

REAL SOCIAL

DELIVERING TRUE BENEFITS FROM ENTERPRISE SOCIAL COMPUTING



It has never been easier than it is today to connect people, share information and ideas, and use that information to accelerate innovation and drive stronger business practices.



The era of social computing—a powerful force in our individual lives—has come to fruition, and the ability to integrate social computing into the enterprise has reached a maturity tipping point that makes it an essential ingredient for every knowledge management recipe.

Last year, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg began referring to social communication as “infrastructure” rather than a “utility.” Social tools have become so integrated into the way people collaborate that they disappear as products and become part of the plumbing of conversation – the medium really is the message.

Enterprise Social products abound, and every second consultant it seems has hung out a “Social” shingle and added the paradigm to his/her tool-kit. With the release of SharePoint 2013, Microsoft has made a bold move into social – taking the largest install base of a “document management” and “Intranet Portal” platform and “baking” social computing capabilities deeply into the platform’s fabric. The current social enterprise needs are being served

by disparate “point” systems, and employees have increasingly been using ungoverned services like Dropbox, Yammer and Basecamp, exposing a whole host of governance issues and corporate risk. SharePoint 2013 has gotten enough right to attack these issues head on, and become a game-changer in this space.

So how is an enterprise to cut through the hype? The answer is what we at Navantis call Real Social, in which social computing is woven tightly into the services fabric of business collaboration and knowledge management, not just a weakly executed marketing meme. This paper will introduce you to the concept of Real Social—a new way of looking at the social experience in the enterprise—and provide prescriptive ways to bring its advantages to your organization.

REAL BENEFITS

Real Social provides an opportunity for organizations to change businesses processes; in fact, any deployment of enterprise social networking must be accompanied by process changes to be truly effective.

To look at its benefits, one must take a look at employee demographics. A majority of today’s businesses simultaneously face a graying of their workforce, as the proportion of workers over 55 steadily increases, and at the need to recruit and retain the talent of Millennials, those tech-savvy employees born from the early 1980s on.

As this older generation of leaders and employees reach retirement, they take with them today a vast wealth of knowledge, hoarded in their minds and caches of notes on their desktops, drives, papers and email. Adoption by this generation of document management and knowledge management systems—comparatively new to them—has been slow. A corollary to this is that many closely guard their knowledge and information. Valuable knowledge simply dies on the vine.

Millennials, or Generation Y employees, are the opposite. By the standards of many Baby Boomers, these employees “over-share,” and they do so through social networking platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc., all too commonly outside the corporate firewall, where valuable knowledge can be lost in the ether, or worse.

This is the way the incoming generation of employees behaves and works effectively. It is part of their DNA, but to be embraced, social must be brought inside the firewall. Human Resources departments can, and should, encourage this intra-office sharing, and it must be supported and through technology. It can recruit and retain fresh talent, but also accomplish so much more.

A NEW WAY OF LOOKING AT KNOWLEDGE

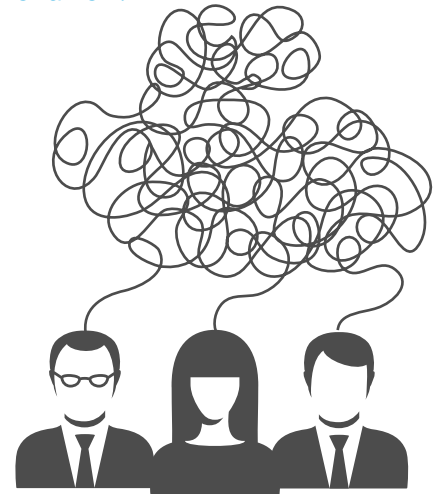
Real Social empowers collaboration and knowledge sharing. It creates “person-centric” as opposed to “document-centric” knowledge capture and discovery. Knowledge is not stored on a site or file-share and potentially lost, but follows individuals throughout the organization. People follow people and ideas, and in the process knowledge is shared at exponential levels previously unattainable inside the firewall in document-centric systems.

SharePoint 13 supports all of the social paradigms, but they must be nurtured and governed, and careful and thoughtful consideration needs to be paid to adoption and training needs.

The key power to any social network is serendipity – the happenstance stumbling upon beneficial information because of your connections. Inside the firewall employees can now use this same force to uncover the “a-ha” moments and building blocks for new and innovative ways to do things better.

Importantly, while some training and governance is required, social has already become the baseline for how many employees interact, and enterprise social networking empowers them to work in a natural way, fostering productivity, retention and growth.

For Real Social to be effective, knowledge must move beyond its “containers” of documents, projects and teams, to a level of free-flowing interaction. It must move from transactions, such as document uploading and emailing files, to transformation, where real connections are made and from which collaboration can bring innovation.



GETTING REAL

We've reached a point where enterprises are recognizing the power of social. However, many have in the past implemented solutions piecemeal or ineffectively and, as such, are cautious about its risks and implementation.

But there is good news for organizations seeking to achieve that level of collaboration. While in the past social capabilities have been deployed through disparate point solutions, today it is becoming deeply integrated into collaborative solutions, in particular through Microsoft SharePoint 2013.

The latest release moves away from past added features, such as disconnected newsfeeds and micro-blogs, and integrates them into the transactional component of the platform. Because of this, newsfeeds, micro-blogging, badging, and self-promotion -- all mainstays of social networking -- reach the users “where they live” as opposed to in isolated islands of functionality. The social elements integrated into SharePoint bring a new communication paradigm for a business that transcends geographies and fosters community; communities based on roles, tasks, interests and insights. In no time, employees can begin to share and develop knowledge beyond the org-chart, and within the free-flowing paradigms of unstructured collaboration – from transactional to transformational.

DEPLOYING REAL SOCIAL

While there's no one-size-fits-all solution, successful deployments of social computing have a few things in common.

It must be treated like any project that has the potential of dramatically changing business operations. As such, successful Real Social deployments should:

Unify what is being done inside the firewall with what is being done with social networking outside the firewall. In years to come, don't be surprised to see a Chief Social Officer overseeing this crucial component of business.

Include a plan and roadmap for adoption. Just "turning it on" is not going to work. It is not going to get the business where it needs to be in order to succeed.

Understand the pros and cons of—and

plan for the landscape created by—Microsoft's acquisition of Yammer. This has muddied the waters of Social on SharePoint, replicating many of the features now available out-of-the-box with SharePoint 13. Both platforms have integration points and a road map for co-existence not yet fully realized.

Incorporate training, governance, the hardware and software infrastructure needed around design and configuration.

Be more than a "coating of paint" or box-to-tick. It is a path to transformational knowledge sharing and collaboration, and pursued for its business benefits, not lip service or purely marketing or recruitment.



Perhaps most important is the cultural change that must occur.

Businesses must see social computing as more than an employee distraction. To succeed in enterprise social computing, businesses must recognize the serendipity that emerges from the free sharing of knowledge, especially between, but not limited to, knowledge workers.

GETTING HELP

As with any emerging business technology that promises great change, implementing Real Social effectively is not an easy task. Already many organizations have disparate systems in place and cultural challenges to overcome. Organizations without the in-house experience, or those needing to shore up their social capabilities, should seek assistance from those who've done it before.

Navantis has been working with businesses to help make social computing part of their core for years as it has evolved. We know how to connect people, information and ideas to create business advantage, through expertise in SharePoint and Office 365. We can seamlessly integrate internal social infrastructure with external customer-facing social transactions, and create a comprehensive interactive view of your customers, problems and solutions.

CONCLUSION

There is no longer a question of whether social computing is a passing fad. Businesses should look to social computing as more than a recruitment tool to engage younger employees, but also as an infrastructure on which knowledge is shared and business transformed.

Affecting business outcomes and seeing real results requires a commitment to Real Social. And achieving effective Real Social is a constant journey. Businesses must investigate what social infrastructure they have currently in place—perhaps from previous deployments—where they are on their path and where they are going. As with any journey, many may need help along the way.

It may seem small at first, but this built-in aspect of social networking provides the impetus for big things. Employee engagement in a Real Social infrastructure may start as a trickle, but soon becomes a creek and finally a raging river, where communities along that river share ideas that will transform business outcomes. Don't be afraid to get help navigating its waters.