The 5 Biggest Blunders with Enterprise Social Software

And How to Avoid Them

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The challenge of social software success

Business social software allows co-workers to connect and share in ways that can dramatically improve organizational effectiveness. But social software solutions incorporate Web 2.0 technologies that are new inside the walls of most organizations – technologies such as microblogging, social networking, automated activity feeds, wikis, blogs, social spreadsheets and more. As such, it can be hard to know how to implement social software in a way that ensures the dramatic results you are seeking.

This paper is designed to help you focus on the areas most critical to success with social software, and to avoid the five biggest and most common blunders others have made when implementing social software for their organizations.

#1: Fail to define your goals and rollout strategy

According to Gartner, 70% of social software projects fail because they lack a business purpose. To achieve business results with social software, you need to clearly define your goals, and then follow a rollout approach designed to achieve those goals.

As more and more businesses have deployed social software, a clear pattern has emerged of the rollout methodologies that lead to highest success. All successful rollouts start by gaining results in a specified area before expanding the solution into other areas. The best place to focus your initial implementation depends on the business problems you are trying to solve, and your organization's tolerance for risk. There are six distinct places to start. For example, one starting place is to focus on solving one or more business problems within a given department, another is to focus on improving communications across the organization.

Each of the six approaches delivers different business results, and has a different level of risk. And most importantly, each has different requirements to succeed. To be successful with social software, you need to choose the rollout methodology that is best for your organization, and understand its requirements for success.

Our companion paper, *"Six Ways to Get Business Value from Social Software*," outlines these rollout methodologies and the risks, requirements and rewards of each. Use this companion paper to reduce risk and achieve the fastest success with social software.

#2: Confuse document management with collaboration

A common blunder when considering social software is to miss the most fundamental opportunity it presents: to help your people work together more effectively across the broad set of functions that make up their day. The key to achieving this is to break down the barriers to sharing that exist today, and work openly and transparently.

A document can be the best delivery paradigm for certain information types and purposes, such as packaging a visually appealing data sheet that you intend for sales reps to use as a leave-behind in prospect meetings. The very piece of information you are reading here is packaged as a document so it can be delivered from multiple places, to unknown recipients, as a printable package.

However, the sharing and synchronization enabled by social software and the process control created by document management are two very different things. Specific features are important to managing documents, features such as document check-in and check-out, the ability to define approval workflows, and a library for storing and finding these documents. A formal process flow can be defined for managing each document or document type, and the set of people involved in managing each document can be defined.

In contrast, the bulk of knowledge worker interactions are made up of informal processes that cannot be predetermined. Improving these interactions involves enabling the process rather than controlling the process. Knowledge worker processes are severely hampered by captive information in files (e.g. documents), on different physical storage sites (individuals' hard drives, individuals' e-mail inboxes, shared folders). A document is a very poor delivery paradigm for sharing information for the purpose of staying in sync and getting work done.

Social software is designed for the type of sharing that makes up the bulk of knowledge worker interactions, such as:

- Keeping teammates informed of progress, setbacks, and changes

- Asking questions when you don't know who might have answers

- Disseminating information that people may need to find later

- Opening a topic that will spur a dialog with multiple people

- Sharing information that could increase corporate intelligence, such as competitive insight or product feedback

- Sharing information that may later change

Instead of a static document paradigm, social software provides dynamic information streams. It does the work of informing others via automated activity streams, group communication channels, and subscribed notification mechanisms. It does an excellent job of keeping teams synchronized. Social software allows people to work openly and transparently and to stay much better informed, across the broad set of interactions that make up their day, while at the same time eliminating communication overhead.

#3: Ignore practices already in use in your organization

Knowledge workers are measured by the results they deliver. They have a large degree of latitude in how to approach each new challenge and task. It is, in fact, this latitude that defines a knowledge worker who must figure out how to apply their specialized knowledge to deliver results to the organization. As such, your knowledge workers are very creative and inventive in *how* they accomplish results.

If you have not yet deployed a social software solution, it is likely your knowledge workers are experimenting with solutions on their own. They have experience using tools available on the public web, and they have experienced the benefits of those tools. As they contrast these tools to the ones they use inside the organization, they often conclude there is a gap that needs to be filled. Free microblogging tools, for example, are being adopted by workgroups who have realized that many of their communications needs are not served by today's in-house communication tools such as e-mail and instant messaging.

You want the tools being adopted within your organization to adhere to corporate security and IT policies. For example, do you have the authority to remove a user, say a user who leaves your company? Do you own the data your employees are creating? Where is that data stored and what

are the security implications? A growing number of IT departments have discovered that the microblogging tool their employees are using has already created a security problem for the organization, a problem that needs to be addressed before it grows.

An immediate task while creating your social software strategy is to inventory the tools already in use and discover the unmet needs in your organization. This exercise will not only give you insight into those needs, but will also identify social software champions that can help your rollout, and will help you determine the first business problems to tackle with social software.

#4: Fail to put your people in control

As mentioned, knowledge workers are accountable for what they produce and are used to having a high degree of freedom over how they produce it. For social software to be successful, the user must have a high degree of control. When a few people come together to tackle a challenge, for example, they should be able to instantly create a gathering place for their new group that gives them the social tools the group needs to stay posted on progress and accomplish their goals.

Unlike today where people have to involve IT just to change an e-mail distribution list, to be successful, social software needs to let your people readily serve their own needs. For example:

- The deployment team you assemble for a new customer should be able to create a home page for their team complete with a membership list, a microblogging channel, and a shared workspace.

- A user should be able to easily set up a workspace and invite others as they choose.

- Your people should be able to subscribe to activity streams, channels and alerts as they see fit to do their jobs, easily and on the fly, without asking anyone for help.

- A person should be able to set up his or her own personal home page with the information they need to produce business results. They must be able to adjust their choices and settings on the fly, as part of the process of learning how to use the solution to best fit their needs.

People need to change their subscriptions, notifications, personal home page, group memberships and the like as needs change, projects come and go, and new information sources become available.

If the social software doesn't allow people to make these changes, as and when they wish, on the fly, it will severely hamper the pace of collaboration and will not gain the level of adoption needed for success.

#5: Fail to recognize the system requirements critical to success

A set of specific system capabilities is also critical for success with social software. For example, the system you choose should contain certain capabilities in order for you to create a sharing culture in your organization. It should be specifically designed for high adoption, with the set of features and capabilities that come together to make a product highly adoptable. It should also have low total cost of ownership.

To learn the key system requirements for social software success, read our companion paper, "*Five Key Requirements for Enterprise Social Software*."

Conclusion

By learning from the mistakes of others, you can avoid the common pitfalls of social software and instead realize the tremendous benefits it can bring. The right social software solution, deployed with the right rollout plan, can improve organizational effectiveness in ways never before achievable.

About Socialtext

Free the flow of work

With Socialtext, people stay synchronized and work together much more easily using the best of social software in one integrated solution. The Socialtext platform incorporates secure microblogging, social spreadsheets, live personal profiles, activity feeds and more. It creates a surge in group cohesiveness and allows a company and its people to mobilize in unison and be more agile and effective.

Socialtext provides hosted and appliance-based solutions to more than 6,500 large and mid-market businesses world-wide, including Egon Zehnder, Epitaph Records, Mayo Clinic, McGraw-Hill, OSIsoft, Symantec and The Washington Post.

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