

## A Fully-Formed Social Computing Strategy

By Ethan Yarbrough and Ken Efta, Allyis Inc.

**There is no either/or. You need to consider how to integrate external content into your company. You need the outside information to gain insight and social computing inside to help turn that insight into action.**

In working with businesses and observing their approach to adding social computing to their operations we've noticed a distinct either/or pattern developing: either businesses see social computing as a tool for engaging in external conversations with customers or they see it as a tool for expertise location and knowledge management inside the firewall. It's our contention however that either approach on its own represents only one half of a fully formed social computing strategy. To maximize the benefits of social computing an organization's goal should be the integration of both external and internal information.

In their seminal work [Groundswell](#), Josh Bernoff and Charlene Li present social computing as a critical tool of business insight. Tapping into the exchanges about your business that go on outside your four walls can yield a strategic advantage. Analysis of the social exchanges can, for example show you new patterns in customer sentiment. But only if the right people inside your organization have easy access to the data being gathered by the external social computing tools, augmenting the knowledge built through internal social efforts.

I was reminded of the importance of this holistic approach to business social computing at last week's [Enterprise 2.0 Conference in San Francisco](#). Participating in a panel discussion on the use of micro blogging inside the enterprise, Yammer CEO David Sacks discussed how some companies are now integrating external Twitter feeds into internal Yammer accounts. Why do that? So your internal strategy makers can have conversations about the conversations going on about you in the consumer world.

Simply put, social computing outside the enterprise helps you gain insight, while social computing inside the enterprise helps you process that insight into innovation and action.

These benefits, however, are accompanied by management and compliance considerations:

**A. Source the Right Social Information:** Not all social content is equal. Frankly, some is inaccurate and inappropriate. Thus, it's important to decide what social information sources are most appropriate to your organization. Are certain topics on Twitter important to your company? Which thought leaders in your industry blog or share links on sites like Digg? One approach to sourcing information may be to survey the subject matter experts (SMEs) in your organization, learning which social tools they use as well as the topics they follow. Source that content first, and you'll expose where your SMEs go for their information.

**B. Filter and Import Selectively:** Although there may be a temptation to cast the net wide and import as much social content as possible, ensure you selectively pre-filter and import only the highest value information. For example, if you're importing tweets from Twitter, decide what hashtags are most appropriate; identify the Twitter handles of users who tweet things your company needs to be aware of; decide which Twitter handles to exclude from content imports.

**C. Content Management and Compliance Considerations:** In some cases, it may be "good enough" to surface social content as-is. Many of the Twitter plugins for platforms like WordPress essentially provide a snapshot of what's happening on Twitter at that time. However, there may be a need to review and approve content prior to publishing to a wider internal audience. This sort of review mechanism is often used by community managers, and at its simplest, may check for stopwords and inappropriate language. Additionally, these tools may help a community manager identify and surface the "canonical" discussions happening in the social Web that are important to an organization. In highly regulated industries—those subject to Sarbanes-Oxley or HIPPA compliance—there may be legal reasons to review and pre-approve content. Finally, certain organizations may choose to integrate "social media listening" capabilities: tracking sentiment, correlating social media traffic with marketing campaigns, or identifying and engaging with key influencers of social content.

**D. Technology Considerations and IT Sponsorship:** Finally, although many platforms support tools that allow organizations to aggregate and manage this sort of social content, there's the possible need for custom development or evaluation of third party tools that facilitate this functionality. Sharing your vision with IT and getting early buy-in will be a factor in successful deployments.

Although the points above don't constitute an implementation roadmap, they serve as important starting points in developing a successful strategy to cultivate social content into innovation by processing external social content through internal social tools and communities. Like a factory that processes raw materials into commodities for sale, an integrated system such as this can process information into its own useful by-products.