

“Oh.” Not “Wow!”

One of my clients who is in the security space remarked to me that he wants more “Oh.”s than “WOW!”s when he describes his vision for endpoint identity assurance and virtualization. This is a great insight into positioning new technologies for adoption. Positioning “Oh.” is strategy, and the tactics are then everything. Knowing (1) what to do that is truly useful, and, then, (2) what will be used is quite a bit more difficult and valuable than knowing how to build or change it. Know what is useful and used is a business problem; know how is a technical one. This is a variation on “Get the requirements first before you build or change.”

“Wow!” you say?

With “Oh.”, one is starting from a point of understanding by the adopter of the technology. However, what is left is JUST to execute. But, indeed, “Oh.” starts with only the execution risk, the complexity risk is substantially lower than with “Wow!” “Wow!” implies I do not know how to use the amazing thing I see.

In April of 2002, at a Wharton eFellows meeting, I talked about the success of my then employer firm through 15 years of its four waves of business and technology innovation. The characteristics that seemed to guide each business innovation were Low-Cost, Easy-to-Use and Simple-to-See. Evoked an “Oh” from the audience and not “Wow!”

This is a great lesson learned from years of describing motivations for projects to decision makers in the building and maintaining of systems in financial services. Hard to get for project managers. Harder yet for engineers. I have been both.

Now, I advise project managers, engineers and decision makers alike.

“Oh.” I want you to say.