Just as enterprise It infrastructures are achieving better performance and availability through new architectural options and management tools, we see equally profound changes happening to users' application choices. It is difficult to ignore the software-as-a-service (SaaS) wave crashing through the industry, often the most visible manifestation of cloud for most customers. We had the pleasure of attending Cloudforce London yesterday, together with some 14,000 others. What a long way Salesforce.com has come from its humble beginnings in 1999.

Although it was billed the Social Enterprise Tour, we nevertheless expected the same old product announcements. Thankfully, it was a very different kind of day. The day started with a two hour keynote hosted by George Hu, COO of Salesforce.com. With the help of his 'always live demo team' they created a montage of on-stage interviews, videos and use case demonstrations. Not many companies have the confidence to let their story to be entirely narrated through the eyes of their customers.

We heard from CEOs, CTOs, organisational development managers and developers. Chatter was the most frequently discussed capability, and we also heard about Rypple, Service Cloud and Radian6.  putting customers on stage is the most powerful way to convey impact of technology, and yet most vendors prefer to tell their own story.  all are hitting prime time within organisations. Burberry, O2, Kimberley Clark (the only B2B case study), ActiVision, Spotify, and HP were deep-dive case studies on implementation and benefits. Time flew by.

Takeway: Salesforce.com has a broadening range of online solutions with social capabilities that are becoming increasingly sticky within customer implementations. Potential up/cross sell in future is high. As its application portfolio expands and acquires deeper functionality, it is hard to see co-existence with SAP and Oracle continuing beyond the short term.

We joined the developer stream for a while and this too was an eye-opener. Random conversations suggest it is internal change agents and project managers who are driving implementation as initiative, usually sponsored by CEO. In all the conversations we had, their internal IT people were not involved, and rollout will not touch "corporate IT" systems. Force.com as a development platform and the spectrum of tools appears to have ignited the imagination these customers. But the implication for vendors targeting enterprise IT infrastructure budgets is profound. Increasing proportions of workloads are shifting out of corporate IT systems to externally hosted providers. We have beed discussing the increasing importance of aggregators for a while, this event has underscored the speed of workload transition.

Image credit: Gary Koutsoubis