

Many computer users hesitate to ride the Wave

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Google's latest brainchild, Google Wave, is all the rage among bleeding-edge technology enthusiasts. But corporate information technology executives say that while they're intrigued by Wave -- a replacement for e-mail, the most widely used of all Internet services -- they're not ready to adopt it.

Part of the reason is a reluctance to entrust important data to someone else's servers, even those of giant Google. But another factor is old-fashioned resistance to change.

"If I knew how long it will take for [Google Wave](#) to be adopted, I'd be a lot richer than I am," said Stuart DeVaun, CEO of Implex.net, a Minneapolis firm that provides IT outsourcing of services such as e-mail

to 2,000 firms worldwide. "The user experience is the Holy Grail of computing, and once people are used to using something like e-mail it's hard to get them to use something different. Google will have to win people over by proving Wave offers a better user experience."

With Wave, people can exchange messages, share or edit documents, even play games in a computer desktop space that is shared by many people simultaneously. Google introduced it for testing by a select group of users in May, and in September opened up the testing -- by invitation only -- to about 100,000 people.

Wave immediately ran into a wave of skepticism.

"People have a reluctance to change," said Mark Bowker, an analyst with Enterprise Strategy Group in Milford, Mass. "E-mail is pretty simple, and people understand what it does. Maybe the consolidation of instant messaging and e-mail Google Wave represents makes sense, but it might be years before it happens."

"I kind of like Google Wave," said Bill Konkol, vice president of technology for Hopkins radio advertising firm Marketing Architects. "It saves running separate computer servers to do a lot of different things, such as live video meetings, instant messaging and e-mail. But are people willing to trust Google Wave as a replacement for e-mail? That's going to take years. After all, it's taken some time for people to adopt Gmail, Google's free e-mail."

Gmail, introduced in 2004, has only recently been adopted by local universities that plan to outsource student e-mail to Google in order to save money. The University of Minnesota, Macalester College and Hamline University have done so, and Macalester also put its faculty and staff on Gmail.

But, just as Gmail simplifies life for universities running big e-mail systems, some, such as blogger Daniel Tenner, believe Google Wave simplifies e-mail.

For example, employees no longer have to collaborate on documents by e-mailing them back and forth; they look at the documents together. Wave also makes it easier to bring in new collaborators without forcing them to speed through a long list of e-mails that have already been sent back and forth. In addition, Wave allows much bigger attachments than e-mail typically does, and, when e-mail messages are flying furiously back and forth, it automatically downshifts into the faster instant messaging mode.

"Wave is not a geek/hacker tool, or a social media tool, it's a corporate tool that solves work problems," wrote Tenner, who is chief technology officer at Woobius Ltd., a British tech firm that sells its own collaborative software. "The way Google should have advertised Wave is: 'It solves the problems with e-mail.'"

So why wouldn't people, corporations and universities accept something that is designed to be superior to old-fashioned e-mail? Maybe because they're still busy figuring out how to use the last technological revolution, "cloud computing."

In cloud computing, companies are supposed to save money by using distant computers owned by others to run programs, store data and manage networks.

DeVaun's firm uses cloud computing to test its new software, but he admits that the cloud concept isn't for everybody.

"When we need to test business applications we've developed, we go to Amazon and use their servers for an hour or a day or a week -- it's

temporary computing power you can use as you like. But that's not something we'd offer to our customers."

Konkol is interested in cloud computing, and does it in a very small way using a storage networking device from Compellent Technologies of Eden Prairie, Minn. The device can "borrow" data storage from one of Konkol's company locations for use at another location. But he'd be reluctant to use anyone else's "cloud" service.

"If the company that provides the cloud goes out of business, how secure is your data? How do you access it?" he asked. "So far, cloud computing has not been embraced in the Twin Cities in any significant way."

Given the reluctance to accept the better-understood [cloud computing](#), it may be no surprise that there's no stampede to Google Wave.

"Right now, people don't take Google Wave seriously as a business product," said Greg Schulz, a Stillwater information technology analyst. But maybe that's fine with Google, which he believes has other motives in introducing new technology like Wave.

"[Google](#) keeps creating these windmills that Microsoft has to chase in order to catch up," Schulz said. "It keeps Microsoft unsure of where to focus."

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