



When Execution Matters

Leveraging Social Media Technology to Increase Sales Productivity March 26, 2010 – 12:20 pm by Gopinath MR

Over the last few years, social networking websites like Facebook and Twitter have changed the way people communicate over the Internet. Social networking has influenced not only individuals' day-to-day activities, but also how the Internet is leveraged in business context. Organizations are exploring ways to leverage social media capabilities to extend customer reach and to improve employee and partner productivity, product launches and brand campaigns.

The Marketing and Sales functions are highly dependent on effective collaboration with prospects, clients and colleagues, and can benefit a great deal from social media technologies. While traditional enterprise products provide end-to-end technology and functional & marketing capabilities that support traditional business processes, it is important to integrate new social media technology into existing technology investments as well. Social media technologies can be leveraged to drive specific business benefits such as using blogs to enable employees to share ideas and perspectives on different business scenarios.

Marketing

As online users spend more time on social networking sites, online marketing products using targeted ads have become increasingly effective in gaining prospects. Social media platforms capture valuable user information, such as customer interests and background, which organizations can use for targeted marketing. Marketing campaigns on social networking sites are becoming extremely effective ways to increase the volume of sales prospects. Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn have provided their own advertising platforms for advertisers to publish targeted ad campaigns.

Sales Prospects

Social media has also changed how sales teams can use their contacts information to get new prospects. Websites like LinkedIn have the capability to enable sales representatives to search for "contacts of contacts", which exponentially expands the reach of their networks. This allows sales representatives to reach prospects through known contacts and avoids cold calls.

Sales Collaboration

For a large enterprise deal, there is often an entire sales team, rather than an individual sales representative, working on the account. In addition to sales representatives, there may be various product specialists, sales engineers and other overlay sales team members working together during a sales cycle. Sales teams require effective collaboration to achieve their targets. The sales collaboration may happen over various mediums such as phone, email, instant messenger and different enterprise applications used for tracking sales opportunities, contacts, solution, configuration and pricing information.

The data exchanged between sales team members during a sales cycle is confidential, and an information leak on public sites can lead to losing a sales opportunity. Sales collaboration using public social networking sites therefore poses a threat to data security. Instead, many enterprises prefer to use internal social networking sites which provide collaboration using the Software as a Service (SaaS) model to make sure the company data is confidential and not accessible by users outside the company.

Impact on Enterprise Platforms and Applications

The potential of using social media to increase sales productivity has influenced many companies providing Enterprise products and platforms to reposition their product portfolio with social media capabilities. Gartner has predicted one of the changes to observe in 2010 is how enterprise platforms will start adopting social networking

concepts. Enterprise social software is helping companies to increase the collaboration and productivity within organizations. Companies like Salesforce.com, Microsoft, and Oracle are providing social media capabilities in their enterprise products.

Salesforce.Com

Salesforce.com is adding social media capabilities to their platform with a new function called “chatter”. The chatter platform adds collaboration capabilities with Twitter and Facebook like feeds, notifications, and groups in Salesforce.com. The notifications are created by applications running on the Salesforce.com platform and other enterprise applications using chatter APIs. The chatter APIs will help enterprise applications to enable social media capabilities and integrate with the chatter platform. The chatter platform allows sales teams to share order status, revenue and booking details, information about opportunities, knowledge about customers, and market trends. It provides users with the ability to follow the updates to enterprise data which they are allowed to access. When events occur which update the data, the chatter platform will provide notifications in the user’s homepage with details.

Figure-1: Personalized dashboard to manage customers, sales opportunities, and tasks

Salesforce.com: Sales Cloud with Chatter



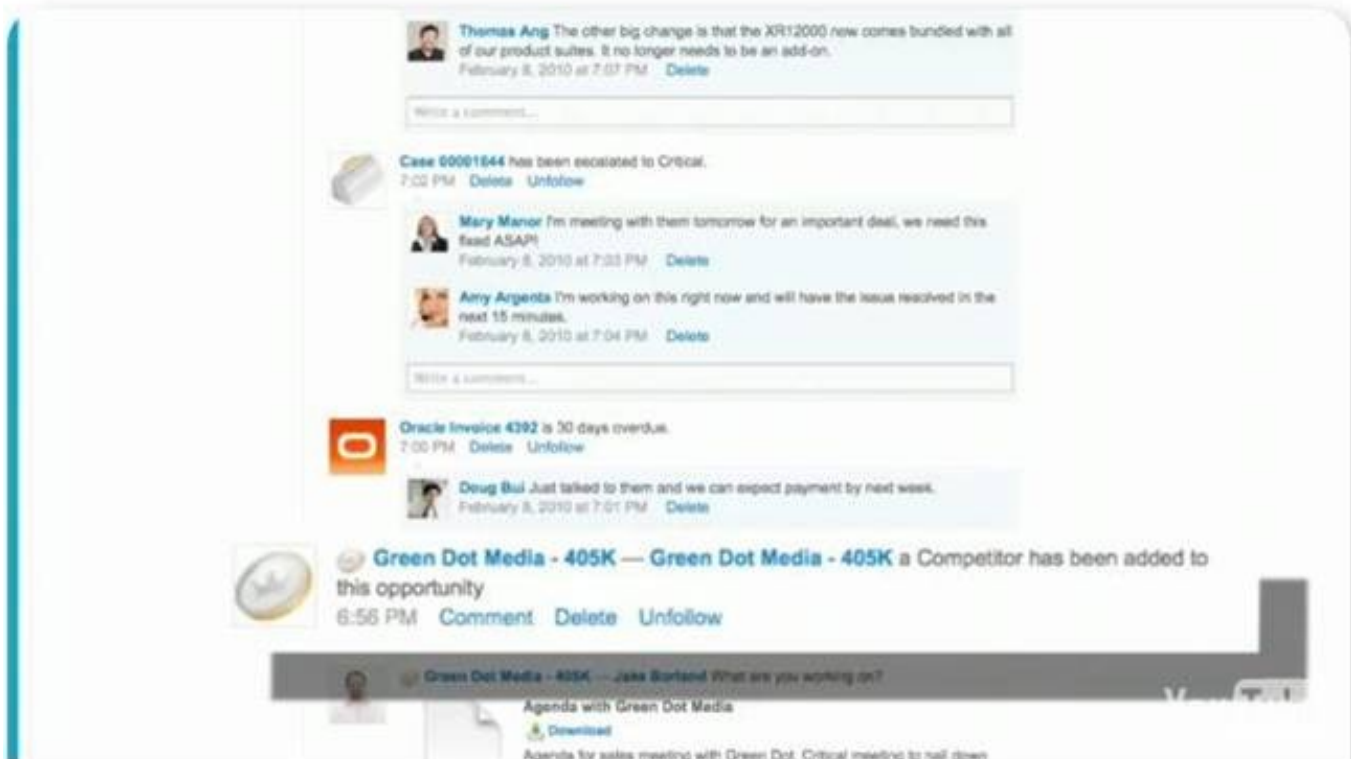
Figure-2: Ability to follow other colleagues and also any enterprise data from different applications

Salesforce.com: Sales Cloud with Chatter



Figure-3: Notifications generated by user comments and data updated by applications

Salesforce.com: Sales Cloud with Chatter



Oracle

Oracle has provided integration with social networking websites in social CRM products like Oracle CRM Sales Prospector. Oracle CRM Sales Prospector allows sales teams to find contacts in Facebook and LinkedIn who can help them get in touch with prospects.

Microsoft SharePoint

Microsoft SharePoint allows users to create their profile, follow colleagues with certain subject matter expertise, manage office documents, and collaborate with other colleagues by using Wikis, blogging, and subscribing to RSS feeds.

Social media will continue to impact the architecture and business processes of in-house enterprise applications. The in-house applications will be required to integrate with social media platforms hosted either within enterprise or hosted outside with a SaaS platform like Salesforce.com. Traditional enterprise platforms have begun adding the ability to do the following to leverage social networking benefits:

- Create user profiles, blogging, podcasting, wikis, manage contacts
- Search contacts of contacts and add them to contact list
- Follow specific users and the data generated by enterprise applications
- Collaboratively create user content and subscribe to user-generated data as RSS feeds
- Join users or groups with certain interests
- Connect to subject matter experts within the organization to solve business problems

Conclusion

Social networking capabilities provide the ability to manage the knowledge base regarding customers, prospects, and subject matter experts within an organization. It allows the sales team to use this information to increase sales, better serve customers, and improve productivity. Businesses need to start leveraging social media to develop a competitive advantage by increasing the effectiveness of their sales force and marketing campaigns.

Enterprise IT organizations face the challenging decision of whether to integrate social networking capabilities through an in-house effort or to wait for large-scale enterprise platforms to provide required the social networking capabilities. One thing is for certain, given the momentum of web 2.0 and social networking, enterprise platforms will need to be influenced by these new social networking capabilities, and enterprise IT organizations will need to develop a convergence strategy for the long-run enterprise platform migration.

References

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