vfridge – early social networking why did it fail?

the future of the web (in 1999)

the websharer vision (1999)

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!

background

1999 – dot.com era

existing start up aQtive
– intelligent internet agent onCue

2000 dot.com crash!

... but spawned a spin-out!

dominant view:
– expecting ‘shake out’
– small number of large players
– future of web as TV-style broadcast medium

‘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?

we thought differently ....
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