

B2B: The Power of Social Media

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November 11, 2013

The  **Moscow Times**

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There's a lot of buzz about social media these days, but there's really nothing new about being social. It has always been part of how we work and live together and do business. What is new is the way that technology enables us to connect and communicate in real time, across geographical distance, and on a scale that's literally unprecedented in human history.

Employees want to be able to find each other and talk, and to build new values together across traditional hierarchies and silos. Social technologies can remove communication barriers and give employees a real voice in making the company better. According to a recent Gallup poll, companies that embrace social media can reduce employee turnover by more than 50 percent. Moreover, enterprises can innovate and compete more effectively when they enable vital connections and collaboration among employees, empowering them to solve business challenges.

The real power in social media comes when you extend this reach to include stakeholders who are external to your organization—including, of course, your customers.

There are currently over 2.8 billion tweets per week, 400 million per day, and a billion Facebook users—the growth in these numbers over a short time is incredible. Consumers are responding to information and influence from within their social networks as they make decisions about purchasing and brand loyalty.

In the consumer space, social networking is driving changes in customer behavior, leading to the rise of the social customer. The new consumer is "always on" and expects to be engaged in new ways. For instance, 44 percent of consumers today complain about products and services on social networks, prioritizing information from social networks over what they hear through advertising. And every fifth of them expect a response within one hour.

In a world where the pace of innovation will continue to accelerate, it's more important than

ever for companies to be more nimble and agile. By working social media, companies can align and adapt quickly to change by breaking down geographical and organizational barriers, opening communication channels and access to information, and bringing people together to achieve a common goal.

However, social can't just be a destination—social capabilities must be a natural part of how we work, seamlessly woven into the tools you use every day to get your work done. Social has to be easy, frictionless, and in context.

There are vendors of all sizes in the enterprise social space — from large vendors who are trying to build social media into existing suites to smaller niche vendors who provide point solutions. In order to unlock the full potential and value of enterprising social media, Microsoft believes it must be an organization-wide social layer across people and applications. We are bringing together and weaving social capabilities across networking, collaboration, e-mail, unified communications, and business applications.

Our vision of a connected experience is to have a tool that will allow you to start a conversation in a newsfeed, ping one of the participants on instant messenger, escalate to voice and video, follow up over email, and circle back to the original conversation with an update. We want to have the context of those conversations follow you across those tools, and have everyone involved be able to participate in the interactions regardless of where they are or what device they have with them. Some of this is already possible today, and we will continue building this "connected experiences" scenario to make it available to everyone.

In order to be successful within your business, social media must be a part of a connected platform that IT can rely on to manage and secure. Business leaders get value from a connected platform as well, because it means users will have a single identity and presence across individual tools. And leaders can connect social analytics with other business data for powerful insights.

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