Knoco Newsletter

Summer 2012 - KM and Social Media in the organisation

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KM and social media in the organisation

Is social media part of an in-house Knowledge Management solution? Unequivocally, "yes!" Knowledge Management is all about finding the knowledge you need when you need it and learning from previous mistakes whether they are yours or someone else's. Social media is about making connections to other people, and sharing knowledge.

However many of the current models of social media usage come from social networking on the web between individuals, or social marketing by businesses using tools like Twitter and Facebook to build presence, gather data, and interact with customers. There are few models for how social media can be used as part of a Knowledge Management Framework within an organisation.

We can't just import (say) Facebook and Twitter into our company, and expect KM to "magically happen" in the same way that social networking "just happens" on the web. We have to be smarter than that - we need to be able to blend Social Media and Knowledge Management together as a solution, in service of business goals.

Learning about social media

Stephanie Barnes

During the summer of 2011 I read three social media books, and took a social media course because social media often comes up in the KM consulting that I do and I wanted to have a better understanding of it and how it can be used, other than what I had figured out on my own.

One of the books I read, "[The Executive's Guide to Enterprise Social Media Strategy](#)," by David B. Thomas and Mike Barlow, identified that knowledge management has been given short shrift, but argued that social media was on the verge of revolutionizing and transforming KM because of the direct access that people have to each other through social media. This can be employees inside the organization or customers and business partners outside of the organization interacting with the organization; all as a means of getting their jobs done.

The books were great; very enlightening about how to use social media and the kinds of things to do or not do, like not putting a twenty-something in charge of your social media strategy just because they "use it all the time." Social media is another channel for communicating and interacting with your staff, clients, business partners, other stakeholders, and in some cases the general public (if we're talking about tools like Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook). Having someone with an understanding and appreciation of the magnitude of that responsibility is a good idea.

Better than the books was the course. It provided a model based on work done by [Advanced Human Technologies](#). Their model, which is available under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 License, allows for the creation of a comprehensive social media plan for an organization. The framework takes a thoughtful look at what an organization wants to achieve with social media, whether inside or outside the organization, and provides the questions that must be answered in order to engage the audience, develop capabilities, and measure success. The activities and questions asked by the model are much like the questions we ask of knowledge management initiatives. In the end, I think, social media is just another way of finding out who knows what and asking them to share it or sharing what we know and hope that others learn from our experience, which is what knowledge management is

all about.

Do's and Don'ts for Social Media as part of KM

Nick Milton

Here are some tips and hints for the use of social media as part of a Knowledge Management Framework within an organisation.

Don't just introduce the tools and expect KM to happen. The history of KM is littered with failed projects where technology was introduced in isolation, in the expectation that it would be a KM silver bullet. There is no technology silver bullet - not even social media technology. A framework of roles, processes and governance must accompany the technology.

Do introduce KM and social media with a business purpose in mind. Knowledge Management, and Social Media, need to be introduced with a business purpose, not because they are cool or trendy. And "connecting people better" is not a business purpose; "improving efficiency through reproducing best practice in manufacturing" or "improving market share by developing and re-using client knowledge" are business purposes.

Don't just focus on publishing. We worked with one client who strongly rewarded publishing of material; through multiple social channels including blogs, case stories, wikis, microblogs. So much material was published, often duplicated many times and in many channels, that it created a vast amount of noise, and there was very little re-use of the knowledge. The goal is to maximise re-use, not maximise publishing!

Do focus on problem solving. The most effective business uses of social media within KM are where it is used to solve employees problems, allowing them to ask questions and receive rapid answers from their peers. This helps the users, and helps the company.

Don't assume everyone will naturally contribute. Sites on the Web with voluntary contribution, such as Wikipedia, show a 90:9:1 contribution rule. 90 of people read but don't contribute, 9% contribute to a minor extent, 1% are major contributors.

This sort of ratio means that you would only access 2% or 3% of your company knowledge. Improve the odds using the tip below.

Do link social tools to roles, accountabilities and process. To beat the 90:9:1 rule, link your social media to your Communities of Practice, and ask the community facilitator to encourage contributions. Use KM processes such as [AARs](), [Peer Assists](), [KM plans]() and [Retrospects]() to feed into social media tools such as wikis and collaboration tools. One MAKE-award-winning company has tied its wiki usage closely to the Communities of Practice, thus providing wiki ownership and a steady supply of content.

Don't introduce tools just because "other people recommend them". One government institution recently abandoned a trial of Yammer, which had been highly recommended by another company, because they found that, being all located in the same office, it was easier to walk over and talk to someone.

Do tailor the toolset to the needs of the users. Think through who needs what knowledge, and when. Then think through how it can be delivered. People always on the road, like a sales team, may need to access tools on their smart phones. Office based staff could use an online system. Some people need to access knowledge in the heads of their peers, others may want to refer to a central repository. Choose the tool that satisfies the need.

What Drives Employees to use Social Media Tools?

Just having the software installed within the organization's portal will not necessarily bring about great results of knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer.

Abdulhameed Al-Hosani

People need to have some reason to share knowledge. We continuously need some kind of motive or a drive to perform or accomplish something. Organizations must generate creative incentive schemes that encourage their employees to use available social media tools for communicating with each other

and exchanging knowledge.

The majority of people using social media on the web, such as Facebook and Twitter, do that because they are motivated by the joy they get when they talk to their friends or family and exchange news and stories. The same concept should be applicable to organizations.

How can we create a constructive environment whereby employees discuss useful experiences and give-and-take knowledge? Here are some ideas to stimulate the use of available social media tool in any organization:

* Publicize throughout the organization that such social communication tools are available and elaborate on their benefits to their users

* Broadcast some interesting anecdotes about people's experience with social media

* Publish some success stories of problems solved as a result of knowledge gathered through social media

* Broadcast "knowledge of the week" on the social media tool for those who might benefit from such feedback

* And finally give some recognition for the best sharers and users, perhaps using the social media tool itself to collect nominations.

Some Key Social Media tools for KM

Nick Milton

Collaboration tools have huge value in two contexts - virtual teams, and communities of practice. Both of these structures rely on trust to function, and social collaboration tools can support this. Our partner company, Vedalis, can advise you on the development of such tools.

Yellow Pages are a well-established KM tool, giving you the ability to find people with knowledge to help you. Here you have to be careful with your social media choice; tools like Facebook and MySpace are great at allowing personalised home pages, but not so good at cataloguing tacit knowledge into an expertise directory. They are more like a high-school

yearbook than a telephone Yellow Pages.

Wikis are rapidly becoming a core technology for KM, allowing the construction of a knowledge base from multiple inputs. Companies like Shell, Pfizer and ConocoPhillips use wikis as a crucial component of their KM frameworks.

Blogs must be treated carefully. The sort of "personal opinion blogging" you find online is of limited business value within an organisation, and can act as distraction (in particular, avoid the tempting idea of the "director's blog"). However you could consider the use of community blogs, project blogs, or even operator shift blogs within a factory.

Microblogs frequently fall flat when introduced just as "something to try". However they can add real value when used as a tool to ask quick questions of, and provide rapid feedback to' a Community of Practice, particulary a dispersed CoP such as a sales force.