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DETROIT*with John McElroy*

Software can help auto industry reduce information overload



The modern world is creating an information explosion that is inundating most people and leaving them unable to keep up with the flow. E-mails, fax machines, cell phones and other traditional means of conveying information have made it easier and cheaper for anyone to blast off a message. So they do. And the resulting barrage of messages means many businesses are missing important information even though they have more communication than ever before.

"Imagine you're in a car company or a supplier company, and you're getting warranty claims coming in," says Nandit Soparkar, the founder of a company called Ubiquiti. "That's a form of information that's being transmitted to you from dealers, technicians and customers. It's information that's usually written in a cryptic way using abbreviations and acronyms, or they're not writing full sentences and have words that may be misspelled. But it's very valuable information."

The problem is that most people aren't willing to sit down and write a complete and comprehensible report, especially when their car isn't working. However, if a company can't decipher or digest all the reports that are coming in, it may find that it is unable to deal with a problem in the field, even though it's being told about the problem. That could lead to dissatisfied customers, a loss of sales, or a costly and embarrassing recall.

"In much of the information being exchanged, from one company to another or from person to person, the content is what is important," Soparkar explains. "There may be structure and formatting to the information that is sent, but the content is what is important."

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Technology may provide a solution to this problem. New types of software are able to analyze what is being written... not just by looking at key words, but by discerning meaning from a report.

Ubiquiti is a company which produces the kind of software that can analyze these documents and provide a synopsis of what they're about. It can organize all the information that's coming in, and draw some abstractions

at a higher level.

"For example," Soparkar says, "if it's seeing more complaints about engine overheating it can figure that out, even if the words 'engine' and 'overheating' do not appear in all those documents. It might be written as 'car has high temperature.' What the software can do is abstract out the concepts from all the messages coming in and take care of the tedious work that would involve a lot of humans reading it. The software has a higher cognitive sense to figure it out."

This is a concept that's intriguing to anyone who deals with lots of information. Clearly, companies that become more adept at handling the flow are going to have a definite advantage over their competitors... because quite literally, their competitors are going to be on information overload.

