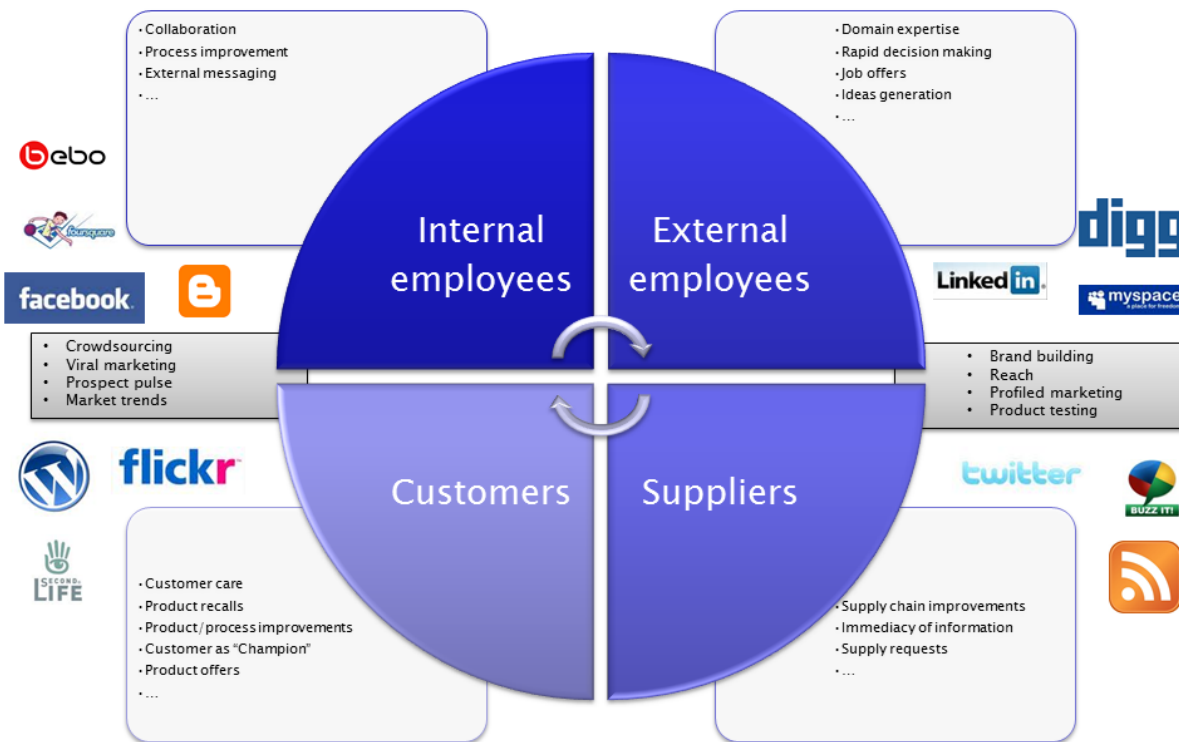


ComputerWeekly – Social networking for business

By Clive Longbottom, Service Director, Quocirca Ltd

Social media for reach



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Many organisations are still trying to come to terms with how (or even if) social media can help them in their day-to-day business. Well documented issues, such as postings from disaffected employees, campaigns backfiring or information leakage tend to make senior management wary – but overall, the potential business value and financial benefits of social media must be considered alongside controllable risks



Reach

- Massive reach to millions of people
- Viral capacity for cascade republishing
- Users will use their platform of choice, further increasing reach



Timeliness

- Near real time
- Scalable platforms require no internal scaling to manage workloads



Feedback

- Mass feedback – more meaningful than focus groups
- Pre-production testing – identify and use profiled individuals and groups

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In terms of value the primary benefit social networking can bring to an organisation is reach. With Facebook having passed 500m users and Twitter somewhere around the 100m level (bearing in mind that some of these accounts will be duplicates and/or dormant), there are huge potential audiences. Many social networking sites work according to a “streamed content” model, where anything posted will be “of the moment”, with little value beyond a short period of time. However, content on sites such as YouTube and Flickr, aimed at video and image files, as well as specific types of content on Facebook have a longer shelf life, and other sites can point people to such content.

Social networking also offers a means to gain and gauge user sentiment in a rapid and effective manner, and also to involve target audiences in the testing of ideas and/or products at an early stage through by issuing invitations across a broad audience.

## Risk (positive)



## Speed

- Cascade impact happens in near real time, maximising campaign impact
- Responses from targets also rapid, enabling organisation to respond accordingly



## Resource pool

- Greater reach into expertise
- Social network provides “crowd sourcing” capabilities



## Tools

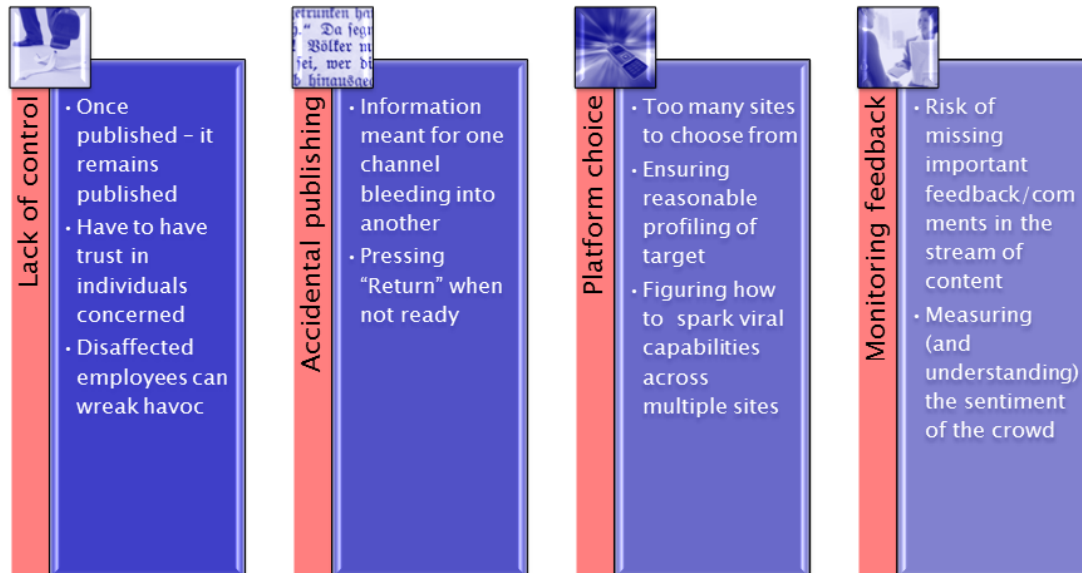
- Variety of tools enable each individual to participate
- Variety enables the right tool to be chosen for the right purpose

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Social networking also enables risk to be minimised in many ways. The speed of publishing and the cascade nature of re-publishing allow businesses to address certain risks more effectively. For example, a specific message aimed a product recall or advisory can be communicated far more rapidly than could be done through other means such as email or paper mail as an adjunct to other mechanisms. When looking for specific skills to help in dealing with an issue, business networking through targeted sites such as LinkedIn – or even through generic sites where the overall “pool” of possible resource can be high – can help bring in skills that the organisation would otherwise have been unaware of.

Also, social networking can now be used from pretty much any computing device – from PCs to majority of smart phones using specifically crafted clients.

## Risk (negative)



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However, as social networking involves using external sites, there will also be issues that need to be pre-planned for. Once information is on these sites, it will be next to impossible to call it back or erase it – so it will be far better to use data leak prevention tools in order to prevent such accidental or malicious content from getting out there in the first place.

Also, choosing the right site as the prime publishing point for any social networking campaign can be difficult. With such massive choice out there, should a broad profile site such as Facebook be chosen, or a more targeted professional one such as LinkedIn? Will a more geographic site, such as VKontakte in Russia meet your requirements more directly? If your campaign is to be based around video stored on YouTube, how can you best use other sites to spark interest through using pointers to the YouTube content?

Also, monitoring feedback and the sentiment of the crowd is difficult as the viral nature of a campaign or comment takes off. The lack of a consolidated means of doing this is leading to a rapid growth of third-party sites and organisations dedicated to tracking comments and sentiment on behalf of organisations.

## Cost



## Scalability

- Publishing based on external capabilities – little internal IT required
- Viral capabilities provides publishing scale



## Content

- Prepare once, publish freely
- Diversity of content – text, video, image, sound, etc
- No reprint, air-time or per view costs



## Recalls / Advisories

- Low cost reach to impacted customers
- Use viral capabilities to extend reach

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But can social networking help businesses reduce the cost of achieving certain goals? Certainly the cost of trying to replicate the reach and scale of publically available social networks would be prohibitive. At a campaign level, costs can be minimal. The content itself will still need to be created – and doing this “on the cheap” will generally have negative impact overall. However, once you have high quality content, then publishing it is free, with no republishing, air-time or viewing costs to pay. A multimedia campaign can be cost effectively constructed pulling the capabilities of multiple different social networking sites together.

Also, as a means of letting customers know of a product recall, advisory or upgrade offer, social networking can be very effective – but will still need to be combined with other approaches where the law or common sense dictates.

Although there are many issues around the use of social networking, the overall benefits based on the capabilities for reach and scale heavily outweigh the issues. Provided suitable policies and procedures, backed up with data leak prevention and monitoring tools, organisations should be looking to how social networking can be used to their advantage.

## About Quocirca

Quocirca is a primary research and analysis company specialising in the business impact of information technology and communications (ITC). With world-wide, native language reach, Quocirca provides in-depth insights into the views of buyers and influencers in large, mid-sized and small organisations. Its analyst team is made up of real-world practitioners with first hand experience of ITC delivery who continuously research and track the industry and its real usage in the markets.

Through researching perceptions, Quocirca uncovers the real hurdles to technology adoption – the personal and political aspects of an organisation's environment and the pressures of the need for demonstrable business value in any implementation. This capability to uncover and report back on the end-user perceptions in the market enables Quocirca to advise on the realities of technology adoption, not the promises.

Quocirca research is always pragmatic, business orientated and conducted in the context of the bigger picture. ITC has the ability to transform businesses and the processes that drive them, but often fails to do so. Quocirca's mission is to help organisations improve their success rate in process enablement through better levels of understanding and the adoption of the correct technologies at the correct time.

Quocirca has a pro-active primary research programme, regularly surveying users, purchasers and resellers of ITC products and services on emerging, evolving and maturing technologies. Over time, Quocirca has built a picture of long term investment trends, providing invaluable information for the whole of the ITC community.

Quocirca works with global and local providers of ITC products and services to help them deliver on the promise that ITC holds for business. Quocirca's clients include Oracle, Microsoft, IBM, O2, T-Mobile, HP, Xerox, EMC, Symantec and Cisco, along with other large and medium sized vendors, service providers and more specialist firms.

Details of Quocirca's work and the services it offers can be found at

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