Happy New Blog

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/09/opinion/saving-the-fed-from-itself.html?hp&rref=opinion>

Once a year I write a post that tries to predict some of the big happenings of the year ahead. The success of these efforts relies on clear thinking and objectivity — trying to figure out what will come to pass rather than what I want to see happen. It’s hard but thankfully no one ever checks up on me a year later.

First, let’s take a look at the general economic outlook. The global economy is improving, unemployment is trickling down at least in the U.S. and there are some bright spots like improvements in manufacturing and construction. The Federal Reserve is poised to get a new leader and Janet Yellen has been nominated though at this writing it is far from certain that she’ll pass the senate because she’s a Keynesian after all.

But in a recent Op-Ed in the New York Times, Martin Feldstein, a professor of economics at Harvard, who was chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers from 1982 to 1984, under President Ronald Reagan, suggested a very Keynesian stimulus so perhaps some further stimulation of the economy could be in the offing.

Long story short, the economy is looking better than it has for some time but it’s not great. On the other hand, there is a goodly amount of capital floating around looking for homes in late stage start-ups and the class of potential IPOs looks strong with names like InsideView, Xactly, Apttus, TOA Technology, ServiceMax, FinancialForce and many others. None of the CEO’s want to talk about that stuff, it’s like they’re a pitcher in the dugout in the 8th inning of a perfect game.

All of these companies offer SaaS solutions and all are available on the AppExchange which suggests that my universe needs to expand. Nevertheless, the Exchange is a good place to look for signs of opportunity. I suspect application stores or exchanges are going to be very important incubators for new ideas in front office computing so I’ll continue watching them for new signs of life. You never know what you’ll find.

I expect a continuation of a trend that started last year in which marketing became the new darling of the front office suggesting that customer service (which is always important) is cycling out. Service is where vendors go during downturns so that they can try to protect existing revenue streams and, of course, SFA takes a back seat. But after a year of marketing hoopla I think the stage is set to put more wood behind the sales arrow to begin reeling in some of the leads that new marketing systems have been nurturing. So I am looking for new activity in the SFA part of CRM. But not just any activity.

I am still digesting the Bluewolf report “The State of Salesforce” that came out just before Dreamforce. One of the most intriguing findings from the report is that community is the new CRM. If that’s true, it is fairly easy to postulate significant changes to the way we sell. Perhaps sales people will become more involved with communities sponsored by their companies as a way to accelerate sales processes and lower the costs of making customer calls. What sales manager wouldn’t like that?

But I think the hidden message is that community will evolve more as a marketing and service hub, than as a sales tool. Sales will be a by-product of a lot of customer-to-customer interaction. Currently communities are mostly thought of as a part of marketing or as a part of service but I do not think it too far fetched to consider the possibility that community will become its own entity on a par with sales, service, and marketing — its primary consumers. Away from its departmental blinders, the community might be more able to take action to benefit all departments instead of just one.

Run well a community can provide a lot of information to a company and at some point it might make sense to give it its own charter and budget rather than having it mooch off the budgets of marketing or service. I suspect when that happens it will get a new name. Right now we have IT, which takes a technology perspective and that perspective is valuable. But this new entity will be more focused on information development or intelligence. This seems right and I like everything about it except the moniker. No one is going to want to work for ID, just a hunch but I can’t see calling the new department the intelligence department. Given the NSA’s reputation right now, we’ll keep clear of that.

This transition won’t happen over night so it won’t be complete in 2014, which sort of gets me off the hook in prognostication. But from another perspective, the oft quoted Gartner idea that the CMO will have a bigger technology budget than the CIO in a couple of years, I think, goes to the heart of what I am saying. But it won’t be the CMO’s budget, it will be the CIDO’s or whatever we decide to call him or her.