

SOCIAL MEDIA COLLABORATION

Social tools can motivate location-independent collaboration and help staff engage in anyone-to-anyone communications.

Executive Summary

The most successful organizations get that way by fostering a culture built on open communication and collaboration – within and across departments and lines of business, between workers across the room and across the globe, up and down the organizational chart.

But an open culture only goes so far, encouraging the level of communication, collaboration and trust that knowledge workers need to translate shared knowledge into the kind of innovative ideas that fuel growth. An agile IT infrastructure is needed to enable the information-sharing that's critical to creating an efficient organization – one that's capable of connecting employees anytime, anywhere; that can support a range of communication channels, collaborative social tools and digital content; and that's sufficiently secure and scalable to extend collaborative capabilities to communities of partners, workers, customers and constituents.

Enter Intranet 2.0. The potential operations benefits that stand to be gained by connecting staff via a social intranet optimized with communication, collaboration and sharing tools are extensive, though still largely untapped. But stay tuned: The promise and technology are there.

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Collaboration: Data, Voice and Video Communications

IP network architectures that provide voice, data and video convergence enable IT teams to execute unified communications (UC) strategies that dramatically raise their organization's game while easing their own support headaches. IP telephony, video conferencing, chat, web conferencing, presence awareness and other digital options are taking their place alongside long-entrenched counterparts.

Organizations with multimillion-dollar investments in legacy telephony systems have watched them slowly slide down the list of preferred ways workers use to communicate and collaborate. Advanced UC technologies have proven so valuable on the productivity front that they've gained enthusiastic acceptance, not just among early-adopter departments, but across entire organizations.

And why not? They accelerate communication through real-time connectivity; enable one-to-one, one-to-many and many-to-many interactions; are location independent; and support a diverse mix of content that streamlines, enhances and facilitates information-sharing, problem-solving and other collaborative efforts.

Intranet 2.0 Tools: How Organizations Are Using Them

Here are the top 15 social media and collaboration tools, the left column showing the percentage of organizations using the tool, the right column highlighting enterprisewide deployment of the tool.

	USING	DEPLOYING
Blogs:	75%	26%
Discussion forums:	65%	26%
Instant messaging:	63%	44%
Wikis:	61%	19%
User comments:	60%	32%
RSS feeds:	56%	21%
Social tagging:	51%	26%
Videos or vlogs:	43%	15%
Social networking:	43%	19%
Microblogging:	42%	18%
Podcasts:	39%	11%
Photo or video sharing:	33%	15%
Content ratings:	29%	14%
Social bookmarking:	23%	10%
Mash-ups:	10%	3%

SOURCE: *International Association of Business Communicators*, 2011

Two real-time communication channels enjoying high workplace adoption are instant messaging and chat, used for both internal and external interactions. IM enables known users to engage in one-to-one or multiuser interactions, and some services allow employees to add video and voice over IP (VoIP) to a text session, embed small files and links, and send offline messages.

For external communications, front-office staff, such as customer service agents, regularly employ chat to interact with customers, either by proactively reaching out when they perceive a site navigation issue or in response to customers who select click-to-chat options.

Employees are increasingly choosing IM and chat tools over e-mail for interacting behind and beyond the firewall for the instant gratification they provide. Still, e-mail remains a leading workplace communications channel, particularly among older employees. It's got ubiquity, longevity and loyalty behind it

The Extended Social Circle

Social media has changed the provider-customer relationship in innumerable ways. The "relationship" component of customer relationship management (CRM) is essentially under new management, with constituencies, whether they're businesses, consumers, clients, citizens, patients or students, taking a much larger ownership stake. In the cloud, voices carry, amplifying every rant, accolade, cheap shot and high five, sometimes defining brands more effectively than multimillion-dollar marketing campaigns.

More troubling to many organizations is social media's ability to enable their communities to crowdsource their issues. Everything from product usage questions to curriculum comparisons, maintenance requests, public hearing results, illness symptoms and investment options is brought to the social media forum, rather than turning to the entity once considered a trusted source.

For example, consider the ramifications for organizations that directly or indirectly increase earnings through customer service or technical support. According to a recent study conducted by research firm ServiceXRG, for every service and support issue resolved through a vendor's contact center or self-service knowledge base, seven are now handled via nonvendor social outlets, including product forums, dedicated tech support communities, wikis and popular social networks.

This shift has brought service models full circle and caught the attention of other front-office departments. Faced with a diminishing number of consumers contacting them directly (and therefore, diminishing opportunities to heighten engagement, increase satisfaction or try a little up-selling), organizations in both the private and public sector have been forced to develop a branded social media strategy. If they can't get constituents to come to them, they're going to their constituents in new and innovative ways.

Go Forth and Socialize, But Do No Harm

Different market sectors have varying levels of freedom when it comes to engaging socially with their base. Although segments governed by strict regulations can benefit from using social media to increase their public profile and raise awareness on a number of fronts, they have to tread carefully. Healthcare, financial services and government organizations need to be progressive, but can't risk tarnishing their image as trusted information gatekeepers.

Hospitals and physician practices, for example, must compete for increasingly knowledgeable and selective patients, but Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) regulations and privacy concerns restrict what they can post, tweet and accept from patients via social media.

But with strict guidelines, healthcare-affiliated organizations can use social media to competitive advantage. For example, a large health insurance provider may try to differentiate itself through external adjunct services such as Facebook groups and electronic mailing lists as part of a comprehensive services package.

Internal Memo: Go Intranet 2.0

Although social-as-business-tool discourse has largely centered on customer engagement, many experts believe the biggest advantages from social technology will derive from its applications within the enterprise. Even though a number of social media categories span both external and internal functions, they differ in terms of users and how they're applied. Meanwhile, there are also social platforms and tools developed to deliver benefits to internal activities that are distinct from those designed to target external processes.

In external engagement efforts, for example, marketing, service or sales professionals use social-targeting technologies that enable them to monitor conversations, analyze sentiment and review metrics (such as likes, followers and retweets) to better understand their influence and reach. These groups reactively respond to direct requests for brand information or service sent through popular social channels (typically, Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn).

When possible, they proactively reach out to users who tweet about a product's shortcoming or post a complaint in a community forum, asking them to contact the appropriate departmental team or sending them links to content that addresses their issue.

Within the enterprise, workers use social media tools primarily to facilitate collaboration, communication and knowledge-sharing across a range of business activities, and take advantage of efforts by the IT group or other tech-savvy coworkers to "socialize" certain business processes.

In some cases, IT departments upgrade their existing intranet by integrating social tools, including popular social networks

such as Twitter. Others choose to build a social intranet based on Microsoft's SharePoint collaborative platform, while still others are rolling out Intranet 2.0-related communication, collaboration and sharing functionality through commercial enterprise social network platforms such as Cisco's WebEx Social, IBM's Connections, Microsoft's Yammer and Salesforce.com's Chatter. Some other enterprise social tools regularly used by workers include wikis, blogs, microblogs, social tagging, user comment options and discussion groups.

In what kind of situations are social collaboration tools proving themselves? The scenarios are numerous, but consider this one: A salesperson in a midsize generator-manufacturing firm needs to model various sales forecasts and have the figures done by the end of the day. He opts to complete his task with Excel. But he doesn't get very far; every time he saves a change the program freezes and he has to quit.

Extremely frustrated, but remembering his long wait in the phone queue the last time he called the help desk, he opens Yammer and posts a short request for advice to his fellow employees. Shortly after, a woman from the organization's communications office responds and details her own recent issue with the spreadsheet and how she resolved it.

His reach out to his colleagues obviated the need to call the help desk. The upshot: The help desk saved money, as it doesn't use charge-back for transactions, while the salesperson saved time.

McKinsey Global Institute analysts estimate that organizations will see twice as much value from leveraging social technology within the enterprise as outside of it through improved collaboration, communication and knowledge-sharing. By improving these activities through strategic social technology implementations, according to McKinsey, organizations could potentially increase the productivity of their knowledge workers by as much as 25 percent.

Collaborative Tool Deployment: Your Place or Mine?

On-premises or in the cloud? CIOs shouldn't veer from their typical policies and general philosophy when considering enterprise social network platforms and any other enterprise-directed collaboration, communication or social tools.

Keep in mind these types of software, the data they generate and the networks they run on are vulnerable to the same security breaches that threaten every other type of application, data and secure network. And many IT and security professionals prefer to run every technology asset behind the firewall.

Further, enterprise social intranets run a significant number of collaborative and communication applications used to design the products that create competitive advantage, map strategic plans, convey sensitive information, or create dynamic knowledge – all forms of intellectual property unique to the organization.

Small businesses and public-sector organizations don't always have the IT budget or staff to purchase or support on-premises solutions. SaaS options that run on a vendor's secure servers, that enable immediate ramp-up, that are regularly upgraded with new functionality, and that are supported and maintained by the on-demand application vendor are an appealing option for organizations of any size. For many small and medium-size private and public-sector organizations, SaaS may be the only viable way to leverage rich social collaboration functionality on their intranets.

Best Practices

Transforming the typical static, underused intranet to a social intranet requires IT and all stakeholders to develop a blueprint that draws on top-down strategic objectives, key performance indicators, business processes, and the social platforms and tools that align with departmental functions and the organization's market imperatives.

The goals of such an initiative should include:

- improved collaboration and knowledge-sharing;
- increased employee engagement, leading to higher talent-retention rates;
- improved vertical and horizontal communication;
- increased individual and workforce productivity;

- increased commitment to knowledge management activities;
- an increasingly comprehensive knowledge ecosystem.

Department heads can help identify the right social media platforms for their collective base as well as their specific departmental function; map processes that enable branded social site visitors to escalate to the right personnel for assistance; and provide tools that enable the organization to not only field, parse and route social messaging that directly requests information or help, but also stay abreast of brand-related conversation in the cloud.

For IT and organizational leaders, the key to securely and successfully leveraging social technologies is to manage institutional risk through procedures and policies that address, among other guidelines, the appropriate use of social media channels. To that end, they should also determine whether to require front-facing workers to interact with customers, partners and prospects through a strictly defined "organizational voice" or give them some autonomy in their social interactions.

With well-enforced usage policies, personnel authorizations and response parameters (covering the who, what and why of internal and external social messaging), organizations will see significant ROI from enabling their employees to interact with each other and with their constituent base through social channels.



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