

PRESS RELEASE

Banks: ABI, higher branch efficiency through social networks and communities

At the ABI Lab workshop on company Intranets, an overview of the solutions adopted by the bank sector to communicate, collaborate and share applications, information and documents on-line, improving operational efficiency, quality and reducing the time needed for action or decisions as well as costs.

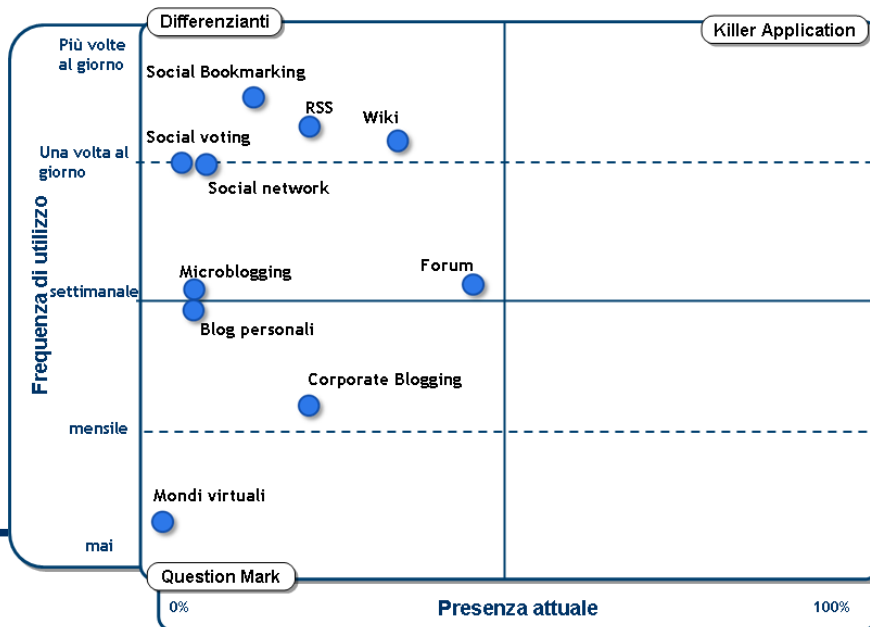
More social networks and communities at branches: blogs, wiki, forum and podcasts are starting to get a foothold at the bank and the top priority of company Intranets – which increasingly speak web 2.0 – has become to communicate, collaborate and share applications, information and documents “on-line”. Besides, thanks to the new paradigms of Enterprise 2.0, Intranets have become an increasingly important aspect of efficiency for banks that wish to streamline transactions and improve the quality and timeliness of action or decisions, thus cutting costs. Therefore, despite the difficult economic scenario, over the next three years, 50% of the banking groups interviewed envisage increasing their investment in the company network and 36% envisage no changes to the same. This is the outcome of the 6th Report on Bank Intranets, drawn up by ABI Lab, ABI bank’s Technology Research and Development centre, run in collaboration with the School of Management of Milan Polytechnic. The report – presented in Milan at the annual workshop organised by ABI Lab on the topic – encompassed 14 banks, representing 71% of the sector in terms of employees and 66% in terms of branches. The following paragraphs outline the main results of the survey, which identifies three main focus and investment areas: the *Social Network & Community* (namely the tools that encourage an exchange of ideas and the involvement of the wider community even beyond the organisation); *Unified Communication & Collaboration* (namely the technologies behind increasingly integrated communication); *Enterprise Content Management* (the infrastructures to manage content and documents inside and outside of the organisation, optimising their accuracy, accessibility and integrity).

More investment in bank Intranets

An analysis of the evolution of the budget dedicated to the Intranet confirms the growing importance that banks are giving their company networks. A comparison with the figures of the past three years with forecasts of expenditure for the next three, shows that 50% of banks envisage an increase in investment (7 banks), while 36% retain that it will not change (5 banks) despite the difficult economic scenario. Budget trends therefore show signs of growth or continuity, while the logic underlying the investment has changed: innovation, productivity, process quality and cost reduction continue to play a fundamental role, however there is increasing focus on the “person” and on networking as a means to support collaboration and operations within the bank.

Social Network & Community: wiki, forum, blogs and avatars in the Intranet

Company blogs and forum are starting to get a foothold in the Intranets of the Italian banking sector: 46% and 23% respectively of the banks interviewed have already integrated these tools in their networks. Branches are seeing the emergence of *wiki* and *collaborative real time editing* tools for web pages, text documents, spreadsheets and presentations (38%); podcasting to make the publication of messages and content simpler, facilitating discussion and comment (23%); *folksonomy* or *social bookmarking/tagging* for the collaborative classification of information. Instead, *virtual worlds* for collaboration and socialising within three-dimensional virtual environments, where individuals interact by means of an electronic alter ego (*avatar*) are still at the experimental stage. Finally, the survey conducted by ABI Lab shows how RSS, Wiki, Social Network, Social Voting and Social Bookmarking can be considered “differentiating” tools because, as soon as they are introduced, they are used by authorised company Intranet users several times a day.



Increased collaboration with integrated communication

In terms of communication, intranets have paved the way for the unified management of the various communication channels, leading to considerable savings on set-up and management costs. Via the company network, users can access integrated communications tools (e-mail, VoIP, mobile telephones, SMS, video telephoning, instant messaging and chat); verify the presence of people on different channels, automatically forwarding correspondence on the most appropriate channel; hold remote meetings on the internet by means of live sessions with shared voice, video and chat applications; share slides, documents and desktops in real time. While applications such as VoIP, shared diaries and calendars can today be considered the norm, web/videoconferencing, instant messaging, on-line presence and the sharing of presentations during a videoconference are also becoming increasingly important. Lastly, although still niche markets, tools such as Web TV, virtual workstations, softphones and voice mail are also of considerable interest to banks.

Less paper, more Intranet

In line with the commitment of the banking sector to promote digitalised flows, with a view to an increasingly paperless operation, intranets increasingly represent a valid alternative – efficient and “to hand” – to paper archives. Especially documents used several times a day are managed electronically, and made available through the network: contracts, catalogues of products and bank services, as well as regulations, procedures, correspondence and organisational information. Furthermore, compared to 2008, the number of banks that intend to publish management control reports and invoices on the Intranet has increased.

Roma, Palazzo Altieri, 8 January 2010

KEY

Frequency of use

- more times a day
- once a day
- weekly
- monthly
- never

Current presence

Differentiators

Killer applications

- Social bookmarking
- RSS
- Wiki
- Social voting
- Social network
- Microblogging
- Forum
- Personal blogs
- Corporate blogging
- Virtual worlds

Question mark