

Chapter 72

Social Media for Knowledge Workers

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores social media for knowledge workers. Social media enables people to connect with others beyond their physical social circle. Constraints of space and time, as well as class boundaries, can easily be overcome by the use of social media. Socializing through social media is not merely the virtual version of physical socialization. It allows for different kinds of social interactions. The preservation of expression allows asynchronous communication and learning what others have written, which in turn shows one their interests and identities. The mostly simple and short messages cannot, however, accommodate the sophisticated information, which knowledge workers usually create and exchange at work. Social media is designed to be simple to use so that anyone with access to the Internet can use it. Many users become addicted to social media such that they cannot resist wasting their productive time. However, despite its limitations and potential for distraction, social media can be beneficial for knowledge workers. It may not be a good source of Know-What and Know-Why, but it can provide us with abundant and rich information of Know-Who. The uniqueness and specialty of Know-Who gained from social media is that it contains personal information, which in physical company only close friends possess. It allows us to develop social bonds with people who are difficult to reach through conventional media. It also enables us to develop our identity and makes us more easily discoverable by potential partners or employers.

INTRODUCTION

The Internet has developed to be the second familiar world to its users. People use the Internet for daily routines: reading newspapers, searching for information, shopping, buying tickets for the movies or a concert, collaborating on a project,

and even socializing. New possibilities of uses are continuously explored by ICT industries. The Internet has developed to be very user friendly which makes us forget that in the past using the Internet “was like belonging to a cult, with its own inner secrets, sub-cultural style and tough entry requirement of technical competence” (Curran,

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2012, p.34). Today, the Internet is not the domain of geeks anymore, in developed countries everyone, from children to pensioners, can access it.

Prior to the emergence of the Web, the Internet had spread through higher education institutions, mostly through their engineering departments. Various applications had been developed voluntarily by faculty members and students who had no plan to create any start up. Its limited user base was still unattractive to businesses. Even today, higher education institutions are still the source of many Internet innovations, even though their role has been surpassed by ICT industries.

Since the emergence of the Web, the Internet has grown exponentially in terms of the number of users and applications. Market and technological progress strengthen each other. The growing size of the market attracts technology providers to enter, compete and then innovate, which will push technological progress even further. The rich functionalities of the Internet for exchanging information and knowledge make it the very infrastructure of the knowledge-based economy. Knowledge workers, those who use knowledge intensively to do their jobs, would need to spend a lot of their productive time on the Internet. They rely more and more on search engines, such as Google, for finding information. Haglund and Olsson (2008) found that young university researchers relied heavily on immediate access to electronic information and they had very little contact with the library.

The most recent development is that the Internet has become more social. The specific technology which facilitates social interaction is social media. But many other Internet technologies, including the old ones, have been developed to enable users to share their contents easily. Through the Internet it is becoming easier to share information, to let others know what you do, to observe what others do, or to collaborate virtually. The Internet has developed into a tool for the masses who do not have sophisticated technical knowledge. Even social media does not require its users to have

sophisticated or intelligent information. Social media can be used to facilitate the most trivial talk, to share useless information. In some cases social media shows that people value contact more than content. It is communication that some people need, while the content is only needed to make communication possible. The growing number of social media users show that many people are also addicted to this kind of communication, and they may even let social media intervene into their life by running it on any gadget they use, from computer to tablet to mobile phone. To some people social media opens up a rich means of communication, while to others it steals their productive time.

This chapter will discuss how social media can be used productively by knowledge workers.

BACKGROUND

The extensive use of ICT suggests the increasing importance of knowledge in the economy, and therefore today we can speak of the knowledge-based economy. Knowledge workers, who intensively apply and/or generate knowledge in their works, increasingly become the most important labour force. In short, the progress of ICT leads to an increase in the importance of knowledge workers (Jemielniak, 2012).

In this chapter knowledge worker is defined as the one who works in a knowledge intensive profession, either uses or exploits knowledge intensively such as many professionals in industry or business, or works on producing knowledge such as researchers or academicians working in corporate laboratories or higher education. Academicians and researchers can be considered as the first generation of knowledge workers, because they were already using and generating knowledge before people in other sectors deliberately did so. Higher education institutions are places where existing knowledge workers teach future generations of knowledge workers.

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