



## IBM Verse — A New Way to Work

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Email is a stalwart in business today and remains a primary mode of communication for many organizations. However, the nature of business communication is changing dynamically as organizations are increasingly looking to solutions that are more mobile and social in nature to support the changing nature of work. At an event in New York on November 18, 2014, IBM unveiled its next-generation email client, formerly known as Codename: IBM Mail Next and now dubbed **IBM Verse**. The company has been respectful of the overwhelming organizational reliance upon email for communication, but it is hard to call IBM Verse an email client. It is a redefinition of how users are able to manage their day in a single interface — in this case, email is the primary source but it could easily have been some other enterprise business system.

The changing nature of work is a vibrant topic and one that is being approached by many adjacent communication angles from vendors across the industry. The fundamental problem that IBM is trying to solve with IBM Verse is around intelligent management of daily work, and IBM has taken an approach where users would approach their email inbox as a personal task management system. IBM Verse is also the first product developed by IBM using a new design and user-centric approach called IBM Design Thinking. The process seeks to draw out user needs and wants and drive products that are more complete and on target — or, as IBM puts it, "user-first, user-tested design."

IBM Verse is unique in several ways, but two fundamental design concepts underpin the entire product: IBM Verse is people centric instead of message centric, and IBM Verse is analytics driven, converging communication capabilities, such as calendaring, meeting management, task management, and chat, with underlying intelligence built into the system. The people-centric approach means that the entire experience is oriented to connect people, not just display messages chronologically. The underlying intelligence learns who you interact with and prioritizes communications accordingly, extracting and highlighting messages that the system learns are important to you. Fast, faceted search technology allows users to explore information across all of the connected sources, inbox, and calendar as well as file-sharing services and Web chat logs, by applying multiple filters. IBM Verse also helps hide and reduce noise and clutter by prioritizing and allowing threads to be muted from the message stream.

IBM Verse is designed to move the complexity to the background and presents a simple, fresh view of all your daily communications as well as other content collaboration. The home screen has a streamlined user interface and displays a set of avatars as a top panel where a user can see the people that are sending the most emails. Below this is a filtered set of emails that are ranked in importance (where the importance can be learned by the system over time). The bottom panel on the home screen is an integrated calendar that also displays main tasks requiring attention as well as other important business workflow. The initial structure of this bottom panel is role based so a user can see what they owe to others and what is owed to them. There is also a prioritization engine that helps push forward important deadlines and meetings.

IBM Verse will be available first as a mobile application on iOS and Android and a Web application across all major browser types including IE, Chrome, Safari, and Mozilla. IBM Verse will also provide offline access to a local archive. If a customer is using the Domino server as the local content store, then Domino-based experiences are able to be rendered in the offline view. File markup and annotation is also available in this view. Beyond communications, IBM will enable Verse users to make an IBM Watson-enabled query

to receive a direct reply with answers ranked by degree of confidence with evidence-based hypotheses. Essentially, Watson becomes a "person" in the mail portfolio with an avatar at the top of the home screen and you are able to "ask" Watson a question as you would any other user in your organization.

The ability to find experts and resolve exceptions or get approvals is the most challenging task for users inside an organization according to IDC's 2014 *Social Business Survey*. Oftentimes, information about people and their skills and expertise is held in systems that are outside of where work is being done. That means a user would have to leave that system to find additional information about the right path to get an approval or complete a task. IBM Verse aims to leverage the user base information held in IBM Connections (if that company is a customer of IBM Connections) to offer additional context. In relation to resolving exceptions and getting approvals, IBM Verse is structured around personal productivity so a lightweight task management panel can offer some support to this "process." In the past, many systems have aimed at solving these issues but have been relatively unsuccessful because those systems were contained in a single business unit or department silo. As IBM Verse has focused on the ubiquity of email, it has a solid opportunity to solve some of these common business challenges from an organizational perspective.

Many users treat email in the same way that they do a task management system because business processes are so heavily reliant on email. However, the general user interface associated with the majority of email systems is not focused on tasks. According to IDC's 2014 *Social Business Survey*, the main place where users "check" emails is on a smartphone. Those users checking email on their smartphone will often refer to their notebook or tablet when they need to compose more complex messages or responses. This implies that business processes that are able to be attended to quickly or passed to another user for approval or escalation are prime for smaller mobile devices. IBM has thought about not only the content being consumed across device types but also how content is delivered across the Web client and mobile form factors. In the future, IBM Verse will have the ability to preselect documents that are most relevant to what you are working on and sync them directly to the tablet device for offline use, bringing them in line with best-of-breed file-sharing solutions.

Worldwide revenue for email applications was \$3.6 billion in 2013, representing a year-over-year growth of 2.3%, down from 2.6%. In the near term, organizations will not divest from large investments made in email but they will look to solutions that complement traditional email functionality. In its current form, IBM Verse offers a compelling solution to small and large organizations where the majority of users share email internally. The solution will look to include information and context around users outside an organization. With external users, it is much more difficult to gain context about user activity. As more data and information is able to be analyzed by IBM Verse and the complementary IBM Watson system, there is a broad opportunity for IBM to play a critical role in connecting networks of users that collaborate often via email or across other collaboration modalities.

Currently, IBM Verse is in limited beta but will be generally available in 1Q15. It will be offered in a freemium model as well as an enterprise SaaS or on-premises deployment model, making it a Google and Microsoft Web mail competitor. The presumption is that some capabilities will be offered as add-ons, like the connection to IBM Watson, although that is not yet completely laid out.

IBM Verse represents the first outcome from applying the new IBM Design Thinking approach to delivering meaningful user experiences. The adoption of IBM Design Thinking is driving a significant change in the way IBM designs products and services. The focus of IBM Design Thinking is on the prescient act of how to solve business problems grounded in empathy, prototyping, and radical collaboration. When combined with the IBM Design Visual Language, the results not only have an enhanced look and feel, they solve real user problems in a meaningful way. IBM Verse is only the beginning of a new suite of IBM products and services that provide a solid path for IBM to remain relevant in the constantly changing and user-focused application ecosystem.

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