

Too Damn Fast

How to match the blistering evolution of social media with effective internal & external social technology strategies

speakTECH
Interactive Design & Technology

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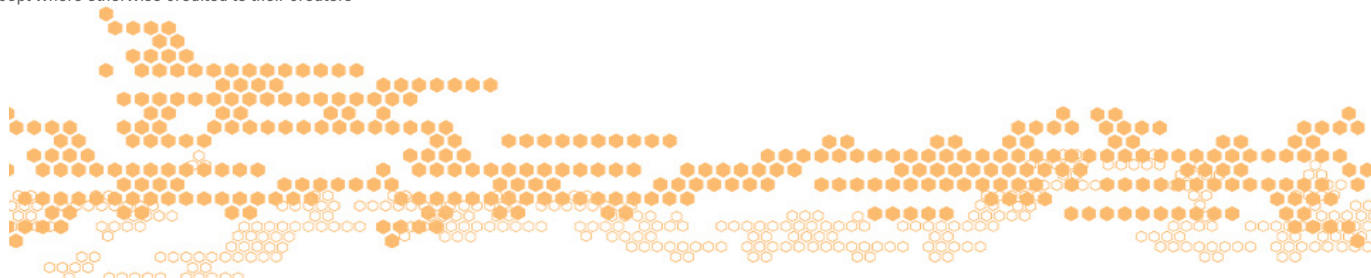
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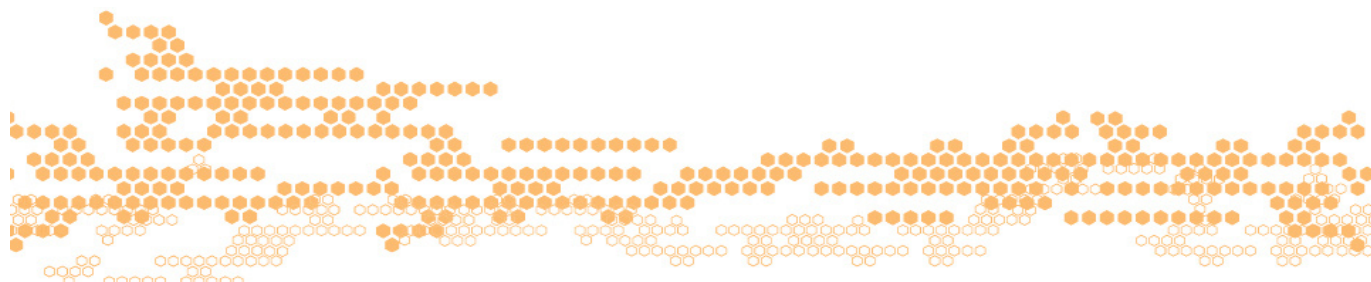
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Foreword

This is not your average white paper on social media.

This paper will not cram your business culture into a one-size-fits-all jumpsuit, nor promise to help you Twitter your way to a shapelier bottom line.

Instead, we offer clarity on fast-evolving crowd-linking behavior. We recommend tools for building a long-term social-technology strategy as a way to connect, build your brand, boost KPIs and monitor change.

And we will deliver a healthy dose of high-altitude truth: Social technologies are evolving too damn fast for many to keep up with.

While progressive companies are tying themselves in million-dollar knots just building Facebook apps or chasing the latest Twitter-marketing strategy, SpeakTECH proposes that firms take a more holistic view:

The most popular social technologies did not even exist eight years ago, so the trick is not in deciding which ones deserve your money or man-hours.

The trick is learning how to anticipate and leverage trends in human interaction in ways that will keep your business responsive, agile and synched with the ever-shifting DNA of social media evolution.

The trick to mastering social media is this:

It's not the software. It's the culture.

Definitions:

Social computing: *Technology that enables virtual relationships*

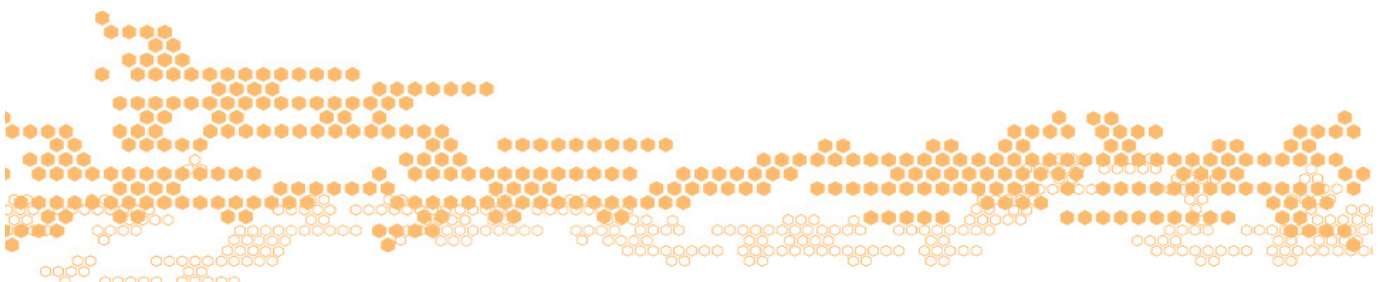
Social media: *Social computing solutions*

Community: *Social media organized around a purpose*

- *Communities of practice*
- *Communities of interest*



*How to master social culture:
Evolve or die trying*



Social Technology Strategy Matters

Social networking is booming. That's obvious.

Web users love it: In the past year, activity on social-networking sites in the United States has increased by a massive 83% – and that's just the average, according to a report out from Nielsen Online.

In 2010, Twitter users sent 25 billion tweets¹, and Facebook participation has jumped to a staggering 500 million+ users worldwide².

People now spend 22% of their internet time on social-networking sites – up from just 6% three years ago³.

Social technology succeeds because it augments a basic human need: forming relationships based on interest and sharing information with friends old and new. Now, connecting and collaborating with like-minded people (or people with specific, needed talents you lack) is push-button easy and eye-blink instantaneous.

Social technology is more than just a fad, like the CB radio of the '10s - It's a bona-fide revolution in human interaction, offering huge potential for new and better ways to do business.

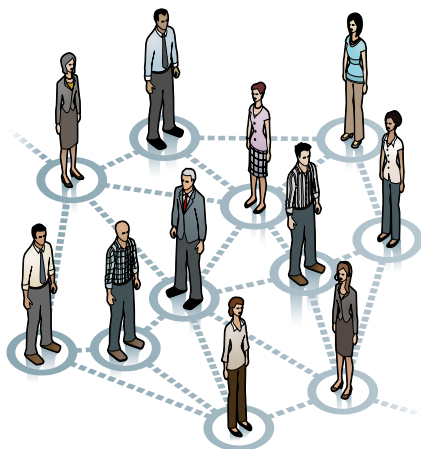
As your employees, partners and customers grow accustomed to making connections on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Flickr or YouTube, they are responding more actively to companies that actively communicate via social media.

Savvy companies large and small have launched highly successful marketing, branding and community-building campaigns via popular social platforms. Most ecommerce sites have introduced some form of comments and rating, allowing better customer service and product usage and high-quality feedback to suppliers and manufacturers.

Others are growing their business and improving efficiency, collaboration and time-to-market performance by empowering collaboration and communication with internal social media tools.

But at the same time, web users are proving incredibly fickle. They try one social medium after another – sometimes discarding them as they go – so it's best not to get sucked in by any particular brand or platform.

For instance, MySpace (the 800-pound gorilla of social technology not five years ago

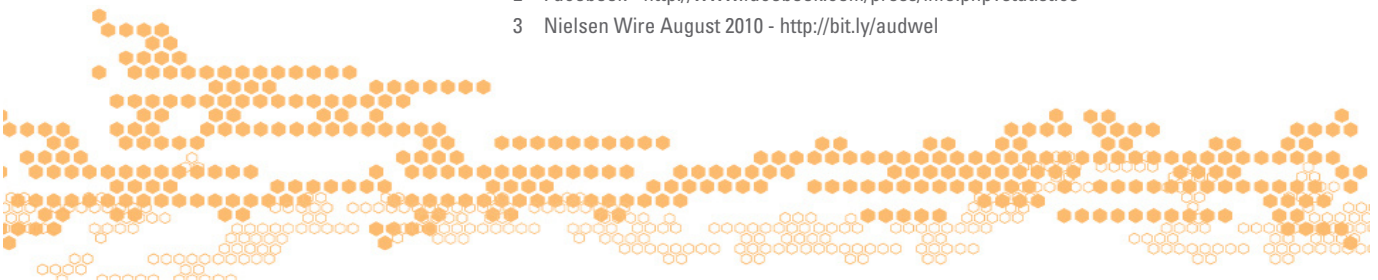


Time spent on social networking has nearly quadrupled since 2009

1 Twitter company blog - <http://bit.ly/dNlxZN>

2 Facebook - <http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics>

3 Nielsen Wire August 2010 - <http://bit.ly/audwel>





when NewsCorp. paid the massive sum of \$580 million to buy it) has laid off more than half its staff after watching Facebook and Twitter steadily erode its market share in the past few years.

But Twitter’s wild growth is also marked by an extremely low retention rate. Fully 60% of new Twitter users walk away from their accounts after just one month, compared with users on MySpace and Facebook, 30% of whom abandon accounts within a month of setting them up⁴.

Choosing the right platform for your purpose today may seem obvious – Twitter and Facebook for reaching users, SharePoint and services such as Yammer or Jive for empowering your employees’ collaboration and communication.

Deeper in this paper, we will discuss the latest analytics and best practices for using the currently popular social media platforms, connecting with people and capitalizing on your social technology investment.

But because platforms and audience tastes and needs evolve permanently, developing a controllable, scalable and sustainable social media strategy turns out to be far more critical than learning how to leverage the existing tools.

The questions you should be asking yourself are: What kind of customer conversations will we always want to invite? How can we get better market intelligence without spending more money? Which communities of interest need more consistent brand traction?

4 Nielsen Online: “Twitter Quitters Post Roadblock to Long-Term Growth” <http://bit.ly/QK7hu>



Who do we want to be two years from now? Five? Ten?

Perspective – Keeping social technology “real”

Social media is an extremely young – some would say juvenile – business domain. Here is a bit of perspective:

Twenty years ago, the Web as we know it did not exist.

Eight years ago, search technology as we know it – the concierge-like, almost pre-scient blend of well-sifted and categorized links, maps, images and web services offered by Google, Bing and less-known search engines – did not exist.

Barely more than seven years ago MySpace was in its infancy and most of what we know today as the vibrant and powerful world of social media – Facebook, Twitter, Friendfeed, Flickr, YouTube, FourSquare – did not exist.

Yet the social activities supported by all this “new” technology are as old as business itself. The concept of the Agora – from which “I shop” and “I speak in public” stem – dates back to ancient Greece.

Social technology simply enables basic human behavior: seeking knowledge; talking with and about ourselves and each other; sharing information and ideas, products and services, facts and opinions.

As technologists work to make all this “easier”, they are really just responding to cultural cues from the users, refining what “works” and shedding what fails, which makes for a ceaselessly moving target, at best.

So, every move you make in social media and technology should boil down to how easily it lets you interact with users, and how much power it gives them to interact with each other under your brand. Companies’ corporate communications departments do not control their brand anymore, the consumers do.

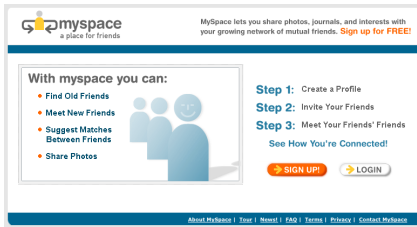
Again - it’s not necessarily the tools, it’s how you use them.

Social Media Technology Perspective – SLATES

Probably the most influential social media technology perspective is summarized in “Enterprise 2.0 : The Dawn of Emergent Collaboration” by Professor Andrew P. MacAfee, published in spring 2006 in the MIT Sloan Management Review⁵. In this research article, Professor Macafee has synthesized his vision of six components of Enterprise 2.0 technology he called SLATES.

SLATES is an acronym that describes the business-impacting capabilities of social

5 Download it here: <http://bit.ly/b4h9v>



MySpace, circa 2003

Search

Links

Authorship

Tags

Extensions

Signaling



media, derived from the effective use of Web 2.0 technologies in and across enterprises. It stands for Search, Links, Authorship, Tags, Extensions and Signaling.

Later on, Dion Hinchcliffe⁶, a leading social media visionary and consultant who created the Web 2.0 University, further refined SLATES to fewer words.

They are:

Search: Discovery of information drives reuse, leverage and ROI

Links: Using URLs to forge thousands of deep interconnections between enterprises' content, 24/7

Authorship: Ensuring all individuals within and across enterprises can easily publish content on Enterprise 2.0 platforms

Tags: Allowing natural, organic, on-the-fly- organization of content from every point of view

Extensions: Extend knowledge by mining patterns and user activity. (Ever purchase a book on Amazon and seen the phrase "other customers who purchased this book also purchased these books?")

Signaling: Make information consumption efficient by pushing out changes

Understanding SLATES' implications is key to defining a sustainable social media strategy.

"Open Hand" – 5 best practices of social technology

Equally important is the human factor. To quote the old software developers' gag: PEBKAC – Problem Exists Between Keyboard and Chair.

No matter how the Next Big Trend in technology or audience behavior affects the platforms you choose this year, your challenge is dealing with people.

Your company's success in social media and technology should be guided by a unified, transparent strategy, framed within five core best practices that we think of as the "Open Hand":

- **Welcome**
- **Engage**
- **Listen**
- **Adjust**
- **Refresh**

We will discuss these in context a bit farther down.

6 <http://hinchcliffeandcompany.com/about.html>





*“Open Hand”
5 best practices of
social technology:*

Welcome

Engage

Listen

Adjust

Refresh

Bottom line, your work in social technology will differ from your other IT endeavors because of its very nature as something that is raw, human, direct and dynamic.

Social technology should help you build, nurture and manage ever-changing relationships – whether with your employees or your customers. In the end, people will remember how you treated them far more clearly than they will the technology you used to communicate.

Welcome – Give the people what they want

Market research likely already guides your business strategy.

Use this intelligence to identify social-market venues, Design social spaces and communication channels that invite people – current customers as well as prospects – to interact not just with your brand, but with your people. Make them easy to use, open, smart.

Tailor your marketing voice to the social space – but be plain: You’re inviting a conversation with them because you want to understand their needs for valuable new products or enhancements to current products. They need to know you will bring actual value to their lives, not just a sales pitch.

Then:

Engage – It’s all about the Conversation

If social media is the “voice” of your brand, then tone is everything.

Whether you blog, tweet or post into threaded discussions, whether you open a customer-support forum or live-tweet your next product release – you must treat your users like humans. Each one is smart, opinionated and unique. Each one deserves human interaction.

Be humble. Be cheerful. Be as open as you can. In short, engage with people at their own level, and you’ll gain more market insight and brand traction than you ever thought possible.

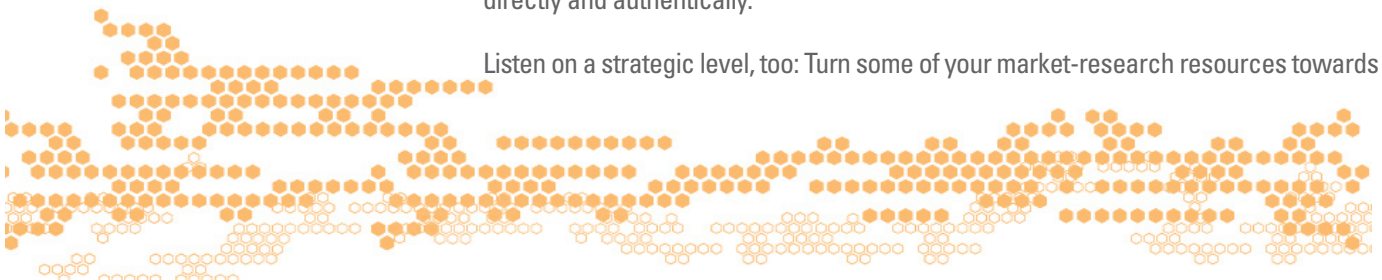
Identify allies and early adopters, and recruit them to help build the culture you want.

Most importantly:

Listen – Active listeners enjoy better conversations

In every interaction make sure you “hear” what users say – and then respond swiftly, directly and authentically.

Listen on a strategic level, too: Turn some of your market-research resources towards



monitoring social media discussions about your market space – or even your company (more on this below).

Find the influencers and pay attention to what gets their attention. Then:

Adjust – Monitor, validate, adapt

Are you providing exactly what people want – in interactions as well as your product? Anticipate their needs. Do what you can to accommodate their desires. And acknowledge criticism so they know you're listening.

Did you screw up? Admit it. Humility bolsters brand loyalty just as fiercely as defensiveness corrodes it.

Are you losing users to a competitor's online space or strategy? Spot what they're doing – do it better – and then look for ways to make your social media presence even stronger.

Remember – you are entering the social space for the long haul. Keep honing your company's instincts for survival there.

Refresh: Watch the people, not the machine

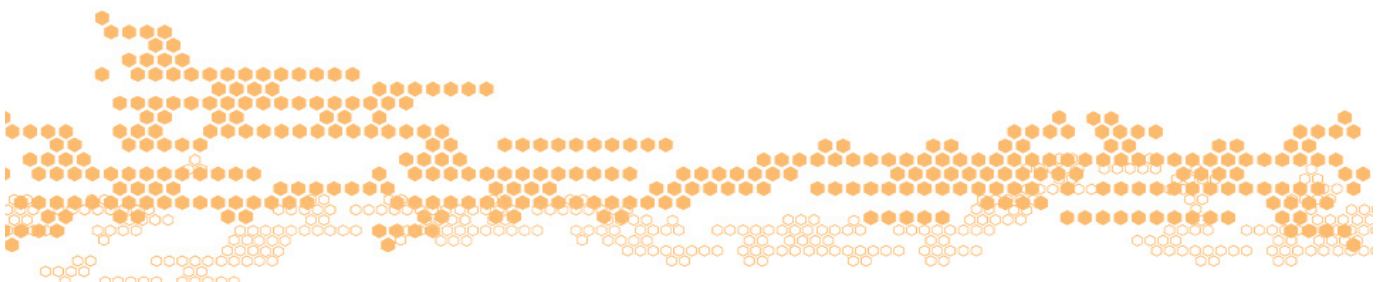
Social technology itself will continue to evolve. Just as new tools will replace the tried-and-true (remember: MySpace --> Facebook --> Twitter), your users' behavior, habits and needs will inexorably change.

As deeply as your company may invest in one particular social technology now, it should be ready to switch platforms, tactics and targets to match your users' changing tastes.

Younger social media audiences can be a good barometer for trends in platforms and behaviors, but if you're serving a broad customer base or workforce, make sure you understand what's happening in the over-30 crowd, too.

Audiences are growing sophisticated enough in social media that future technology may begin to stratify broadly not just by medium (as in Twitter versus Facebook) but also in interests, age groups, geography, socio-economic status and segments we cannot yet imagine.

If you are not dedicating some portion of your staff to social technology strategy yet, now would be the time to start.

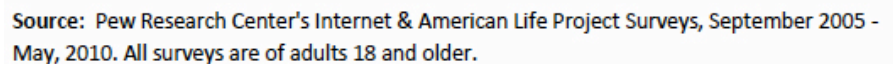


Know the audience

According to a recent study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, social networking among adults aged 50-64 is growing even faster than among 18-29-year-olds.⁷ This means that your audience – whether your company uses social-technology strategies for external marketing or internal workflow – is far broader and better plugged-in than they were just two years ago.

7 Pew Internet and American Life's study of Older Adults and Social Media - <http://bit.ly/db4MAU>

The percentage of adult internet users who use social networking sites in each age group

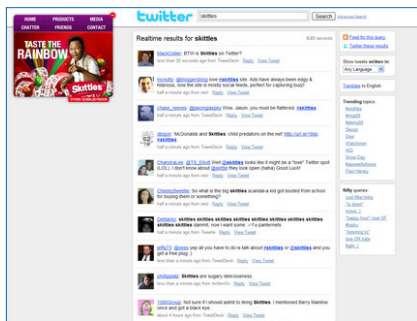


When following celebrity influencers, make sure you have the real account - this graph shows traffic growth on the account therealshaq. Actually, Shaquille O'Neal's account name is THE REAL SHAQ.





Screen captures from two of the less-propane mock Tahoe ads



We can't show you what some people Twittered using the #Skittles hash-tag. Suffice to say, it wasn't very nice.

Likewise, your work in social media will encounter more resistance from older users.

Externally, this means you may be (initially) less successful reaching older audiences with social media strategies.

Internally, however, the picture changes: Younger employees are often the first adopters, fastest learners, strongest evangelists and best source for feedback on using social technology for collaboration.

They are also more likely to welcome the innovation and help older, less-adaptive users understand new collaborative tools and learn how to use them.

Look down the road to anticipate the social media experience your audience will have two, five, 10 years from now. Build towards it today, and you'll be ahead of the curve.

Find the conversations already in progress

Chances are your brand is already under heavy discussion. If you have a strong, eagerly-watched product pipeline, people are talking about your next release and comparing it to your latest. If you are a service company, they are comparing notes about how well or poorly they were served.

They might be crowing about your work - or idly slagging your brand, trashing your waitstaff and kibbitzing about comparison-shopping against your competition

Solid social strategy is based on intelligence, and for that you must listen not to experts, but the actual conversations. Whether you choose DIY tools such as Google and Technorati, or license social-monitoring platforms such as Alterian's SM2, Radian6, Jive, IceRocket or ScoutLabs, good intel is critical to your ability to make smart decisions.

Get a feel for how people are talking about you - and how you can engage with them - before barging in and making a mess with tin-eared chatter or ham-fisted marketing tactics. Here's a list of monitoring solutions that may prove useful: <http://bit.ly/CMHbl>

Choose the right stance and voice

People want to engage with brands they are watching so that they can make the most informed purchase choices possible.

People also innately want to belong, to feel like they are "in" on something.

Screen Twitter for consumer influencers and vociferous users who are focused on your market segment, follow them, and connect. Get a feel for the give-and-take and the topics that get them buzzing.

Are they keenly interested in upcoming product releases? The R&D process?



Competition? The evolution of your brand? Build your social voice on platform stances that hook into these interests.

If people are obsessed with whether your next product will be able to beat your competitors' next product, then open a dialogue with them in the form of a Twitter feed on R&D progress, or a Facebook wall devoted to customer feedback on next-gen feature desires.

The better you understand the culture and needs of your audience in a social media setting, and the more intelligently you position your social technology efforts, the more naturally you will be able to join their conversations.

Know the territory

Get to know your audience, find their influencers, speak their language and give them what they want.

Contrary to the drumbeat message coming from hundreds of self-styled "social media experts" on the Web, social-based marketing is not your guaranteed route to better profitability.

Do it wrong and you expose your products to hostile criticism, your operations to time-sapping consumer relations (and potential litigation) and your very brand to ridicule.

Social media audiences are smart, opinionated and ruthlessly inventive when they feel they are being pandered to by brands that do not "get" them:

Chevrolet learned this the hard way.

Several years ago, Chevy published a "Make your own Tahoe spot" tool on the Web. Anyone could log in, edit together ravishing footage of Tahoes in the wild, superimpose their own text messages, and create commercials. Big mistake.

Culture-jammers quickly co-opted the tool to publish hundreds of negative commercials⁸. So, Chevy succeeded only in crowd-sourcing a new brand for its Tahoe SUV as a bloated, polluting, accident-prone land-barge⁹.

Likewise, Skittles launched a Twitter-based viral marketing campaign in spring, 2009 – and then quickly killed it after profane responses wound up being Twittered right back onto Skittles' own home page.

And in spring, 2010, Nestle posted a message on its Facebook wall¹⁰ that probably seemed like an innocuous request to respect its brand: "To repeat: we welcome your

8 Google search: Tahoe culture jam - <http://bit.ly/4n3tnZ>

9 Online Media Daily, March, 2009 - <http://bit.ly/19jvcs>

10 Nestle Facebook message - <http://on.fb.me/9E2cSk>





Take a lesson from the late Capt. James Cook. Learn about social-media culture before trying to use it. (image via Wikimedia Commons)

comments, but please don't post using an altered version of any of our logos as your profile pic - they will be deleted."

The resulting backlash flooded the wall with barbed criticism, raw insults and, of course, photoshopped Nestle logos.

To this day, the top Google search result for the phrase "nestle facebook" is a CNet story on the imbroglio. Nestle's Facebook page is the second hit. The offending message thread is the third.

Doing social media right, however, can revolutionize your relationship with customers, open new lines of business and re-energize your brand.

Carefully-applied social media strategies can streamline business processes, encourage employee-driven innovation and collaboration, shorten R&D cycles, attract critical sales leads, and actually rebrand your company as smart, grounded and visionary.

The secret is understanding your audience, giving them natural ways to interact with your brand, and doing it with integrity.

Now, you need to plug into social media to research the behaviors, attitudes, customs and language with which your potential customers are discussing you.

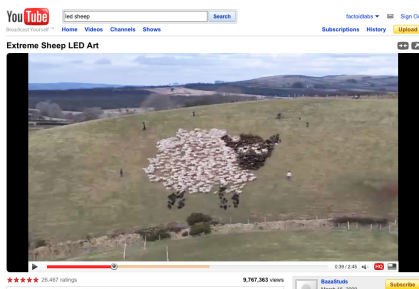
Because in much the way that Capt. James Cook never quite got the hang of talking to the Hawaiians¹¹, your very survival in social media hangs on your ability to understand its ever-shifting cultures and to connect effectively.

Without this understanding, you risk market missteps that will help your competition tear you apart.

Key Strategy: **Befriend the influencers, recruit the advocates**

Tools

- Run keyword searches on your brands and products in all the major social media platforms.
- Identify not only the discussion trends and audience interests, but also the "influencers," the people who are talking most often, most vocally and to the greatest number of people about your world – both good and bad, in any medium. Learn how often they engage in dialogue with users and brands.
- Check these influencers' "follower counts" in Twitter, their friend counts on



Samsung's wired-sheep video has pulled nearly 14 million views since March, 2009.

¹¹ They killed him when he tried to take their king hostage during a skirmish in 1784 - <http://bit.ly/SOeNb>



Dell credits its many Twitter feeds for product lines like Alienware with boosting earnings by more than \$3 million from 2007 to 2009.
<http://twitter.com/alienware>



Pixar's John Lasseter in one of a large series of "insider" videos Disney/Pixar has published on YouTube.

Facebook, their subscriber numbers on YouTube, the comment traffic on their blogs and so on.

- Identify the people with the biggest audiences and most persuasive voices. For the most popular, measure the number and tone of negative critiques they draw.

Tactics

- **Follow the influencers** – Find them with tools like Klout¹². Connect your profile with theirs in Facebook, on Twitter, in YouTube, Flickr and other media-sharing sites. Get to know their habits, their likes and dislikes. They are valuable because, online, people really listen to each other when money is at stake: Fully 60% of people believe consumer opinions posted online, and 90% follow friends' online recommendations.¹³
- **Figure out what tickles them**, and what sets them raging: Strike up a dialogue – be humble, honest and respectful of the sway they hold in their sphere of social media. After all – they could become your best allies for disseminating news, swaying opinions, gathering intelligence and making friends with your future customers.
- **Keep your discussions "real"** and your social media voice honest and open, they'll invariably respond in kind – and recommend your brand to their followers.
- **Offer them access** – not just access to previews of your upcoming products and services but to direct connections with your mission drivers – the people whom your audience would be most interested in "meeting." Consider hosting Q&As, live chats or even on-site visits with design directors, brand creators and any celebrity consumers of your products. "Insider views" shared among influencers and your customers can have tremendous viral power.
- **Identify and recruit brand advocates**: These users may not have popular blogs, nor the number of social media followers enjoyed by influencers, but if they are clearly friendly to your brand, then alliances with them can be valuable – they can spread the word beyond social media.
- **Reach out to them via private messages** (on Twitter or Facebook) and offer them "early" information about upcoming products, "inside" tips about industry trends, or other intelligence. Treat them as you would sales leads, for they can help attract permanent audience to your brand as powerfully as traditional marketing helps generate sales.

Key Strategy: Develop publishing streams, develop voice

Tools

¹² <http://klout.com>

¹³ Nielsen online (Adweek), July, 2009 - <http://bit.ly/3SQ40U>

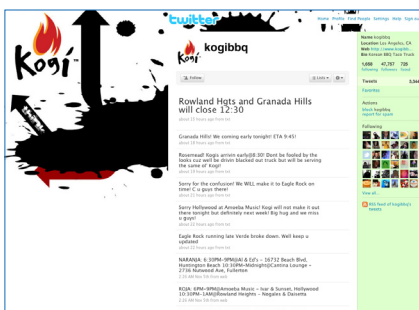
- **Microblogging, via status reports:** Twitter, Facebook, Friendfeed and Google all allow “microblogging” — short (140 characters, in Twitter’s case) status reports. You can set up your company’s Facebook page (or pages) to “pull” Twitter feeds so that your social media authors need post only once to have the post appear in both places. Find ways to talk with your audience, not just at them.
- **Multimedia content:** Media companies learned long ago that good movie and TV trailers “go viral” the minute they hit YouTube. But other companies are just starting to leverage YouTube and Flickr as vectors for “free” word-of-mouth advertising.
- **Blog, blog, blog:** It may seem almost old-fashioned and quaint at this point, yet some of the most successful social media strategies are built around a central, “human” brand voice.
- **Ratings and review:** Rating and comment tools let your customers share their feedback on your site, directly in the purchase path. This feedback fuels consumer decision-making to drive sales, decrease product returns, and build trust in your brand.

Tactics

- **Microblogging:** Twittering constantly about your company’s latest exploits may please your closest fans but the steady drumbeat of outbound marketing will turn off everyone else. Instead, consider how you might offer services via the medium:

For instance, JetBlue mixes it up with a blend of product offerings, flight-status reports and answers to support questions from users¹⁴. More than 1.2 million people follow the airline’s Twitter feed. Ford Motor Co. maintains nearly a dozen Twitter feeds, focusing on product lines and lines of business. Here is a list of even more ways that large companies are using the medium to their advantage¹⁵.

- **Multimedia content:** While Flickr and YouTube are obvious paths for posting pure marketing content — straight and guerilla — they can also be used for “inside our company” views that help Web users identify with your brand as a collection of employees who share their interests.



Lines of hungry diners form at Kogi BBQ’s truck within minutes of its tweets.

- **Show people your “guts”:** Consider publishing videos about your non-privileged manufacture processes, your corporate culture, even your extracurricular activities if you believe people will connect with them.
- **Share your tastes:** Music playlists published on services such as Spotify or Blip.FM can help reinforce your image as a tastemaker in your markets.
- **Parade your “heroes”:** Some of Pixar’s most popular videos on YouTube turn out to be those of director/exec John Lasseter discussing the studio’s cre-

¹⁴ <http://twitter.com/JETBLUE>

¹⁵ Search Engine Journal - <http://bit.ly/e9lryq>

ative process¹⁶. If your products have dedicated users, give them content about the creation of the products they love. People share – and re-share - whatever they find engaging. Brand enthusiasm is contagious.

- *Traditional blogging:*

- Choose the busiest, most engaging voices. (For instance - General Motors CEO Bob Lutz's "Fastlane" blog was lauded for its damn-the-torpedoes frankness.) But execs are often busy, and rarely are they your most authentic writers. Your best, most reliable and most-forwarded blog posts may come from somewhere far below the boardroom. Pick bloggers who understand that a good blog has to be:

- a) authentic and engaging as hell*

- b) informative*

- c) modest (or willfully brash)*

- d) occasionally clever and, most importantly,*

- e) refreshed at least every day or two.*

This list¹⁷ points you to some smart efforts by large companies that are enriching their brands and expanding their reach through traditional blogging. The Social Media Business Council¹⁸ is also a good source of best practices for corporate blogging.

- *Empower all interactions:* The tools you choose for blogging are not nearly as important as the transparency of your blog and, thus, your brand. Make sure you:

- **Publish trackbacks**

- **Maintain a generous blogroll** (linking to your influencers in particular, and even your competitors)

- **Enable commenting** but respond directly and courteously to all comments, no matter how harsh. The risk of "bad" content appearing on your blog will be far outweighed by the respect your positive stance generates.

Key Strategy: Be indispensable

Engagement is the secret to successful social media campaigns. Sure, cute viral content and clever games can help spread your brand. But they are swiftly consumed and costly to refresh.

Bring information, edification, even order to people's daily lives, and they will engage with you day after day. Something alive and active is attracting customers to your brand. Publish that.

16 YouTube - <http://bit.ly/39vNBi>

17 Mashable.com- 15 Excellent Corporate Blogs to Learn from <http://on.mash.to/cuZyZo>

18 <http://www.socialmedia.org/>





Audi polled Facebook users on its entry for the L.A. Auto Show's Design Challenge. The theme - "Youthmobile 2030." One resulting design: the eSpire

Tools

- **Domain status reports:** Keep people posted not only on what you are developing for them, but also on the state of your industry and the legal, political and cultural events surrounding it. Become the pulse of your market sector. JetBlue is one example of how magnetic good status reports can be. At the other end of the spectrum is Kogi BBQ, a business with a Twitter feed that boasts 80,000+ followers. The feed¹⁹ is actually posted by the staff of a small Korean taco truck company broadcasting the location of its upcoming stops. *A taco truck.*
- **Live support:** Real-time help – whether in the form of a tweeted answer to an anxious question, or a detailed message forum post from a fellow user replying to a newbie's cry for help – can be a powerful brand-builder. It shows that your company not only puts out a good product, but also backs it up.

The cost of maintaining a dedicated call center dwarfs the light commitment of running peer-to-peer help forums or a user-generated knowledge base or even posting your support staff to monitor a dedicated microblogging channel.

- **Responsive experts:** Fielding an expert to answer how-to questions in real-time can bring a tremendous ROI by growing audience and broadening your brand's footprint.

Tactics

- **Be useful:** Provide information that helps people make decisions.
 - **Talk about the world,** not just the market sector. Remember where your goods and services impact your customers' lives. Engage them in their world.
- Think: hunting lore for gun-makers, auto racing for oil companies, safe driving for insurance companies, health tips for pharmaceuticals and so on. People will always flock to a ready source of genuine expertise in their world – no matter how broad that world may be. Make your brand the expert, and they'll think of it when it comes time to buy - or recommend.
- **Be authoritative, not combative:** Hype and braggadocio about your superiority over your competitors won't win you followers: Being responsive, authoritative and real definitely will.



Telligent Community Server 5.0 couples front-end tools for blogging, microblogging and group-based social networking with powerful back-end tools for configuration, moderation and analytics.

Key Strategy: Crowdsource your R&D

Notwithstanding the secrecy challenges (and the lesson from Chevy's disastrous Tahoe experiment) You can bring a hugely positive stamp of transparency to your brand by inviting your customers into the design and research-and-development cycles.

While much fuss over companies like Audi, Fiat and LocalMotors crowdsourcing new

¹⁹ <http://twitter.com/KogiBBQ>



car designs²⁰, your company can create an intimate connection between users and your R&D department in several ways without giving up your secrets:

Tools

- **Ideation:** Simply put, ideation is like plugging a suggestion box into a voting booth. You invite customers to post ideas for new products, services or features – then let them view and rank the ideas. The tastes of your target audience drive the most popular ideas to the top.
- **Virtual R&D labs:** Focused message forums can help you debug current product challenges, or workshop entirely new concepts.
- **Open contest:** Offer a prize, in exchange for the best ideas from your target audience. The winner has his/her concept built.

Tactics

Unlike other strategies explored in this paper, this one is more concerned with considering your company's competitive and legal exposure than with maximizing traction for the tools you choose. The tools are straightforward – but how you use them can be complicated:

- **Legal concern** – Intellectual property rights: Opening your doors to consumer input can also expose your brand to the threat of intellectual-property-theft – or accusations of the same. Make plain the terms under which you are soliciting your audience's help, particularly who owns the idea in the end, and how much the "creator" should be compensated.
- **Secrecy vs. confidentiality vs. transparency:** Journalists and professional bloggers who fall into the "influencers" category can usually be trusted to honor press embargoes of a few days or even weeks. But if you're crowd-sourcing next-gen products and features that give your company a distinct competitive edge, you'll want to ensure you have two things in place: Top-notch security and rock-solid NDAs with all participants.



*Rule #1: Do not feed the trolls
(image via Wikimedia Commons)*

Key Strategy - Offer an open platform

Most companies will realize that it's generally better to welcome customers to branded spaces in existing platforms – Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr – than it is to try to reinvent the wheel. The giants are laboring hard and iterating fast on their own next-gen user experience, and it would be unwise to try to develop your own, in hopes that people will use it to engage with your company.

But owning your own social ecosystem can give you a formidable level of control that you cannot approach by tweaking Facebook templates. Configuring a commercial-

20 <http://bit.ly/ihBvQo>

grade platform to your business goals can prove to be a worthwhile investment.

Tools

Open-source platforms such as Joomla and Drupal offer robust, endlessly customizable toolsets and a strong, fast-refreshing base of functionality thanks to active development communities.

However, they may not be as secure and robust as commercial solutions such as Telligent Community Server, which can be set up and run with less tech support, thus providing a higher ROI. Telligent's tools for controlling spam and abuse and its scalable moderation framework make it a solid choice for external communities.

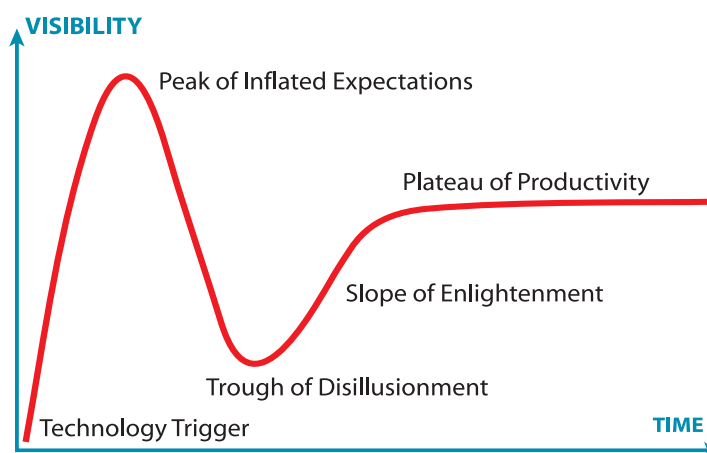
Tactics

We have already covered tactics for using each of the components found in these systems. But overall, your internal social strategists will want to take a holistic approach to configuring, launching and managing external communities on a stand-alone platform, weighing how each available tool - and the overall mix - can be weighted and maximized to further your business goals and community strategy.

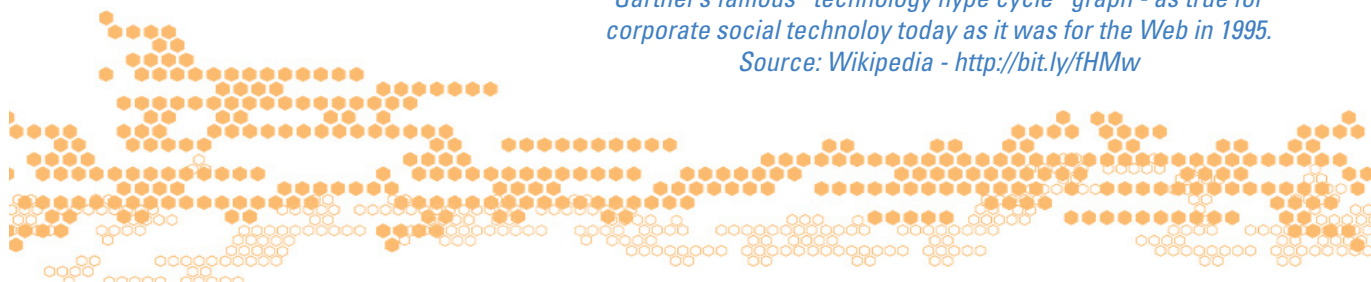
Governance:

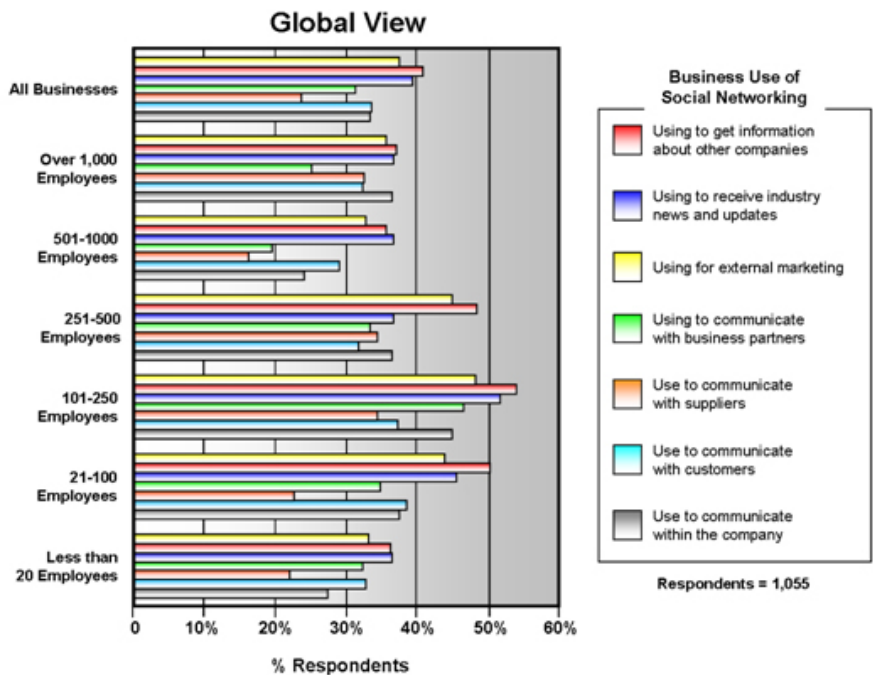
Communities, like terrariums, need management. Setting them up with no plan for handling their evolution is a recipe for letting the real-world equivalents of algae, fungus and rot overwhelm your beautifully encapsulated garden.

Decide on goals, analytics benchmarks and failure thresholds that will guide ongoing management. Assign a manager to every space. Then assign a community coach to



*Gartner's famous "technology hype cycle" graph - as true for corporate social technology today as it was for the Web in 1995.
Source: Wikipedia - <http://bit.ly/fHMw>*





Source: TMCNet.com

help managers react appropriately to challenges such as activity surges, trolls, flame wars and unforeseen events in the marketplace that spark debate or fan criticism of your brand.

Summary:

Core Strategies for External Social Technology

- **Connect with your customers:** Speak in voices they can believe in. If you can make the conversation engaging, informative and entertaining – and give them a stake in the discussion – they'll join your brand for the long term.
- **Pay attention, invite interaction:** Befriend the tastemakers. Watch the conversation and give customers a say in what comes next. Know what people need today and may come to need tomorrow, and invite them to keep you on the right track.
- **Be transparent, be human:** Avoid facades and pseudonyms. Users of every stripe – from bright-eyed fans who love your company to battle-hardened trolls who seek only to destroy you - will likely see your community leader as “some marketing suit at the company” unless he shows himself to be human too.

Interact with customers as if they were not just vital to your business, but important personal friends.

If you stumble, lean on your allies. Defensiveness and denial are blood in the water to trolls, but your other users are your best allies: turn them to your favor – and you may



even disarm your attacker – with good humor and self-deprecation. (Below are some great resources for spotting and handling trolls²¹.)

- **Stay useful:** Provide valuable information and insight within and beyond your brand domain. Be what people need and want you to be – in business and in conversation.
- **Stay fresh:** Match the way your customers' conversations are evolving and speak to what matters in their daily lives, to stay ahead of the next social-tech tide.

Don't be afraid to continually reinvent your methods and tools for interaction.

Strategies for Internal Social Technology

While the same best practices are critical to a healthy and sustainable social technology strategy inside your company as they are outside, the landscape behind your firewall is completely different.

So, too are the types of communication and collaboration you are enabling.

In external social media, you are engaging people at their most enthusiastic and hospitable. They want to interact with your products and services because they like what you do (or what they've just learned about you) and they have chosen to spend their spare time on exploring your brand.

Internal social media engagement can be almost the opposite:

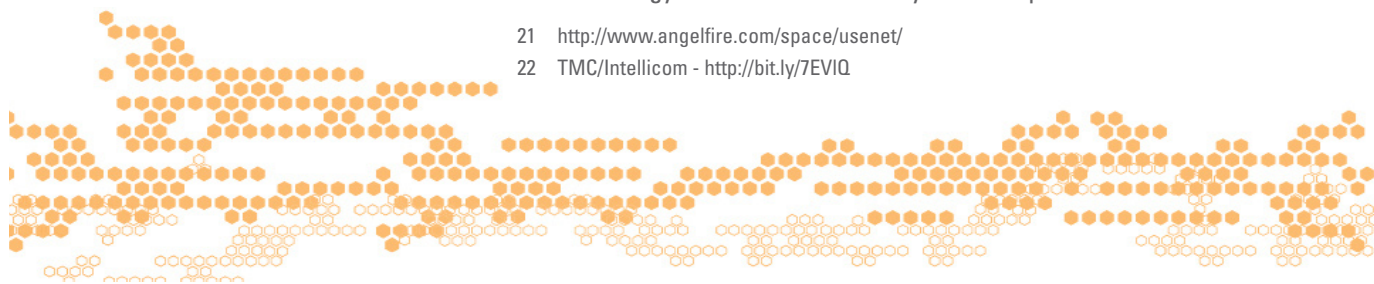
- You are trying to connect your employees at their most socially vulnerable point – they feel burdened with existing duties, pressured to perform and nervous about keeping up “professional” appearances in social settings.
- If they are not already die-hard social medianauts they may just be dabbling, and they worry that spending time on it at work will cost them time, reputation – even their jobs.
- They are about as comfortable yakking casually with each other on the company intranet as a group of 14-year-olds facing off at their first high school dance.

Furthermore, you're asking your employees to weather a seismic shift in their business environment. Ideas like replacing emails with instant messages, chain of command with wiki-based brainstorming, or even something as “light” as posting your expertise on your internal company profile can seem like radical departures from the norm.

A 2009 report from TMC/Intellicom²² shows that private enterprise has been adopting social technology much more tentatively than the public – and in a limited fashion.

21 <http://www.angelfire.com/space/usenet/>

22 TMC/Intellicom - <http://bit.ly/7EVIQ>





*Dion Hinchcliffe
(photo: Tim "Avatar" Bartel,
via Wikimedia Commons)*

Those surveyed were using social tools primarily for intelligence-gathering and marketing, with collaboration – the most powerful and transformative use of social technology for enterprise – taking a distant but slowly-rising third place.

A study commissioned by Cisco in 2010 found that only one in seven companies surveyed even had a formal process for adopting consumer-oriented social technologies, and only one in five had policies in place governing their use²³.

But the latest numbers from Gartner²⁴ show that adoption is heating up - Companies spent \$769 million on social software in 2010 - up by 15% over 2009 - and expenditures in 2011 are projected to grow by another 15.7%.

The ROI is strong for companies that embrace social technology, and the impact is overwhelmingly positive. In short, it's a trend that most companies will ignore at their peril.

TransUnion, one of the nation's three largest credit report companies, reports that it is enjoying a savings of \$2.5 million on just a \$50,000 investment in social-networking tools.

Upon being pressured to set up a public Facebook page, TransUnion opted instead to build a social ecosystem behind the firewall. Now, some 2,700 TransUnion employees can use SocialText's wiki, instant messaging and social-profiles to solve business problems with brainstorming instead of spending more on hardware and software²⁵.

Meanwhile, a report from usability expert Jakob Nielsen found in more than a dozen case studies that enterprise social technology – even when led by guerilla efforts and pilot programs from within the enterprise – is profoundly successful and self-correcting.²⁶

Among the findings by the Nielsen Norman Group (cited here²⁷):

1 Underground efforts yield big results – Companies are turning a blind eye to underground social software efforts until they prove their worth, after which they integrate them more thoroughly.

2 Front line workers are driving the vision – Many senior managers still consider social tools something their teenagers use. Young workers, who do not need to be taught or convinced to use these tools, expect them in the workplace.

3 The business need is the big driver – Social software is not about the tools, it is about

23 <http://bit.ly/8TxeI9>

24 <http://bit.ly/ftLFDQ>

25 InternetEvolution.com - <http://bit.ly/175j6>

26 Enterprise 2.0: Social Software on Intranets: A Report From the Front Lines of Enterprise Social Software Projects - <http://bit.ly/pBOWQ>

27 Social Computing Journal - <http://bit.ly/OQLeH>



what the tools enable the users to do and about the business problems the tools address.

4 *Communities are self-policing* – When left to their own devices, communities within enterprise intranets police themselves. Workers tend to retain their professional identities, leaving little need for the organization to institute controls.

5 *Organizations must cede power* – As companies have been learning from using Web 2.0 technologies to communicate with their customers, they can no longer fully control their message. This is true, too, when Web 2.0 tools are used in internal communications.



Forums thrive with steady, engaged but very light-handed moderation.

Dion Hinchcliffe, a prominent supporter of what's coming to be known as "Enterprise 2.0", maps the adoption flow this way:

Enterprise 2.0 Success Pattern: When Bottom-up Meets Top-Down



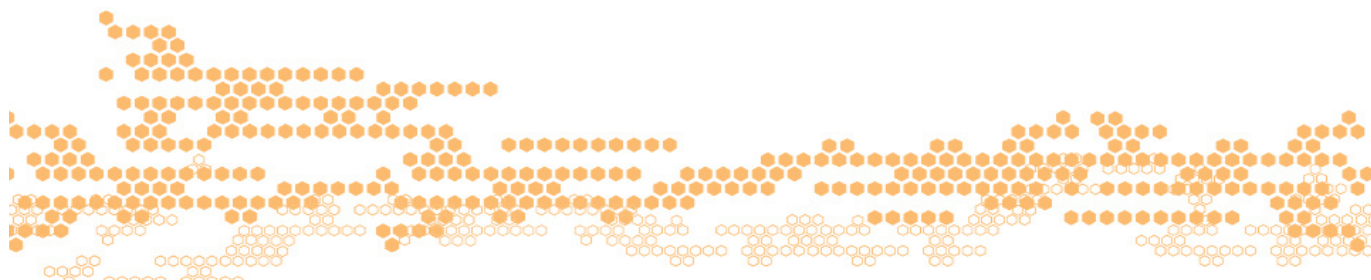
From <http://blogs.zdnet.com/Hinchcliffe>

Hinchcliffe also offers "14 Reasons why Enterprise 2.0 Projects Fail," and they have far more to do with properly managing the wetware – the organic community using the tools – than with investing in the right software²⁸.

Hinchcliffe cites flaws ranging from technology tunnel-vision and failing to grow the community ecosystem to impatience, lack of planning and what might be gently labeled "managerial hubris," but again, the tasks of successful implementation boil down to this:

The biggest challenges you will face in implementing enterprise social technology are not fiscal, nor technical – but cultural.

28 ZDNet - Dion Hinchcliffe - <http://bit.ly/UQFoJ>



Best practices

Again, while the audience and purposes for internal social technology differ from the external, the five “Open Hand” best practices for sustainable communities should drive your efforts:

Welcome: Make work easier

First impressions and rollout strategy are critical to the success of your social media tools.

Your employees will see any major new social technology initiative like this: “Wait – I already have plenty to do – and now you’re loading me up with social media tasks? Excuse me while I just give up the rest of my so-called life.”

The key is choosing collaborative tools and workflows that actually do save time and money.

Build communities around lines of business, and provide tools for sharing best practices, finding resources and getting fast, useful answers.

Design and deploy tools to reduce the flood of regular email: Set up document libraries, status dashboards, workflows, forums and P2P (peer-to-peer) communities that put all critical information within employees’ reach on a need-to-know basis – rather than fire-hosing them with everything and forcing them to filter out what they need.

Establish metrics and human monitors to measure the frequency, quality and success of your staff’s socialtechnology engagements.

The more helpful your social tools are, the more likely people will use them – and contribute their own help to others who need it.

In other words, build systems that welcome interaction, self-help, problem-solving and informal mentoring.

Finally, make sure your leaders understand and fully back the mission: Retooling traditional workflows for social technology can be disorienting and challenging. It is critical that a voice from the top articulate the reasons behind, expectations for and benefits of taking the plunge.

“People who do surf the Internet for fun at work – within a reasonable limit of less than 20% of their total time in the office – are more productive by about 9% than those who don’t.”

– Dr Brent Coker

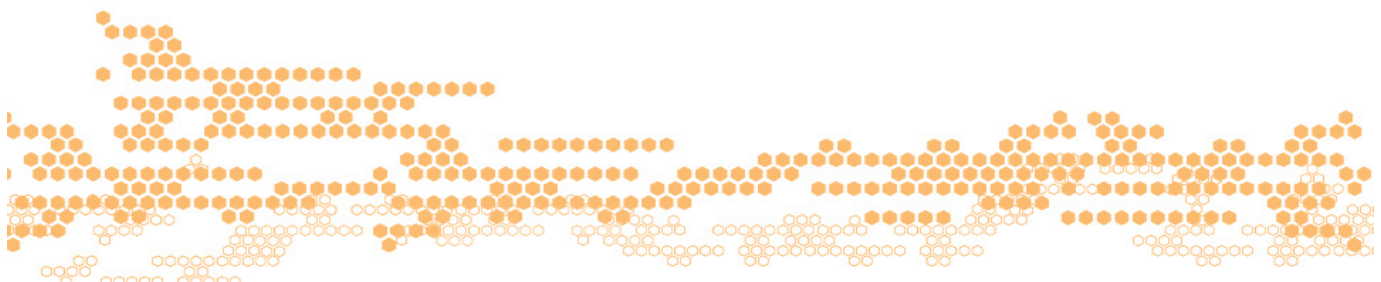
(Study, Department of Management and Marketing at The University of Melbourne.

<http://bit.ly/Nigw>)

Engage:

Staff it, recruit process champions, build culture

It’s one thing to set up a threaded-discussion board for sales execs to share best practices.



It's another to sustain a community that gives as much to the discussion as it takes away.

Identify smart, social media-savvy employees to “own” each of your social spaces. Then make sure they engage constantly, invite new ideas, and guide regular traffic into those spaces. Reinforce participation with encouragement, and share best practices broadly.

The more people see an online space being used to good effect – and the more they see useful information posted there on a regular basis – the more likely it is that they will add participation to their daily routine.

Listen: **They're telling you more than you think**

As with any solid public social strategy, listening to your users is vital to the success of your internal social media culture.

But in addition to monitoring what people are saying – about your products, your processes and their interests and needs – you should be listening to what they're hinting at (or not even telling you) about the way things are running.

An open and responsive social culture online can help you gauge (and affect) morale, manage expectations and streamline processes – but it can also help you spot trouble as readily as innovation.

Carefully-managed and open social culture that encourages frank dialogue, constructive criticism and swift response can be foundational to your company's ongoing internal health and social growth.



*33% of all email is
unnecessary -
Gartner report*

Adjust: **Enable collaboration, but address valid issues**

For better or worse, social technology allows instantaneous communication – and swift virtual collaboration.

Some companies fear the worst: that social tools let employees dawdle, grumble, vent, and offend in ways they could not before. Indeed, 54% of U.S. companies surveyed say they already block Facebook and Twitter within their networks²⁹.

But while your first instinct may be to clamp down, this can actually kill the fragile social culture you're working hard to enable.

Let your existing company policies manage such behavior. (Remember – Nielsen's study found that most enterprise communities are self-governing, and that users by

²⁹ <http://bit.ly/14f4Cy>



and large remain professional).

And – as with a good external strategy – handle valid criticism with humility, sensitivity and speed. If someone gripes relentlessly and bitterly about a known problem, address the tone and manner of the complaint as you would someone shouting out in the lunchroom, “This company sucks.”

But be sure you also address the problem. Even cranks tend to have a point.

Refresh: **Make things happen in that space regularly**

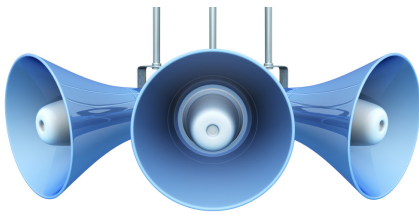
Employees get busy.

In open, non-workflowed social tools such as forums, wikis and microblogging activity streams, even your most active social media users will “fall off the map” from time to time, while less-active ones will make only token appearances.

Give them reasons to engage: Float (and solicit) new ideas. Bring in outside voices; present “guest speakers” who will post and respond to ideas on a special topic for a day or a week at a time.

The logistics of using social technology to engage and encourage collaboration among your employees are casual, low-impact and, thus, far less costly than real-time lectures, meetings, discussions and debates.

People engage when they want to and when they can spare a few seconds. Give them reasons to return often and take part.



A successful internal communications strategy recognizes that employees who feel they are being heard have a stronger stake in the company than those who do not.

Strategies

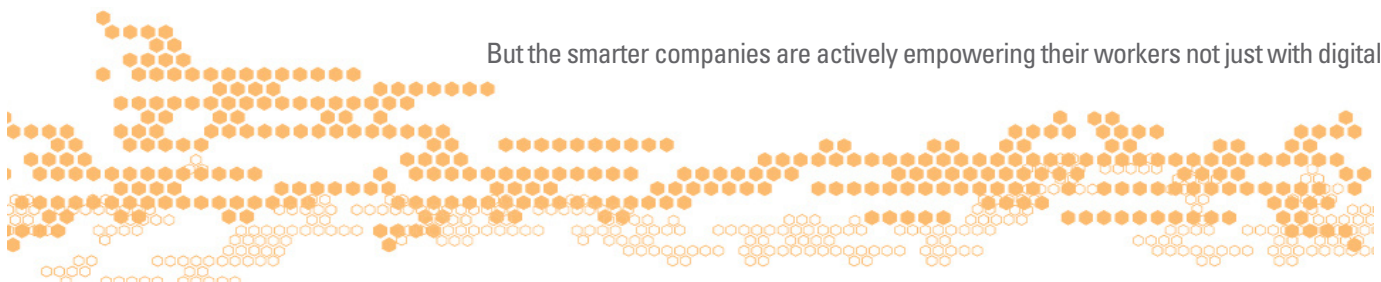
Computers have buried the modern workplace under a distracting avalanche of “convenience.”

Emails pile up unanswered in in-baskets. PowerPoint presentations have empowered the most boring among us to be even more boring. Track-changes puts a dizzying array of full-color fingerprints all over that nice, clean document you thought you had authored.

And the Web (for less-restrictive offices) is an open license to waste time on YouTube and, well, kill work cycles browsing social media.

Policies and procedures can help most companies manage the worst of these diversions.

But the smarter companies are actively empowering their workers not just with digital





Picasa is fast, powerful & free
<http://picasa.google.com>

tools, but with collaborative culture powered by crisp infrastructure and solid strategies such as these:

Key Strategy:

Remove the glass ceiling, knock down the cubicle walls

One of the great boogymen of enterprise social technology is the fear that by giving employees a voice, you lose control over them. As we have seen, this could not be farther from the truth.

In fact, by inviting open discussion of processes and products – social technology gives employees in investment in your success, empowers them to help you on both conceptual and practical levels and gives management valuable intelligence on evolving internal culture.

Blogs and forums can also serve as a gentler social-technology on-ramp for companies that are concerned that a full-bore initiative would be too jarring for the existing culture.

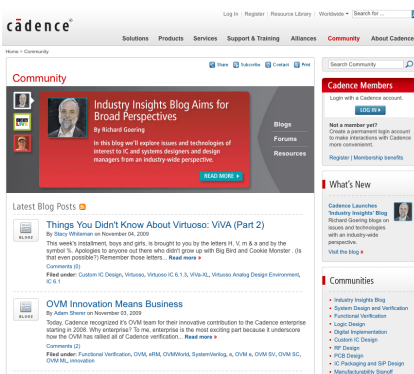
Tools

- **Internal blogs:** A good blog – regular, informative, opinionated and engaging – can swiftly and economically improve communication and understanding throughout your organization.

The flexibility and accessibility of blogs also makes them extremely powerful: Done right, one or more blogs can keep your employees informed on news or insight. Enabling comments – and responding to them quickly - can invite dialogue to explore deeper issues, work out problems or spark brainstorming on new innovations in your processes and products.

- **Threaded discussion forums:** Correctly-built and -moderated forums can support an unlimited array of business tasks. Whether left open to all or restricted to task-specific user groups, forums can provide IT support, answer human resources questions, share best practices, air out workflow challenges and reinforce mentoring and team-building work.

- **Ratings:** Providing a mechanism for rating blogs or documents is an invaluable source of feedback to the authors and to the readers. For the authors, it provides a incentive to improve their work and for the reader an indicator of relevance – especially when the ratings are connected to users' profiles.



<http://cdnusers.org>

Tactics

- **Tailor your tools to business needs:** Clear focus is just as important to a successful



internal blog as a strong voice. “All Things HR” won’t enjoy near the readership of a blog focused on “HR Advice and Answers,” for instance.

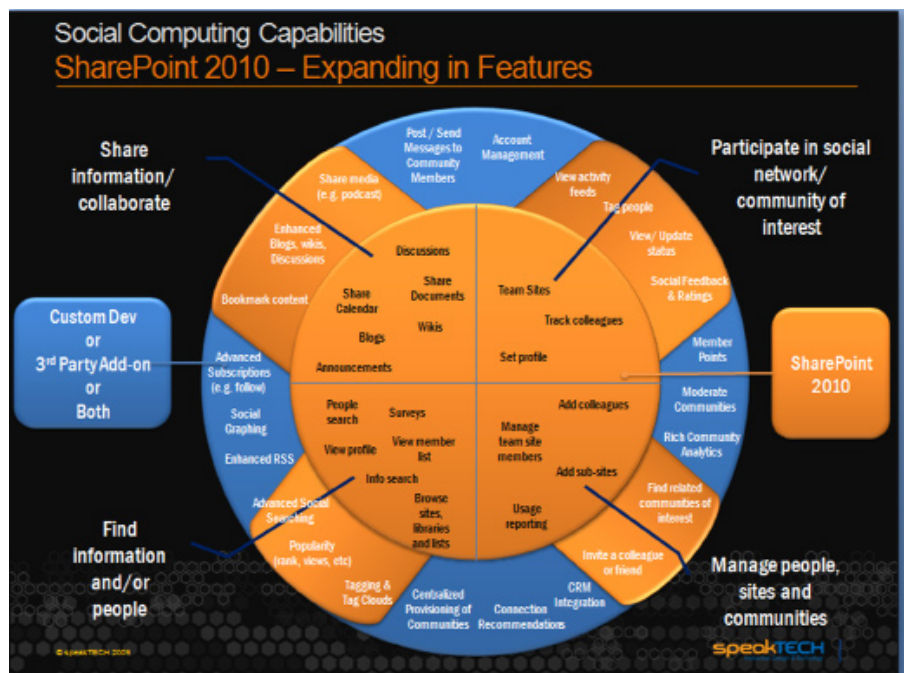
Know what you’re blogging about, then gear the blog’s title, content and tone towards the audience and business need that it most directly addresses. If you have multiple blogs in a single line of business, you can always aggregate them into a single feed, benefiting anyone who lacks time or interest to follow each one individually.

Likewise, forums should be crafted to serve specific lines of business and cultural constituencies, to attract and foster discussion among employees with common goals and needs.

- **Monitor and respond:** If you are blogging or monitoring a forum, make it a daily habit to check for and respond to comments. Many blog and forum platforms include optional email-notification for the comment stream though, of course, you will want to weigh whether the benefit of instant notification is worth the hassle of extra traffic in your inbox.

Casual notes of “me too” or “cool!” don’t warrant a reply. But ignoring substantial comments – or even leaving them hanging for more than a day – can invite unwanted speculation about the motives behind your silence.

As with external social media, be human, be genuine: Compliment genuine insight, accept praise and criticism with equal grace, and offer something back that will ad-

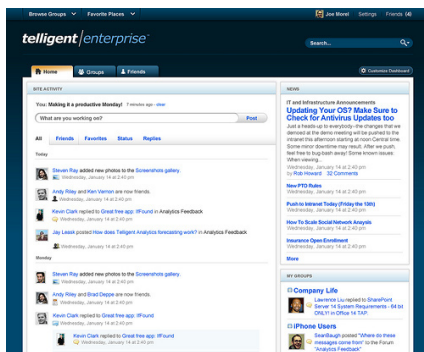


vance the discussion.

- **Be transparent, don't censor:** With the exception of trade secrets or blatant violations of civility or privacy, actively censoring or deleting posts is counterproductive and has a chilling effect on discussion. Salty language, for instance, is better left in place and commented upon so that it can serve as a reminder to everyone else that it's not allowed.

Even unwanted criticism can launch productive discussions, and you will likely find others springing to your defense. Killing a post or comment – particularly without a followup explanation – leaves everyone feeling more gun-shy and unsure of what's “acceptable,” while plainly disapproving and moving on clearly reinforces the culture of your community space.

- **Identify influencers and recruit moderators at all levels:** Your most-active commenters and forum participants may come from within the ranks rather than management. Encourage the most active ones to take on moderation roles – providing positive reinforcement of productive discussions and community values so that everyone understands what's expected and valued.
- **Optimize for search:** As generally described below in “Key Strategy – Team Workspaces,” good search technology and keywording practices will make your blogs and forums more useful. When useful content flows through a community space on a daily, even hourly basis, finding what you need can be as valuable as being able to respond to what people are saying.
- **Illustrate wherever possible:** People read (and respond more actively) to blog posts with images attached. Not every post needs an image, but you'll find that at least a mix will improve readership and commenting response. If no internal images are available, you can find a ready source of royalty-free photos and illustrations on all topics at the Wikimedia Commons³⁰ or, for a small fee, at iStockPhoto³¹. Use Google's free Picasa tool³² to crop and size images.



*Telligent Community Server
has evolved into an enterprise-
grade intranet platform.*

For a solid example of how powerfully social technology can connect your company both internally and externally, please see this case study³³ on speakTECH's work for electronics technology leader Cadence.

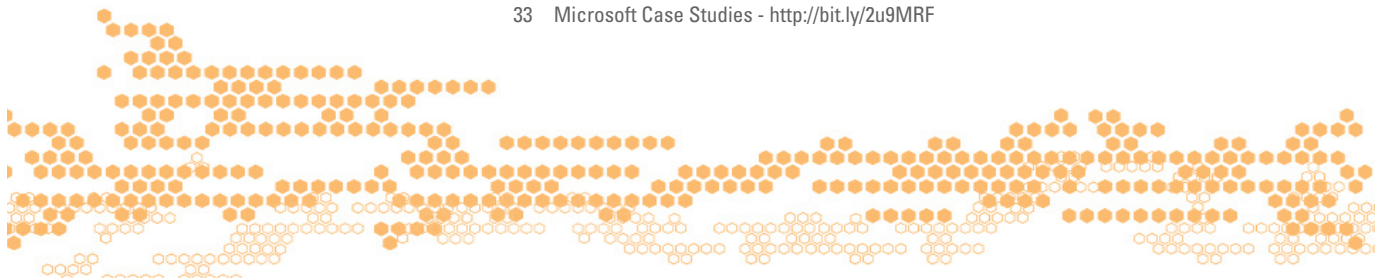
The community speakTECH built for Cadence can be found at <http://cdnusers.org>.

30 <http://commons.wikimedia.org/>

31 <http://istockphoto.com>

32 <http://picasa.google.com>

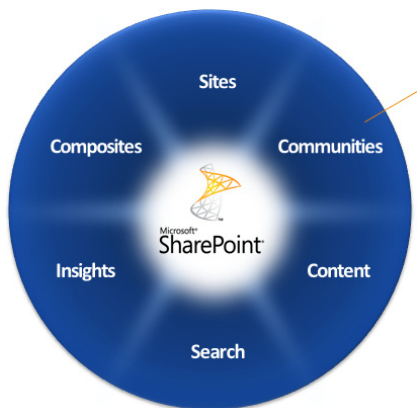
33 Microsoft Case Studies - <http://bit.ly/2u9MRF>





You can use the same basic platform as Wikipedia's to build project-level workspaces or company-wide knowledge bases.

*Learn more here:
<http://bit.ly/ywOZa>*



New social features in SharePoint 2010 include tagging, tag clouds, social bookmarking, ratings, enhanced blogs & wikis, improved MySites, ac

Key Strategy: Team workspaces

Traditional team-communications tools (phone calls, emails, memos, meetings) can seem cartoonishly outmoded, compared with a well-built, fully-adopted and socially-oriented team workspace.

In the end, teamwork is still collaboration toward a common goal, and teams need the same things they always have: A place to talk, a means for sharing work products, a way to track progress and the ability to target communications.

Correctly built and supported with a strong cultural strategy, these tools and tactics can bring much greater efficiency to the way your teams interact and drive towards their goals:

Tools

- **Microsoft Office SharePoint 2010** – Microsoft's integrated suite of collaborative applications gives your company not just a toolset, but a full ecosystem for collaboration. A solid SharePoint development company (like ours - plug, plug) can set you up with the ability to launch team spaces, share documents, track progress and collaborate actively.

SharePoint is fully scalable for extremely large enterprises, and since it is under constant development, it is keeping pace with the evolution of business practices. New innovations are being introduced with every new version.

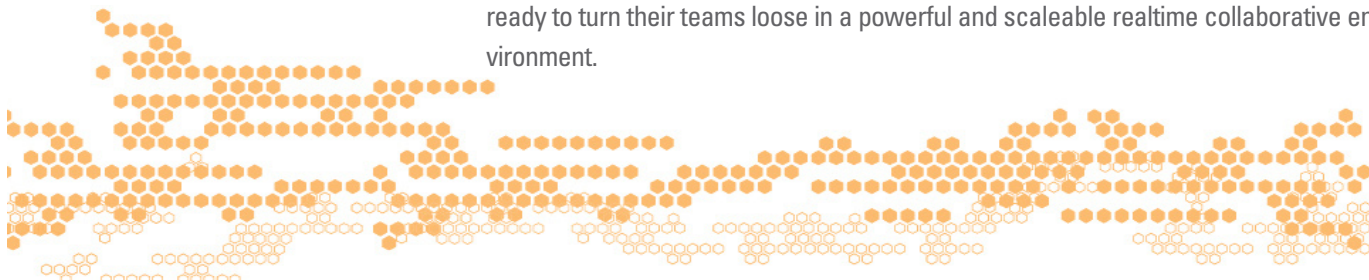
SharePoint 2010 has been beefed up substantially over the 2007 version, offering advanced social search, user ranking, activity feeds, people-tagging, bookmarks, improved "MySites" profiles, better Outlook integration and enhanced features for blogs wikis and forums that are too numerous to mention here.

With more than 17,000 customers worldwide and more than 100 million licenses, SharePoint has become an industry standard, fueling a rich ecosystem of solutions and partners as well as skilled IT workforce availability.

- **Telligent Enterprise:** Recently, Telligent released Enterprise, the intranet-focused re-working of its class-leading social-networking platform, Community Server.

Enterprise layers a user-centric UX and drag-and-drop configuration tools atop an already-robust array of group spaces, enhanced profiles, group-focusable microblogging, multimedia content management and other tools.

Integrated, search-driven menus for navigation and bookmarking make the platform's already-strong social-networking capabilities a solid choice for companies that are ready to turn their teams loose in a powerful and scaleable realtime collaborative environment.



Wiki – A low-cost, user-editable website can be set up to bring focus, authority and flow to ongoing collaborations among teams that work on everything from intellectual property and software to pharmaceuticals and consumer goods.

As a stand-alone solution, or in concert with other tools, a wiki – supported with best practices and features like editorial hierarchy, version rollback and email notification – puts all of a team’s collective knowledge – and work product – in one place.

- *Forums* – Threaded discussion forums (also low-cost) can serve as archived conversations or full-fledged knowledge bases. You can float concepts, workshop new strategies, develop detailed plans and share best practices. Everything is stored for easy retrieval in full context.

Two keys to success with forums: Make sure your categories, keywording and search are solid; and establish and maintain firm policies governing the creation of new discussion topics. The most important rule that your users must follow for keeping forums useful and useable: ***Do not post a question until you have carefully searched the forums to make sure it has not already been answered.***

Tactics

Overall, you will encounter something of a training ramp – and probably active resistance – upon launching any of these team-workspace services.

Shifting old-school business practices to SharePoint can seem dauntingly complex on first sight, as employees wonder why they have to learn a whole new system and change their comfortable way of doing things.

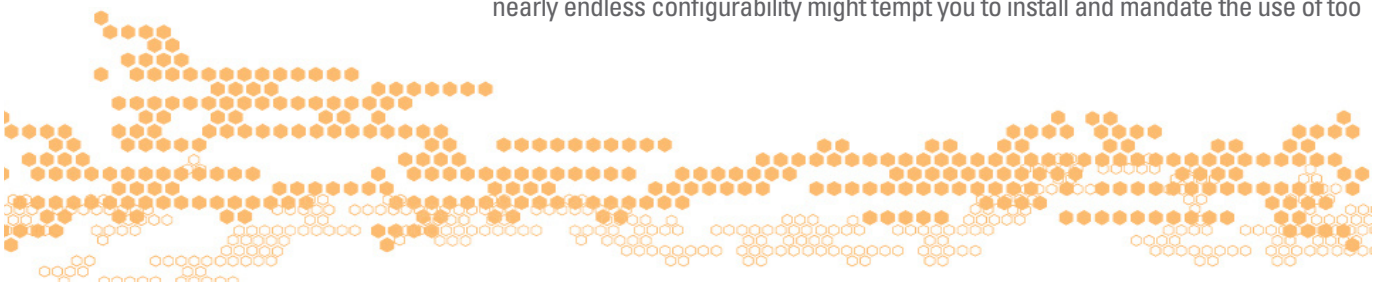
The cultural ramp will also be steep: even computer-savvy employees are often nervous about seeming less-than-authoritative or “posting the wrong thing” in forums or wiki articles and it will take time for people to adapt to these new layers of transparency and – in their eyes – exposure.

Here’s how to minimize the impact:

- *Provide plentiful support:* Post clean, easy-to-read FAQs in central locations (your intranet) and in context (within social tools themselves). Make experts available to everyone, and make sure the mentorship cascades from one person to the next.

No matter the tool, a strong set of often-updated FAQs (backed by go-to mentors) will speed adoption and create a sustainable community culture for your tools.

- *Analyze and strategize, then configure:* For instance - SharePoint and Telligent’s nearly endless configurability might tempt you to install and mandate the use of too



many features – to the point where some go unused and others require more focus than your teams are likely to give.

The surest tack for setting up effective teamsites is to analyze your business processes and team structure carefully.

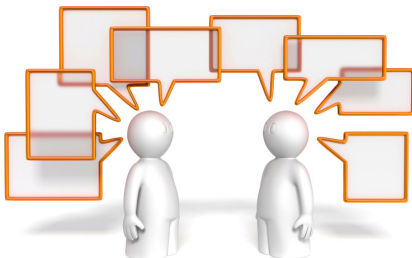
Then map tasks and user types to specific use cases. Which processes can you shift entirely to a social intranet? Which threads can you compress into a single workflow? Do team members have the interest and focus required to blog, or the work output that makes permission-trimmed document libraries a necessity? Who should get e-mail notifications on milestones versus regular events?

Answer questions like these. Analyze and strategize. Then configure.

- **Implement fully, and discourage old habits:** For instance – if you are building a wiki to discourage emailing multiple contributors multiple versions of a single document, then push the stragglers from email to the wiki. If you are replacing folders on a networked drive with a SharePoint document library, then eliminate access to the folders. Halfway adoption puts a drag on everyone's progress.
- **Build a culture around benefits** – and expectations: Make sure your team leaders understand the value of and best practices for encouraging participation in and managing a team workspace. Forums, wikis and other, less-conventional team spaces thrive when they become the go-to destination for collaboration.

Take time regularly to review successes and failures with key members. As with external social media, two of the most important steps in keeping the workspace usable and useful will be to listen to what's working and adjust what's not.

SpeakTECH's Microsoft West practice (formerly speakTECH) has set up numerous SharePoint workspaces for companies in the consumer goods, pharmaceutical and electronics industries, as well as for city governments and school systems. You can learn more about one of them in this case study³⁴.



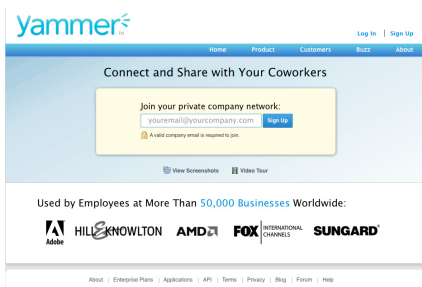
Key strategy: Crowdsourcing and ideation

Your employees' interest in your company goes far beyond a day's wages and benefits for an honest day's work. Their ideas for new products, processes and efficiencies could help propel you to the next level in sales and success, but chances are you're not asking them or, more likely, not really listening.

Giving employees an active stake in shaping your product as well as your progress can enrich your IP portfolio, boost morale and result in a more-unified market stance.

34 Microsoft case studies - <http://bit.ly/Vq0gP>





Yammer offers Twitter's point-to-point and broadcast microblogging for companies, plus some premium functionality - for a fee.

Tools

- **Simple crowdsourcing:** In concept, you will need nothing more complex than a digital version of the old-fashioned lunchroom suggestion box: An email alias (ideas@company.com) can collect ideas easily enough – but employees have no sense of whether their ideas matter unless and until they are publicly adopted.

However, devoting a standing forum topic or employee blog to exploring and sharing new ideas – and building a culture that supports public brainstorming – not only collects the ideas, it puts them into context with others and makes the practice part of the company's culture.

Crowdsourcing is most effective when it is completely transparent and most fruitful when employees are actually competing with each other for affirmation in the creative space.

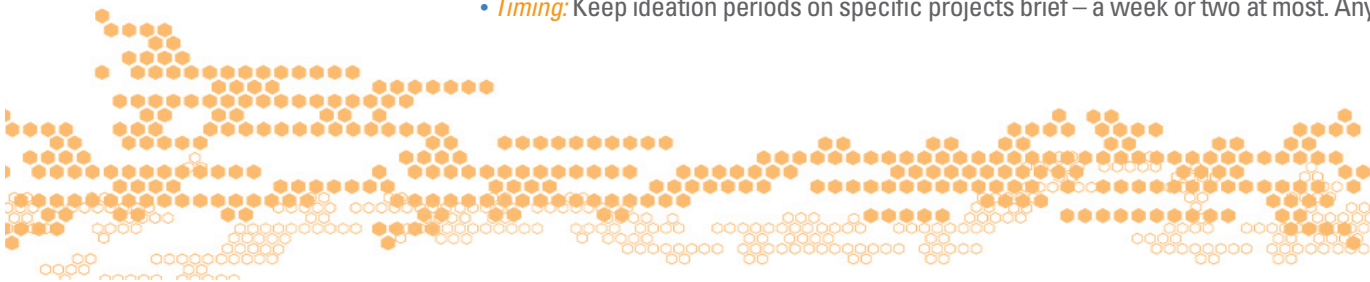
- **Ideation system:** This is a more-formal version of the basic idea forum: Employees post ideas to a company-facing page. Subject-matter experts can complement these ideas with additional information. Colleagues then rank the ideas up or down and add comments. Finally, a notification workflow sends the top-ranked ideas to process-leaders and decision-makers who can combine them with their overall new-product development portfolio for prioritization.

Larger enterprises can benefit from setting up ideation systems to focus on entire divisions, business processes, product lines or specific projects.

What's more, ideation metrics can show where the best ideas are coming from and which team's leadership in the area of creativity is proving the most fruitful.

Tactics

- **Pose questions to solve problems:** Wide-open questions like "Where should we expand next?" are invitations to wild speculation that can be fun but ultimately frustrating to people who really believe they know what's best for the company's strategy. Instead, focus on specific business needs, product directions or process challenges that can benefit from diverse feedback and imagination.
- **Transparency is critical:** If you tell people you're elevating ideas from all ranks, make sure your internal communications are clear when you put an idea into action. If you're just gathering creative input on a large initiative, don't lead employees to believe that one of their ideas could be the one that is sent into production to lead it. And if you expect to choose only a handful of ideas to implement each quarter, make sure to state that plainly.
- **Timing:** Keep ideation periods on specific projects brief – a week or two at most. Any



shorter and you'll miss out from people who lack the courage to be among the first to contribute. Any longer and you'll burn people out on waiting for results that may seem too few and far between.

Likewise, keep ideation open indefinitely for anything that could improve processes, product lines or lines of business in the long run. Sometimes these ideas occur without context – other times they have existed under the radar for some time and only exposure and consensus can really expose how important they are.

- **Deliver payoff:** If everyone understands that your ideation philosophy is “throw everything at the wall and see what sticks” then you will have managed expectations and maximized participation. The best ideas will bubble up to the top.

But always – always – announce the best, and praise the runners-up and most-creative ideas. This properly rewards creativity, encourages participation and sets the tone for future ideation sessions.

SpeakTECH has set up ideation systems for half a dozen firms (ranging from manufacturing to life-sciences to business services), giving them a ready supply of company-tuned innovation and their employees a stronger stake in their future.

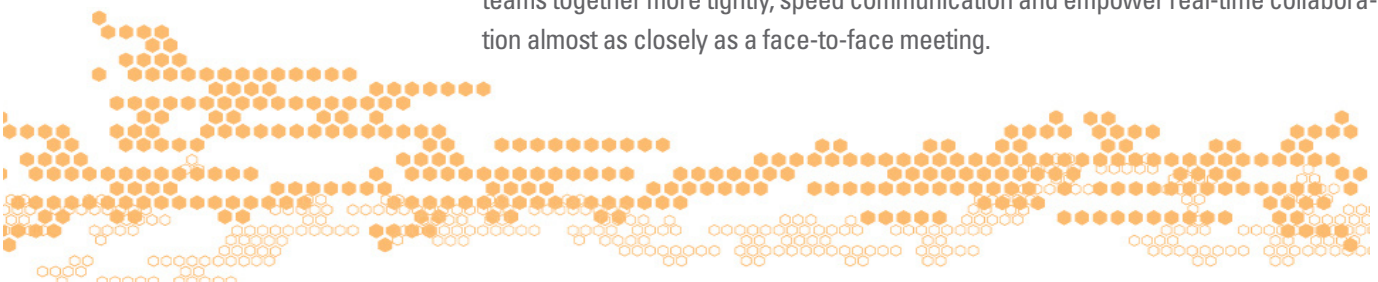
Key strategy: **Chat, microblogging and realtime interaction**

Some companies use chat tools on an informal basis, letting employees plug into AIM, iChat or whatever client they are already using. Others take the enterprise route, setting up Windows Instant Messenger or Microsoft Office Communicator.

In most cases, chat connects colleagues more swiftly and efficiently than email or even the phone for one simple reason: presence. When you chat, you know whether or not the other party is online, hence you can have the dialogue you expected – on the spot – without waiting for anyone to return your email or voice message. Quick questions, requests for information, status reports, URLs, pictures, even casual inquiries like “Who’s going to lunch?” flow back and forth in a few keystrokes and a fraction of the time.

The rise of Twitter, Facebook and enterprise-grade “micro-blogging” systems like Yammer has added another flavor to the chat mix: archiveable, searchable, team-targetable conversation.

Enabling chat does encourage more casual non-work conversation to flow. But the time lost is often outweighed by the benefit of ongoing conversation that can knit teams together more tightly, speed communication and empower real-time collaboration almost as closely as a face-to-face meeting.



Active microblogging keeps everyone monitoring it appraised of current projects, which can reduce duplication of work and invite knowledge-sharing beyond the confines of a team.

That's one reason that a large nationwide financial services company contracted SpeakTECH to build a private micro-blogging system atop SharePoint, allowing the firm's employees to message their own workgroups instantly. By following teammates, colleagues and entire workgroups the company's employees are able to track – in real time – projects, trends and issues that may affect their own work.



Newsgator and other companies are partnering with Microsoft in the much-anticipated launch of SharePoint 2010.

Tools

- **One-to-one chat clients:** AIM, iChat, Windows Instant Messenger and Microsoft Office Communicator offer the same basic behaviors for text, audio and video chat. However, Communicator syncs with Outlook and LiveMeeting, allowing easier scheduling and realtime desktop -sharing.

Consider using video chat in professional environments – even for basic one-to-one communication – though it works well between small conference rooms, too.

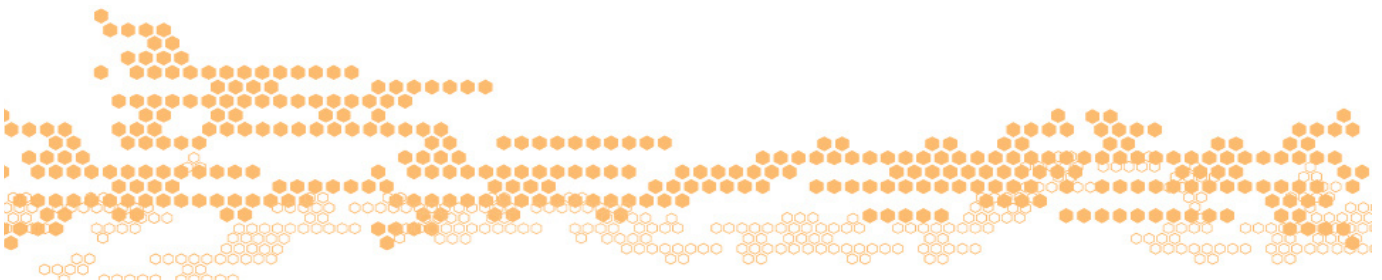
- **One-to-many:** Twitter lets users send short text messages up to 140 characters in length from their cellphones or computers to anyone who subscribes to, or “follows” them. While it is essentially a public medium in that anyone can follow anyone else's Twitter feed, you can achieve some workplace efficiencies with direct (private) messaging, and create social-media forums by using hashtags and keyword search.
- **Yammer:** Virtually identical to Twitter in function, Yammer³⁵ lets you set up a private microblogging network for free, allowing only people with email addresses within your company's domain (e.g. me@company.com) to join. However, extra features such as directory integration, message export and actual ownership of your data cost considerably more³⁶ – \$5 per seat per month.
- **Custom:** Again, a company like SpeakTECH can build you a turnkey microblogging system – even one that integrates with SharePoint. This will cost less and offer more than the alternatives do, fully archived, behind your firewall. What's important is to determine how such a system fits your company's culture and goals.

Tactics

- **Go private:** Free, public-chat applications invite more non-work communications into

³⁵ <http://yammer.com>

³⁶ <http://bit.ly/19mHKJ>



your work environment. Many of your employees already use apps like these (as well as Google's chat) to communicate with friends. Consider setting up an internal-use-only chat network to keep your teams' signal-to-noise ratios strong.

- **Encourage focused use:** Set clear policy on how these tools should be used, but keep the culture open enough to allow for innovation. Consider setting up dedicated channels or hashtags for specific teams, initiatives or business missions. Use the employment contract - not the technology - to regulate usage.
- **Archive, archive, archive:** While your employees may never need to revisit discussions of 90 days ago, you might want to – plus, archiving is required for compliance with the Sarbanes-Oxley Act³⁷. Conversation is the mother of innovation, and revisiting brainstorming can sometimes unlock solutions to ongoing problems.

Key strategy – Intranet social networks

Your company may already be using seminars, user groups and so forth to encourage professional knowledge-sharing and mentoring beyond the confines of project or team-specific collaboration.

But with the rise of social media and technology in the non-work environment, we often find ourselves building in-house social networks for clients who want to harness this “new” collaborative behavior to much greater effect.

Social networks connect and unite employees who have common skillsets, business missions, expertise, career goals, professional interests and leisure activities. The better people know each other, the more smoothly they are likely to collaborate.

There is a variety of tools available for setting up social networks, but – again – the culture you deploy will be far more critical to a network's success than the platform you build.

Systems like these – if implemented and adopted thoroughly – can greatly accelerate collaboration by letting people find others with needed skill sets, interests and experiences.

Picture your widely-distributed sales force in a networked situation: They are able to ask questions, share techniques and tactics and discover needed mentors and subject-matter experts among colleagues regardless of their location, in a single venue and in real-time.

37 <http://bit.ly/PmuJX>



Think about the benefits of bringing your IT division's troubleshooting discussions, training sessions and testing environments completely indoors, where finding the right in-house expert who understands the company's business as well as the technology in question – is no more than a search query away.

Tools

Enterprise-grade social platforms are evolving rapidly and will continue to evolve in three main areas: external, internal and industry-focused. Early providers were either generic social-networking platforms such as Jive, Mzinga and Pluck or point solutions such as Bazaar Voice.

Microsoft SharePoint 2010³⁸, with an array of partners such as NewsGator has upped the ante considerably. SharePoint 2010's already-strong feature set (described above) can be extended even farther and tailored directly to your specific processes, culture and goals.

For the startup or budget-conscious enterprise, open-source solutions can offer some of the same value and critical functionality as the commercial solutions – but they also require you to be more self-sufficient on the IT front.

The two leaders in open-source community/content management systems are Joomla³⁹ and Drupal⁴⁰. Both have powerful, extensible frameworks, active developer/support communities and strong adoption in the market, but they require a good deal of in-house investment in IT expertise and lack SharePoint's complete Windows-ecosystem integration.

Another, more lightweight option – Ning – may be useful for smaller companies and startups that want to try out basic social-networking technology before making a real investment in something as robust as SharePoint.

Tactics

A white paper (even one of this length) is too cramped a venue for adequately addressing the thorny business of shaping an entire social network to your company's specific and surely complex needs.

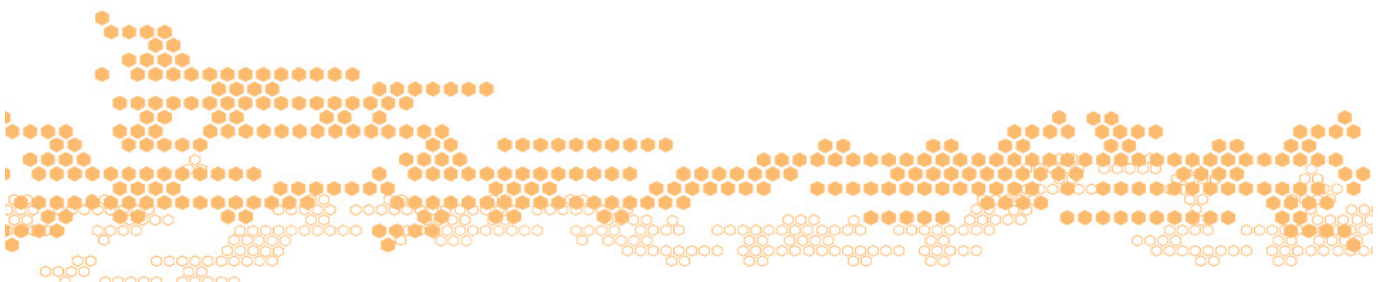
Suffice to say, SpeakTECH has a long list of satisfied customers using our enterprise social technologies, and we can help.

In any case, sticking with the core philosophies we have outlined above – and

38 <http://sharepoint.microsoft.com/>

39 <http://joomla.org>

40 <http://drupal.org>



repeated below – will help you shape your social solutions for maximum efficiency and minimum drag.

Summary:

Core Strategies for Internal Social Technology

In the end, your choice of technologies alone won't matter nearly as much as your strategy for this new era of social interaction.

Only solid business analysis, flexible implementation and active engagement will ensure your success, whatever tools you use.

As public social technology gravitates towards the next post-Twitter flavor of the year, you will – undoubtedly – want to keep your social technology up to speed with it.

Likewise, your ability to implement strong strategies and adapt them to changing business needs will keep your company's social initiatives moving forward as society finds new ways to interact – and filter those interactions for maximum usefulness.

Be ready for constant change.

And keep these goals in mind:

- ***Take the long view:*** Map your existing corporate culture and long-term goals to the way people use social tools – and keep pace with the way it's changing them.
- ***Choose tools that save time and work:*** Carefully map your business processes to specific social tools that – once adopted – will speed collaboration, reduce workload and foster focused collaboration.
- ***Own the space, empower the employees:*** Follow the five “Open Hand” best practices of sustainable social technology:

- ***Welcome***
- ***Engage***
- ***Listen***
- ***Adjust***
- ***Refresh***

- ***Launch authoritatively, manage well:*** Adoption moves faster when driven from the top. Culture grows best when managed by people who understand it in the larger context. Technology works best when tailored to the way people use it.

Finally, and most importantly:

- Don't fear the people: They want to do a better job. Empowering their ability to communicate to, share information with and understand each other can only advance



your company's progress.

Your existing personal-conduct policies can address all the “problems” of commercial social media that frighten too many companies away from enterprise social technology.

The greatest danger in enterprise social media is ignorance.

Implementing social technology halfway, with insufficient understanding of its power and nuance (or not implementing it at all) will cost your company time and money as your competitors simply do a better job of going social.

Do it right – tap your employees’ natural social behaviors with tools and strategies that enhance collaboration, accountability and productivity – and you’ll be bringing your entire company to a significant next stage of evolution.



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