

JIVE WHITEPAPER

7 SIMPLE STEPS TO GETTING A HANDLE ON SOCIAL APPLICATIONS IN YOUR ENTERPRISE

ITS EASIER THAN YOU THINK

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EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

As of January 2011 there were 600 million Facebook users and 200 million Twitter users. Many millions use social services, from sharing photos via Instagram to sharing files via Box.net to via SlideShare.

So how many of your employees use social media? A lot. That's because social has become a normal tool used to manage and organize our lives. Social tools are flexible, efficient, effective and easy to adapt for personal and business uses.

In other words, you can't tell your users not to use social at work. It's like telling them not to walk on their feet. Yet due to regulations like Sarbanes-Oxley, you have to figure out how to manage social application use while adhering to the stringent requirements for compliance and eDiscovery.

Here are 7 ways you can increase your chances of controlling and properly channeling the use of social media in your organization.

1. Consider, from a business standpoint, why social is so powerful and why everyone uses it.

First, think about social in terms of business cases. Social is the lens through which employees increasingly expect to interact with data, whether or not they realize it. Consumer software services have made enormous strides in collaborative interaction and management of information. You don't have to look any further than the biggest technology names of the last few years to observe these sorts of data methodologies.

This doesn't pertain solely to the "Generation Y" segment of the workforce. According to InsideFacebook.com, users older than 35 years of age represent nearly 30% of all Facebook users. Indeed, social applications and services have been so successful, not only because their social nature makes them so compelling, but also because of zealous commitment to software simplicity and serving user needs.

As a result, users have a growing set of expectations about interface design, data portability, ease of sharing and readily available tools for collaborating. Once users grow accustomed to Facebook, it's hard to go back to emailing back and forth.

Consider the "workflow" for a typical Facebook user:

- Simple single sign on, available from any browser anywhere (no siloed log-ins)
- Personal "dashboard" view across entire personal network
- Status and activity alerts float to the top, unified view of disparate groups of friends
- New content and pictures, with cross commentary
- Able to easily drill down to alerts from a given group of friends
- Personal view of all relevant information
- Interesting or relevant content is curated, searchable and made easily accessible, without leaving the larger interface.
- It's the only copy of the content, and it's available with commentary from interested parties
- Facebook makes it easy to search either the entire graph, or a given segment, and to start conversations with others in the graph either privately or in groups.

Facebook is about staying connected with friends and family. Being social in an enterprise context is about a new way to do business.

Some or many of these features are replicated in other tools, such as the popular Q&A site Quora.com or in the latest generation of social clients such as Seismic Desktop. When you take a hard look at the work flows coursing through this usage, these flows map remarkably well to activities a user would want from an enterprise tool. An alert that a new comment has been posted on a discussion that the user is following. Notification that a new document has been uploaded to a project the user is currently involved in. An easy way of jumping from the content to a view of other activities of the owner of that content.

Performing these tasks inside Facebook is dead simple. Doing this inside most enterprise software is not. So no wonder everyone uses it in business settings, either for personal reasons or to speed up business processes.

But don't be confused. While Facebook sets the bar for the user experience that users have come to expect and love,

this doesn't mean your job is to replicate Facebook for the enterprise.

The average Facebook user has about 130 friends, with a relatively small percentage of them actively generating content.

In a typical global enterprise, a user is connected to tens of thousands of co-workers—all of whom are producing content on a daily basis. Employees also need to be connected outside the firewall to vendors, partners, customers and others on the social Web.

On Facebook, members share trivial details. In the enterprise, users need to share documents, competitive analysis, discussion threads, and so on. So social applications in business actually need to be better than Facebook in order to support the operating and revenue goals of the organization.

2. Acknowledge that social is like water. It goes around all barriers...so rather than try to dam it or push it back, you have to channel it.

For all the reasons discussed above, social software creates a compelling experience for users that is difficult for traditional business processes to compete against. Social systems are easy to understand and manipulate. Social systems are organized in the context of people, rather than information system hierarchies. Naturally, the social habits and expectations employees have picked up filter into the workplace.

There's also plenty to learn from social media and networking about effective ways to disseminate information within an organization. Activity streams, in-line commentary and easy image, video, and file storage are all compelling ways to move knowledge within a company and to share it with collaborators and customers.

So how can you defend against a service that's designed, from the ground up to have to sort of addictive virality of Farmville? Resistance is futile. Attempts to block or dampen the reach of social are certainly technically possible, and a skilled administrator can block, ban or prohibit many problem sites. This approach is a time consuming one, requiring an ongoing arms race against the technological innovations of the outside world. Unlike time spent to improve security or establish protocols for how data is managed, blocking social tools is time spent working in direct opposition to employee desires and needs.

For IT managers and CIOs, owning the social channels that the workforce is clamoring for—and currently using in unauthorized fashions—is an extremely productive and largely necessary alternative. The value proposition has already been embraced by the users. They know how to use the tools intuitively. So accept that social is going to be part of your business processes and develop a strategy to make social a positive, included, and secure part of your business processes and systems.

3. Identify key business areas where social has made inroads or is used and make plans to address the business reasons why.

Current problems can provide vital insight into needed services. If users are keeping track of daily progress or asking open ended questions with Twitter, it may suggest a need for a communication platform that caters to more passive forms of information movement. If users are employing third party file sharing services to move or sync work, maybe the company VPN has become a barrier rather than a convenience.

The business reasons for deploying may be slightly more abstract than typical resource allocations, but they're fundamentally rooted in questions of productivity. These social capabilities may seem to lack tangible direct return on investment, but the secondary effects can be extremely valuable. Moving information more readily between

disparate departments, quicker on-boarding of new employees, propagation of new best practices and techniques, better retention of company history and lessons learned are all achieved more efficiently with social business tools. In other words, social tackles what are otherwise some of the most resource intensive activities in the company.

The CIO is a hero. And a classic, painful business process problem is solved simply and quickly.

Use of unauthorized external file-sharing or syncing services are perhaps the poster-child example of bad behavior applied to alleviate an excruciating user pain-point. Current enterprise file sharing tools often require (in one way or another) manual management of files. Many allow for collaboration and real-time updating, but put up huge barriers to sharing files with contractors or customers. Version tracking for lightweight file management remains hugely painful. Even tools that provide syncing can fall short, leaving coordinating changes and edits made by multiple collaborators to the user.

Social business software can provide a single location and container for a given piece of information, allow all authorized parties to access, discuss and make changes to that file and then disseminate the changes back to the group at large—while preserving a record of all transactions. Management of the file itself is handled in the background. Users can concentrate on the work. The CIO is a hero. And a classic, painful business process problem is solved simply and quickly.

4. Create a social structure and channel that both the CIO and the Gen-Y employees can love.

So you have identified some pain points where social tools have already been adopted. Chances are, some of your organization's passionate users of social tools have favorite services that offer enterprise versions designed with auditing, granular controls, and better security. The financial sector has been an early adopter of social business and collaboration tools. As a result, many social business software developers have explicitly built in the types of controls required by Wall Street in order to meet the highest audit trail and information control requirements in the private sector.

Even better, these same social business tools are likely to have architectures that support ad hoc collaborations with customers—a key business imperative in today's fluid work environments (your customers and contractors are social business animals too, right?).

In cases where the social tools in use are not enterprise-ready, usually a close analogy exists due to the rapid explosion in social business software development. By empowering these passionate users to drive selection of appropriate social tools for business processes and using their passion to drive adoption, an IT organization can channel the energy and use it to improve productivity while still maintaining appropriate controls.

Why is the participation of these in-house social advocates necessary? Consider the simple discussion board. When it is full of lively conversations, a discussion board is an incredibly powerful social tool. When it's empty, a discussion board is sad and lonely.

Likewise, heavy-handed, top-down selection of unpopular social business tools significantly decreases the likelihood of adoption and social success. Social, before anything else, thrives on content and activity that comes from user buy-in. In the social sphere phony or inauthentic content sticks out like a sore thumb. That's why jump-starting a social tool with forced activity in hopes of sparking interest is a thankless task. Living ecosystems of data and interaction are what make social tools compelling to use, and early usage is critical to their growth and adoption.

Recruiting thought leaders within the company from the outset can have a tangible impact on the uptake of the service. Users who are bought-in and understand the strengths of the particular service (or the personal pain-point it may be solving) can be fierce allies and advocates internally, in addition to driving usage to the service by using it themselves.

If an IT department collaborates with passionate users who are creating and sharing high quality content using social tools, (either in the form of files or more abstract experience/knowledge), others within the enterprise will arrive organically. Thus, building and reinforcing a sense of ownership among the early users is a key for ultimate social tool adoption.

5. Build a social apps roadmap to anticipate future user needs (by asking them).

Unlike massive legacy software systems for enterprise resource planning or financials, social software is easy to try out.

Among those same passionate users of social tools are likely social tool tinkerers who love to try out the latest and greatest services posted on TechCrunch or Hacker News (in fact, these folks may well reside within the IT department).

Tap their expertise to get a sense of what gaps are in your existing social plans and what could be done to fill them. Utilize user groups and panel discussions or other forms of product development feedback to understand developing use cases and stay ahead of the adoption curve.

With non-technical employees, make an effort to speak their language. For example, users may not necessarily be familiar with terms like “micro-messaging” or “micro-blogging”, but may be familiar with Twitter and status updates. Listen closely and your constituents will provide guidance that will steer your planning process far better than any analyst notes or expert recommendations.

6. Teach your users why information that goes outside the channel is bad for the company so they can make the right choice.

Even after an IT department or CIO creates appropriate enterprise social channels and tools, use of unauthorized tools will likely continue. This is where a well-designed education campaign fits into the plan. Again, tapping passionate advocates to evangelize your security message will go a long way towards ensuring social usage remains proper. Through their actions, these evangelists will codify proper behavioral norms.

Overt education is also important. Video or text explanations (presented via the approved social tool) can be used to outline the consequences of unintentional exposure via external channel paths. Put some thought into this messaging. Dry PowerPoint slides will inevitably fall flat. Think funny. Think smart. Think of unique ways to make the point. A silly cartoon? Great. A funny xtranormal clip? Absolutely. Make it casual, but detailed and to the point. Everyone hates mandatory training so make the training less painful. Then deliver this message informally and via the same social channels you want your constituents to fully adopt.

The education process is ongoing but, hopefully, will become self-reinforcing. Keep in mind, however, that the single biggest defense against use of unauthorized external tools is providing powerful internal tools. Frictionless social workflows that let users find the information they need, seamlessly interact with their colleagues and get more done with less headache are just as powerful inside the enterprise as out. Having these tools available can all but wipe out unauthorized external social tools usage.

7. While you can channel social, expect that they will still use unsanctioned social while at work. Plan for it, segregate it on your systems, but don't ban it for personal use.

In much the same way as personal email accounts before it, social business software has grown markedly in importance for personal communication.

If expectations for personal social use are clearly laid out, and the delineations between internal and external tools are clear, consider allowing personal social for non-work use. It dovetails cleanly with policies about personal calls and checking home email. Banning personal uses of social is a non-starter in the vast majority of work environments. Segregating usage into a safer zone, if necessary, is perfectly acceptable.

Social Business Software is the most transparent piece of software on the market in terms of what it's designed to do, and how it can be leveraged to produce business results.

So don't think too hard about all this stuff. The beauty of social is the user direction ultimately defines the product and the user "gets it" so quickly that much of the dreaded training and continuing education required for ERP, financial packages, HR and other software is ridiculously unnecessary. Remember, above all, social has to be simple and simple is as simple does, in the most positive sense.

Gartner predicts that by 2016, social technologies will be integrated with most business applications.

- Gartner Identifies the Top 10 Strategic Technologies for 2011

IN CONCLUSION

What the enterprise really needs is a social platform with the ability to manage groups, projects, tasks, documents and discussions. One that connects to back-end systems to integrate existing enterprise data into the workflow. One that can create an “enterprise social graph” for employees, vendors, partners, customers and others on the social web.

In the next paper in this series, we’ll cover what a next-generation portal looks like.