



vfridge – early social networking
why did it fail?

background

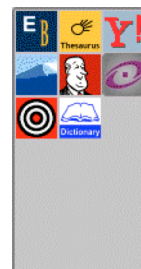
1999 – dot.com era

existing start up aQtive

– intelligent internet agent onCue

2000 dot.com crash!

... but spawned a spin-out!



the future of the web (in 1999)

dominant view:

- expecting 'shake out'
- small number of large players
- future of web as TV-style broadcast medium

we thought differently

the websharer vision (1999)

“ The web/Internet is not just a medium for publishing,
but a potential shared place.

Everyone may be a web sharer — not a publisher of
formal public 'content', but personal or semi-private
sharing of informal 'bits and pieces' with family,
friends, local community and virtual communities ...”

- sounds prescient (web 2.0!)
- and was translated into a product (vfridge)
- so why didn't it work?

timeline of vfridge

- 1999 – first implementation – stand-alone Java app with bespoke server
later first web version using applet
- 2000 – dot.com crash
but seed funding for vfridge.com 😊
- 2002 – vfridge mothballed ☹️
- 2010 – 'facsimile' version reproduced in PHP!

demo

technical barriers

- applets – write once run nowhere
- Java and SQL
- pre Ajax
 - but some clever tricks – image loads and frames
- cross browser
 - blood and tears

market barriers

- downloads still very slow
- use of web still limited
 - esp. problematic for collaborative apps.
- dialup rather than 'always on' connections

commercial pressures

need to demonstrate ROI

- (return on investment)

=> divided focus:

- intranets, schools, homes

vision

- big vision (websharer) great
- metaphor (fridge door) loved
but text version loved too!
- locked into surface appearance
forgot the big vision
- Facebook could have been produced on '99 web