

## **Digital Natives: Employees 2.0?**

### **Digital natives and their incorporation into the working world**

**When we talk about innovation, there is a tendency to focus only on technical advances or, at most, productivity improvements innovation can offer us. But innovation also has social, educational and – ultimately – workplace implications. One example of this is found in digital natives, and the changes they will have on the workplace.**

A digital native is an expert in the use of new technologies. Digital natives are usually considered to be people born post-1990 and having grown up surrounded by technology (computers, Internet, mobile phones, ...), but the term can encompass anyone who acts naturally with technology, regardless of age. Another, complementary term – digital immigrant – is often used (people who were brought up in non-technological environments but who have adapted to new technologies), as is its opposite, digital illiterate.

Nowadays, because the vast majority of so-called digital natives are in college or high school, a debate is brewing on the methods and form education should adopt with respect to students who, in many cases, have a greater mastery of new technological tools than their professors (an example of the so-called digital divide.)

But, to take this a step further, what will happen in a few years when these students enter the workforce en masse? Are companies prepared to take advantage of a new type of worker? or, more importantly still, are they willing to make a series of changes to attract those new employees?

In companies where the digital native pioneers have already settled in, we already see features that set them apart, such as a different approach to the perception of privacy, with personal identity often linked to digital information (from social networks) – in other words, they consider their digital identity as additional to, and not separate from, their personal identity; the way they carry out learning or training is faster and usually online, as they are used to a constantly changing technological environment; they cannot conceive of a work

environment without collaborative tools (chat, p2p, blogs, forums, wikis...); they tend to seek out and need a greater degree of autonomy; and, finally, they have a different value system with regard to work, with greater emphasis on collaboration and innovation, but also a greater tendency toward workplace mobility.

Many companies are still establishing their corporate identity on the Internet, or, in the case of the most advanced, adapting to the so-called Web 2.0. However, they cannot stop there, as they have to face changes (driven by the latest technologies and these new workers) both organizationally and technically, to not get stuck in the past and become less competitive.

With regard to changes relating to company technology, we must ask ourselves the following questions: Taking into account all the tools available to workers, does it make sense to keep certain corporate services? For example, providing a corporate email account when all your employees already have personal accounts and are fully identified with them. If your workers are increasingly accustomed to using virtual environments and collaborative tools, why not use them effectively, lowering costs for meetings and training? Likewise, with some workers accustomed to using new mobile devices, why not propose mobility and telecommuting solutions?

Thinking in terms of the organization, we have to adapt the corporate mentality and philosophy: organizations should focus more on being networks than hierarchies, to be able to leverage the characteristics of the new worker. One example of this can be found in the new employee recruiting process; if they use social networks, companies should go there to find them, and that is where companies should make themselves attractive to new employees. We must move towards an "enterprise 2.0" model, establishing dialogue between workers, customers and management. Our aim is to create a community where the company makes itself known both to its future employees and its potential customers.

Considering the educational and workplace changes brought on by digital natives, we must respond to the growing gap between the use of the latest technologies by new hires and more traditional work practices, a difference which impacts on the efficiency of all workers.

**Raúl Gonzalo**  
everis senior consultant