

Towards Enterprise 2.0

Five ways collaborative technologies will impact upon your organisation

As a professional communicator, you will be aware of the debate surrounding the impact of collaborative technologies on traditional communication methods. You are almost certainly thinking about how you can implement these technologies. You might already be experimenting with one or more tools. But it is unlikely you have yet seen your internal communication environment transformed.

We believe that collaborative technologies (including blogs, wikis, discussion forums and content aggregators) will fundamentally change the internal communication landscape over the next five years. We don't expect the change to happen overnight and we certainly don't expect these new tools to replace more traditional channels. But we do expect to see widespread adoption and with that, a new communication agenda. Here we identify five areas where we believe collaborative technologies are most likely to impact and what this means for you.

1. Managing and sharing organisational knowledge

Internal networking and employee-generated knowledge sites will become commonplace inside organisations as a means of sharing and creating knowledge.

Ask someone where they go to find out about something and the chances are that a quick trip to Wikipedia will feature high on their list. Now contrast that with the same challenge inside your organisation where there is probably no Wikipedia equivalent, Intranet search is a pale imitation of Google and your knowledge management system goes largely unused.

Extracting, sharing and creating knowledge about strategy, products or just about anything is the lifeblood of your organisation. Sourcing information, forming networks, exchanging experiences and pooling resources all help to

accelerate knowledge creation making a technical and cultural environment that supports this kind of collaboration essential.

The adoption of networking tools (such as an internal Linked In) and organisation-wide employee-generated knowledge sites (such as an internal Wikipedia) will become commonplace inside organisations. They will help to share what is already known and accelerate the process of developing what is not yet known. Most importantly they will be open to all, so your organisation can draw upon the entire knowledge base.

What this means for you

Knowledge management has not traditionally been the responsibility of the internal communicator. But the availability of MS SharePoint and tools like it mean the technology is quite possibly already in place and simply requires an owner. Perceptions of internal communication will be shaped by the way collaborative technologies are used and as that is likely to matter to you, we believe that you need to be at the heart of your organisation's efforts to share and exploit knowledge.

2. Building leadership visibility and transparency

Blogs and video blogs will play a key role in helping leaders engage in dialogue and build trust with their people

Trust is the essential ingredient in any relationship, no more so than between a leader and his or her people. For a variety of reasons, trust might currently be in short supply and having a negative impact on your organisation. Building trust takes time and requires constant dialogue to thrive. But for a busy leader finding this time can be difficult, with little immediate obvious reward and a host of other priorities to focus on.

The use of blogs and video blogs by leaders at all levels, combined with active participation in online discussion, is fundamental to promoting dialogue and building trust. It is not a replacement for face-to-face communication,

more an extension of the same principle that ultimately comes naturally to a good leader.

What this means for you

You can expect a growing number of managers at all levels of your organisation to want their own blog or microblog. Whilst it is not your responsibility to 'own the channel', it is essential you establish the necessary infrastructure (including a planning template, user guidelines and a code of conduct) so that blogging can improve and not burden an already crowded communication environment. You should also plan for the probability that some leaders will require you to write their posts and contributions to the ensuing conversation.

3. Accelerating the pace of change

The use of micro-blogging, instant messaging and discussion forums provide significant opportunities to boost peer-to-peer communication and increase the pace of change.

Your organisation's ability to implement change successfully has long been critical and the pressure to obtain value from large scale change programmes or mergers and acquisitions has never been greater. Add to that the bruising felt by many of your colleagues as a result of the downturn allied with general sense of change fatigue and the challenge becomes greater still.

The role of effective communication in implementing change is well established and there is no doubt that a well-executed communication campaign can make the difference. But change happens most effectively when communication is peer-to-peer (rather than top-down) as it confers legitimacy and reduces the sense of unwanted imposition.

Collaborative technologies have potential to increase significantly peer-to-peer communication and accelerate the change process. Micro-blogging, instant messaging and discussion forums provide the most obvious bases for promoting this kind of communication but blogs also provide subject matter experts with a great opportunity to talk about and engage colleagues with their specialism.

What this means for you

Responsibility for organisation-wide discussion channels will undoubtedly become yours. Past experience of discussion channels is mixed with some undoubtedly delivering value and others simply providing an outlet for criticism and negativity. So being clear about the channel purpose, setting out the rules for participants and ensuring leaders are willing to engage are all essential building blocks for success. Your real challenge though is to ensure discussion is effectively moderated without appearing to be censored, so it can achieve its goal.

4. Promoting employee advocacy

Your people have always been important advocates for your organisation but until recently, their influence has been comparatively weak and confined largely to personal networks. Online discussion has changed that and your employees now have the opportunity to influence opinion about your organisation and its products and services like never before.

This prompts questions about the effectiveness of traditional brand building activities such as advertising and PR. More importantly, it presents you with an opportunity to play a key role in converting employees from passive spectators (or worse) to informed advocates at the front line of your marketing effort.

It is essential that your people are aware of the opportunities they have to influence public opinion and develop the skills and expertise necessary to use them effectively. This also means that the need to engage staff with strategy and information about your products and services has never been greater.

What this means for you

You have two key roles in the process of creating brand advocates. The first is to provide your people with the information they need to influence opinion and the willingness to use it. The second is to ensure they understand how they can use this advocacy to promote your brand in online conversation.

5. Selecting and aggregating content

The adoption of content aggregation tools is the only plausible way of managing the proliferation of content inside organisations

The proliferation of content, not least the new content created via collaborative technologies, presents you with one more challenge. Once your people complained of having insufficient information, but now they complain of having too much.

You will not want content owners to reduce output as this deprives your organisation of valuable information. But you can equip your people with the tools they need to manage what they receive and ensure they get what they need to do their jobs effectively.

Content aggregation tools such as RSS or personalised Intranet start pages modelled on iGoogle will become commonplace inside organisations as employees take control of the content they receive. Communication will cease to be a spectator sport where employees depend on others to provide them with what they need and content will live or die by the amount of interest expressed in it.

What this means for you

Of all the changes collaborative technologies will promote, content aggregation is the least understood. So your first challenge is to help people understand what it means and how it can help them. You will then move on to the more fundamental challenge of making certain content available on a subscription-only basis and of helping and persuading receivers to select only the content they require.

Help with your next steps

We'd love to talk to you about how collaborative technologies will impact upon your organisation so if you'd like to speak to us, please call Paul Roberts, Alan Richardson or Angella Newell on +44 1494 616043 and we'd be delighted to chat.

About us

Ibis Communication helps organisations perform better by engaging and activating their people. We provide advice and support in six related areas:

Research and insight

We help you understand your internal communication challenges through rigorous research and analysis

Strategy and planning

We help you meet your challenges by developing strategies that align with your business goals

Channel development

We help you create or revitalise channels to ensure communication remains relevant and effective

Programme delivery

We help you deliver business-critical messages and create conversation around them

Stakeholder education

We help you ensure your success by engaging, preparing and training colleagues

Success measurement

We help you quantify success and demonstrate return on your investment

We have experience in global, European, Mid-East and Asia-Pacific markets, and a successful track record in a broad range of sectors. Our clients include:

ARM, BRITISH AIRWAYS, BERRY BROS & RUDD, CISCO, FRIENDS PROVIDENT, HEINEKEN, ING, MUSHRIF, NATIONAL GRID, ROYAL & SUN ALLIANCE, UN (UNRWA), VODAFONE, WATES

Visit our website or contact us to find out more about how we can help you

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