



WebRTC Asia Forum Singapore 23rd Jan 2014

Event Summary

TRPC and Inspira Events held the **WebRTC Asia Forum at the Rendezvous Hotel in Singapore on January 23rd**. The event continued the discussion from the Hong Kong forum held on January 21st. Prof. John Ure, co-director of TRPC, chaired and moderated both events.

Prof. Ure noted that WebRTC was beginning to generate interest from users and service providers in the US and Europe, largely owing to its usability, which is embedded in websites and in apps. Because the technology remains nascent and is still under development by service providers in the Asia region, these forums were a timely introduction to WebRTC technology and a way to create greater regional awareness.

Session 1: Dean Bublely (Founder and Director, Disruptive Analysis, UK - <http://webrtcapac.com/speakers-deanbublely.php>) provided an introduction to WebRTC, speaking of its potential game-changing implications for communications. WebRTC allows real time communication (video + audio + data) on browsers, such as Chrome and FireFox, without having to download separate stand-alone applications, such as Skype. This feature makes WebRTC potentially one of the most disruptive and significant innovations in voice/video communications and consumer web services. It effectively 'democratizes' the use of voice/video and ends the 'hegemony of callers'. Most importantly, WebRTC allows communicators to add context (not only who is calling but why you are calling), which significantly increases the efficiency of the communication. WebRTC is a magnifier of both the benefits of real time communications and of the threats to existing services, potentially a scarier entity than, for example, either Skype or WhatsApp. The driving forces for adopting WebRTC will come from existing web services and real time communication services providers.



The three groups seriously looking at utilizing WebRTC are telcos, consumer web-based service providers and enterprises, including contact centres. Devices, network tools, and TV/gaming spaces are also sectors likely to adopt and be affected by WebRTC. Early adopters among vertical markets are mostly likely to be FSI, health and education.

Session 2: Bill Lewis (Managing Director, Temasys, Singapore - <http://webrtcapac.com/speakers-billlewis.php>) spoke about how WebRTC is essentially embedded communication that enables business processes and helps remove friction from voice and video communications, just as Google removed friction from information retrieval and Netflix removed friction from movie acquisition. WebRTC functions as a clever code in a browser that sits on webpages and allows communications in a standardized way without having to update standalone applications separately.

Temasys takes the complexity out of technologies for businesses that want to use WebRTC and has invested heavily on the infrastructure needed to scale its offerings according to the clients' needs. Underlying the simplicity of WebRTC are some very clever technologies that require the support of a substantial network, signaling, transportation and quality control tools and only vendors who can provide that will be able to offer sustainable high enterprise-grade levels of service. And with that underlying infrastructural support, Bill was of the opinion, looking at the data on number of devices that could already support apps with WebRTC embedded, critical mass or "take-off" could happen as early as 1H 2015.

Session 3: Anish Malhotra (Head of Sales Engineering – Asia for the Enterprise Business, Google, Singapore - <http://webrtcapac.com/speakers-anishmalhotra.php>) talked about current trends of BYOD (bring your own device) and how there is a need for people to be connected anywhere to anyone. Employers nowadays will need an

open/interoperable way to communicate. Google apps, such as Google Hangout, Google Drive, and Google Now, are some examples of apps that allow everywhere, everything and everyone communications. In this context, WebRTC is an important contribution to the future of real time communications, especially for the enterprise sector, but also in the future of Internet-of-Things and for consumer apps.

Session 4: Doug Tait (Director of Product Marketing, Oracle Communications - <http://webrtcapac.com/speakers-dougtaid.php>) referred to WebRTC as being the next 'phone' that can bring enormous benefits to service providers and enterprises who want to integrate real-time communication in their current offerings. However, there were three main requirements for WebRTC to bring businesses value: interoperability, security and reliability. Currently, standards for WebRTC remain a problem, where the W3C and IETE have chosen to leave the development of universal standardization to the industry and the market to decide.

Challenges remain for WebRTC to fulfill its potentials. The main ones include: no built-in network security, no identity nor authentication management and issues with interoperability. As with any new technology, the challenges stimulated industry to come up with workable answers, and some of these were referenced. A live demonstration showcased the Oracle WebRTC application using laptop computers and tablet PCs and illustrated the ability to conduct live video conferencing through the use of browsers, and seamless hand-off between different networks and devices without having to log-off and log-in again.

Panel Session 1: The first panel session of the day was led by **Dean Bublely**, and included **Lawrence Chan** (Head of Business Development and Product Management, MyRepublic, Singapore - <http://webrtcapac.com/speakers-lawrencechan.php>), and speakers **Bill Lewis** and **Doug Tait**.

A question was proposed to the panelists: *"What impact and opportunities does WebRTC provide to telcos, mobile service providers and internet players?"* Lawrence

suggested that there were three likely reactions from incumbent telcos: buying a WebRTC product in hopes of developing a new killer app, integrating the WebRTC into existing business models and partnering with WebRTC developers to hunt for the killer app. Telcos have to embrace WebRTC in the long term to mitigate the erosion of traditional territory (i.e. providing communication, identity and building relationship). Bill Lewis added that while conservative telcos will remain at the back of the adoption curve, eventually, telcos and service providers will all have to work with WebRTC developers. However, the main challenge for telcos will be how to integrate WebRTC with their legacy systems. Doug Tait added that enterprises wishing to adopt the technology will also need to look into the track record of WebRTC partners.

The panelists were then asked a second question: *"How could a progressive telco, such as MyRepublic, go about building a business model using WebRTC?"* Lawrence stated that differentiation through quality of service in pipe management would work. Telcos and incumbent customer web services (e.g. Google, YouTube) are not masters of real-time communications and rely heavily on cache. They would not know how to handle the explosive growth of traffic through Internet pipe if WebRTC takes off. Doug added that one caveat is that traffic stays domestic, but as packets try to travel across borders there may be a drop in reliability. However, Bill noted that Internet connectivity remains a challenge in Asia outside a few developed economies. Temasys has developed the capability to communicate with less than 300 kbps.

The panelists all agreed that WebRTC was still too ahead of the curve for regulators to think about. And that the cost savings from WebRTC would come from call centres and others who no longer want to invest millions of dollars for their communication applications. Developers would also only need a fraction of the resources to develop video-communication capabilities, given the ease of access.



Session 5: Bill Zeng (Chief Technology Officer - APJC, TelePresence and Collaboration, Cisco Systems, Singapore - <http://webrtcapac.com/speakers-billzeng.php>) spoke about how every year \$4.8 billion is spent on collaboration equipment. While WebRTC may be a potential disruptor in the world, it is still important to demonstrate to CIOs how the technology can be used to add business value. The issues of interoperability will also need to be resolved before the technology can fully take off. Three important aspects for opening the door for WebRTC are the ease of access (no requirement to install an additional client), ease of development (wide pool of IT developers, even from universities), and ease of deployment (browser just needs a refresh to get the latest code update).

Bandwidth and culture remain obstacles to adoption of WebRTC. In countries, such as India and Vietnam, with insufficient bandwidth, the use of kiosks is preferred and these can be easily equipped with WebRTC. In Australia, businesses are also keen on kiosks, while in China, banks are interested in WebRTC to reduce labor costs.

Session 6: Chip Wilcox (Senior Vice-President, Temasys, Singapore - http://www.linkedin.com/profile/view?id=4465&locale=en_US&trk=tyah2&trkInfo=tas%3Achip%20wilcox%2Cidx%3A1-1-1) emphasized how important it is to have the right culture and the right academic environment to create a greater level of engagement within the web developer community. Singapore and a couple of other places are trying hard to encourage entrepreneurship; however, it remains hard to “make people do it”.

Panel Session 2: The final panel of the day was moderated by **Dr Peter Lovelock** (Co-Director, TRPC, Singapore) and included **Bill Zeng**, **Dean Bublely**, **Drew Graham** (Director and CTO, eVantage Technology, Singapore - <http://webrtcapac.com/speakers-drewgraham.php>) and **Mohan Belani** (Co-founder and CEO, e27, Singapore - <http://webrtcapac.com/speakers-mohanbelani.php>).

The panel discussed the investment opportunities and interest in WebRTC. Mohan mentioned how WebRTC suffers from the fact that user experience is still very neutral when it comes to investment in browser applications. Drew added that the benefit would be the ability to use apps within browsers, without the need for hundreds of thousands of dollars’ worth of infrastructure.



However, SMEs may be more risk averse to adopting new technologies, as they usually have less technical understanding. With WebRTC, companies can use the technology through their browsers without even having to download a plugin. Dean made the point that we are likely to see a shift from BYOD to bring your own conferencing/bring your own contacts. At the end of the day, while WebRTC may be a new technology, it is not a new service. Conferencing has been around for a long time.

When asked about cannibalization, Bill agreed that cannibalization was bound to occur. Kodak’s video conferencing service used to be worth \$10,000 in the old days, but was only worth \$500 today. With the same machines, a lot more sessions can be provided. While it will take time for the technology to mature, the biggest opportunity in WebRTC remains in the communications field. In theory, you should not be able to do communications this way.

Conclusion

Although everyone has a slightly different view as to when WebRTC will hit critical mass, at least two of the vendors were of the opinion that the 1H 2015 would see take-off. As with every technology, the test will be in the number of services that come onto the market and offer value, and that in turn will be boosted by a growing awareness of WebRTC. Dean Bublely made the point that in two or three years’ time, WebRTC may be used everywhere without anyone calling it WebRTC. It will just be an embedded technology known to web developers. Users will only know the names of the apps that embed it. The future is the *function* of WebRTC, not its name.