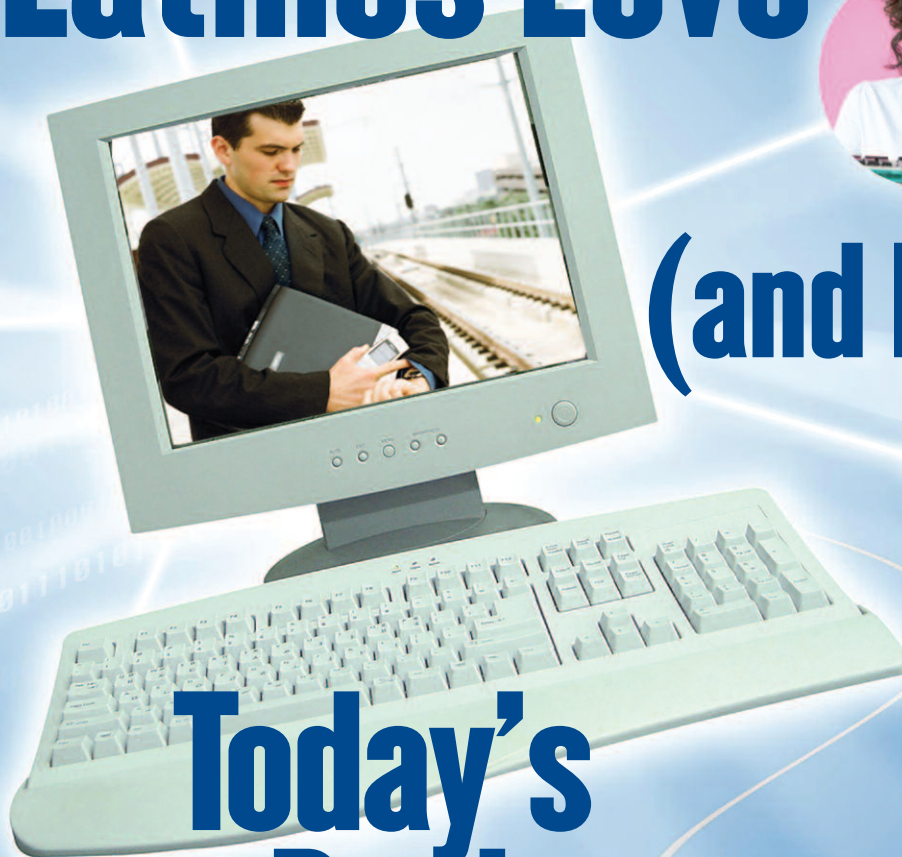


Why Latinos Love

(and Hate)

**Today's
Business
Technologies**

BY GRACIELA TISCAREÑO-SATO



Are you juggling ten communications systems throughout your workday?

When I ask Latinos and Latinas what technologies they use at work, the list goes like this: mobile phone, mobile voice mail, corporate e-mail account, office phone, office voice mail, fax and corporate (or public) instant messaging. Additionally, many use text messaging, audio, web and video conferencing.

After work, they use several other devices to communicate with friends and family. Some maintain blogs and participate in online communities.

How many communications systems do *you* use each day?

Do you feel out of control or well connected?

As a communications industry professional, I'm interested in how people feel about technologies they use. I'm especially interested in gauging the attitudes and knowledge levels of professional Latinos about today's newest capabilities.

The Data

The American Hispanic consumer is heavily researched these days. The 700 billion dollars in annual spending power is why.¹ Perhaps you've seen this data?

- ▶▶ 88 percent of the online Latino youth community (ages 18–34) report having profiles in either the Facebook or MySpace communities.²
- ▶▶ With a median age of 27, the Hispanic population is the youngest of any ethnic group in the U.S.³
- ▶▶ “Hispanics are active mobile data users, outpacing non-Hispanics in every mobile data activity.”⁴

But is anybody asking the “why” question? *Why* do Latinos adopt what they do? Why do U.S.-based Latinos love audio conferencing and Brazilians reject it?

Which technologies do we really love (and hate)? Why? Are we more productive now or just eroding personal time?

What We Love and Why

We love technology when it:

- ▶▶ Gives us a sense of being in control, with flexibility in how and where we work
- ▶▶ Feels personal and helps us share
- ▶▶ Connects us to large groups
- ▶▶ Helps us communicate while we're mobile
- ▶▶ Provides us with the business results we need

We Love Control and Flexibility

Sylvia Garcia-Chavez is an IBM software engineer who writes code from her home office. She has complete control over who communicates with her. Her corporate instant messaging system is Lotus Sametime, which informs colleagues whether she's available to communicate. She knows when colleagues are available to collaborate. On such a system, an employee's location is irrelevant; it's availability that matters. Sylvia says, “I've been able to have my own technical career, contribute significantly to my family's income, yet be close to my three boys. Modern communications technologies made this scenario possible for me.”

A 2008 study found only 32 percent of young Latinas aspire to be stay-at-home parents.⁵ Translation: 68 percent expect to have careers. The smart organization will tap this talent pool by

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¹“Grow Your Business In A World Changed By Technology” Forrester Research. *Consumer Technographics Brochure*. 2007. <http://www.forrester.com/imagesV2/uplmsic/ConsumerTechnographicsData072007.pdf>

²Press Release from The Intelligence Group, 2008 *Latino Lifestyle Study*. <http://www.reuters.com/article/pressRelease/idUS111915+28-Apr-2008+BW20080428>

³Forrester Research. *Consumer Technographics Brochure*.

⁴Hispanics Connect to Mobile Data, Forrester Research, February 2, 2007. <http://www.forrester.com/Research/Document/Excerpt/0,,41178,00.html>

deploying systems today that are accessible securely from anywhere. Doing so creates flexibility for the entire employee population—a good move now that professionals expect flexibility.

We're Open and Love to Share

I asked Eileen McCoy, NSHMBA member and retail merchant in California, if being Latina influences how she perceives new technologies. “Our cultures are very open. Look at biracial integration. We are far more

with JPMorgan Chase, personifies the hyper-mobile, hyper-connected Latino.

“My parents are Cuban. My dad was a theologian in Honduras, so culturally I'm Honduran. As Hispanics, we are from everywhere and have family everywhere else. We may have a sibling in Europe and family in Central America. We're geographically dispersed yet have larger families. We need to somehow stay connected.”

Josue is a power user of multiple social networking sites and instant

ance broker and commutes between Texas and Mexico. He carries a “U.S. mobile phone and a Mexican iPhone” and has a simple view of what he loves. He says, “I use technology to get in front of people. If it gets me an appointment, I'll use it.”

We have a passionate love/hate relationship with our e-mail. We love it because we can prioritize our responses. We can communicate with many at once and it provides global contact.



“I believe that being Latino helps us to embrace new technology better, because it connects us with people. We tend to believe something first and then verify later. We trust people.”

open to other ethnicities. I think that openness translates to technology and a willingness to share.”

Fernando Cesar, a product manager in the IT services industry in Brazil, concurs. He says, “I believe that being Latino helps us to embrace new technology better, because it connects us with people. We tend to believe something first and then verify later. We trust people.”

We Love Speed, Large Groups and Being Mobile

Forrester Research discovered that Hispanics adopt mobile phones and services faster than any other group. Josue Sierra, a NSHMBA member who works in eCustomer Marketing

communication tools. He lists several on top of the seven systems he uses at work.

Latinos are “twice as likely as non-Hispanics to prefer a large group of friends.”⁶ Anyone who has ever attended a “fiesta de cumpleaños” in a park with extended family knows this. Many of us do prefer large groups. It's how we grew up.

Latinos like Josue who maintain many relationships using online tools are simply extending this cultural tendency into the virtual world. We quickly connect with many friends. This need for speed also satisfies the need for results shared by professional Latinos.

Gerardo Chavez is a licensed insur-

We love mobile phones because they connect to a person. Regina Lee, NSHMBA's North Central Regional Development Executive explains, “When I have a close, personal relationship with someone, they get my mobile number. Otherwise, they get my landline number.”

We hate it when...

What do we hate to use and why? The answer is anything that creates the opposite of control, flexibility, results, speed, personal contact and openness.

At times, we hate our e-mail:

- ▶▶ “Excessive e-mails slow down the decision-making process. A 10-minute call could provide faster and more thorough resolution.”

⁵Press Release from The Intelligence Group, 2008 *Latino Lifestyle Study*

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(Eddie Correa, NSHMBA Board member and planning manager at Cisco)

- “I wish there was a way to control where an e-mail can be forwarded. It’s too easy for a recipient to forward to people unknown to me.”
(Fernando Cesar)

We can be highly annoyed by voice mail. Josue Sierra speaks for many when he says, “Voice mail annoys me. I feel like I’m calling my bank. Most people can’t leave concise voice mails. I waste time listening to the blabber. Ninety five percent of it is obsolete when I hear it.”

Instant messaging is disliked when people exhibit “childish behavior,” as Regina Lee explains. “They send an IM and expect an immediate response. If you don’t respond, they repeatedly bug you.”

Sometimes, the reasons we don’t like certain systems are deeply cultural.

Dr. Arnaldo Moreno, a San Francisco-based psychiatrist, states, “I feel that being Latino makes me generally more aversive to technologies. I feel more comfortable with face-to-face communication. Technology feels like a depersonalization of the communication experience.” He will soon get video conferencing, “because it feels more personal.” This personalization point is important. Do your Latino colleagues or customers feel the same way?

Protecting Your Business and Your Family

A company’s competitiveness in a globalized economy depends on its employees’ ability to collaborate with dispersed customers, suppliers and employees. Latino professionals who understand this will emerge as strong technology advocates within their organizations. Conversely, competitive



Fernando Cesar, with wife Monica and their two girls at Carnaval.

erosion will find those who do not.

At a personal level, you need systems that protect personal time. Without the ability to filter the true emergencies from people who think every problem is urgent, you’ll allow everyone to interrupt your weekend.

Fernando in Brazil said it best. “So many people don’t protect themselves from the technology invasion. They protect their families from burglars, yet they let others steal their family time. They take their work home, especially the Blackberry-aholics.”

Network engineer Patricio Chacon in Quito, Ecuador turns in homework assignments to the university using a secure VPN (virtual private network), preserving his family time.

Regina Lee uses conference calls to protect family time by avoiding business travel. Although her husband dislikes calls at dinnertime, he understands it’s better than the alternative.

Raising Your Awareness

When I ask Latinos whether they feel in control of their technology, I find those who do have one thing the others don’t: *user-based* controls in everything they use.

It’s the ability to communicate your availability and preferred media of the moment (IM, voice, video or e-mail). It’s rules to avoid interruptions by sending some numbers directly to voice mail while sending others directly to your mobile phone. It’s knowing who’s available (and how) when you need to collaborate to advance a business process.

Does *your* technology do that?

Instead, do you send an e-mail *and* call two numbers, hoping to get through? Are your competitor’s employees faster in making decisions? Consider this next week when you’re juggling ten different systems.

You can demand change.

Alternatives exist.

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What if your team could communicate from *within* your online financial planning software, customer database, or HR system? Or launch a spontaneous voice conference with available colleagues to finalize a task?

It's possible today and is called *unified communications*. It's called *unified* because it's the opposite of today's communications chaos where each device and system you use looks and acts differently.

NSHMBA sponsor Cisco offers options from instant messaging to video conferencing. Sponsors IBM and Microsoft have the longest experience with instant messaging and web conferencing. Siemens Enterprise Communications offers a single dashboard to control *all* these capabilities. Small businesses can consume these services via monthly subscriptions. There are *many* companies offering a variety of choices, yet this knowledge is not widespread outside the IT department.

Takeaways: Demand Change

If you're an MBA student or a young professional, please take your love of instant communications into your work place. Help your manager see how today's collaboration tools will make your team more effective. Explain how online communities can improve your business. If you see outdated systems in place, demand change!

If you're a manager or executive, there are more reasons to demand change.

First, recognize the strategic need to adopt advanced communications technologies to be successful in an "always on" global business environment.

In a global economy driven by speed, where "follow-the-sun" development and production cycles are becoming the norm, how will you compete with companies who have extended their communications systems to sustain virtual project teams across sixteen time zones?

Then there are the financial consequences of the status quo. A large study

of end users found fragmented communications systems waste *\$1,000 per person per month*. For companies with 1,000 employees, that's nearly \$13 million lost annually in team productivity, extraneous travel expenses, and missed collaboration attempts.⁷

If you're one of the two million small, Hispanic-owned businesses, it's also critical to have the right systems in place as you grow and your competitive landscape becomes global.

Secondly, recognize traditional mindsets that can severely limit your talent pool.

An example is "Everyone needs to be in the office every day." This mindset limits your ability to recruit talent outside your geographical area. Many candidates seek an employer with environmentally responsible policies like telecommuting and desire flexibility in where and when they work.

Eileen McCoy in California says, "I'm concerned about the next generation (of Latino youth) and how they communicate."

Will your company, without instant collaboration systems, be able to recruit from the huge, influential talent pool of Latino youth? These are the kids who've grown up knowing only instant communications. Many gave up on e-mail years ago; it's too slow. Almost 90 percent have online profiles because they love to collaborate with many people and share ideas. Do you want them working for you or your competitor?

Lastly, understand the appeal and power of online communities and the social networking they provide.

If you're a corporate leader between the ages of 45 to 54 (or report to one), understand that only 29 percent of your

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Sylvia Garcia-Chavez and Gerardo Chavez celebrating their boys' birthday in Monterrey, Mexico

⁷ *Measuring the Pain: What is Fragmented Communications Costing the Enterprise?* Insignia Research Report. October 2007. http://www.ucstrategies.com/uploadedFiles/UC_VIEWS/Industry_Buzz/Summary%20Report%20for%20UCStrategies%20FINAL.pdf

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population uses social networking websites. Very few corporate leaders understand the power of online communities because they don't use them. They won't invest in them as business tools

internally or externally. But that's where your customers are now and you must go where they are to remain relevant to them. Executives and managers missing this connection are endangering future growth and revenue streams.

Three-Step Checklist to Advocate for Better Communications Tools

1. *Start with people and processes. Uncover your team's biases, frustrations, motivations, likes and dislikes. Take apart the processes they are responsible for executing and pinpoint exactly where communication roadblocks exist.*

Evaluate how outside customers and consumers communicate with you and with each other. Are you making it hard for your customers to tell you things you need to know? An outside expert can help facilitate that critical discussion if needed, not to talk tech but to understand the people and processes. The first discussion (before any company invests in any communications technology) **MUST** take place at the business team/workgroup level. The reverse (IT shops around, buys, then deploys to business users) will likely fail to meet the needs of the majority of users. As Josue Sierra said, "Bad choices in technology exacerbate and expose business process problems."

2. *Bring in someone who is well informed on the wide variety of technology options available today, including hosted services.* Your expert will help document your business requirements and advocate with you when you talk to the IT staff. If your business is too small to have an

IT staff, the expert should be able to discuss managed service options with you. The managed service (or "hosted service" approach) means that you and your team use new applications and benefit from them, but don't spend resources to manage new systems. Someone outside the company takes care of it. You simply pay by the user per month for sophisticated capabilities.

3. *Participate in the pilot phase of the new system to ensure it meets your documented requirements and the expectations of your team.* Be sure it provides a solid return on investment in the following areas:

a. process improvements (e.g., faster decision-making, shorter project timelines, faster time to market for your product, accelerated customer service)

b. team productivity enhancements (e.g., less waiting time for colleagues to provide information, less time spent scheduling future team meetings, less time processing e-mail and voice messages)

c. improved employee morale (your folks gain a sense of control over their communications, protect their personal time, experience less frustration, and gain flexibility in how and where they work).

Become a Technology Advocate

As the ranks of professional Latinos in business expand, it will become increasingly important for decision makers to understand the attitudes of our diverse Latino communities—why we accept and reject certain technologies. Corporations globally are transforming their communications infrastructures, some faster than others.

Participate in these strategic changes as an informed advocate, ensuring that your team's requirements are considered *before* an investment is made. After all, the technologies a company invests in, regardless of size, should be selected based on employees' and teams' requirements, aligned clearly to the business processes they will improve. You, as an informed NSHMBA member, can lead this important conversation. You can help protect your employer's competitiveness and equally as important, your precious time with family and friends.

Graciela Tiscareño-Sato is a communications industry professional who takes a "people and process" approach to initiating technology discussions. She is uniquely positioned at the intersection of diverse Latino cultures, business processes and communication technologies.

Graciela has been an active NSHMBA member for over eight years. She is now in the San Jose chapter.

Graciela earned her B.A. from the University of California, Berkeley, and completed her master's in international management at Whitworth College, while stationed in Washington State. She lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with her husband and children.

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