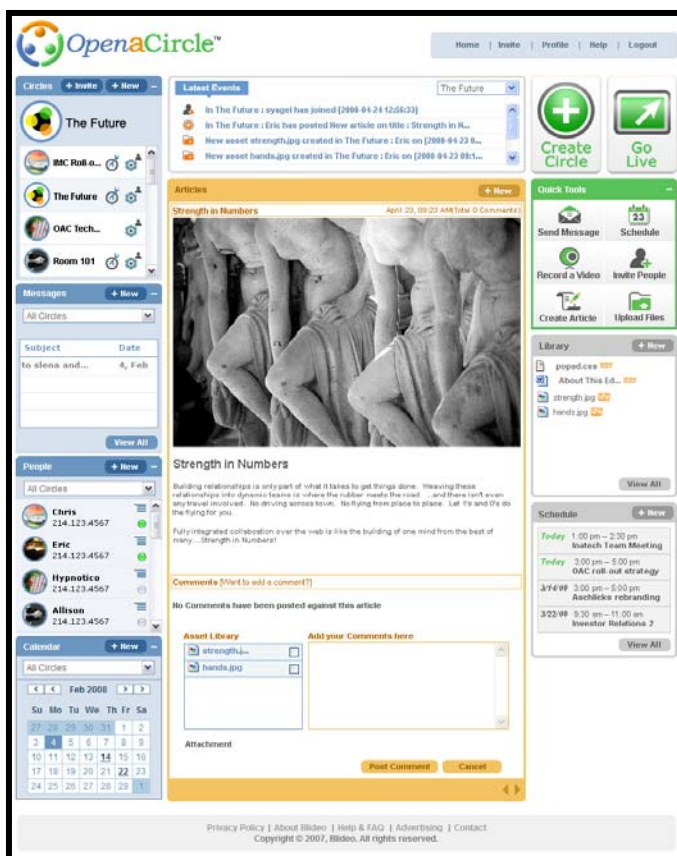


Solution in Spotlight: OpenACircle

Go-to-Market Premise: OpenACircle is a Swiss Army Knife of hosted Web Communications, offering a range of integrated technologies designed to create an anchor spot for a specific group's live and on-demand communications that are related to a specified project. OpenACircle's business model is predicated on selling ad sponsorships as well as user upgrades for access to premium features.



Key Features & Capabilities: No single technology woven into the OpenACircle platform is revolutionary. Rather, the secret sauce of the solution comes in how online technologies are blended together to create a unique communications environment.

The user experience is based on an interface metaphor called “Circles.” Each of these “circles” is a browser-based window featuring a range of communications assets, such as online articles, downloadable documents and calendar features. Access to a specific circle is limited to registered users who have been invited to participate in the online group. An individual could be invited to participate in multiple “circles” that each

serve as the communications home for a specific project.

In addition to serving as a storehouse or archive for electronic documents related to a specific project, each circle home page offers a direct clickable, link to a Web-based communications center accessible only by members of a given circle. In this communications center, which spawns in a second on-screen window, users can engage in real-time text chat, screen-sharing, online video conferencing and other applications. It is also possible to capture these real-time meetings and make them accessible to other “circle” members on an on-demand basis. (The most advanced of these meeting capture capabilities are available to premium users willing to pay add-on fees.)

Users have the option of customizing the look and feel of their online video meetings, selecting up to three Webcam video feeds that can be displayed on their desktop during the course of their video meeting. Scheduling features integrated into the OpenACircle solution offers free conference calling options that allow users to use traditional telephone lines for the voice connections in their meetings. Using a Java-based video codec, the video conferencing option works well on a standard residential cable modem. The integration of the audio conference call with the live Java video feed also produces a highly synchronized end-user experience.

Each of these fundamental elements of the on-screen interface are offered to registered users on a free basis. However, it appears likely that the existing free platform lends itself to the development of a broad array of premium features over time that could further enhance and streamline the on-screen experience for business users.

IMS First Look Bottom Line: OpenACircle represents a creative integration of Web technologies that holds promise for fostering a new breed of online communications activity structured around a project-oriented or team-based metaphor. At its core, the solution helps executives create a tailored online repository for archived content related to a specific work task. Integrated communications tools make it possible to build a custom “work community” around these document archives. The integrated nature of the solution positions it as well as any product on the market today to capitalize on trends discussed in Interactive Media Strategies’ recent report “Blending Web Technologies for Business Benefit.”

The challenge for the OpenACircle solution will come in describing the value of the integrated communications experience to a set of prospective users who are largely accustomed to using these Web capabilities on an a la carte basis. The team-based orientation of the product, however, could lend the solution a highly viral attribute that could lead to significant user-to-user introduction of the OpenACircle service.

