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!
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