Social Business Software: Realizing the Potential of Web 2.0 in the Enterprise
Web 2.0 and social software have taken the online world by storm, with everyone talking blogs, Wikis, Twitter, Facebook, Yahoo groups, etc. The reason is simple as people have discovered the advantages of easy, instantaneous communications with a community of people that promote collaboration and the exchange of ideas and information across geographic and time boundaries.

For the business community the potential for social business software is tantalizing. Social software can create a new era of collaboration across the enterprise that breaks time and geographic barriers, enables collaboration and conversation across widely dispersed people all while capturing the ideas, insights, and experiences for ongoing use.

Already companies are proving the value of social business software across a variety of functions and processes from customer-facing initiatives to internal department enablement, including:

- Customer service and support, who are leveraging customer expertise to improve service, reduce call and email volumes, and create a more scalable environment.
- Sales organizations who are enabling their sales teams to discover and share their organization’s deep, but often underutilized, know-how, helping to sell more by making each sales professional more effective, efficient, and responsive to their prospects.
- Field services, who are empowering their teams to readily access critical information and expertise required to resolve important issues encountered in the field.
- Professional Services who are offering more effective methods for practice directors and experts to collaborate and educate their implementers as well as capturing the historical knowledge gained through each implementation.

Across these initiatives, the use of social software for business offers the possibility of improved effectiveness, greater responsiveness to customers, increased collaboration and contribution independent of geographical or time boundaries, resulting in a more agile organization. An organization that can respond more quickly to business, process and market changes by taking advantage of the insights of the masses, both inside and outside the enterprise.

To support these initiatives, a number of innovative companies have taken the lead to build a new class of social software, specifically designed for business use. But as with any software offering, not all of products are architected with the same vision. Typically offerings can be assigned to one of three categories:
Category 1
Products which offer a number of non-integrated social channels but lack enterprise-grade capabilities (see discussion below) and as such are best suited for smaller group implementations.

Category 2
Products whose platform is broader and deeper, but do not fit existing processes or take advantage of existing technologies in common use across the enterprise, which results in lack of adoption or a siloed approach when using the technology. In fact, these companies frequently advocate a business revolution where the social software platform replaces existing ways of doing things, and suggest that existing enterprise applications are an impediment to be tossed aside.

Category 3
Products which offer a comprehensive and integrated set of capabilities to serve the needs of a single business process or initiative, inside and outside the company, as well as the organization as a whole. This requires robust functionality including:

- The ability to manage a variety of communication channels so that users are not forced to communicate through just one or a few channels.
- An approach that integrates Web 2.0 channels with traditional business communication methods such as email, instant messaging, Microsoft Office, enabling people to use the channels that best suit their existing work processes.
- The ability to automatically capture all business conversations as they occur so that insights, experience, and information can be made available for re-use across the organization.
- An expert network to streamline the process of finding the right resource. Expert networking removes the burden from the user of needing to know who the right resource is to answer a particular question.
- Security to provide appropriate access to channels and knowledge.
- Workflow that can be configured to address the distinct requirements of each business function and process.
- The scalability and reliability of an enterprise solution.
- Integration with back-end systems to leverage existing information, such as documents on network directories, information from internal and external Web sites and learning content management systems, and feeds from news sites, blogs, or podcasts.
- Analytics and reporting to provide visibility into participation, interactions, and usage trends to promote and maintain a healthy, active community.

OutStart strongly believes that organizations are best served with offerings from this last category. With a social business platform delivering these capabilities, enterprises can leverage the power of Web
2.0-driven conversation and collaboration throughout the organization and the use cases that follow showcase how robust enterprise-grade social business software can help organizations to achieve tangible business results.

**Professional Services Use Case**

Professional service organizations operate in a complex web of individuals often spread across multiple businesses, locations, and time zones. Distributed teams constantly shift and recombine, coming together for varying periods of time to complete projects. This complexity increases the difficulty of sharing ideas and expertise, collaborating effectively, and engaging in efficient interactions.

Social business software empowers users to transcend the geographic, organizational and time boundaries which are fundamental to professional service engagements. For example:

This newly “structured” content is now meaningful to the organization. Individuals can be pointed in the direction of the DMS/CMS to pull specific documents, search for drawings and find the answers to information within the categories. The DMS offers precise searching, easier navigation than uncharted file sharing systems and can be tailored to specific groups based on security. The DMS/CMS does not enable re-use in traditional terms. Re-use within a DMS/CMS is typically characterized by finding the document, copying it locally, making changes, and then uploading the document under a different name, category, etc. This does not really constitute re-use, but at times gets termed as such. In reality, workers “re-purpose” instead of “re-use” the existing content.

- Teams do not need to waste time determining how to best communicate and coordinate, as the social business platform provides the structure for interactions, helping to reduce project ramp-up time.
- When a team needs to brainstorm new ideas, they can instantly begin an online collaborative conversation that enables all participants, regardless of where they are, to contribute.

**Business Justification**

**Professional Services**

- Increased team productivity and reduced project cycle time with faster time-to-answers and fewer escalations
- Shorter training and ramp-up time with easily accessible, complete knowledge transfer
- Re-use of high value knowledge with information exchange automatically captured and retained as it occurs
- Improved client satisfaction with greater transparency and higher levels of project participation
- Ability to augment the organization with contractors and have them come up to speed rapidly
Conversations in any social channel are captured for organic growth of knowledge, best practices, and expertise as a by-product of daily work. This high-value knowledge is available for immediate re-use, which drives learning and innovation across professional service teams and the enterprise. It also provides a history of insight and experience that maintains corporate memory even when experts leave the company.

With all information searchable and findable, any team member can quickly discover specific knowledge that is needed to inform a decision. Expert Networking connects one consultant with another who has addressed a similar need, providing immediate and highly relevant knowledge to drive projects forward.

If desired, clients can participate in a controlled manner, offering them higher levels of participation and transparency into the project and its status, helping to develop greater client satisfaction, intimacy and retention.

Management or practice directors can define topics for collaboration, having consultants collaborate and address issues that can help everybody’s effectiveness.

Teams can set up workspaces around an implementation, so they can collaborate between implementers, and even with their clients to make sure everybody is on the same page, addressing problems quickly, and assuring smooth and on time implementation.

New hires and new team members can be brought up to speed quickly by facilitating interaction with mentors, peers, management and experts and by accessing historical insights, ideas and experiences.

Learning Content Management Systems

Technicians at a customer site need to be prepared when they walk in the door, especially given the cost for sending highly trained staff onsite and the importance of resolving the customer’s issue as quickly and professionally as possible. Field staff face many variables with each call – the product model, the options installed, the version of each component, previous repairs, the actual nature of the problem compared to the reported issue, and much more. This level of complexity makes it almost impossible for any technician to be prepared for every possible scenario.

Social business software allows field service staff to readily leverage a network of peers and the captured historical knowledge to help diagnose and resolve an issue faster and service customers in a way that demonstrates their professionalism and preparation. For example:

- A technician who uncovers a new problem or solution onsite can use social business software to document their insight and experience, using one of the many contribution channels, such as authoring a blog or Wiki entry, sending an email, starting a conversation in the community, or even submitting information via a mobile device. With the information automatically
captured and made available, other technicians immediately benefit from the experience without having to engage in a one-to-one conversation. They can also extend the contribution, by joining the conversation using the Wiki, blog, or email to submit additional information that constantly refines and improves the content. As a result, field technicians gain up-to-the-minute collective intelligence which can lead to faster diagnosis and repair.

- Technicians can subscribe to particular topics, such as products they are assigned to service, so that any time new information is available, they are automatically and immediately notified to keep them abreast of product changes, new repair techniques, and insight and experience contributed by peers or experts.
- The reporting and analytic capabilities of social business software help managers implement best practices and more cost-effectively train and equip field staff as they can determine which techniques are used most frequently and should be elevated to best practices; where knowledge gaps exist in both training and content; and where repair kits need modification to provide the right parts.
- Constantly traveling technicians also gain fast access when in the field, via computer or mobile devices that connect to required expertise and knowledge no matter where they are located.
- By subscribing to topics of interest, or people they want to follow, the software can keep them updated and informed when somebody contributes to the topic, or the person they are following contributes. This will keep them informed with the latest insights that they care about.

**Customer Service and Support Use Case**

For many enterprises, customer service is the “face” of the company and a key factor in a customer’s willingness to conduct business with the enterprise. And yet, enterprises struggle to enhance the customer experience to increase revenues and brand loyalty while at the same time controlling costs and improving scalability.

Social CRM driven by social business software can play a key part in helping to meet these often competing business objectives through enhanced interactions, call deflections, faster issue resolution, few escalations and reduction or even elimination of alternative support channels such as email and chat.
Social business software can transform the relationship between the enterprise and the customer, whether B2B or B2C. Customers want to be empowered to interact with a wide range of sources and people to find out about products and services, resolve issues, and contribute their own opinions and expertise. Social business software offers the opportunity to increase customer satisfaction while reducing service and support costs. For example:

- Establishing online communities within the company Web site allows customers to engage with peers to review products, suggest new uses, resolve issues, and connect to the collective expertise of gurus and peers. By managing these communities through the social business platform, the enterprise can deliver a more interactive customer support experience, quickly identify and resolve misconceptions or erroneous information, and gain insight into customer behavior and needs to influence future product direction.

- Because all customer-to-customer exchanges are captured and managed, social discussions become re-usable knowledge. The enterprise can leverage the community to grow the depth and breadth of useful knowledge at lower cost and make that knowledge widely available to customers, and contact center agents.

- Gurus can be persuaded to share their expertise using social reputation ratings. These ratings establish a community status which is determined by peers and frequently results in these gurus responding in a highly effective way to a significant percentage of customer issues.

- Private communities can be established, such as a community for highly technical users to get advanced and detailed technical information. This type of community can enable expert users to get answers faster, and that the company needs fewer agents or technical experts to resolve issues.

- The integration of multiple social media channels provides self-service customers with a broad base of always-available information that they can easily search to resolve issues on their own. This helps to scale contact center operations as agents are freed to respond to the most complex issues and highest value customers.

Business Justification

Customer Service and Support

- Call deflection as peer-to-peer support acts as a highly effective alternative to costly support calls.

- Faster issue resolution with less escalation as agents access an ever expanding community and expert contributed knowledge base.

- Higher customer satisfaction as customers experience fast issue resolution.

- Reduction or elimination of costly alternative support channels such as email and chat as these channels are re-directed to the support community.

- Knowledge retention as both customer and employee contributions are captured for ongoing us.

- Improved scalability as customers can serve themselves and help each other.
In addition to end users, social software can make a substantial contribution to an enterprise’s contact center. It can enhance the quality and efficiency of service delivery, increasing agent productivity, and improving both customer satisfaction and agent morale. This is because social business software enables agents to tap into enterprise knowledge at the moment of need, easily communicate with peers and SMEs, and contribute their own front-line expertise as part of their job function. For example:

- Agents can participate in interactive discussions to connect them with the insight and knowledge of peers. They can also subscribe to discussion topics and automatically receive service alerts at their desktop to stay abreast of important changes.
- When agents cannot find an answer, expert location provides instant access to deep domain knowledge.
- Because social business software allows contribution through many social channels, agents can contribute knowledge without having to step outside their work routines. Social reputation ratings encourage agents to contribute frequently and meet quality goals.
- A technician who uncovers a new problem or solution onsite can use social business software to document their insight and experience, using one of the many contribution channels, such as authoring a blog or Wiki entry, sending an email, starting a conversation in the community, or even submitting information via a mobile device. With the information automatically captured and made available, other technicians immediately benefit from the

**Sales and Marketing Use Case**

Knowledge is crucial to the success of sales and marketing professionals. Unfortunately, these knowledge needs are not being addressed effectively: According to a survey of over 1200 sales executives, sales forces in all industries have information needs that are not being met. The survey identifies that one of the keys to achieving sales effectiveness is sharing institutional knowledge.

Social business software facilitates the capture of the best insights, experiential knowledge, and expertise of the organization, and connects this collective intelligence to sales and marketing staff. Sales teams spend less time searching for information and more time selling, while marketing organizations can create campaigns that better support the selling process. For example:

- Online communities offer a collaborative approach to sales and marketing as they empower geographically dispersed teams to share best practices and collaborate on key selling and marketing strategies. Staff can initiate discussions around particular selling opportunities or proposed campaigns at any time to benefit from the collective wisdom of peers.
Using expert location, all sales professionals can mirror the behavior of top-performing sales people, who surround themselves with a network of experts to call on when they need the best information relative to specific deals. Expert location provides automated assistance to help each representative obtain the right knowledge without wasting time trying to determine the best resource.

Because all social business software conversations are captured and made searchable, the organization gains an historical record of knowledge that can be used to reduce the time sales and marketing staff spend looking for information, as well as the time needed to bring new hires up-to-speed.

Sales and marketing professionals can be incented to contribute valuable knowledge with social reputation ratings that establish a community status designed to motivate them to contribute frequently.

Analytics enable sales and marketing executives to continually refine techniques. Managers can identify sales behaviors and marketing trends, specific information gaps, and techniques that should be elevated to best practices.

In addition marketing organizations can take advantage of social software to enable their customers to participate more closely with the company, expressing their opinion, helping with ideas and insights to help the business improve different aspects of how they develop, market, and sell their products and services.

While some marketing organizations have been taking advantage of pure social networking sites to monitor how customers are reacting, social business software provides more powerful means to manage and direct the conversation, helping to build stronger relationships with customers. For example:

- Enterprise-sponsored online communities can help to accelerate sales of new products, as brand enthusiasts develop the conversation, spread the message, and virally influence the market.
- With SME participation in online discussions, enterprises can more successfully influence the perception of brand, offering special insight about a product, providing direct feedback to consumer questions, correcting errors, and shaping the nature of the conversation.
• Using social reputation in which the community determines a status for contributors, brand enthusiasts can be encouraged to become frequent contributors, providing an independent advocate voice.

• Private communities can be established for specific customer segments. For instance, a community for high-value customers can focus on product enhancements and soliciting ideas from them, providing the enterprise with direct knowledge of their most valuable customers’ interests while also increasing excitement about the brand.

• The ability to capture and analyze conversations from a wide range of social channels, including pure social networking sites, offers a wealth of information about consumer perceptions. The enterprise can drive product decisions and deliverables based on detailed insight into customer perspectives, as well as better understand the competition’s capabilities and ranking.

Learning Use Case

While structured formal learning is an important function in any enterprise, the increasing mobility of geographically dispersed employees, partners, and customers, combined with the need to minimize work disruptions and travel costs, require a more flexible approach to providing learning opportunities.

Social business software can play a useful role in helping people continue their learning. By enabling employees, partners and customers to use social channels to ask questions, get coaching and mentoring, and quickly access SMEs, learning becomes an on-going, daily activity. For example:

• Employees and partners can initiate collaborative discussions for just-in-time conversations to find answers to specific questions, brainstorm how to solve problems, and share insights and experiences. Social channels facilitate these conversations across geographic and time barriers to extend the learners’ reach.

• With the ability to capture conversations, the organization can organically build useful learning content to make learning initiatives more effective and scalable. Content generated through social business software can be made available for immediate re-use as well as incorporated into formal learning programs.

Business Justification
Customer-Facing Marketing and Sales

• Higher customer satisfaction and loyalty with active participation in company-sponsored communities

• Accelerated sales through customer communities where your customers can share their experiences and advocate on your behalf

• Ability to involve customers in new product development, and product reviews to help develop better products and create brand enthusiast
Scheduled collaborative discussions and expert forums can enhance the effectiveness of formal learning programs. During and after a class, learners can ask questions and benefit from the knowledge of fellow learners to reinforce what they have learned. Follow-on learning driven through social business software can also provide a value-added service for formal learning programs sold to customers.

Conclusion

Collaboration in the workplace seems like such a simple idea — we gather people, exchange ideas, ask questions, get feedback, and come to collective resolution — all of which helps us to do our jobs more efficiently and effectively. Web 2.0 and social software have shown the way as they provide the solution that overcomes the barriers of time and distance that thwart effective collaboration.

But to truly develop a business community in which everyone can contribute to the conversation and drive the business forward, enterprises need a platform for social business interactions that leverages the power of social conversations within the processes and requirements of the organization. OutStart Participate is an innovative social business platform that enables the enterprise to leverage its collective intelligence and significantly increase the flow of knowledge and expertise. A true enterprise platform, OutStart Participate:

- Connects social software channels to streamline the process of sharing and collaboration, while automatically capturing knowledge for reuse.
- Enables workers to continue to use familiar business tools. By integrating Web 2.0 channels with standard business tools such as e-mail, MS Office and PDAs, users can share and collaborate in the way that best suits their business needs.
- Readily connects to organizational expertise with a combination of expert networking that identifies the best resources for a given issue and workflow that ensures that answers are provided in a timely fashion.
- Provides flexible, user-friendly administration tools to facilitate fast configuration of business rules and workflows to manage know-how, experts, and communities without programming.
- Offers enterprise-grade reliability and security to protect intellectual capital.
ABOUT OUTSTART

You view knowledge sharing between your employees, partners, and customers as a strategic priority. Their knowledge leads to your success. OutStart’s portfolio of inter-related mobile, social, and learning Knowledge Solutions accelerate and broaden access to colleagues and the knowledge they need to respond to business requirements more quickly and make better informed decisions. Together you excel.

Recognized as a Visionary in Gartner’s Magic Quadrant reports for the last seven years, OutStart is regularly acknowledged for its award-winning solutions including OutStart LCMS; Participate, social business software that integrates social networking, collaboration and knowledge sharing technologies; Hot Lava Mobile for mobile learning and corporate communications; OutStart LMS, a full-featured, configurable LMS; and TrainingEdge.com an integrated learning and knowledge suite combining LMS, LCMS, Social Business Software and Mobile.

OutStart is honored to serve organizations that are surpassing expectations and delivering exceptional business results such as AgustaWestland, BB&T, Boeing Company, BT, CVS Caremark, DIRECTV, Internal Revenue Service, McDonald’s, MetLife, Prudential, Australian Defence Force, U.S. Navy, UK Ministry of Defence, Verizon Wireless, Xerox, and Yum! Brands.

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