Aligning the Social Organization

7 Key Traits of Highly Collaborative Businesses

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In the past decade, top-performing enterprises have embraced a wide variety of social technologies to drive collaboration within their organizations and build stronger relationships with customers.

While a growing number of business leaders now understand the value of internal collaboration and external social media communication, artificial barriers have typically divided private enterprise social networks and public channels such as Twitter or Facebook. Leading enterprises are now closing operational gaps between internal and external social media to drive collaboration, competitive differentiation, and growth.

Companies that effectively integrate internal and external social media are more responsive to the marketplace and enjoy better organizational alignment around business objectives. When technical and cultural barriers to social communication are removed, ideas can easily flow into and across the enterprise to spark innovation and collaboration. Business impact accumulates from the bottom up as employees become more engaged in their work. From the C-suite to the production floor, the entire workforce is able to bridge networks and synthesize knowledge from a variety of sources to make better decisions.

Organizations must execute comprehensive strategies to manage the convergence of internal enterprise social networks and public social media channels. This requires business leaders to think holistically about how social and collaboration technologies create value, not only within the enterprise but throughout the customer experience and across the supply chain. By implementing a unified strategy for social communications, enterprises can strengthen, expand, and weave together the interpersonal networks that are already driving business success.

This white paper will present seven valuable benefits that collaborative organizations can gain from bridging internal and external social platforms.

1. Socially Empowered Employees

Employees who are empowered with social technologies enjoy dramatically better access to knowledge than those who remain reliant on email and other traditional channels. They can easily locate expertise, organize themselves around shared interests, and rapidly solve problems through emergent collaboration. McKinsey estimates that these benefits could raise the productivity of interaction workers by 20 to 25 percent.

To fully capture this potential, organizations must consider how digitally empowered professionals actually get work done. Today's knowledge workers use a combination of internal and external social networks, moving back and forth between private and public channels to share knowledge and work collaboratively. They are increasingly leveraging social networks such as Twitter and Facebook to interact with subject matter experts, connect with partners, and strengthen relationships with fellow employees. Operational gaps between "inside" and "outside" social media inhibit their natural workflows, yet most enterprises are moving down two separate tracks in the journey toward social media maturity.

Typically, businesses have one strategy in place to guide their efforts on public platforms such as Facebook and Twitter and a separate strategy for internal social business initiatives. The marketing department usually drives the customer-facing strategy, sometimes in coordination with sales and customer service, while social business champions in IT or HR manage an enterprise social network. As a result, the processes and technologies for public and in-house social media are often poorly integrated.

In contrast, highly collaborative organizations support workers with an ecosystem of connections between external social media, collaboration tools, and enterprise social networks. The heart of this ecosystem is the social relationship platform, which enables individuals and teams to securely manage several different communities, networks, and applications from a unified interface. When social technologies are integrated at scale, employees in every business function are able to work more productively and leverage the full potential of social relationships.

2. A Culture of Emergent Collaboration

The modern enterprise is a network of networks, with most employees participating in multiple cross-functional groups, communities of practice, and informal communities—many of which cut across traditional hierarchies. These connective groups are vital to implementing change, transmitting business culture, and retaining institutional knowledge and experience. Such interpersonal networks have always existed within large companies, but until recently they were largely invisible and difficult to map out. The adoption of an enterprise social network has brought them into clear view for many organizations.

The success of an enterprise social network greatly depends on how ingrained it becomes in daily business rhythms. Employees are more likely to participate frequently on the network if it dovetails with their personal and professional social media activity. Therefore, integrating the network effectively with external social channels is vital to achieving critical mass for social business practices.

However, leaders of mature social organizations know that technology alone cannot create a collaborative workplace or guarantee stronger connections with customers and partners. Enterprises must also encourage a culture of openness and initiative, beginning with the visible buy-in of executive leadership. Employees need to know that their contributions on internal and external social platforms will not only be welcomed by management but have a real impact on the way the organization does business.

When these critical success factors are present, people leverage the internal social network to self-organize around shared goals and rapidly get work done. Communications become transparent as the collective knowledge of the organization is brought out of closed email threads and into searchable collaboration spaces.

Enterprise social networks allow unstructured knowledge to be consistently captured and made available for anyone to use. They facilitate the emergence of new working groups and communities, bringing together employees from diverse professional backgrounds, geographies, and business functions. Naturally and without direction, workers begin to acquire knowledge from unexpected places and then integrate it into their own processes.

3. Organization-wide social value

Unifying social media with enterprise communications allows employees in every business function to work more productively and leverage the full potential of social relationships.

Customer Support

- Locate and collaborate with internal subject matter experts to quickly resolve customer issues on social media

- Communicate fluidly with partners, contractors, and suppliers to organize around the voice of the customer

Sales

- Identify new leads and share social intelligence with teammates

- Enable sales professionals to locate and share approved social content with prospects

Crisis Communications

- Monitor brand reputation and respond collaboratively to risks and opportunities

- Disseminate approved messaging internally for the organization to share externally

R&D

- Accelerate idea generation by extending social conversations into the enterprise

- Spur product innovation by breaking down knowledge silos

- Enable cross-functional groups to collaborate with partners in an integrated communications environment

Marketing

- Gather social content from public networks and bring it into the company to initiate work around similar content

- Source employee-created content from internal networks to share externally with social audiences

- Source customer-created content from external networks, sharing it with sales teams, product research, and incorporating authentic customer perspectives into strategy discussions

- Engage customers on social media and share insights with the rest of the company through internal channels

Human Resources

- Drive employee engagement by encouraging networks of people to create business value

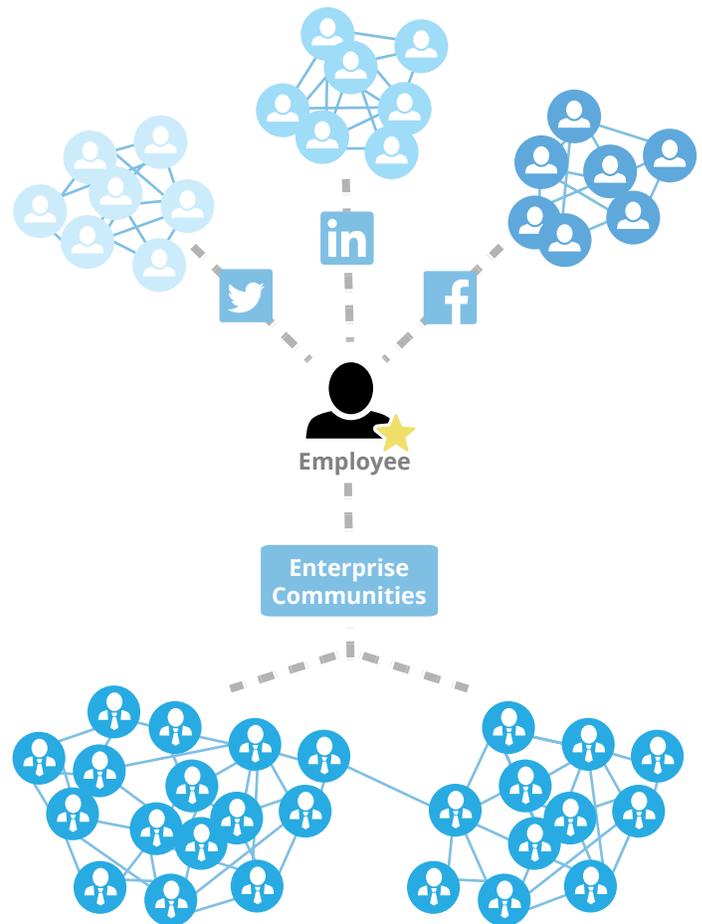- Collaborate internally to recruit top talent from social networks

4. Innovation through Bridged Networks

The groundbreaking research of sociologist Mark Granovetter in "The Strength of Weak Ties" analyzed the crucial role of interpersonal ties in disseminating knowledge. Granovetter described acquaintances as weak ties and close friends as strong ties. His key insight was that weak ties, not strong ties, are responsible for transmitting most information through a social network.

As Granovetter's research showed, the people we interact with regularly are less likely to have new information to share with us. They probably know most of the same people that we do. And most often, the information we share with them simply preaches to the converted and leads to the same approach to business challenges. For new ideas, we need to go beyond our closest spheres of influence. As a result, one of the most valuable benefits of social media is the easy access it gives us to people outside of our inner circle.

Cross-functional collaboration on an enterprise social network demonstrates how weak ties can transmit valuable information between people that are not strongly interconnected. For example, workers in different departments might organize a social community around a shared practice, interest, or professional goal. They can combine years of practical experience by collaboratively writing a guide to best practices and then share that content back into their departments.

Bridging the knowledge gaps between internal and external social networks is the next logical step for organizations looking to capitalize on the value of weak ties. The social networks of employees, managers, and executives represent a vast and largely untapped reservoir of knowledge. Highly collaborative organizations pull this knowledge into internal social communities, where it can collide with people to create better ways of doing business.

"Chance favors the connected mind."

Steven Johnson,
Where Good Ideas Come From: The Natural History of Innovation

5. Employee Advocacy

Leading social organizations recognize that their own employees are some of their most valuable potential brand advocates. By building strong connections between internal and external social media, an enterprise can effectively articulate its brand values to customers and employees alike, creating a high degree of alignment across all stakeholders. More important, the business can empower its workers to collaboratively define those values using internal social media and then brand the organization from the inside out.

Employee engagement is the the key to brand advocacy in the workforce. Engaged employees are committed to their work, fully aligned with the mission of their organization, and willing to exert discretionary effort in the fulfillment of their roles. A highly collaborative organization keeps its employees engaged by maintaining a transparent and authentic business environment, where workers can witness the company's ethos in action.

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Enterprises that transform engaged employees into active brand advocates can significantly increase the social reach and influence of their brands. However, companies must enable workers internally with compelling content that they can share at scale with their social networks. Again, the intersection of enterprise communications and public social media should be as frictionless as possible, so employees can easily discover and disseminate content.

"Internal communications needs to move beyond being company news briefs and alerts to being more content-rich. Company storytelling is not just for external media anymore, it's a way of ensuring that employees are informed and have something meaningful to say about their employers."

Kate Bullinger, Co-Lead,
Global Employee Engagement & Change Management,
Weber Shandwick

However, an effective employee advocacy strategy goes beyond employees retweeting company content. Employees are also content creators and collectively they offer a wide range of passionate expertise. Even the most sophisticated content marketing operations can benefit from sourcing content internally. In highly collaborative organizations, social media teams and HR departments use internal social platforms to discover employee-created content, amplifying this content outwards on public-facing social media channels. This inside-out branding helps an organization showcase talent and employee passion and offer authentic stories on external social media. It results in a stronger corporate culture, new PR opportunities, and greater employee engagement.

6. Coordinated Engagement at Scale

Customers have little patience for organizations with limited channels for support. They expect to have their issues resolved through whichever channel they prefer and without delay. With the volume of inbound social messages only increasing, customer service representatives, social media managers, and community managers are tasked with a dizzying variety of questions.

In order to serve customers effectively, these front-line social media practitioners must be able to quickly leverage subject matter experts, engineers, and other specialists from within the organization. By sharing external social media messages directly with internal social communities, they can quickly locate the information they require and then reply externally. This responsiveness helps the enterprise to build deeper relationships with customers and capture business opportunities that would otherwise go unaddressed.

In highly social organizations, everyone shares responsibility for providing superior customer experiences on social media. All employees—not just social media managers—have the ability to bring timely social media content into the company's social communities for colleagues to discover and act upon. Thanks to the transparency and self-organizing nature of enterprise social networks, a single customer Tweet or Facebook post could be seen by hundreds of employees and dozens of different geographies and teams as it is reshared throughout the business.

The more seamless the connection between public and in-house social media, the easier it is for someone to participate in distributed listening on behalf of the organization. They can also witness the immediate impact of bringing the content into the organization as their colleagues spontaneously collaborate on the internal social network. This visibility creates a positive feedback loop in behavior, driving further employee engagement and organizational alignment.

With concrete customer perspectives, organizations can educate and orientate workforces around the voice of the customer. From reminding an organization of its core business values to offering a story as an impetus for a new product line, the customer can help to prevent a myopic focus in internal company discussions. Enterprises that routinely surface customer voices within a collaborative business environment can develop new products faster and respond quickly to shifts in customer preferences.

7. Strong, Innovative Partnerships

Internal collaboration is vital to innovation. But it's no longer possible for enterprises to stay ahead of the rapidly developing marketplace by innovating on their own. A global study by the IBM Institute for Business Value found that more than half of CEOs are now partnering to innovate and that financially successful organizations are significantly more likely to innovate with partners.

The lines between internal product developers, other employees, customers, and suppliers are blurring; increasingly, all of these groups are contributing to product development by collaborating in a wider business network.

Forrester Research

The boundary between internal and external collaboration is blurring as leading organizations work more and more closely with partners, suppliers, and vendors to innovate. While valuable, such openness can create additional complexity in information security and the management of intellectual property. However, confining inter-company communications to email and other traditional channels greatly restricts the innovation potential of a corporate partnership. By bringing people from both organizations into a secure collaboration space, enterprises can fully harness the complementary competencies of the partnership.

Since a given team within an enterprise could work with several different partners on various projects, collaborating with everybody on a single enterprise social network may not be possible. Companies need to manage their overlapping networks of relationships and collaborate with partners within safe contexts. Therefore, it is critical to empower teams with a centralized platform for securely managing different communities and networks.

Conclusion

As enterprises consolidate in-house and public social media within a managed and scalable environment, the complex networks of employees, customers, and partners that drive innovation and operations will become stronger and more visible. In the most responsive and customer-centric organizations, business leaders will allocate people and resources to capitalize on opportunities as they emerge in real time on converged social platforms. From top to bottom, collaborative enterprises will be more engaged, better aligned, and more agile than the competition.

About Hootsuite Enterprise

Partner with Hootsuite to accelerate your social transformation

Social Media Management

Social Marketing

Social Customer Service

Social Selling

Hootsuite Enterprise empowers organizations to execute business strategies for the social media era. As the world's most widely used social relationship platform, Hootsuite Enterprise enables global businesses to scale social media activities across multiple teams, departments, and business units. Our versatile platform supports a thriving ecosystem of technology integrations, allowing businesses to extend social media into existing systems and programs.

We help organizations create deeper relationships with customers and draw meaningful insights from social media data. Innovating since day one, we continue to help businesses pioneer the social media landscape and accelerate their success through education and professional services.

Request a custom demo today by visiting enterprise.hootsuite.com

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