

Developing social media for internal communications

Presentation summary by Robert Falconer*

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According to the most recent 2013 statistics, Facebook now has 1.06 billion monthly active users, Twitter boasts 500 million total users, and LinkedIn counts 200 million users. No one can deny the impact social media has had on our lives. It enables people to easily connect, communicate and share expertise.

Organizations are taking notice of this trend and implementing their own private social media systems, purpose-built to encourage internal social discourse. Known as Enterprise Social Networks (ESNs), these systems run on such platforms as ThoughtFarmer, Yammer and Socialcast.

On January 23rd, Wendy Kubota (ABC Communications Lead – Cummins), Heidi Rolston (Vice President, People – BuildDirect) and Jonathan Anthony (Director, Corporate Communications – Teekay Corporation) shared with IABC members their experiences with these new ESNs, and how they've leveraged them. Here were the chief takeaways from the group's presentation:

- First and foremost, websites that are old, dull and difficult to navigate need to be redesigned and regularly updated with fresh content to maintain user involvement. In concert with that, an ESN component helps enable employees and management to freely exchange ideas that can shape the corporate culture and evolve business strategy.
- Sharing one's work socially through ESNs subverts the traditional hierarchical structure. It creates a "wirearchical" structure founded on continuous learning, working collaboratively, narrating your work, sharing widely, and engaging in networks.
- Organizations shouldn't be afraid to experiment with ESNs, and should try different ways to get employees to participate (e.g. blogging about a bowling party can be a fun way to develop team building).
- Executives and management often tend to be less comfortable using ESNs, and may require more coaxing, or a separate engagement strategy.
- With technology and social media tools evolving at a rapid pace, it's important not to let the tail wag the dog. Jonathan Anthony said it best. "Spend more time thinking about the cultural implications that you want to affect inside your organization, and the communication theory you want to impact, rather than the tool," he advised. "A tool is a tool. What are you trying to do? That's much more important."

More information: [ThoughtFarmer](#) [Yammer](#) [Socialcast](#) [Altimeter Group](#)