

# Netvibes: Bringing Social Intelligence to the Enterprise

CIMdata Commentary

*Key takeaways:*

- *Companies in all industries face an explosion of information channels without the commensurate ability to monitor that information to access what is most needed.*
- *Workers are accustomed to having always-on, always-connected devices to help enrich their lives by providing just the right information or assistance at precisely the right time.*
- *Netvibes, a Dassault Systèmes company, is bringing advanced dashboarding and analysis tools to PLM, scouring the extended enterprise and the web for wisdom to help improve decision making.*

Life was so much simpler just a short time ago. Most PC users spent their days with productivity tools like Microsoft Office, their enterprise tools, and perhaps a web browser. Now users also fill their days with Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, LinkedIn, and the many other channels that demand their attention—and it is their attention that is the limited resource. The number of enterprise systems has also expanded well beyond most peoples' ability to understand how to effectively use them all to complete their daily tasks.

What is the best way to bring all this information to a user? People often use portals, with some combination of pre-defined searches and RSS (Rich Site Summary or Really Simple Syndication) feeds to bring them the information they think they need—with mixed results. The information is often static, only as good as a user's ability to define the right sources and the right search terms. In addition, many of their most-used sources, like those enterprise solutions within the firewall, are not included in their portals. Making matters worse, sharing the sources is difficult. One way to think about what users might need is to consider our experience with television. Users need information equivalent to the cable TV channel guide, i.e., all of the information sources available, indicated by visual cues that help users select the right source. What we don't want to replicate about our television experience, however, is that we are offered too many channels, with nothing on that we might want to watch. Our goal should be to process the information offerings from these many channels, making sure that the right things are "on" and readily accessible.

There are currently many approaches that can help synthesize knowledge from unstructured data. For example, business intelligence (BI) is discussed a lot in the press. Some of the world's largest companies have made significant BI investments with their chosen enterprise software providers, who themselves have invested in acquisitions and organic development to address this challenge. The BI approach typically requires some knowledge of the structure of the data sources, and programming and analysis skills, which some claim are in increasingly short supply. Another emerging approach to the problem, semantic analysis, is potentially not as labor intensive to set up, as the analyses can uncover structure in the data that users might not understand intuitively.

At the same time, people have become accustomed to the power and ease of use of readily available consumer tools. This phenomenon, often referred to as the “consumerization of IT,” is beginning to have significant impact in the enterprise. People ask, “Why can’t our business software be more like what I use at home?” The public Internet has created the expectation of “instant on,” always-available information that people can use to enhance their personal lives. They often use these consumer solutions when they are trying to get the one nugget of information that will answer a pressing question. Or they will use these tools when they are doing nothing else, just to pass time.

Businesses also see the value of providing readily available information tools to enhance their employees’ work lives. Smartphones and tablets can bring needed information to people wherever they might be working. Companies want to help their people make better decisions supported by the right information at precisely the right time. These two desires have come together in techniques like “sentiment analysis,” where companies use tools built to mine the open Internet to capture useful information about their products and services, in order to empower business decision making.

In February 2012, Dassault Systèmes acquired Netvibes to help them address these trends. Netvibes.com launched its dashboard service in 2005, with a focus on creating tools to help consumers create dynamic information portals using “widgets,” small, focused software components that can quickly be combined for different purposes. Since being acquired by Dassault Systèmes, the Netvibes business unit has been focused on bringing their social listening and dashboard intelligence capabilities to the enterprise software/PLM space. The goal is to embed these tools deep into engineering, design, and analysis solutions to provide intelligence relevant to PLM-focused users. To provide this information, Netvibes is going far beyond their original information sources on the open Internet to also tap into enterprise systems like enterprise resource planning (ERP) or customer relationship management (CRM) systems. The planned reach of Netvibes is shown in Figure 1, differentiating them from other social listening tools that focus only on social analytics, advertising, and CRM.

Their mission, in short, is to provide solutions to help companies to listen, learn, and act. Dassault Systèmes claims that Netvibes can access over 250,000 applications and official content feeds, the largest collection on the web. Netvibes tools also support the easy integration of their social listening tools with ERP, CRM, and other enterprise systems, and offer the ability to index and interpret what some term “Big Data” sources.

Netvibes’ marketing materials claim the ability to “learn from everyone.” The ability to



Figure 1—Netvibes Is Positioned to Bring Social and Dashboard Intelligence to PLM and Enterprise Users

synthesize information from so many sources can be powerful. Just as in television, there is a lot of clutter, and the semantic engine in Netvibes (to be supplemented by more powerful technology from their Dassault Systèmes sister brand, Exalead) can filter this information to provide high value. This approach also helps the system learn from previous successes to give users more of what they want by “curating” the information and providing industry-specific analytics. This can be delivered using techniques that have proved valuable in the consumer space, such as sentiment analysis, trend reporting, and keyword clouds.

Netvibes can bring this listening and learning to a broad base of users through their large library of widgets. These real-time alerts and reports can be run on a wide range of devices, and can be shared with other enterprise users. The underlying technology supporting this portability is their Universal Web App (UWA), a technology built on open web standards. UWA supports developing applications that can be written once and then run on Windows, MacOS, iOS, and Android devices. Users can select components from an “app store” and send them to their device with a single click. Information to this range of devices can be provisioned on premise or using software-as-a-service (SaaS). This approach ties in to several megatrends occurring in the IT space, including the consumerization of IT and bring-your-own-device (BYOD). It also helps address enterprise fragmentation in terms of both enterprise systems and geographic distribution. Companies can quickly build applications able to bring consistent knowledge across the extended enterprise, as shown in Figure 2. Netvibes claims to have a lot of experience integrating enterprise systems, including those in high security environments. This could provide a unique solution for IT departments that frequently implement layers of security and specialized code to support mobile applications. With Netvibes, access to data and widgets can be controlled at that IT level, potentially simplifying security environments.

Finally, armed with “just the right information” on demand, users can act in real time anywhere, at any time, on any device. According to Netvibes, they are offering “next-generation dashboards for the enterprise and social web.” Their technologies and offerings provide a nice complement to Exalead, and will be more fully integrated with ENOVIA in future releases. Netvibes claims that customers see their offering as a powerful reporting tool. Dashboards can help automate and replace traditional reports with “always on” real-time dashboards that can show a snapshot of many different systems simultaneously. These offerings are also being integrated in the “social industry experiences” approach being implemented across the Dassault Systèmes portfolio: “Discover what ‘social’ means for your industry.”



Figure 2—Netvibes Dashboard Intelligence Supports Desktop and Mobile Users

What does all of this mean? Companies in all industries face an explosion of information channels without the commensurate ability to monitor the information to access what is most needed. As we have seen over the last few years, this information explosion will only get worse. Enterprise users need to be able to make sense of all of this information rapidly, to make faster, more accurate decisions. At the same time, knowledge workers are accustomed to having always-on, always-connected devices to help enrich their lives by providing just the right information or assistance at precisely the right time.

Companies are seeing the need to address this problem, and as has happened often over the last few decades, Dassault Systèmes is offering a different approach than others in the PLM market. Netvibes is bringing advanced dashboarding and analysis tools to PLM, scouring the extended enterprise and the web for information to help improve decision making. To provide this new solution Netvibes is leveraging technology tested over the last five years in the consumer marketplace to create bridges to the rest of the enterprise and beyond. Their offerings show great potential, but there is still a lot of work to do to integrate their solutions with the Dassault Systèmes portfolio and their “social industry experience” approach. According to Netvibes, early work with key Dassault Systèmes customers has shown great promise. Once these integrations are complete, this potential can become reality for all Dassault Systèmes customers.

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