

Social business is certainly serious business

by Peter Gartenberg, Managing Director, SAP India

Social media are building a new era in business transparency and engagement, changing the relationships between companies and their customers. Corporate commitment to social media has been linked to above-average levels of growth and social networking sites, properly managed, have the potential to become a powerful business tool. Many companies in India are already taking advantage of these developments, weaving social networking and collaboration into their conventional business practices and strategies.



Peter Gartenberg is the Managing Director of SAP India. Prior to joining SAP India as COO in November 2009, Peter was Managing Director & CEO (India) and Executive Vice President (APAC region) with Siemens Enterprise Communications Pvt. Ltd. Before his Siemens India assignment in 2000, Peter held several executive roles with Siemens in China, Germany and the USA. He started his career in the Information Technology & Communications field with IBM in San Francisco, California in 1986.

Peter Gartenberg is a graduate of the University of California, Berkeley.

The world of technology abounds in buzzwords, and while web 2.0 is not new to the technology-savvy, it has certainly taken on a new level of importance in recent years.

Web 2.0 sites are no longer just online playgrounds used mostly for pleasure; from Flickr to Wikipedia to MySpace and Facebook, they all virtually demand active participation and heavy social interaction. But take a fresh look at the power of their influence and you will see web 2.0 changing the way companies think, function and collaborate over work. Today, thousands of employees across companies such as Shell Oil, Procter & Gamble and General Electric carry their own Facebook pages.

This adaptation is clearly moving towards what has been aptly termed a 'borderless enterprise'. The reasoning is simple – a successful social network is a complex alchemy of purpose, knowledge, interaction models, culture, incentives, communication and tools designed to bring people into specialized communities with quick efficiency. Simultaneously, it creates a record of ad-hoc get-togethers that can be managed and stored for future reference. In all, these sites have every potential to become a very powerful business tool. Social media are also helping to build a new era in business transparency and engagement. Traditional news channels and marketing campaigns no longer touch the consumers the way they used to because social media have changed

the rules of the game forever. Customers now demand a more honest and direct relationship with the products and companies they buy from.

However, what tips the balance in favour of social networking in business is the question that corporations are bound to ask themselves: "Do social networking and web 2.0 really affect the bottom line?" In a recent report on social engagement carried out by US consulting firm Altimeter Group, the study categorically concluded that corporate commitment to social media is intrinsically linked to above-average levels of growth. The most socially engaged are faring better in the current crisis than their direct competitors! So it should come as no surprise that in the Asia-

“In India, brands have already begun to appreciate this sea-change in thought as a precursor to brand acceptance. Companies such as HUL, Tata Tea, Tata Docomo, Aircel, Titan, HDFC...”

Pacific region, governments, corporations and everyday citizens have adopted web 2.0 and its related technologies wholeheartedly at an unprecedented rate.

It's no longer just about transactions then, but about making connections and engaging the consumer that leads to building long-term brand loyalty. Thus the new era of customer-engagement model using web 2.0 will have to focus on three key aspects – driving customer experience; using web 2.0 techniques to interact with customers and partners; and evolving web 2.0 within the company to keep the practice relevant. In all, the definition of a global company today will mean a company that touches multiple industries and technologies and is an active participant of the web 2.0 revolution not only for customers, but with partners and employees as well.

In India, brands have already begun to appreciate this sea-change in thought as a precursor to brand acceptance. Companies such as HUL, Tata Tea, Tata Docomo, Aircel, Titan, HDFC and others are already using peer-to-peer networking on sites such as Facebook or Twitter to talk about product reviews and to create a dynamic buzz around the brand. These companies have set a high bar for their peers. Their Facebook pages capture an array of information presented to its audience in a comprehensive manner. An Indian telecom major uses social networking in an innovative fashion by providing a Facebook voice message application that allows Facebook users to leave voice messages for each other instead of plain text posts.

Web 2.0 products have simple, interactive and intuitive interfaces that enable users' access to information and to carry out tasks without training. For instance, in offering a comprehensive portfolio of business performance and optimization solutions for companies of all sizes, a 2.0 product enables users to browse through billions of rows of corporate data as easily as you browse the web, using innovative memory-resident analytics, coupled with an interface that automatically proposes appropriate analyses. In this context, interactive dashboards are also a priority for seamless integration with everyday business activities. Today we can expect an effective online platform available on-demand to allow organizations to cleanse, store, analyze and share information

effectively without having to install any hardware or software. A comprehensive set of web tools is also expected to provide discussion forums, allowing users to comment on, rank, tag and integrate content seamlessly into other platforms. And there's more. Collaborative decision-making is now achievable when companies bring business and technical experts together to facilitate real-time business work processes.

Dexler Information Solutions Pvt. Ltd, a fast-growing provider of web-based training services for IT professionals, started to enable social interaction both within and among organizations using web 2.0 tools. Dexler facilitated its processes further to offer bundling, subscriptions, flexible catalogues, discount structures, and gift coupons to enterprise customers without compromising security. The benefits were instant. The firm's 21 e-learning staffers, who were generally consumed with serving existing clients, become so much more efficient that resources were redirected for e-learning innovations.

It is worth mentioning that one important aspect of using web 2.0 to engage with stakeholders comes in the form of a community network that enables a company to share questions and expertise with its customers, partners, other solution providers and employees. An effective community network could easily see up to a million members, posting thousands of messages a day in over 200 different discussion forums, and over 250 blog posts each month. This could also cover audiences from an extensive range of countries and territories. These are indeed powerful numbers illustrating the strength of a web 2.0 platform and the growing involvement between corporations and their customers, partners and stakeholders for product and service innovation.

Underneath the customer and stakeholder-facing platforms resides the core concept of engaging employees within the company's day-to-day running of the business. Through internal corporate portals, employees should be encouraged and empowered to blog, to create wikis, discussion forums, and collaboration areas, and to participate in micro-blogging, all with the goal of boosting employee productivity and enhancing collaboration within corporate guidelines. Clearly, social networking and collaboration is being rapidly weaved into conventional business practices and strategies. Information

sharing is now achieved at the speed of thought, while offering flexibility that adapts to new business needs. In a nutshell, it's information DIY.

As we embark on the new journey of open communications, engaging dialogue and transparency, business success may now have less to do with the size of marketing or advertising budgets, and more about the quality of customer interactions. The responsibility of refining the quality of these interactions falls on the league leaders themselves. The forum is now open with a platform that is very easily accessible. Let's get down to business. Let's go social. ●



Connect-World is celebrating its 12th anniversary

Through the years, *Connect-World's* authors told of the rise of mobile, of fibre, of wireless and of broadband; they told of the dot.com meltdown, of digital inclusion and convergence, of standards and breakthroughs, the rise of IP and the fall of switching and of the regulatory turnaround.

In every issue of *Connect-World* heads of state, ministers and regulators, heads of international institutions and leaders of industry speak of what the ICT revolution, as it happens, means to the people in their regions of the world.

www.connect-world.com