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Social Media at Work

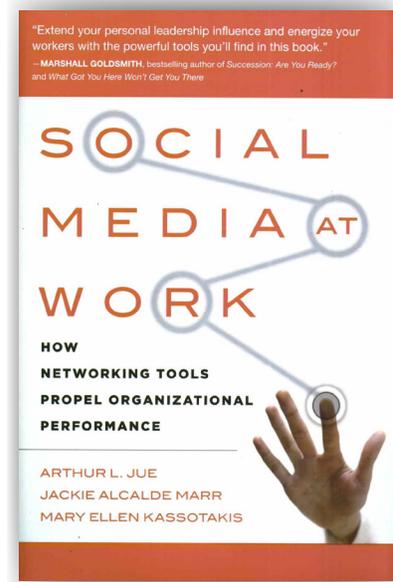
How Networking Tools Propel Organizational Performance

Arthur L. Jue, Jackie Alcalde Marr,
and Mary Ellen Kassotakis

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INTRODUCTION

Today's workforce is more diverse than ever. In order to succeed, employees from different age groups, geographic locations, ethnic backgrounds, and levels of industry experience must learn to work together toward a common vision. To address this challenge, savvy businesses are looking to the emerging world of social media, a set of software tools that allows users to build relationships and solve problems together.

Social Media at Work, by Arthur L. Jue, Jackie Alcalde Marr, and Mary Ellen Kassotakis, is a comprehensive guide for businesses hoping to foster collaboration, communication, and contribution among employees and leadership. In the book, the authors outline the benefits of social media and provide step-by-step processes for designing and implementing specific strategies that harness its power. The book's framework draws on the vast experience of its authors, three organizational development gurus from Oracle.

THE CHANGING BUSINESS LANDSCAPE

The term "social media" refers to the widely accessible electronic tools that allow anyone to publish and access information, collaborate on a common effort, or build relationships. While the term is relatively broad, the tools that often come to mind are discussion forums, blogs, wikis, podcasts, and comprehensive social networking sites. Today, the most well-known social media tools are Facebook, MySpace, and LinkedIn for social networking; Flickr and Snapfish for photosharing; Wikipedia for knowledge-sharing and collaboration; and Blogger and Wordpress for blogging. Three major forces have contributed to the explosive growth of social media:

1. The nature of the business environment
2. Changing workforce demographics
3. Advancements in social media technology

THE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

Businesses today must adapt themselves to an unprecedented, accelerated rate of change. The current business environment is the most complex in history, and it forces organizations to reconsider their traditional ideas about power, commerce, and the acquisition or expenditure of resources. Executives have identified several challenges that have arisen as a result of this new business environment, the most well-known of which include: connecting with virtual team members across time zones, building teamwork, and operating across geographies and functions.

For many executives, social media may be the solution to all three of these challenges. Social media tools allow workers to fully participate in projects with coworkers from all over the globe. It also satisfies employees' need to feel connected to a larger whole, and gives them a sense of common identity, purpose, and shared cultural experience.

A new type of career life cycle is also having an effect on the modern work environment. Workers, especially young ones, are moving in and out of jobs more quickly, and they are demanding more flexibility from their employers. Part-time work, job-sharing, leaves of absence, outsourcing, contract work, and rehiring have all become more common over the past few decades, and they will continue to do so in the future. Younger employees see their careers not as a ladder but rather as a lattice or scaffold, which leaves them free to move not only up and down but also horizontally.

WORKFORCE DEMOGRAPHICS

Today's workforce is composed of four different generations, each with its own expectations and preferences about their jobs. The four generations are:

1. *Traditionalists* – Born between 1900 and 1945, the Traditionalists value stability and security.
2. *Baby Boomers* – Born between 1946 and 1964, the Baby Boomers value teamwork and human rights.
3. *Generation X* – Born between 1965 and 1976, Generation X values empowerment and is willing to rethink common rules and demand corporate responsibility.
4. *Generation Y* – Born between 1977 and 2000, Gen-

KEY CONCEPTS

There are several guidelines for leaders looking to design strategies around social media tools:

- Key players in social media include blogs, wikis, social media sites, discussion forums, microblogs, and podcasts, among others.
- Three major forces have contributed to the growth of social media: the new business environment, changing workforce demographics, and advancements in social software technology.
- Social media makes a difference in attracting and retaining employees, innovation and knowledge creation, operational efficiency, talent development, and employee engagement.
- Implementing a social media strategy requires gathering information, clarifying objectives, designing the strategy, implementing the strategy, measuring outcomes, and leveraging learning.
- Four business practices are vital: gaining commitment from others, communicating to build trust, working the system, and gaining momentum throughout the process.



Information about the authors and subject:
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eration Y values technology, personal growth, and social activism.

The Baby Boomer generation is quickly approaching traditional retirement age. This will create a significant void in the nation's workforce, especially in senior management. Many companies expect to lose 50 percent of their senior managers, and most of these companies do not have effective succession plans in place. In order to address this issue, many organizations will be forced to reach out to the workers of Generation Y.

The Generation Y workforce is huge—it claims more than two billion people across the globe. These workers are extremely comfortable with technology, and most will demand instant access to information and real-time communication in the workplace. Generation Y tends to trust people rather than institutions, and

most of them say that the social aspects of work are very important to their job satisfaction. A significant portion of workers who have quit explain that they did so due to feelings of isolation or disconnectedness. All of these features make social media an ideal way to reach the knowledge-hungry workers of Generation Y.

Today, social media encompasses all the Internet-enabled capabilities for communicating through different means—audio, video, text, images, and every other combination or permutation imaginable.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Arthur L. Jue, D.M., MBA/TM, CCD, is the director of Global Intelligence & Operations for Organization and Talent Development at Oracle. He has extensive senior leadership experience in Fortune 100 companies, teaches at the graduate level, speaks frequently, and publishes widely.

Jackie Alcalde Marr, MHROD, CPCC, is the director of Organization & Talent Development for Oracle, North America. She has worked with Fortune 100 organizations in Europe, Latin America, and Asia. She is also a certified leadership coach and teaches at the University of San Francisco and Drexel University.

Mary Ellen Kassotakis, Ed.D., MBA, CPCC, CPT, leads the Leadership Development Center of Expertise within Oracle's Global Organization & Talent Development group. She is certified as a leadership coach and as a Human Performance Technologist. Mary Ellen is also an adjunct instructor at Drexel University.

SOCIAL MEDIA TECHNOLOGY

Social media can take a variety of forms, and each one can be used in a variety of ways both inside and outside of the workplace. It is important to note that different people use social media in different ways. While some users are heavy contributors, others are merely spectators who prefer to absorb information and observe social activity.

Short for "web log," a *blog* is an online public journal that typically invites responsive comments from readers. Entries in a blog are called posts, and they often include musings on topics about which the author is passionate. Readers can submit comments to augment the author's ideas, praise them, or criticize them. In a large organization, blogs can be an excellent way for executives to reach employees and put a personal spin on happenings in the company. In addition, teams in an organization can use blogs to attack a problem: each team member posts his or her thoughts about a challenge, and everyone learns from one another. Blogs are especially useful in non-profit organizations where they can be used to inspire and engage the team.

Borrowing the Hawaiian word for "quick," a *wiki* is a Web site that can be edited or updated by multiple users. The most well-known wiki site is Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia created by users passionate about sharing their expertise on a vast array of topics. Free online tools allow anyone to create a wiki, and wiki privacy settings can be adjusted based on the needs of its users. In an organization, wikis can be used to collaborate on a grand scale: team members can edit and discuss project pages any time of day, accelerating the speed of innovation and strengthening the relationships between workers.

Social networking sites such as Facebook allow users to share information and search for others, the goal being the creation of connections and relationships. Social networking sites also encourage people to form groups based on common interests; the members of these groups are often enthusiastic about sharing their expertise and helping others solve problems. Questions can be posted on group discussion boards, often garnering instant feedback. These sites also offer the opportunity for unexpected reach: if a piece of information is posted to a small group, someone in the group may repost it to a much larger online community.

Social networking sites allow users to create a snapshot of their personality and interests, and posting this information implicitly invites others to reach out to them. Introductions can be made on the basis of anything from geographic location to favorite movie.

The lines are blurring between different social media because they can be combined, embedded, and intertwined. In today's social networking efforts, organizations can weave together all sorts of social media to serve their needs.

In an organization, social networking sites can serve a variety of purposes. Job hunters can post online resumes that draw attention to their talents and experience. Organizations can survey current workers for the purpose of succession planning. Most significantly, social networking sites can be used to connect people in an organization, whether across the room or across the globe so they can contribute their knowledge and expertise where it is most needed.

Discussion forums are online locations where users can post questions to the public or to a specific community. Discussion forums were quickly adopted by major retailers; users are often encouraged to write reviews of products, which helps others make confident purchases. In an organization, forums are simple ways for employees to help each other solve problems or discuss company life. Forums can help reduce the load on help desk resources, and savvy companies may use forums to assist in learning and development strategies.

A *microblog* is a blog that limits posts to 140 charac-

ters or less, encouraging users to post short thoughts throughout the day. The most well-known microblogging site is Twitter, which allows users to “follow” their friends and receive updates through a computer or phone. In an organization, microblogging can be used by teams to communicate key ideas no matter where they are or what they are doing.

A *podcast* is a downloadable audio file that is recorded and uploaded to an internet server. Podcasts often include spoken lectures, which can be used by companies to share the latest strategy, spotlight recent successes, or inform employees of new regulations. Podcasts are especially useful to global organizations with mobile employees, as these employees are usually comfortable locating and downloading digital files for use in their daily work. Podcasts are powerful educational tools, especially because they can be easily shared between workers.

Web conferencing is already a staple of everyday operations in large companies. Online conferencing allows people in different geographic locations to see the same computer screen in real-time, and oftentimes a live-chat feature is included. While video conferencing requires specialized equipment, web conferencing only requires that all participants have a working internet connection.

A *virtual world* is a complex simulated environment in which each user controls an avatar, or digital representation of himself or herself. The most popular virtual world is Second Life, which has been used extensively by both large corporations and academic institutions. Second Life can be used to hold meetings, teach classes, or simply provide an online environment for employees to socialize. Some tech-savvy companies have begun selling their products in virtual worlds, generating extra revenue and visibility.

Two tools that can be used to navigate social media efficiently are *tagging* and *RSS* (Really Simple Syndication) *feeds*. Tagging assigns keywords to pieces of information so that search functions can easily locate the information later. RSS feeds allow users to be notified every time a specified website is changed or updated. The new information from the user's favorite sites is presented in one

place, saving time and increasing efficiency.

WHERE SOCIAL MEDIA HAS AN IMPACT

In the workplace, social media makes a difference in five main areas:

1. Attracting and retaining the best employees
2. Innovation and knowledge creation
3. Operational efficiency
4. Talent development
5. Employee engagement

Attracting and retaining the right employees can be a daunting task, especially in this day and age, but social media provides companies with a connection to the tech-savvy workers of Generation Y. Younger employees work to live rather than live to work, and they expect their jobs to provide ongoing learning experiences and opportunities to contribute. Advertising on social media sites can help reach these workers, but keeping them is another challenge altogether.

In order to help these workers assimilate into the company quickly, it is vital that they be immediately connected with a network of colleagues. Aside from readying a desk, phone, and Internet connection on day one, social media can be used to speed along the onboarding process. Workers who feel connected to others and have a sense of common goals are more likely to stay with the company, even considering today's increasingly dynamic career life cycle.

Innovation is primarily fueled by effective collaboration and the creation of *social capital*: the advantageous connections between people. Wikis are excellent platforms on which people can collaborate, and social networking sites are excellent places to find collaborators. A new collective wisdom emerges when workers share knowledge, allowing for improved ideas, products, and services, as well as more effective business decisions.

Social media has a measurable impact on operational efficiency. A study by Dynamic Markets revealed

that social media increases the efficiency of 65 percent of workers worldwide. A significant amount of this extra productivity is derived from social media's ability to quickly familiarize new workers with their company and coworkers.

Talent creation can benefit from the use of social media because it enables people to learn from each other, illuminates hidden knowledge, and helps extend the learning process over time. Furthermore, online tools allow workers to continue learning beyond any scheduled events. Today, online learning is a common phenomenon: the Dynamic Markets survey found that 71 percent of companies reported using Web 2.0 tools in their training efforts.

In addition, social media keeps people engaged and motivated. In order to remain satisfied with their jobs, employees must feel that they are a part of something larger than themselves, and they must be able to contribute in some meaningful way. Companies that use social media build a culture of contribution that values the ideas of every single employee, allowing them to make a difference in both big and small ways. The satisfaction that employees gain through continuous contribution is a key factor in retention, especially for younger workers.

An increasing number of organizations are exploring how social media can help them become and remain competitive among their peers. Our increasingly complex environment demands that we employ tools to help us stay agile and adaptable.

EXAMPLES FROM TRAILBLAZERS

A wide variety of companies have already harnessed the power of social media to attract workers, foster innovation, increase efficiency, develop talent, and engage employees. These trailblazers have weighed the risks and rewards of implementing social media, and have ultimately found great success in the workplace, both tangible and intangible.

At networking software company Cisco, social media is an integral part of company culture. Cisco claimed to be the first company to take orders and offer support online. The company also uses web technology to reduce travel costs by offering online training.

Cisco's "Nerd Lunch" program uses telepresence technology to share information between its operations in Texas, California, and beyond.

The BT Group, a UK-based telecommunications company, has used social media to build relationships in creative new ways. Several years ago, employees were given the opportunity to converse with the previous CEO every six weeks via a 90-minute online chat session. The company also uses an internal wiki called "BTPedia," as well as a blog that allows employees and customers to keep up on company news and add their thoughts through comments.

Make no mistake; the CIA is not lacking candidates. This is an organization that truly searches for the best and brightest young talent. But by using social media technologies, it is possibly more likely to attract the kind of tech-savvy candidates it seeks.

In addition to the trailblazers highlighted, many other organizations are also taking advantage of these tools. The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is always looking for tech-savvy candidates, making social media an ideal connection channel. Oracle has reached out to female workers with its OWL initiative (Oracle's Women's Leadership), a thriving talent development program. OWL uses cutting-edge social software tools that give members access to announcements, reading suggestions, links to industry resources, and links to professional career coaches. The online portal is also supplemented by chat and forum discussion features, making communication and learning both fast and easy. Even the Roman Catholic Church has jumped on the social media bandwagon, offering a YouTube channel that allows worshippers to keep up with the activities of the pope. The Church hopes that new technology will encourage young Catholics to "bring the witness of their faith to the digital world."

Many companies have used social media to foster innovation and knowledge creation. Best Buy's Geek Squad uses wikis, video games, and other unorthodox technologies to help employees manage progress, exchange service tips, and even contribute to product development and marketing. The Geek Squad wiki was used to design a flash drive with a retractable USB connector, earning the group several technical design awards. Health organization Phil-

ips has begun experimenting with Second Life for its product developments in the area of lighting. Oracle uses wikis extensively in its daily operations and even has its own microblogging service, Oratweet. These tools allow Oracle team members to contribute to projects anytime, anywhere.

One of the most groundbreaking uses of social media was that of the Obama campaign in 2008. Through the integration of several networking tools, the campaign made it easy for supporters to donate money, fight smear campaigns, and organize locally. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS Church) now

uses podcasts to broadcast the Church's semiannual conference in Salt Lake City, giving church followers an insider's look at their leaders and Church processes.

Several companies are using social media to help employees and students learn. Detroit's Henry Ford Hospital made news when it broadcast a brain surgery on YouTube, which was viewed by medical students nationwide. This broadcast gave students a look not only into the technical processes of the surgery, but also into the intuitive decision-making processes of the head surgeon. Oracle's Global Leadership Academy is another example of success in talent development; the program is aimed at senior leaders and uses a wiki, discussion forum, and live web seminar sessions to help develop leadership skills and ensure the safety of Oracle's future.

In order to engage employees, Best Buy created an internal social networking community called Blue Shirt Nation, which reinforces the company's emphasis on mentoring. Oracle took similar measures by creating OracleConnect, a social networking site that allows users to create profiles, share information, and search for others in the company. IBM's Beehive is yet another example; this social networking tool includes popular features such as "top five" lists, which helps workers connect with each other based on interests and light discussions.

Each of these trailblazers has used social media to connect workers in creative ways. When it comes time to design a social media strategy, it can be difficult

to choose what tools may be necessary. Companies looking to communicate might first investigate the use of a blog. Workers who want to collaborate may benefit from a wiki. Organizations that want to bring their employees closer together might consider an internal social networking site. When making a decision, it is critical to stick to the company's purpose, goals, and key strategies.

PUTTING SOCIAL MEDIA TO WORK

Generally, social media takes hold in an organization in one of three ways:

1. **“all-hands-on-deck” approach** — leadership mandates a complete and immediate change
2. **“phased” approach** — change is implemented gradually over time
3. **“bubble-up” approach**— change begins at the bottom of the corporate ladder and works its way up.

Each strategy offers advantages and disadvantages. The “all-hands-on-deck” approach is likely to work best in small organizations that have very homogenous workforces. This strategy is also best for tech-savvy workforces with employees who hunger for common processes and infrastructure. The “phased” approach is often used because it is the least disruptive to daily workflow. Small groups within an organization become familiar with the new tools one at a time, resulting in small tremors rather than a major organizational earthquake.

The “bubble-up” approach is often the best strategy for large organizations. This approach consists of three phases: pioneering, exploring, and leveraging. The process begins with pioneers who experiment with the new tools and spread the word. Exploration begins to take place in small subgroups until a critical mass is achieved in the organization. At this point, new tools are leveraged for even greater success.

The process for implementing social media strategies can be broken down into five steps:

1. **Get intelligence**
2. **Clarify objectives**

3. **Design strategies**
4. **Implement the plan**
5. **Measure outcomes**
6. **Leverage learning**

Companies must begin their social media efforts by gathering intelligence about both their environment and their organization. SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) is a useful tool that can help a company make better decisions in the strategic planning process. A worker's age, industry experience, and level of comfort with new technology, as well as the organization's history of success with large-change efforts are all important pieces of information that can be used to make decisions about the company's social media strategy.

In order to clarify objectives, a company must articulate how social networking strategies will lead to success, and it must be able to measure the degree to which the company is achieving the desired outcome. One of the best tools for clarifying strategy is the Balanced Scorecard, a summary of the organization's strategy that includes relevant metrics and data.

The successful use of social media is not about technology; it's about people. It is about the in-between: relationships and connections that catapult ideas, energy, and purpose.

When designing a social media strategy, it is important for the company to ask the following questions:

- Which social media tools can best help us achieve our business strategy?
- Who will be involved, and when will it occur?
- What training is needed for different groups so that the tools can be used effectively?
- Are there any quick wins that can be gained in the process?
- How will progress be measured?
- How will success be communicated?

It is important to remember that the strategy does not have to be perfect. Just like any other business

plan, social media strategies evolve over time.

Implementing the strategy itself is nothing more than putting plans into action. In this stage, companies may opt to work with a business partner, which presents some special considerations. When selecting such a partner, a company should gather information about the partner's experience in social media, their ability to share knowledge with employees, and their overall vision for the project, as well as technical details such as their plans for data storage, backup, recovery, and security.

We all must avoid contributing to the modern problem of information overload. If left unchecked, social media can become just another source of 'information noise.'

As soon as the plan has been implemented, companies should measure the impact of the strategy. Organizations must determine if they have implemented the plan they designed, if social media is helping to achieve the organization's key objectives, and if the new work process is producing the required output. The Balanced Scorecard can help address each of these issues.

The final step of the process is to leverage learning—in other words, to reapply the learning that has taken place. This is the stage in which plans evolve according to the strengths and weaknesses of the strategy, giving everyone the opportunity to pause and reflect on the change that has taken place.

This six-step process for implementing social media strategy is useless without the support of effective practices that consider human dynamics. Four practices in particular can help companies maintain their performance and encourage employee commitment to the new strategy:

1. **Involve others for commitment**
2. **Communicate to build trust**
3. **Work the system**
4. **Gain momentum**

In order to gain commitment from others, a company must first identify its stakeholders—the people who will be affected by the new use of social media in the organization. Stakeholders should be involved in

the planning and implementation stages so that they understand how social media can increase personal and organizational effectiveness. It is also crucial to secure sponsorship from leaders. Enthusiastic leaders can publicly pledge their support, provide resources, remove barriers to success, and make key decisions on a budget. Their support is often vital to the success of a strategy, especially if they step forward early.

Communication is necessary throughout the implementation process; without it, employees who lack necessary information will often fill the void with rumors, conjecture, and creative stories.

Leaders should be honest with workers and openly acknowledge that some of their relationships, processes, and tools will be undergoing a change. Targeted

messages are an effective means of reaching wide audiences, while generic "one-size-fits-all" messages are often ineffective, especially since they disregard the differences between generations in the workforce. While Generation Y workers may approve of efforts to be progressive, Traditionalists will need to hear how the new strategy will affect the bottom line and increase productivity. Good communication also utilizes "sticky" messages—messages that employees can and will remember easily.

For a strategy to be effective, leaders must "work the system," or understand how the interdependent parts of the organization will respond to change. Companies that have implemented social media strategies often find that they need to spell out the strategy in explicit detail, or else risk frustration from employees who cling to old processes and norms. Companies must also consider the unintended consequences of implementation, such as resistance from those who feel threatened by new information channels. The organization should take a moment to identify some of the negative consequences that social media can have on the company or its employees.

Generating momentum is an important step, and it can begin by creating "small wins," or short-term, easily achievable goals. Traditionalists in particular will want early evidence that the strategy is working. One tactic to increase momentum is to "burn the ships," or create a point of no return in the strategy. Some strategies can

only move forward when employees are left with no choice but to embrace the new practices and norms.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Social media is here to stay, and its benefits and applications will only continue to grow in number. At some point, social media will not be a competitive advantage; it will be a “table stake”—a way of working necessary to attract and retain employees in the 21st century. Trailblazers will continue to reap the benefits of social media, inspiring followers to design and implement strategies of their own. Social media will help foster diversity in the workplace, whether in terms of age, race, gender, or geographic location. Shared knowledge will become a sort of currency; the wealthiest companies will be those that best use the available knowledge to improve their products and services. Finally, social media will begin to blur the line between the internal and external aspects of a company. Organizations will be defined by their sense of community rather than by their formal legal structures.

Social media itself will also continue to change. As social software tools become more complex and diverse, users will demand more simplicity and integration. Experts predict that people will eventually organize all of their online information into a single location: the “Centralized Me.”

Society will continue to use these tools in increasingly creative ways. Social media has already begun to make connections between police departments and concerned citizens; some neighborhoods grant the police access to live surveillance streams that can help apprehend criminals and keep people safe. Social media has already changed the face of U.S. political campaigns, and elections will continue to be impacted by effective use of these tools. Social media will boost the capabilities of healthcare, an industry desperately in need of qualified, trained personnel and a way to share information for quality patient care.

Most importantly, however, social media will help people band together across the globe. Because of these new technologies, individuals can have significant impact on the issues facing their own countries and the world as a whole. Companies willing to dive into social media despite the risks will reap the ben-

efits of increased collaboration, communication, and contribution.



FEATURES OF THE BOOK

Reading Time: 4-5 hours, 222 pages

Social Media at Work is a practical, step-by-step guide to the design and implementation of social media strategies in the workplace. The book begins by outlining the benefits of social media, then goes on to offer strategic advice based on thorough research and the authors’ experiences.

Each chapter in the book is supported by special “trailblazer” sections, which examine success stories from a wide variety of industries. The book places special emphasis on attracting and retaining young workers, as well as catering to the needs of older workers. Though the book is intended for those in organization development and leadership positions, employees at all levels can use this text as a strong case for the integration of social media in just about any organization.

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