



The 5 Most Critical Requirements for Enterprise Social Software



Contents

- Collaboration: We've been doing it the hard way 2**
- Enterprise social software: 5 requirements for success 2**
- #1: It creates a sharing culture 2
- #2: You have absolute confidence in its adoption rate..... 4
- #3: It fits the way people work 5
- #4: It aggregates information from all sources..... 6
- #5: It has a low Total Cost of Ownership 6
- About Socialtext..... 9**

Collaboration: We've been doing it the hard way

Collaboration is simply a series of conversations to get to a goal. It involves connecting people, asking questions, collecting answers and ideas, surfacing new information, getting feedback on interim deliverables, and the like. It is social. It involves connecting and sharing. It is the way most work gets done.

Employees spend up to one day a week looking for information, which can be 25% of your staff costs.

We've been collaborating for a long time, but we've been doing it the hard way. Using today's business tools – email with attached documents – collaboration has been slow, difficult and ineffective.

Topics get fragmented across many places – individual emails, different versions of presentations, excel files and word documents – stored in different desktop applications, shared drives and content management systems. And with all the communication overhead, most people in an organization know very little about what is going on. In the words of one Socialtext customer, "We don't know what we know." Corporate employees spend up to 1 day a week looking for information, according to research firm IDC. The cost of this unproductive time can be as much as 25% of your staff costs. And according to an IBM study of 400 human resources executives, only 13% of people can find someone with a particular area of expertise in their own company. This means the bulk of work doesn't leverage the specialized knowledge that exists right there in the company, because there is no good way to find it.

Social software solutions, based on microblogging, social networking, wikis and other Web 2.0 technologies, are focused on solving these problems. But social software only addresses these problems to the extent it connects the right people and information fluidly and easily. With the right social software, people connect and share, group productivity and organizational effectiveness are dramatically increased, and decision cycle times greatly reduced.

The bulk of work done doesn't leverage the specialized knowledge that exists right there in the company.

These results may be critical to survival in difficult economic times, and deploying the right social software is the easiest, most cost effective way to achieve them. This paper is designed to inform your search for a social software solution that achieves these business results.

Enterprise social software: 5 requirements for success

#1: It creates a sharing culture

Engage and energize people with integrated microblogging

A sharing culture emerges when people have an easy way to share, and when they trust the sharing will be valued (vs seen as an interruption) and reciprocated. One of the most powerful and contagious ways for a large group of colleagues to share with each other is for them to connect on a private microblogging network. With simple 140-character posts colleagues can provide great value to each other, leverage each other better, and feel more engaged and energized. The group is more cohesive and more informed. The entire group moves more in unison. As an added benefit, email volumes begin to diminish.

Help people get to know each other with social networking

When people get to know each other better, their desire to share increases. Profiles in the social software solution should truly help people get to know each other, with content such as photos, background, experience, expertise, interests, links and stories. Profiles should be alive with dynamic content, such as all the person's recent microblogs, edit summaries, workspace activities and more. The profile should reveal who the person is following so others can learn about their network. It should show tags; both the tags a person gave him/herself and tags others gave him or her. Looking at a person's profile should also show the workspaces in common between you and the person, as this provides further relationship context.

Get a rich picture of the person behind each contribution

When people have the context of the who, what, when, where and why of the others they are working with, it builds the level of trust they have in each other and their sense of teamwork. As the sense of teamwork and mutual reliance increases, people feel they have a higher "stake in the game" and overall work quality tends to increase. Any social software you consider should show a thumbnail photo of who made each contribution, and let users click through to learn more about the person, from any of their contributions.

Keep up to date automatically with activity feeds

The social software should let people stay in touch with a large network of colleagues, allowing them to keep up to date automatically with what others are doing, working on, and producing. Every person should be able to keep the network informed of what they're up to, simply as a byproduct of doing their work. For people working together directly on a project, the unproductive time team members spend today informing each other of what they are working on and their progress on those items should be virtually eliminated.

Discover others who could be valuable

A great deal of the value of social networking comes from connections with all the people not directly involved together on a formal project, what sociologist Mark Granovetter calls the "strength of weak ties." Until recently, social software solutions have focused on making "strong ties," or active working relationships, efficient and effective. But it is "weak ties" that can unblock and accelerate group productivity. These connections offer new perspectives, ideas and insights. The social software should provide a variety of quick and easy ways to make associations and leverage weak ties to get work done faster and yield more informed and innovative outcomes.

Social software should provide a variety of easy ways to make associations & form connections that might not occur otherwise.

You should be able to pivot directly from any contribution to the contributor's profile to learn about the person. You should be able to browse a collection of tags, to get a big picture of the makeup of the community, and to surface ideas for new connections. You should be able to search tags to locate someone with the exact expertise needed to inform a decision, guide thinking or provide more context for a project. And finally, the profile should show all the people a person has subscribed to, which gives you another way to discover new connections.

Learn from observing others who are more skilled

We all get better at what we do by watching others who are more skilled. Someone who wants to be a great orator watches other great orators. People get better at their jobs by observing others. Any social software you consider should let users observe and learn from the people who can be valuable to them. As they watch the flow of useful content created, they also learn what's important to the person, how they approach situations, how they prioritize and make decisions. People get to mentor others and increase their reputation simply as a byproduct of getting their work done.

People get better at their jobs by observing others.

#2: You have absolute confidence in its adoption rate

Adoption is everything

The success or failure of any solution you consider will be directly aligned to its adoption rate. There are tens of thousands – perhaps even hundreds of thousands – of failed social software solutions lying unused in corporations. Why did they fail? Because they were not embraced by users.

Adoption happens when users want to use the product, and they take action as a result.

While certain best practices encourage fastest adoption, adoption is not something that can be forced on people. Adoption occurs when users decide for themselves that the solution provides them with a net benefit. It happens when users want to use the product, and when they take action as a result. Users very quickly weigh “what’s in it for me?” against any perceived pain, such as giving up the comfort of an old way of doing something.

Must be dead easy to get started

The first requirement for adoption is that the solution be completely intuitive for the typical business user. A basic familiarity with popular desktop and internet applications should be the only skills required. A user should be able to open the interface and start productively using the solution with ease. How do you know this will be the case with the solutions you are considering? The best way is to sign up for a free trial and use it for yourself. Also, it is a good idea to find out the provider’s adoption and renewal rates.

Must be self-evident: What’s in it for me?

It needs to be self-evident to users that the social software will benefit them. Make sure any solution you consider includes personalized group productivity tools that have intuitive appeal. One of the new “killer apps” for personalized group productivity is private microblogging with colleagues. Users easily share links and updates, connect with colleagues much more naturally, and stay informed much more easily. Another application popular with users is their own home page they can customize to filter in the information they want with standards-based widgets. The user gets a 360-degree view of everything they need including the latest on projects they are working on, recent activities of people who are important to them, and information from enterprise systems and the web.

Other features with high user appeal include:

- A profile that includes not only the standard corporate information (which should be synchronized with the LDAP directory or Active Directory) but a way for the user to add pictures, additional means of contact, a story about themselves, and tags so others can find them based on expertise or common interests.
- The ability to subscribe to the activity feeds of colleagues.
- The ability to subscribe to alerts that summarize changes made to workspaces, in the format and on the schedule desired.
- The ability to set up a new workspace and invite others as you choose.
- The ability to put a “watch” on any particular page or blog and be notified immediately when changes occur.
- The freedom to eliminate the practice of giving status updates, as updates are now a byproduct of what each user does.

The user must be in control

A knowledge worker who is accountable for what they produce should, have a high degree of freedom over how they produce it. For a social software to be successful, the user must have a high degree of control. They must be able to make all of the choices highlighted in the above section without having to involve anyone else. They must be able to adjust their choices and settings on the fly, as part of the process of learning how to use the solution to best fit their needs. As their needs change, as projects come and go, as new applications and information sources become available, they need to be able to change their subscriptions, notifications, dashboard and everything else, easily, on their own.

For a collaboration solution to be successful, the user must have a high degree of control.

The structure must be fluid

A social software solution that requires a user to involve IT to create a new workspace, manage permissions, form a new group or customize their home page will not adapt fast enough to enable productive collaboration. If it doesn't allow users to make these changes, as and when they wish, on the fly, it will slow down collaboration and will not gain the level of adoption needed for success.

In addition, if changes require IT intervention, a new overhead burden will be created for IT, one that is endless and thankless.

Should have high social incentive

Social software applications like Facebook and Twitter have gained fast adoption because there is a strong social incentive to use them. When people you respect are using an application to reach out to you and build social networks you'd like to be part of, there is a high degree of personal incentive to use the application. You want to choose a solution that incorporates microblogging, social networking, dynamic profiles, and automated activity feeds and lets this social effect work in your favor.

#3: It fits the way people work

Email integration

To get high adoption, a social software solution must fit in with the way people work today. Since employees rely heavily on email, email integration is critical. Business social software should allow users to easily create a new wiki page, or add to an existing page, by sending an email. Users should be able to title the new page, for example, by simply typing the subject line of the email. The body of the email should create the body of the page. If a file is attached to the email, the file should get attached to the wiki page. Anyone who receives the email should be able to add to the page simply by replying to the email. In addition, users should be able to easily forward an existing wiki page to others via email. An easy way to do this is for the collaboration solution to simply present the user with the list of all authorized users and let them create the email distribution list right there, with a few clicks, without leaving the page. Another important email integration feature is email notifications. Users should be able to specify the frequency and content of email notifications for pages, people, and workspaces.

Support for mobile devices

Today's workers rely heavily mobile devices. People are accustomed to being able to get work done on the go. For social software to get high adoption, it needs to work seamlessly with mobile devices so people can continue to connect and share on the go. The people who are mobile, in fact, are often the ones on the front lines with customers and prospects, and have the greatest need for fast access to information, ideas and insights

Mobile workers are often on the front lines with customers and prospects, and have the greatest need for fast access to information, ideas and insights from colleagues.

from their colleagues. The social software should automatically detect mobile device access, and present the appropriate interface across a wide range of devices.

Offline access

There are also times when people need to work offline, such as when on an airplane or otherwise off the network. For high adoption, social software solution needs to allow users to download a single page or a group of pages, read and edit the content while offline, and then synchronize changes back to the server when they come back online.

Working with outside 3rd parties

People in the organization who work with 3rd party contractors and partners can often increase productivity dramatically by creating a shared workspace with the 3rd party. For example, a marketing manager can work much more productively with her contract web designer by managing their joint list of web changes in one shared workspace. By using a shared workspace, a PR manager can stay on the same page much more easily with a 3rd party contractor who is managing speaker submissions. To allow this type of flexibility, the solution should be SaaS-based, lightweight and web-native, so workspaces can be set up without involving the 3rd party's IT department, and without installing any local software.

#4: It aggregates information from all sources

A hub for the information and people you need to do your job

Social software needs to provide visibility to all information and people involved. A user should be able to search across all the workspaces to which they belong, by key word, page title or tags. People should be able to create links that lead to pages on other workspaces or external sources. A tag cloud should show tags across all workspaces and people. Workspace pages should also support rich text, embedded images, video, links, and attachments, so conversations are no longer limited to a single media format. But beyond these basic requirements, social software should serve as a hub for both the information and people you need to do your job.

Information from workspaces, enterprise applications and external sources

People use a variety of information sources to do their job. For example, they may use emails and calendars from Microsoft Outlook or Lotus Notes, lead records from Salesforce.com, documents stored on their computer, on shared drives, or in a system like SharePoint. They may use news and information from media sources, blogs, microblogs and social networks. Once they start using social software, they also rely heavily on the content in the workspaces and the people in their social network. Users should be able to filter in all of this information using standards-based widgets so they have it all in one place. They should be able to drag and drop a widget and configure it for the information they want in a matter of a few intuitive clicks. The widgets should filter in information from all internal and external sources the user finds relevant.

#5: It has a low Total Cost of Ownership

People services

Every software application requires human labor to administer and support it. The cost of the people services can be the most significant cost in the total cost of ownership calculation. According to Gartner, the cost of the people services to own and manage a licensed software application can be 4X the cost of the software license per year. When a company has no prior experience with an application, which is typically the case with enterprise social software, these

costs will typically be higher as IT must get trained and certified to administer and support the unfamiliar application.

IT overhead costs for licensed software are not only significant, they are also typically underestimated. Accurately predicting the licensed software overhead is even more difficult for a new application category, as there is no history to draw on. Since this is typically the biggest cost that needs to be considered, if it is incorrectly estimated, the projected bottom line results can be grossly overstated.

For these reasons, in cases where the application category is new, the software-as-a-service subscription model makes especially good business sense. It avoids investing up front in any one application while the category is still rapidly evolving, it eliminates the risk of underestimating the overhead effort, which is exacerbated by the newness of the product category, and it provides all the traditional cost benefits of software as a service.

Budget considerations & hidden costs

Gartner estimates that more than 75% of the typical IT budget is spent simply maintaining and running licensed software and its required infrastructure. This means 75% of the IT budget is not focused on strategic initiatives and core competencies. In difficult economic times where IT budgets are constrained, this is especially problematic as IT needs to affect change with what remains of their budget after keeping existing systems running. Subscription software allows this discretionary IT budget to go further, which is especially important in uncertain economic times. It also frees IT from the risks associated with hidden costs that can wreak havoc on a tightly bounded budget.

Support

Any application destined for widespread use has the potential for significant support costs, for the simple reason that it is being used by a lot of people. So support is an important variable in the total cost of ownership calculation for enterprise social software. Here again a SaaS-based solution can drive down TCO. The SaaS vendor is motivated to drive adoption and maintain that adoption over time to support their primary financial objective: recurring revenue. Support is a critical success factor in driving and maintaining adoption. You should look for a SaaS vendor who offers the option of direct user support, with a solution that offers clear, easy-to-navigate online help.

De-risking the single biggest success factor: Adoption

Social software drives group productivity vs. personal productivity, and as such adoption is critical to success. A group productivity product can only benefit the group if it is used by the group. The software-as-a-service model is much better suited for this type of product, since it is much better suited to drive user adoption. Since software-as-a-service vendors sell a recurring service, the sale does not end when the initial contract is signed. SaaS vendors have a significant financial interest in driving adoption and creating a broad base of happy and loyal users.

Up-front investment

Since social software is a new product category, the market is still rapidly evolving and an organization likely has not had a chance to experience and quantify the benefits first-hand. As such, it makes sense to de-risk your initial investment as much as possible. With traditional licensed software, you typically have to invest in hardware and software infrastructure for the initial application deployment. This usually represents a large upfront cost. With an unfamiliar application, capacity needs are especially hard to predict, so the organization typically faces one of two evils: over-provisioning infrastructure, which underutilizes capacity, or under-provisioning infrastructure, which delivers poor performance. Since software licenses tend

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to be highly discounted based on volume, organizations also have an incentive to buy more capacity than needed in the initial license purchase. Avoiding these high up-front investments is another reason SaaS is recommended for social software. With software-as-a-service there is no infrastructure to acquire. You can easily expand the capacity of SaaS applications as needed. Except for additional Internet bandwidth, there are typically no incremental infrastructure costs to handle any additional capacity you need. And since the SaaS vendor relies on recurring revenue, their focus is on ensuring high loyalty and adoption over time rather than on providing incentives to buy more than is needed in the initial purchase.

Upgrades

When a product category is new and highly competitive, software applications are evolving rapidly. This means updates and upgrades come faster than they do with a more mature product category. SaaS eliminates the costs of the frequent updates and upgrades typical with a new product category, and in this way further drives down costs for social software applications. With licensed software, major on-premise upgrades can cost as much as 30% of the initial deployment costs. This not only drives up the total cost of ownership, but it causes upgrades to be delayed because of their high costs, which mean businesses don't get the benefits of the new capabilities.

Time-to-results

Given that the benefits of a new product category are yet to be experienced first-hand, time-to-results is an especially important consideration. In this regard the subscription model again makes most sense. SaaS deployments provide much quicker time-to-results because the organization does not need to concern itself with installing underlying infrastructure, and because the SaaS vendor takes responsibility for the end-to-end delivery of the application. With SaaS, a social software platform can be deployed in days, returning tangible results in weeks. With licensed software, deployment alone can take months, with payback deferred until well after the one year mark.

Administration

There are several administration capabilities that reduce the cost of ownership of a social software solution. The first is directory integration, which eliminates the redundant cost and needless overhead of managing two separate user directories. Directory integration also eliminates the security risk that an application may be giving access to users who have left the company. With any social software platform you consider, you want to make sure the user profiles are auto populated from your LDAP directory or Active Directory. To eliminate the helpdesk overhead of managing a redundant set of user logins, you also want single sign on. In addition to the cost considerations, single sign-on also removes a barrier to user adoption. Finally, a social software application should offer the ability to delegate and share administration. Not only should a user be able to freely create their own new workspace, without involving IT, they should be able to specify who else can add and approve new users to the workspace.

User flexibility

Social software solutions can create a significant and unexpected new cost if they require IT to get needlessly involved in making changes that should be left to the users. The nature of collaboration is such that the people involved in any given topic are changing all the time, and new topics are being added all the time. If IT needs to get involved to add users to a discussion or to create workspaces for new groups or topics, the IT overhead cost grows considerably. Given the nature of collaboration, the volume of these changes is not small or finite.

In addition, in order to come up with a personal home page that works best for them, each user will go through an iterative process of trying new things, and will change their home page when they learn interesting ways to use widgets from others, when new Internet applications are delivered, when their projects change, and so forth. If IT intervention is required to manage the personal home page of each user, the overhead burden created will be endless and thankless.

If IT is the gatekeeper to changes the users need, not only do costs rise but friction grows between users and IT, a significant barrier to adoption is created, and business results are diluted. Any social software solution you consider should give users the ability to create a new workspace, form a new group, customize their home page and do other common tasks that should rightfully be left to the users. This will enable the solution to adapt as quickly as needed to support the desired results, and will keep your total cost of ownership low.

About Socialtext

Microblogging + social networking + collaboration

With Socialtext, your workforce benefits from a powerful combination of social software technologies adapted for business use. Your workers share and connect with private microblogging, social networking, and integrated activity feeds. They see each others' "personality stamp" at every turn and get to know each other better through rich, dynamic profiles. With Socialtext, co-workers connect with each other in a way that is fun and natural, share with each other in a way that is highly productive, and leverage each other continuously. With Socialtext in place, people have a better way to work together.

Highest adoption, lowest TCO

The Socialtext social software platform is designed for adoption. It is as easy to use as the Internet applications that are so popular today. Users simply click to the interface and start productively using the application. Microblogging and personal productivity features capture the interest of users immediately, and integrated social networking creates self-perpetuating rapid adoption.

Rapid deployment, Software-as-a-Service

Provided as software-as-a-service, the Socialtext platform can be up and running in days, and returning tangible business results in weeks. Our professional services team provides end-to-end implementation and support services to ensure success.

Business results

Using Socialtext, companies across the globe have reduced the time employees spend searching for information by 30%, and have sped up their cycle times in virtually all functions across the organization. Socialtext customers have reported compressing project cycles by 25% and reducing e-mail volume by 30% or more.

More information about social software for business

Visit our resources page for more whitepapers, short product videos, and other resources:
<http://www.socialtext.com/products/resources.php>