

Chapter 8

Getting Started with Social Media for Knowledge Management

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores how, as social media tools and platforms become more common inside organizations, KM teams need to incorporate them into their toolbox. It is necessary to learn how they work and how they can be used to be effective in accomplishing the organization's knowledge and information-related goals. It is not as easy as jumping onto Facebook or Twitter and suddenly engaging. The technology is more difficult to set up; getting buy-in from senior executives is not always easy; and getting a sufficiently wide adoption of the tools can be a challenge if employees are not ready for it. Planning and change management are needed to encourage success.

INTRODUCTION: PUTTING SOCIAL BACK INTO ORGANIZATIONS

Knowledge management involves sharing knowledge between people as the need arises. We organize many activities and create many systems to help facilitate sharing and the capturing of the knowledge for future use, but some see the adoption of social media tools and techniques inside the organization as having truly delivered what KM has promised. Add a discussion forum, and people are comparing notes and giving advice between offices around the world. Implement a Twitter-like microblog, and people are ask-

ing each other for help (and receiving it!) when they are not sure how to get started on a piece of work. Add a blog, and now there is more facility to easily share information specific to the work at hand. Put a wiki in place, and suddenly people can more easily co-author a document.

The many benefits from these tools make them usable in a range of areas within any given company or non-profit organization. They can be used for communication (broadcast, one-to-one, or many-to-many), collaboration, training, skills development, recruitment, and professional development. They are instrumental in creating informal communities of practice, distributing information,

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onboarding of new employees and volunteers, and empowering employees in their daily work. In many ways social media constitute the answer to the “How are we going to do more with less?” question that has been plaguing managers for a number of years.

Do not let the success stories mislead, however; successful adoption of social media inside an organization takes work. It is not as easy as jumping onto Facebook or Twitter and suddenly engaging. The technology is more difficult to set up, getting buy-in from senior executives is not always certain, and getting a sufficiently wide adoption of the tools can be a challenge if employees are not ready for it. Planning and change management are needed to encourage success.

As social media platforms become more common inside organizations, KM teams will need to incorporate them into their toolbox if they have not done so already. It is necessary to learn how they work and how they can be used to effectively accomplish the organization’s knowledge and information related goals.

BACKGROUND: FROM WEB 2.0 TO THE ENTERPRISE SOCIAL NETWORKING

The idea of “social business” or “enterprise social networking” may seem an oxymoron to some. Yet what are organizations if not collections of people serving the market, also made up of people? Knowledge management and social media (also known as “Web 2.0”) are two areas that emerged in parallel but largely apart until social tools such as blogs and wikis started to become adopted inside organizations. Social tools often accomplish some of the aims of KM; for example, knowledge sharing between people who have the knowledge and those who need it, and the capture of tacit knowledge for future use.

One of the first enterprise social networking instances was described by Andrew McAfee in his book *Enterprise 2.0* (McAfee, 2009, p. 97). Serena Software replaced its unsuccessful intranet with the use of Facebook in October 2007:

Facebook gave its users tools to assemble a network of people, stay on top of what these people were doing, and provide their own updates to the network. Serena’s executives realized that these were just the activities needed to create a stronger sense of community within the company.

While use of Facebook was voluntary, Serena encouraged employees to learn its use with “Facebook Fridays.” Photos of co-workers on profiles proved most popular, allowing people to see what fellow staff looked like. Within 24 hours of the first Facebook Friday, half the staff had profile photos.

In his blog *Wirearchy*, Jon Husband explains (April 12, 2008):

It was not until the middle of 2006 that IT executives and managers began to realize that lightweight, easy-to-use-and-integrate capabilities for finding information, pulling it apart and putting it together again in different ways, and exchanging that information to build useful knowledge would probably transform key areas of knowledge work and its attendant dynamics.

Slowly but surely, many of our KM-related technologies have been adopting social functionality, making the sharing of information and knowledge easier. Husband goes on to state (April 12, 2008):

Social computing in the enterprise is intended to improve the collaboration, use of information and knowledge and the decision-making effectiveness of individuals, teams or the whole enterprise. Today, more and more of the established KM-

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