

Context is the New King

According to the dictionary, context means 'the set of circumstances or facts that surround a particular event, situation, etc.' However, in the context of today's IT environment (pun intended), context-aware computing takes the static data in the form of simple facts, and converts them into specific actions that provide extra value to the end user. Gartner defines Context-Aware Computing ("CAC") as "centering on the concept of leveraging information about the end user to improve the quality of the interaction with the end user." Gartner believes that by 2012, CAC will start to become main stream.

But what exactly is CAC, especially in words that management can easily understand so as to approve IT funding? CAC is the set of systems and processes that are created such that they are able to absorb and comprehend a much broader and deeper appreciation of the customers'/users' specific situation. Whether we realize it or not, this is already happening in pockets using user's standing within the loyalty schema to decide on a complimentary upgrade; mobile location to calculate directions; past buying behavior to suggest other books of interest; profile-based preferences to select rooms or seats; etc. are all examples of this phenomenon.

However, there are plenty of other important sources of information one could potentially use to predict behavioral patterns that many travel companies don't take into consideration today. A few such examples: do we leverage the power of social networking? For instance, using traveler's LinkedIn profile to determine her first-level contacts and intimate her if any of them are in the same flight? Similarly, could we use the user's comments in TripAdvisor or other such blog sites to alter the choices one offers them? Could our support personnel take into cognizance the fact that the caller's baggage was lost in their previous flight or is someone who is in the middle of a disrupted itinerary due to equipment failure (attributable to airline) and change their entire messaging? How about the user's last few search

terms on Google or Yahoo!? TV channel preferences? Stock portfolio? Last summer's vacation place and spend while there? Gaming preferences, avatars on the net, favorite movies... the list is unending.

Finally, and most importantly, none of our today's applications, systems, and processes takes into consideration all of these various sources in conjunction to drive behavior, which is the real power that is predicted by CAC.

A few early adopters have already started paving the road. IBM recently announced Blue Insight, which is a massive cloud-based infrastructure to source a petabyte (one million gigabytes) of data from 100 warehouses to provide useful market- and customer-intelligence to over 200,000 IBMers. If the source-data stores are truly unique and provide non-overlapping information, that is a significant beginning to the CAC journey. Network providers such as Cisco, Nokia, Sense Networks, Appear Networks, have all one or more products to support CAC.

So, while service and communication providers are gearing up, what should enterprises do? At the very least, start enabling our systems and processes to accept "sense" from a more disparate set of information sources in the ecosystem than traditionally used. However, to the type-A organizations, we suggest that you could capitalize this opportunity and get an early mover advantage in providing differentiated and a more personalized service at higher efficiency levels to your customers.

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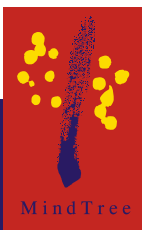
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