it was all too difficult, expensive and hard to use.

2. Lost in the cloud



App creep is a big problem that's brewing for businesses and the trouble is it's hard to see or even control. Digital nomads, tired of overly complex software that hasn't evolved enough for them just doesn't cut it anymore. Further, if email is the only means to communicate with teams and the outside world then you better be prepared for a loss of control and data because users will simply bypass their organizations' IT systems and use whatever apps they can find to get the job done.

Communication and messaging apps are only marginally better than email. Then there's folder-based cloud file sharing apps (Dropbox, Google Drive, OneDrive) which offer some relief, but they are far from being a structured information and team-based collaboration platform. And we've learnt by now that burying documents and files in multiple folder structures is the best way to lose them.

Before you know it you have a patchwork of apps and you've lost control of your business information and processes.

So how should we manage communications, decisions, tasks and projects?

Software giants have completely missed the boat here because they're too busy pushing complexity. So cashed up social media moguls have pounced with the lure of free apps to solve really simple business problems.

Where's the control?
Who is seeing the data?
Where is the data?
What about security?
Where's the record of the transaction? And how does this impact the customer journey?

The right collaboration tool should put an end to email hell, pointless meetings and disruptive messaging, to reveal a truly valuable and rewarding way of working. It needs to have control, security and manage information in a structured way, ticking the compliance box but at the same time letting your teams do what they were hired to do.

3. Stop with the distractions

The problem is not email itself, it's how we're using it.

It's the first thing we open in the morning and our workday rolls on from there. Without thinking, we use it as our daily task and priority manager. It's hardly surprising when there are no other helpful tools at our disposal to communicate, share ideas and manage work in progress.

We've starting to use free apps to solve communication challenges where email isn't suitable.

Instant messaging, folder based cloud storage, cloud file sharing, communication apps, digital walls, task management, the list goes on. All of these single purpose apps are good at what they do. Which is one thing.

So which one gets priority? Which one is really important? Where are you actually at with your work and how is this communicated with your manager? You guessed it, another app or better yet, the mother of all disruptions... another meeting.

Imperfect.



On a positive note, social media apps have taught the business world some valuable lessons. Software can be beautiful, easy to use, have a satisfying user experience and it can be rapidly deployed. **Tick all these boxes and user adoption will soar.** It has also demonstrated how the right information can be distributed quickly and reach your target audience with minimal cost. Doesn't that sound like the dream solution?

The problem is that a patchwork system of apps are unmanaged. Disinformation can spread just as quickly and it can be abused. In business, attentions should not be diverted all the time. Yet nothing diverts and craves worker attention more than social media apps.

4. New ways of working

Businesses are being forced to think differently to remain relevant in a fast-changing world.

Smart businesses realise this isn't about bean bags, sticky notes and jargon. Positive and sustainable change comes from a cultural shift in harmony with the right servant technology.

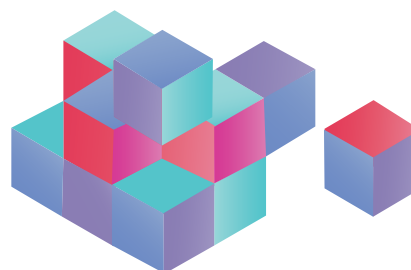
Probably the best example of this to date is working from home. The intention has so much upside: Less office space, less traffic, more time to work, less distractions, etc. However, if stepping out of the office means access to information and systems is difficult or restricted, then workers will literally be locked out of the office.

So let's start with a few observations about how people don't want to work.

- They're tired of how email is being used
- They can't get real work done if they keep getting pulled into meetings
- There are too many distractions
- Dated and over-engineered software platforms on life support are a daily grind
- They get exhausted hunting for information
- They don't want to be chained to the desk or office
- Patchwork systems are making them look bad

This is where the right team collaboration platform can provide benefits to your people, business and customers. Imagine a single platform where your teams can quickly find the information they need, kick off projects, manage tasks, share files, review documents, make decisions, engage with customers and partners, message anyone... all this and you've never left the platform.

Imagine a work culture where your teams can just get on and do what they're good at. Where at any given time you know where everything is and what people are working on. Less emails, less pointless meetings and less distractions. Imagine what could be achieved.



The perfect collaboration platform also needs to support varying modes of complexity – from simple file sharing to predefined workflow. This means you can collaborate about anything in your business on a single platform, and never have to leave that platform.

Having information at hand, ready to be put to work is a must. What's equally important is the ability to collaborate outside your business with customers, partners, without barriers but with control.

5. Security and compliance

This is a no brainer but you'd be surprised how easy files can slip through the gaps if there's a lack of control.

The end result of any collaboration session must remain a company record, after all it is an asset. Who made that decision? Who updated that version and why? Who released that to the client? What about all the files that were added to the collaboration session?

Security covers many areas when dealing with collaboration. We looked into the following;



- Application security – the platform must have a well-structured and visible security presence.
- Data security: All documents, files, interactions and messaging must be encrypted in transit and when stored.
- Document and files: While actively collaborating on a Task, users naturally have access to all documents relevant to the task. However when a task is completed, we must ensure users must only have access to information required for their role.
- Sharing: What files can be shared and by whom?
- Who can see information contributed by third parties while collaborating on the Task?
- Archived events must be searchable with every aspect of the collaboration event recorded for compliance
- Enforcing rules in Collaboration. Where compliance or legal constraints requires work to be completed in pre-scribed way or sequence you need to be able to make sure that the collaboration event enforces these constraints.

6. User adoption

While most collaboration apps are being used departmentally, the most value comes from company-wide adoption, otherwise there's no standardisation and information and knowledge is hidden from the rest of the business.

User adoption is what every software vendor dreams of but there are many barriers to this. Forced adoption very rarely works. You want users and departments to demand it because it would make their workday so much more productive.

So when we looked at what makes collaboration software so successful across a company, we found a great user experience only scratched the surface. It goes without saying that the user experience has to be very good otherwise they simply won't use it. But equally it has to provide real value back to the user and quick. It needs to make their workday a little easier. Less email, less meetings with less distractions. And if it can serve them all the information they need instantly, you can bet they'll use it.

Then there's management buy-in, the biggest box to tick. The commercial and operational aspects of the platform you choose are critical to the success of a collaborative workforce.

Here's what you should look for

A transparent commercial model

If you have to commit to 12 months in advance, that's not really Software as a Service. You should be able to pay as you go and add or remove users at will, without penalty. You shouldn't be locked into any platform, so a term contract is questionable, unless of course you want one.

A cloud-based platform

If it's cloud first then it should be ready to go. However, if it requires installation plus an army of engineers and consultants, you should run for the hills. System administration, where users, security, access and organisational settings are managed should not require a degree to operate, but it still needs to be secure and compliant. If you've chosen a smart platform that includes document management then structured document control will eliminate an IT Manager's worst nightmare - managing access to chaotic shared drives.

Scalability

Any lastly, it needs to grow with your business. It should almost run itself so you don't have to worry about all the technical stuff. That's the beauty of the cloud - the responsibility of the platform and its performance is where it should be - with the vendor.