



## BUSINESS PARTNERS SPEAK OUT

### Why Notes and Domino are Obsolete

By [Ron Herardian](#)

#### About this article

Every year since we started *DominoPower*, one or more of our most respected contributors have declared either Notes or Domino to be dead. It's gotten so that we can almost set our clocks by the damning declarations. Our experience, however, has been that the Lotus market is prospering. In any case, it's time for another view into doom and gloom by Ron Herardian, one of our most prolific contributors. Is he right? Let us know what you think.

We are, today, at the beginning of the next and last foreseeable disruptive shift in messaging and collaboration. This shift is the consolidation of small and medium enterprise systems onto Software as a Service (SaaS) offerings categorically enabled by Web 2.0 technologies such as AJAX. Large businesses in the US must stem rising costs for messaging and collaboration systems. Companies will either outsource these systems or undergo radical consolidation using more scalable, lower-cost products.

In 1995, I declared LAN-based email to be a dead technology, for which I was vilified by countless Lotus cc:Mail employees, customers, and colleagues. Of course I was exactly right. People simply refused to face reality and, rather than be inconvenienced by having to learn a new skill or technology, they preferred to believe in the tooth fairy, at least until reality caught up with them.

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Now, I am saying that distributed client/server systems will be radically consolidated into ISP and ISP-like systems and that new economies of scale will define, and are already defining, the future of messaging and collaboration systems. What does this mean for Lotus Notes and Domino?

Notes and Domino can be accurately described, in my opinion, as a "legacy" technology. I fully expect a similar pattern of responses from people whose jobs depend on Lotus Notes and Domino followed by it inevitably, eventually, becoming undeniable that I was right.

IT customers need to understand that what is more insidious than their own potential for denial are technology vendors whose products are obsolete. I personally believe that vendors' first priority is to obfuscate the single most important fact about their technology so that they can continue selling it as long as possible. Obviously, this is not in the interest of their customers, but, it is business. When we consider whether a technology is obsolete or not, we have to form our own opinions.

Let's look at the business drivers for SaaS. They include falling costs and increasing capacity as well as reliability of bandwidth, cheap compute capacity, rising data center operating costs (such as power and cooling costs), and the ever-growing burden of the supporting infrastructure required for messaging and collaboration (archiving, anti-spam, antivirus, regulatory compliance, legal discovery, and so on).

In my view, the underlying economic model upon which distributed client/server systems were based back in the 1980s and 1990s is dead.

## TCO

The actual TCO of owning and operating an in-house messaging and collaboration system is not economically rational for most businesses today. Whatever top analysts say (and they disagree), Lotus Notes and Domino is a relatively expensive messaging and collaboration solution compared to the costs of ISP or ISP-like solutions. In my opinion, the cost simply cannot be justified in today's economic climate which continues to evolve in favor of SaaS.

There are many reasons why Lotus Notes and Domino is -- or once was -- an excellent choice (security for example) but the bottom line business issue is cost. It doesn't matter that Domino was the first application server in history because it's not a modern application server and doesn't scale comparably to products like IBM WebSphere.

## Technology drivers

Now let's look at the technology drivers. Consider fast, reliable networks, multi-core processors with ever increasing compute density per chip; cheap, big storage and computer memories, and ever higher bandwidth. What makes sense today is not unlike what made sense yesterday: use the fewest number of servers for the greatest number of users optimizing for the lowest operating cost balancing line items like bandwidth and administration staff overhead (low TCO usually means high ROI).

In contrast, today's economics suggest that one server can and should service an entire enterprise with perhaps thousands of users around the world, or that one server can and should service many companies at the same time.

This is a new economic model that mandates ISP or ISP-like systems, not the distributed systems of the past. It means sharing the ever increasing gains in computing power and capacity across multiple companies so that costs go down.

## Microsoft vs. IBM

Microsoft is aggressively pursuing SaaS with its Hosted Messaging and Collaboration (HMC) platform (already version 4.0) which includes Active Directory, Exchange, SharePoint and more. IBM Lotus is far behind Microsoft, in my opinion, and does not seem to have allocated serious resources to address the growing threat to their customer base and to the future economic viability of Lotus Notes and Domino versus rapidly advancing SaaS offerings.

Personally, I don't believe IBM Lotus can compete unless they make radical changes immediately. In fact, based on conversations I've had, I don't think they understand what's happening in messaging and collaboration technology today or what the future direction of messaging and collaboration technology is. In my opinion, IBM Lotus has declined from the preeminent, dominant leader to yet another legacy IBM solution.

It's a sad development from my perspective, considering the once proud and vibrant ecosystem that has gradually withered away on IBM's watch.

I personally believe IBM Lotus has been asleep at the switch -- complacent in their ability to run on big iron -- while the coming revolution has taken shape right under their proverbial noses. Their only dilemma, in my opinion, has been how to gloss over prehistoric Domino applications written in arcane programming languages with a patina of WebSphere and Java. They've made progress on that objective but it is simply irrelevant vis-a-vis what's actually happening in the real world with respect to messaging and collaboration technology, SaaS, and Web 2.0. They just don't get it.

## Where the Sun shines

The unexpected 800 pound gorilla of the SaaS new world order may be Sun Microsystems. Sun has more active mailboxes on their platform today than IBM Lotus, Microsoft, and Novell combined. Their products are two orders of magnitude more scalable than Exchange and Domino with active systems of over 10 million users. If you think about the economies of scale for a technology that's two orders of magnitude more scalable, you have to recognize that the words "cannot compete" accurately describe other solutions.

The ISP and telecom market is Sun's backyard. In the future, the vast majority of business users will be on SaaS solutions. The largest companies will realize their own economies of scale through ISP-like solutions implementing the same technologies. Further, the Sun Java Communications Suite ("Comms Suite") software architecture is virtually the same in a single-server system for just a few thousand users up to a multi-million user system. The days of having a server at every geographical site are already behind us. Now, I personally believe, that the technologies

designed for that now obsolete paradigm are also heading the way of the dinosaurs.

### **It was great while it lasted**

In the future, if nothing else changes, I personally believe IBM Lotus Notes and Domino will be irrelevant at best, assuming that the products continue to exist. In my view, the most likely scenario is that IBM Lotus will merely try to hang on to its shrinking customer base through a never ending stream of minor point releases that change virtually nothing but that may obscure for a time the fact that the solution is no longer economically viable.

I would expect such efforts to eventually fail, as has happened with all other obsolete technologies in the history of the world. In a battle of replication versus Web 2.0, it's not hard to pick a winner because the world that existed in the 1980s and 1990s is no more.

It was great while it lasted. Domino was the first application server in the world and that's a wonderful fact of history, but another, more current, fact is that Domino never made it into the Web application server category alongside J2EE and .NET based products with SQL databases behind them and state-of-the-art Web servers in front of them.

Domino 8 with DB2 on the back end still doesn't make Domino into a modern application server. Nothing ever will. IBM already has a J2EE application server (WebSphere). Domino didn't make the cut. Now, a few years on we can see the results of IBM's product overlap taking hold in a new and growing market, a market without Notes and Domino.

My advice to Lotus Notes and Domino professionals is to start learning new skills. Technology changes. Get used to it.

### **Product availability and resources**

For more information on Ron's company, visit <http://www.gssnet.com>.

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