

Internally Focused Communities

The communities and tools we've looked at so far face the public. Communities are flourishing within enterprises too, driven by a need to communicate freely and transparently with coworkers. Internal communities are a recent innovation in the field of knowledge management (KM). Ideally, KM lets organizations maximize their information resources and optimize collaboration.

That's easier said than done. It's hard to get employees to share what they know, since much of their knowledge is tacit, informal, and hard to extract. A significant amount of a company's information assets is buried in email messages and attachments as unstructured data. Employees spend their time digging through inboxes and duplicating efforts; wisdom walks out the door every night.

Internal communities provide one way to change this. "KM 1.0" consisted of static intranets that were little more than a place to store information. Recently, however, organizations have realized that for KM to work well, it has to be integrated with the way people work, rather than a separate system that expects workers to change. By giving employees tools like chat, instant messaging, wikis, and forums, a company can make more of its inherent knowledge accessible in ways that employees adopt quickly, and that don't require them to change how they behave.

The methods we've looked at for monitoring online communities also apply well to internal communities. There are some important differences, however: employees, unlike anonymous web users, are required to use KM tools as part of their jobs, and the metrics that we use to define success of internal communities are different from those for outside ones.

Internal communities have different goals than their externally facing counterparts. They need to:

- *Capture knowledge* from many different internal sources, many of which are integrated into existing chat, email, and messaging platforms.
- *Improve knowledge retrieval* by users so that employees can find the right information faster.

- *Communicate what's important* so coworkers can see which topics and issues are salient to a particular project or timeline and also to see what other employees are working on.
- *Provide feedback to managers* so they can identify top contributors and use employees' productivity for performance reviews.

Knowledge Management Strategies

Not all companies organize their information in the same way. Consider two leading analyst firms, Accenture and McKinsey.

Accenture focuses on the storage of information—employees are rewarded for documenting and storing knowledge in a way that makes it easy for others to retrieve, using consistent formats and metadata. Those employees are less likely to be subject matter experts. By contrast, McKinsey is all about expertise: the company emphasizes making it easy to find the person who is the authority on a particular topic.

This difference has far-reaching consequences, as documented in “Analysis of Interrelations between Business Models and Knowledge Management Strategies in Consulting Firms” (Sven Grolik, available at <http://is2.lse.ac.uk/asp/aspecis/20030056.pdf>). The study found that Accenture has younger employees and a higher rate of employee turnover, but because its KM emphasizes the codification of knowledge, this is acceptable. By contrast, employees at McKinsey, who are rewarded for service inquiries, tend to be older, and work there longer. Accenture has a standardized, centralized approach, while McKinsey allows less standard forms of communication and more decentralization. There's no right or wrong strategy here, but you want the KM you employ should align with the structure of the organization in which it will be used.

When crafting a strategy for monitoring internal communities, consider not only the goals of the community—knowledge capture, findability, communication of what's important, and management feedback—but also the organization's KM strategy. This will dictate what you measure, as well as which tools or platforms fit the way your employees work.

There are some other big differences between internal and external communities. First, employees may be expected to use the internal community as part of their jobs, so you may have a higher percentage of contributors than you would have on a public site. Second, you can contact your internal community directly—you have the email addresses of all the members, so you can announce changes and encourage interactions.

Just because employees may be obligated to use an internal community doesn't mean they'll want to. If you're in charge of an internal community, your focus will be on quality of contributions and making the application something your users *want* to use, instead of just something they have to use.

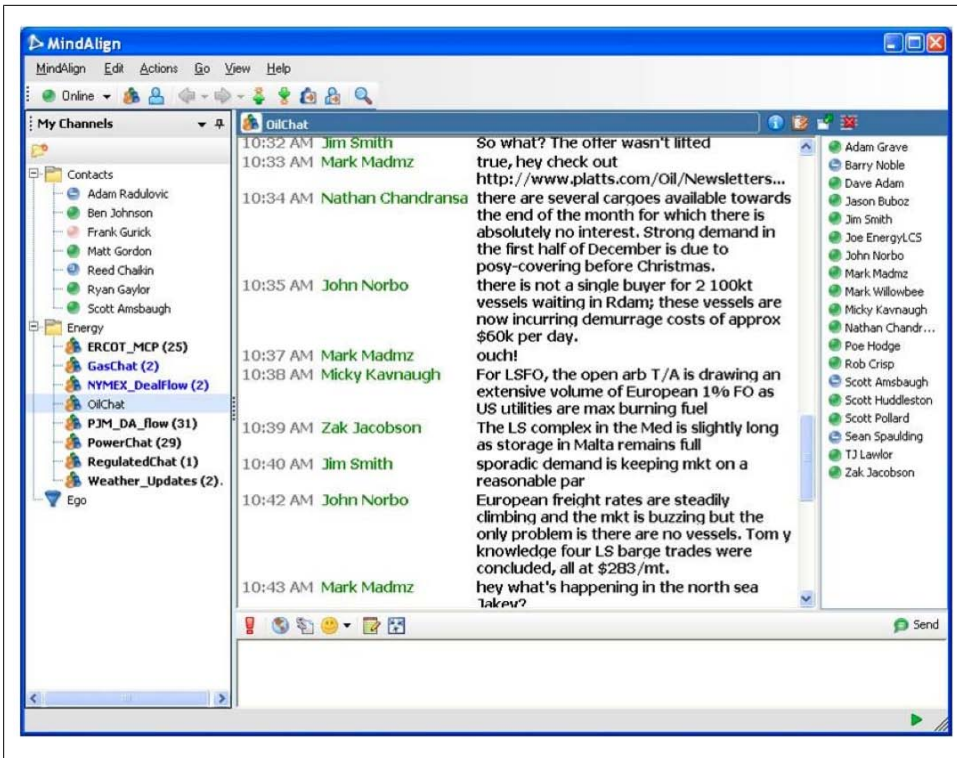


Figure 15-1. MindAlign by Parlano (now part of Microsoft's Office Communication Server)

Internal Community Platform Examples

Most companies already have the building blocks of a community. With email systems, organizational charts, and company directories, they have social graphs. Community platforms extend these systems rather than being standalone platforms. They incorporate several community models under a single umbrella.

Chat

With a known social graph, chat systems can tie into existing messaging servers. For example, Parlano's MindAlign (now part of the Microsoft Live Communication Server) works with an employee's existing contacts, as shown in Figure 15-1.

Hosted solutions, such as Campfire (shown in Figure 15-2) are geared toward smaller businesses that are looking for ways to reach out to one another in real time. These types of solutions are much easier to install and manage than enterprise platforms.

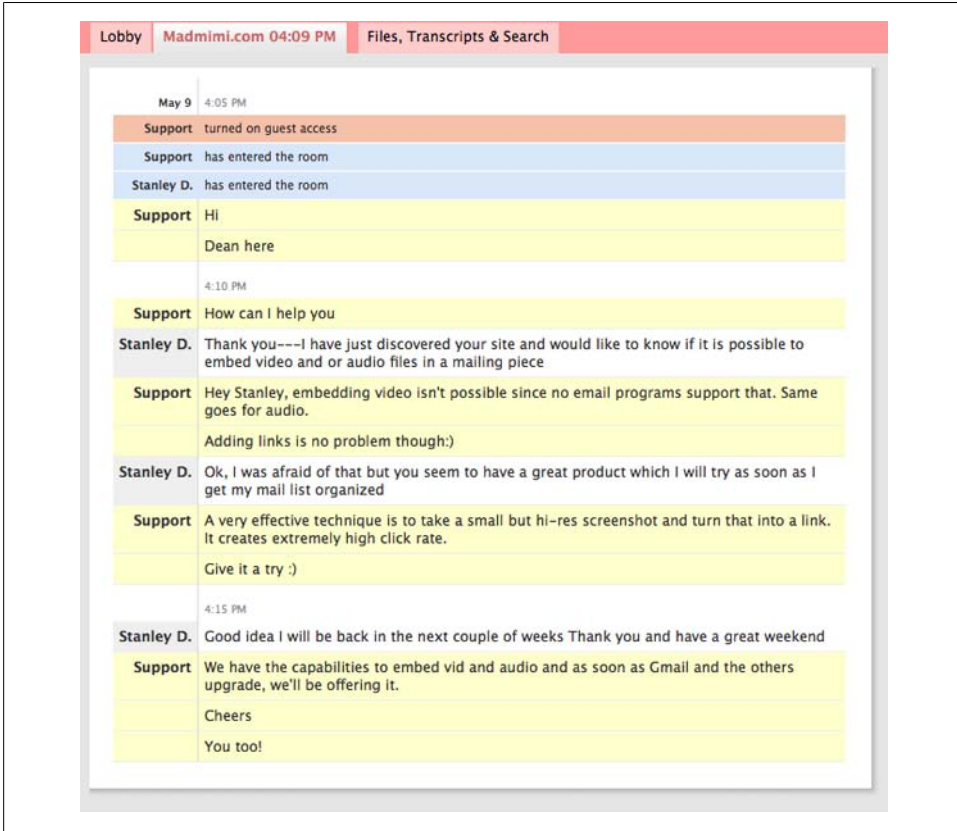


Figure 15-2. Hosted internal chat platforms like Campfire are aimed at smaller, more distributed organizations

Large enterprises will run chat internally in part because of reporting and compliance legislation. Some industries require that all interactions be archived and available for discovery in the event of legal disputes. Also, by using an internal chat system, a company can block outside chat and filter content that reaches outside organizations to reduce malware breaches and slow down corporate espionage.

Social Networks

Enterprise social networks are the rebirth of corporate intranets. They're often tied to social graphs and the company directory, and they provide analytics on contributions. There are some open source alternatives to commercial in-house social networks. Elgg.org, shown in Figure 15-3, is one such example.

Other firms, such as Socialtext (Figure 15-4), tie together profile data, status updates, and content repositories across an organization.



Figure 15-3. Elgg.org is an open source social network platform

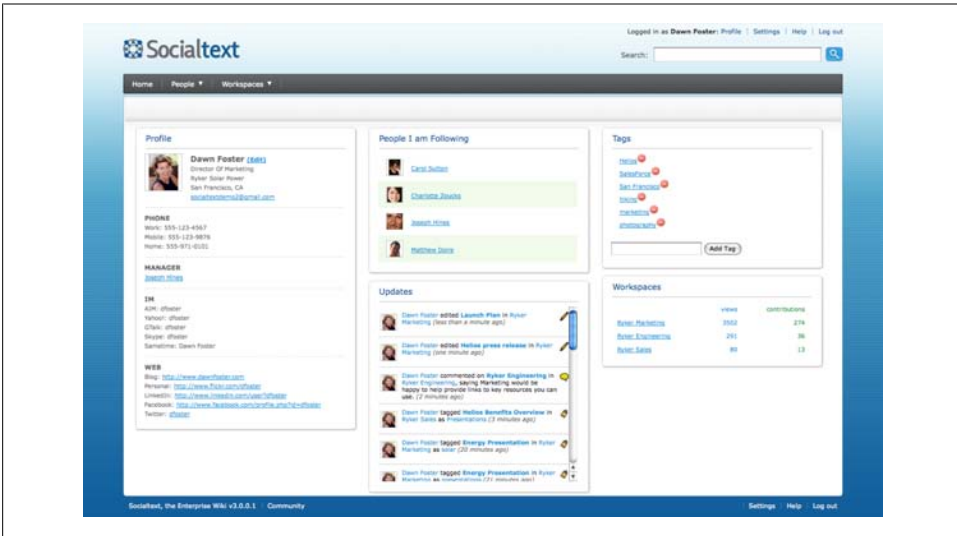


Figure 15-4. Socialtext is a commercial social network that includes wikis, micromessaging, and collaboration

Wikis

Some organizations use wikis for technical information, particularly when it's tied to engineering tools such as bug tracking and documentation. There are a variety of commercial and open source packages available, including MediaWiki, Twiki, Confluence, and extensions to trouble ticketing systems such as Jira. Unfortunately, because they're not tied back to social graphs and employee databases, it can be hard to monitor employee productivity with such systems in ways that a company may require.

Many small organizations are turning to Google Sites or other SaaS-based document management tools that can be used as a sort of wiki. Unfortunately, purely hosted models like these lack many of the detailed analytics you get from running your own site, and won't let you embed analytics into them.

Micromessaging Tools

Twitter's rapid growth has given birth to many competitors, several of which have focused on the enterprise as a way to make money. In particular, Present.ly and Yammer (Figure 15-5) offer solutions for internally focused micromessaging.

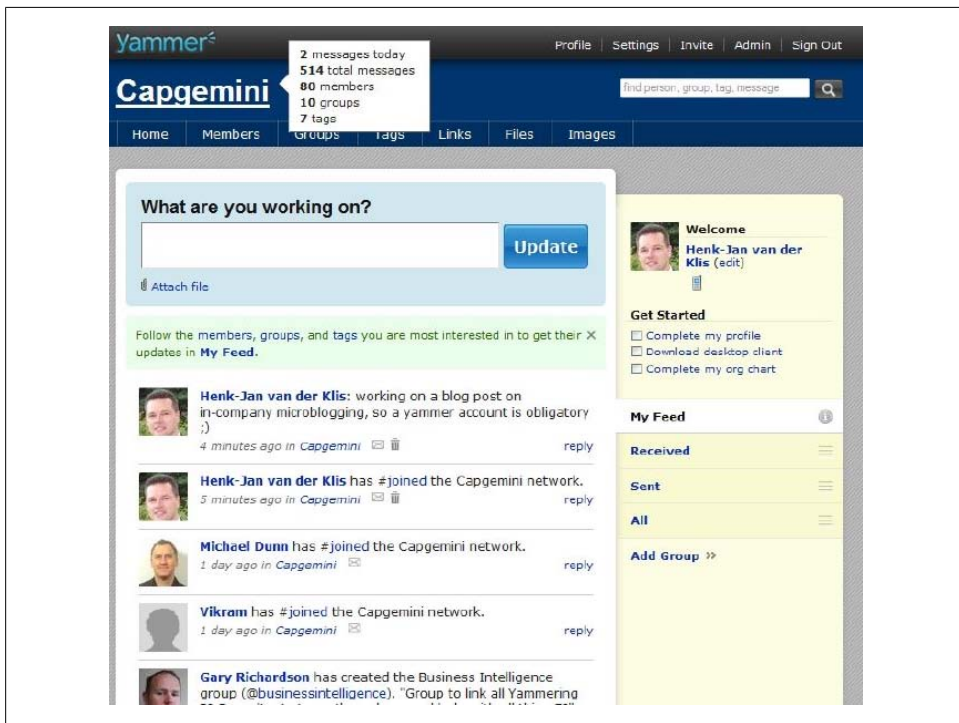


Figure 15-5. A Capgemini employee in Yammer

These tools create ambient awareness about your coworkers and what they're up to, and perhaps this is better than the traditional water cooler model. But while the basic functionality of micromessaging is simple, the real value of these solutions is in the way they collect and interpret what's being said so that it becomes a resource for the rest of the company.

When considering micromessaging tools, it's more important to look at how they aggregate and visualize content than at how they transmit messages. For example, social collaboration tools such as Brainpark analyze what's being said, then try to offer relevant searches, documents, or coworkers, based on the task at hand.

Social News Aggregators

There's a close parallel in internal communities to reddit, Digg, and Slashdot: *prediction markets*. Prediction markets aim to harness the wisdom of crowds by letting people try to guess an outcome. Call them "Suggestion Box 2.0."

There are dozens of companies working in field of prediction markets, which has been around for over a decade. These companies include Consensus Point, NewsFutures, Xpre, Nosco (shown in Figure 15-6), QMarkets, Exago, Prokons, Spigit, and Inkling. With mainstream acceptance of wisdom-of-the-crowd models and broader adoption of enterprise communities, prediction markets are becoming an integral part of the way that some companies make decisions.

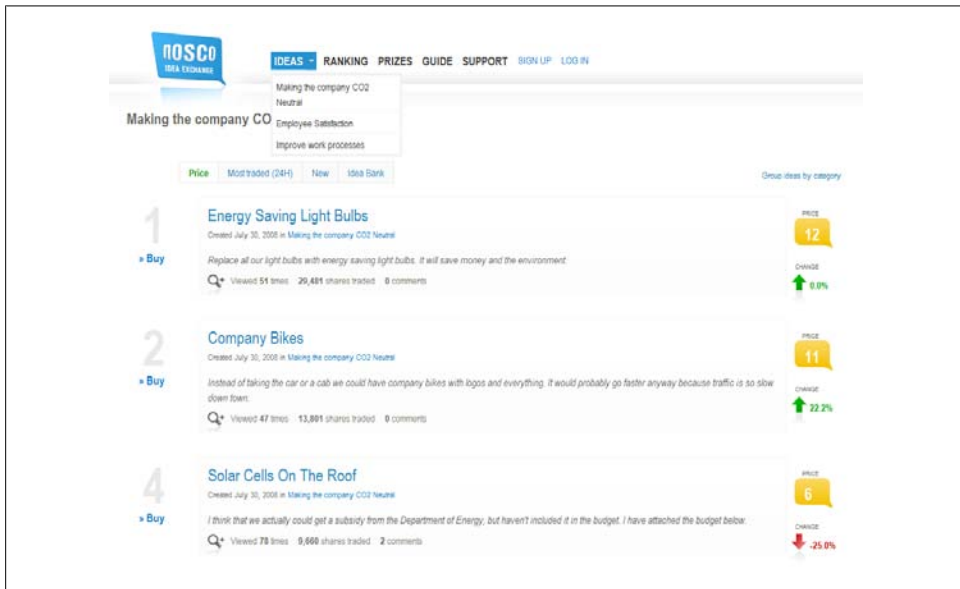


Figure 15-6. A predictive market discussion on Nosco

You'll need to factor predictive market monitoring and reporting into the rest of your internal community monitoring strategy as the technology becomes more commonplace.

The Internal Community Monitoring Maturity Model

As we've done with other kinds of monitoring, let's look at how internal community monitoring becomes more mature over time. Note that because your audience is in-house, you'll be more concerned with productivity and contribution by the organization and by its ability to create useful content that becomes an asset.

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Focus	Technical details	Minding your own house	Engaging the organization	Building relationships	Web business strategy
Emphasis	Volume of content	Usefulness of content	Contribution patterns	Collaboration patterns, ROI from predictions, productivity gains	Community data mining, employee performance reviews based on contribution
Questions	How much information have we generated?	How good is the information we're generating? What's most and least used? How easily can employees find it?	How integrated is KM with corporate culture? What are people sharing most and least?	What's the payoff? How does KM improve per-employee contribution or reduce per-employee cost? How are people connecting with one another? Are our collective guesses good?	What does our organization know? What is our organizational knowledge worth? How can we use better KM posture to improve competitive position? Are we hiring and firing based on employee knowledge contribution?