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## Dreamforce 2011: Ukelele's, MC Hammer, Free iPads, Chatter Still Matters

– David Taber, CIO

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When a tech company with the marketing firepower of Salesforce.com has their user/developer conference, you can expect some sparks to fly. Here are show highlights from three very different perspectives.

### Atmospheric Perspective

Everyone who attended the show has the same reaction: overwhelming. The sensory overload -- noise level, physical scale, content delivered, sheer money spent -- is totally intentional. It's a shock-and-awe campaign targeting the decisionmaker, upper management, and Wall Street. And it works.

- Dreamforce's marketing message and tradeshow achieve a coolness factor that really isn't there at other tech tradeshow. SFDC has done a great job of co-opting the energy of social media, even if the audience is largely classic IT.
- But then there's the Hawaiian cultural center -- complete with ukulele, singing, and hula dancer -- to open the keynote sessions. Interesting antidote for inevitable hangovers.
- Star-studded keynote guests: A weird mix of Will.I.am, Neil Young, and MC Hammer. Hard to know what demographic they're going after.
- Trade show floor -- alive, not just vendors talking among themselves and trading cheap tchotchkes. I registered to win no less than 15 iPads... expecting delivery any day now.
- Metallica for the party band? Quite a change from last year's Stevie Wonder. Volume levels at least 20 dB above discomfort.
- Oracle hired some people to walk the sidewalks with giant cloud balloons proclaiming "#1 in CRM." Wonder how much longer Oracle's lawyers will let them say that, considering SFDC's growth rate and 104,000-customer footprint.

### Management Perspective

The message of the show is totally aimed at the CxO / Board / Wall Street, not the IT person or anyone below VP. Their inspirational message is all about changing the way you acquire, sell, and interact with customers, not about how to automate better.

- One of the themes from a business perspective was "be with the customer where they already are." Companies will do better to respond and serve their customers right where they need help -- within

their favorite social network -- rather than making them go to a new site or use a different app. This is an important customer acquisition and support message for nearly any business.

- The Social Enterprise message is a great way to wrap up what SFDC is doing in collaboration. You can see why Chatter matters and how Radian6 can help measure your visibility and reputation. You can understand how Jigsaw (rebranded data.com) can help build your external social map.
- The Social Enterprise has two faces: inward-facing social networking and collaboration (Chatter + standard Salesforce) vs outward-facing customer and prospect interaction (Chatter + Radian6 + Heroku).
- To a greater degree than the last couple of years, SFDC painted a much more complete picture of what they're doing. They're announcing and demoing stuff >6 months out -- but that's an artifact of the Agile delivery model. Since they make deliveries three times a year, the individual deliveries can be fragmentary features: the totality may seem to be a mixed bag. But by summarizing the features over several releases -- past and future -- it makes things look more coherent and strategic.
- Salesforce is doing a very good job of blurring traditional product categories. Virtually everything announced this week is well outside the boundaries of traditional SFA, CRM, and CSA categories. Companies like InsideView, RightNow, and others -- take notice.
- They've created a "social enterprise license agreement:" all you can eat of all products at a predictable cost.
- The claim was made that Chatter is driving down e-mail traffic, although no metrics were presented. As I [wrote last year](#), decreasing e-mail is the truly important metric of Chatter's impact in the enterprise.

## Technical Perspective

- Chatter's all grow'd up. It now has the beginnings of a decent API (more to come) and they added some "duh" features like a presence indicator, immediate IM, and screen sharing. They've started to really integrate Chatter with the rest of the system: plenty more to come.
- SFDC is clearly pushing HTML5 for all their UI, so that their apps will be "device aware," not device specific. They announced Touch, their initiative for modernizing their UI and moving away from their HTML4/Javascript/CSS code generators. This is a very good thing, as it speeds load times and quickly brings all user-developed apps to current touch-screen standards.
- This "device aware, not device specific" trend also applies to their developer and administrator tools, which often have been windows-only: most of these tools will be moved to open source. SFDC wants the browser to become the UI platform for "all" use cases.
- Even so, SFDC introduced a new iOS library to quickly build native iPhone apps that can interact with SFDC data. Analogous to the VB libraries for windows apps, it's a great way to grab developers on other platforms.
- Heroku is now the "instant/infinite" deployment system for Java, as well as Ruby. Heroku is the mass deployment system for customer-facing social apps, while Force.com is positioned as the deployment platform for employee social networks.
- Database.com is now GA, with good pricing for its base version (first 100K records free). The Data Residency Option is a nice add for those records that simply can't leave your company's systems. Much better than the old way -- integration adaptors. Database.com also has a pricier "list" version that includes access to the Data.com (Jigsaw) records.
- SFDC is gradually relaxing governor limits and other throttles that prevent user code from monopolizing a whole cluster. Hints of expanding the APIs for bulk and asynchronous processing. Developers, happy campers.
- SFDC previewed WYSIWYG editors for site design, workflow, and other purposes. System administrators, happy campers.
- At the same time, they're shortening the length of time that deleted items stay in the recycle bin. This because of performance problems resulting from storing scads of deleted records in purgatory. System administrators, not exactly thrilled.

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