

"Getting into" social software

...Take the experience of IBM

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IBM® Lotus® Connections brings to the world the first integrated social computing software for business, but IBM's employees have been using the core capabilities for some time. Having experienced many of the benefits, behaviors and practicalities of adopting social computing in its own environment, IBM can offer customers some insights on WHY to adopt, WHAT to expect, and HOW to prepare.

IBMers know from experience the value of Lotus Connections

As has been widely communicated, Lotus Connections encompasses five discrete components: Profiles, Blogs, Dogear (social bookmarking), Communities, and Activities. Each of these has enjoyed an active life in some form within IBM prior to current incarnation in the Lotus Connections product and has proved its value through extensive use.

Profiles derives from the online corporate directory IBM created for itself 10 years ago to help its employees locate people and find their phone numbers. The original developers saw that by providing programming access to the data, the directory would also become a hub for other applications and connections across IBM. So it was designed from the start not just as a phone book, but as a programming component of what we would today call social software.

Over time this application (known as "Blue Pages"), has grown to include employees' photos and information on their skills, interests, work associates and reporting structures - creating rich online personas. Blue Pages currently holds 475,000 profiles, serves 3.5 million searches per week, and is an indispensable reference for finding and meeting up with the right people throughout the company.

For the Profiles component in the Lotus Connections product, IBM has taken the defining elements of Blue Pages and generalized them for the customer's option. Every company will have its own directory structure, way of managing its directory, and kinds of attributes it wants to profile. But however customized, Profiles can constitute the social computing core.

Blogging was introduced at IBM four years ago as a way to give employees a voice, let them share their projects and work experience, and find others with similar interests. Blogs give people a new way to think together in depth on mutual concerns, across geographic and organizational boundaries. On a recent day IBM had roughly 30,000 individual blogs and 400 group blogs, with 75,000 entries, 70,000 comments, and 30,000 subject tags. This widespread interaction on focused topics has increased knowledge transfer and collaborative idea generation across the enterprise.

Employees can go to a single location, Blog Central, to search or browse on all the blogs without having to recall individual URLs. This facility enables searching by content, by blog owner, or by tag, and maintains a list of the most used tags which can be filtered for discrete time periods. The Blog component of Lotus Connections is very close to the well-exercised functionality of IBM's internal blogging system.

Dogear, a shared bookmarking system on a company intranet site, is in wide use now within IBM. It was spearheaded by people in research who wanted the benefit of social bookmarking inside the firewall, with access to both intranet and Internet resources. What makes Dogear especially relevant in a business setting is connection to the enterprise directory. In this context, tags are associated with people who are known or are of interest due to their expertise and professional role. When real identities are merged with tagging, users can search for things both by people and by tag. IBM's internal Dogear system presently has over 300,000 bookmarks internal and external information sources pre-qualified and tagged by colleagues.

Communities enables people to link up with each other in stable groups based on common interests. Self-defined and managed, online communities give groups an easy way to exchange information, post events, and collaborate on joint objectives. A community might consist entirely of employees or also include external participants. A number of tools supporting group interactions and team projects that have been in use within IBM for some time have fed into the Communities component of Lotus Connections. There are over 900 registered communities currently at IBM.

Activities was first created by Lotus research and then productized by development. Its purpose is to assemble the information accrued in the course of a business activity, regardless of how it has been generated. I.e., the information relevant to a particular project or action may reside in e-mails, instant messages, documents, presentations or other vehicles, and may originate from multiple team members and other sources. But in Activities all this content is pulled together and presented to the activity participants in an orderly sequence for their shared use. The information can also be captured in templates to guide new instances of the same type of activity. Use of this tool in IBM grew by 150 percent over the second half of 2006 to 10,000 activities, 60,000 entries, and 32,000 users.

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Listen to a seasoned professional: Luis Suarez



Known both in and outside of IBM as a knowledge management guru, community builder, and social computing evangelist, Luis Suarez has had a long history working with Lotus collaboration technologies. In recent years he has been teaching people about social computing through workshops and lectures, and through his blog. Suarez is now based in IBM's Global Technology Services organization where he supports over 100 online communities.

Most of the people Suarez supports are working remotely, at customer sites, or at home or mobile locations. As consultants, they must stay up on the latest thinking and best practices. Suarez encourages them to share their knowledge with each other, helps them build the communities they belong to, and shows them how to leverage the social computing tools - in most cases leading by example.

Suarez himself has been using capabilities now in the Lotus Connections product for some time and testifies to the advantages. He can *work smarter* in that he can share more information with more people, with a lot less effort. He *saves time* because he can refer people who come to him for information on topics to the tags in his blog, and his blog preserves valuable written outputs for further reuse.

He can *extend his network*. "I have been in the company for 10 years," says Suarez. "In the almost four years I've been using blogs I've gotten to know two to three times the number of people I knew in the six years when I wasn't blogging, even though I've gone from working in the office surrounded by colleagues to working at home in the middle of nowhere."

Social computing enables him to *be known and heard* outside of IBM as well as in. His blog has given him visibility in the marketplace as he converses with others about what IBM is doing with social computing and knowledge management. This exposure *opens up* opportunities. Suarez gets approached by people looking for advice and referrals as well as many invitations to speak or participate in events on subjects he has written about in his blog. Sharing his knowledge in external venues connects him with other cognoscenti he can learn from, and to whom he can bring IBM's perspective.

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Social computing transforms the Knowledge Management (KM) paradigm

Suarez has been involved with knowledge management since 2000, but the attitude towards it since then has become quite negative because the old methods didn't work very well. When Suarez first encountered social computing, he said to himself, "This is it. This is what is going to bring KM back into the spotlight because it allows businesses to place their focus where it should have been from the beginning - not on the tools, not on the processes, but on the people." His evangelism comes from wanting people to understand that "knowledge management is what they do every day, and now they are the ones in control of the

conversation."

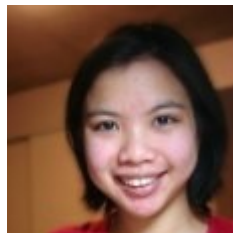
Social computing differs radically from the old KM paradigm and is more successful at achieving the ends. Consider the contrasts in approach.

- KM was about explicit knowledge -- codifying it and storing it as intellectual capital. There was little attention to tacit knowledge, the know-how people have that enables them to do a particular task. Whereas social computing taps into networks of people to access relevant practical expertise at the moment of need.
- KM was pushed down on people by management intent on amassing intellectual capital, and it was an extra job. Social computing arises spontaneously as a core activity of daily work and is driven by natural motivations.
- KM was an artificial process that required fitting abstractions devoid of context into a library-like framework. Social computing is natural in that it lets people share what they know, whenever they want to, with whomever and in whatever form they want.
- KM forced people to use one particular tool. With social computing people are able to choose how they want to manage their own personal knowledge, and they embrace the tools that serve their purpose best.
- KM managed information storage and retrieval within a fixed taxonomy, with no control by the end user. With social computing, the end users are the ones in control. Information is structured dynamically based on subject tags that arise from shared usage. And association with individuals provides contacts for further information if needed.

Luis Suarez is an acknowledged expert on knowledge management and social computing in a professional environment. At the other end of the spectrum is Sacha Chua, new to the business world but not to social computing.

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Listen to a young Millennial: Sacha Chua



A graduate student and research fellow at IBM's Center for Advanced Studies, Sacha Chua is doing her master's thesis on enterprise applications for social computing, and working daily with IBM's tools. Though at twenty-three Chua is a newcomer to business, she is a seasoned user of social computing like most of her generation. Her interest began at age nine when she first went online. Having experienced all the social networking sites so popular with young people on the Internet, she has had her own blog for four years. "It's always been a good way to keep in touch with family and friends," she says.

At IBM, Chua has quickly integrated herself into the environment by use of the social computing tools. "Most people think I'm part of IBM. I *feel part of IBM*. I talk to people in the research lab in Cambridge, people in the UK, the Canary Islands, at a conference in Vienna. One thing I really like is that I can find all these people without having to know which teams or

groups they're in. To me this 300,000+ person organization feels like a small company."

The problem of keeping things up to date goes away because it's not an extra, imposed task - *"it's a natural reflection of what you're doing every day* and it's something that has value for you," says Chua. For example, with bookmarking, she used to keep her bookmarks in her browser but found she couldn't handle it after 300 bookmarks. Both entering and searching for items got too cumbersome. But with Dogear and tagging she can keep over 3,000 bookmarks, get back to them easily and also share them with others. "This means that other people stumble across them and get in touch with me. What I always really liked about social computing is *how easy it is to discover people with shared interests.*"

Apart from IBM, Chua continues to blog in the consumer space and 450+ people read her blog. She finds blogging a terrific tool for reflecting on and sharing what she's learning, and taking advantage of other people's insights and experiences. She writes about technology and social computing, which brings some readers to her on related search terms. Others come to read about her misadventures with cooking. "I'm 23 years old, writing on what I'm thinking about, searching for jobs, working on my research, looking for an apartment." This *seamless integration of homelife and work life* is typical of Chua's generation.

"For me, being able to *organize what I'm learning and thinking* with blogs and bookmarks, and having a record of it - that's personally useful. Being able to use these tools to connect to team members and other IBMers helps you know people better and develop stronger relationships. You all benefit by sharing resources, and *discovering new resources* you wouldn't otherwise have encountered.

By making it easy for people to capture their knowledge - to write down what they're learning or share what they're working on -- you're making that knowledge available. It's easier to find specific expertise for help when you need it. And it's easier to see the people in an organization. You can know about other functions than your own that are complementary. You get a better understanding of the scale of things and can see the bigger picture of what different groups and people contribute to the whole enterprise. This *gives context and perspective.*

For people Chua's age and younger, online relationships and widened networks based on shared interests are natural. She anticipates changes when more of this generation comes into the workforce. "We won't pay so much attention to organizational boundaries," she says, and "people will be less likely to say, 'Oh, that's not my job responsibility,' or 'I'm not getting paid to help.' I want to be able to connect with people and share what I'm learning and have that passion about what I'm doing. So *it's not just about getting a paycheck, it's about meaning, and connecting with people I really want to work with.*"

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The business benefits of social computing



The personal benefits individuals derive from social computing add up to major business benefits for the enterprise. To get this perspective, we talked to John Rooney, who heads the Technology Innovation Team in IBM's Office of the CIO. The role of IT must always be to support an organization's business objectives, and the mission of Rooney's team is to enable IBM employees across the enterprise to be more productive, more collaborative, and more efficient in performing their jobs. Because of the team's ongoing focus on employee productivity and collaboration, they have always had a natural synergy with the Lotus brand.

Rooney sees the primary business benefit of social computing as *increasing responsiveness to the marketplace*. "The social computing tools really support that goal," says Rooney. "How do you find the knowledge and expertise, and the people in IBM who can deliver for your client? That can happen in both direct and indirect ways. Say you need help to address problem X on behalf of your client or business partner. You could consult Profiles to find people with job related expertise for advice. Or you might search blogs or post a question to a forum, or use an intranet search to find resources that someone else has tagged related to the problem you're trying to solve. This is at the heart of the business goals social computing supports. The business driver is revenue, which comes from being responsive to customers".

"Social computing has helped IBM become more *approachable to customers*, and more *innovative*. A lot of customers interact with specific Lotus bloggers, asking about features of Lotus products, giving feedback on how to improve and features they would like to see. IBM pays attention to this, and a lot of those suggestions do make it into the products. Social computing also *contributes to employee productivity by increasing mutual synergy*."

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How do you facilitate the adoption of social computing?

At IBM the social computing capabilities have been widely embraced without much formal promotion. Luckily, as an organization well stocked with software developers and other technology buffs, IBM has a natural cohort of people eager to test drive and benefit from new technologies, and they influence others. This is a major advantage for IBM's internal Technology Adoption Program (TAP), which Rooney's team created and manages.

The object of TAP is to build a social networking community around early adoption of new technologies. TAP consolidates natural early adoption activities within a common framework and time period, and interested people are invited to participate. The TAP program currently has ~80,000 registered IBM early adopters. This core of adventurers, by their word of mouth influence, greatly accelerates widespread adoption of any new technologies IBM elects to promulgate across the enterprise.

Short of anything like the TAP program, early adopters exist within any enterprise, regardless of the scale or industry. There are always people who want to be on the leading edge of new technology and the first to use. The corporate purchasers of Lotus Connections will presumably want to get it up and running as quickly as possible to reap the benefits, so the TAP principle is relevant. The best way to cultivate wholesale adoption is by starting with a committed core. Here are some tips for getting started.

- Create a community of natural early adopters who will generate buzz. These should be people in the enterprise with natural tendencies to share information and resources, and some technical prowess. . There don't have to be many, just a core of active participants who have a little influence in the organization. They will be able to train and

- support others through informal means, so from them the network effect will multiply.
- Not everyone has to be a producer. Some people will naturally be consumers of information published in the socially connected environments, but not everyone has to bookmark the sites they use and share them through Dogear. There needs to be a few who do that, and others who benefit. Some portion of the beneficiaries will eventually become producers as well. And most of the people who adopt one of the social computing tools will eventually adopt others.
- Be sure a search engine is in place so people will be able to find content. Moreover, integrating Dogear sites and tags into the company's search environment helps people recognize the value of Dogear because they start getting better search results. This drives awareness of other expertise in the blog postings and the commentaries people tag, and natural expansion takes hold from there.
- You have the option of starting small. Lotus Connections is set of components; you may not need to start using all of them together. Think about what is most needed. Do you want people to find people -- as in locating expertise? Do you want them to manage their own personal knowledge with blogs? Build an index of links that people can search on, whatever the topic? Be more collaborative and plug into the work of communities? It is important to identify goals and requirements, which tell you where to start.
- Encourage people to give the tools a try and then let them gravitate to those they find helpful. Usage has to evolve from the grass roots and can only be encouraged, not forced. But once people begin experiencing the benefits, the spread will be unstoppable.

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Why should companies get started with Lotus Connections now?

Luis Suarez responds: "To get into the conversation. To be approachable and hear how things are going with their customers. To help and encourage their employees to share their knowledge so others can benefit. To foster productive exchanges and innovation."

"Lotus Connections is putting together the best of what's going on out there in the social computing space, but in a protected environment. Our Lotus Connections customers get scalability, and security. They're behind a firewall with their own directory authentication, to help protect against people from outside hacking into their system, sharing information that should not be shared. Also, the larger the organization, the more people will be using the social computing tools. Companies with Lotus Connections won't have to share tools on public IBM networks where they can't control loads and speeds."

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