


Corporate facebook

Social media from an Australian perspective



You've heard all the hype about social media from Twitter to Facebook, YouTube to Wikipedia, blogs, podcasts and instant messaging. If you are like the majority of HR directors at corporations across the country, you are probably also starting to hear rumblings from within your own organisation, as people—regardless of their role or position—struggle with the role social media should play in your organisation.

The challenges are huge and varied, but so too are the potential returns. Social media can allow you to connect directly with your existing customers, potential customers and new hires. It can reinforce your company's brand and marketing messages or simply create communities of like minded employees. Ultimately it helps improve relationships at all connection points between employees within organisations and the outside world.

Social media is here to stay and is already having an impact on business and the community at large. Take Twitter for example, used by Brian Hartzler, the former CEO of ANZ Retail Banking, and the first local CEO to experiment with Twitter to better engage with his customers.

"There's no doubt that social networking is not only growing in take-up, but in importance as a channel. Twitter is unlike any other social media vehicle because its immediate, honest and no-nonsense environment really allows you to feel the pulse of the community." *Brian Hartzler, former CEO, ANZ Retail Banking*

Email transformed business communication in the 1990s and social media is transforming business today. If you can't see it, you are not looking in the right places. Employees are embracing social media right now and companies are struggling to catch up.

What is social media?

With all of the discussion about social media, many of the companies we talk to struggle to define it. Put simply, social media is two-way, interactive online communication between groups of like-minded individuals. The Wikipedia definition is “A shift in how people discover, read and share news, information and content; it supports the human need for social interaction with technology, transforming broadcast media monologues (one to many) into social media dialogues (many to many).”

The two key factors are:

- Making all of the information exchanges interactive: think recommendations from friends rather than reading guide books, and being able to discuss them online.
- Making all information easy to access: think bulletin boards rather than mailed brochures, where you can post and broadcast messages to your subscriber base.

Social media tools

Social media tools are diverse and have different purposes. Clients often ask us where to start on their social media journey. And we respond—all tools have their own benefits and limitations.

Figure 01. Forms of social media tools

Blogs	Podcasts
Wikis	Online Video
My Sites	Team Sites
Instant Messaging	Social Networks
Presence	Status
Comments	Discussions

Many organisations struggle with social media because they don't know where or how to begin using it. Typically someone suggests piloting a tool to see how it works, IT rolls it out and that's it. In most cases there is no overarching strategy or plan for how to harness the benefits of social media and how to track whether social media projects have been successful. Companies are now asking—what is the bigger picture? What are the risks of having multiple systems in a permanent pilot?

Did you know?

Figure 02. Australian social media statistics

Internet users	17,033,826
Internet penetration rate	80.1%
No. of social media users	9mn
Average time user spends on social media per month	>7 hours (highest in the world)
Average time user spends on Facebook per month	7.75 hours
Annual % growth of Facebook's use as of June 2009	95%
Percentage of internet users who have downloaded a podcast	40%
Percentage of internet users who subscribe to RSS feeds	25%
No. of online forum users as % of internet population	86%

Sources: AC Nielsen, ComScore., Internet World Stats

Social media matters – collaborate, communicate, motivate your workforce

Australian companies are uniquely placed to take advantage of the benefits social media delivers.

- 1. It eliminates the tyranny of distance.** Being online and global, your physical location is irrelevant. Australian companies have been challenged in the past, as physical location has been a major and costly stumbling block that inhibits the ability for employees to actively work together and share knowledge. By using social media, everyone has equal access regardless of whether you are in the next office or across the globe.
- 2. It decreases reliance on email.** Information is in open forums and ready to be accessed or searched. This stops email systems getting clogged up, and it's much easier to search for and share information globally.
- 3. It promotes reuse of information and tools.** This saves companies money by increasing productivity. Employees can learn from the successes and lessons of others instead of learning things the hard way! In effect, you stop having to reinvent the wheel around the globe. Instead you share best practice. This in turn leads to increased efficiency by improving internal processes.

Social media is all about connecting people. Within organisations, this can take two forms:

- Groups of individuals who connect for a specific business purpose.
- Groups of individuals who share common interests.

Either way, it's really about the relationships and social media gives individuals the ability to build, develop and maintain those relationships. Employees are seeking out social media technologies and, if you don't supply them, they will find it externally, often in an uncontrolled unsafe environment.

Our proximity to Asia also needs to be considered; Australian business transfers a high degree of knowledge to Asia, which has allowed Australian companies to flourish. However, this can present difficulties and companies who have failed to make this work typically cite cultural differences, poor support, and the inability to connect or establish a rapport. In Asia, relationships are everything and social media is all about connecting, collaborating and maintaining relationships. Asia is embracing social media with some of the fastest adoption rates globally. In China alone, for example, there are 160 million active Internet users. Nearly 70% belong to a social network and over 90% have used social media technologies.

Corporate Australia needs to embrace social media to continue to promote connections in Asia. Australia has a reputation of being innovative and adopting new technologies—our people are seen as being flexible and adaptable and Australia must again gain competitive advantage by being an early adopter.

Measuring success

One fact that a number of organisations tend to overlook is that employees will participate differently when it comes to social media. This is not dissimilar to the way employees currently interact in different styles in real life settings. You will have those who actively contribute regularly, your occasional contributors, regular consumers and occasional consumers along with those who simply ignore the communications.

We can help you determine a holistic social strategy for your organisation, and how to determine whether it's working and ways you can improve along the way to ensure you harness the power of social media.

Further information

Additional information on this subject can be found in our recent article on [Leveraging the Power of Social Networking](#) or if you would like to discuss this subject in more detail, please contact:

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