



Book The Social Factor

Innovate, Ignite, and Win Through Mass Collaboration and Social Networking

Maria Azua
IBM Press, 2009
[Listen now](#)

- [play](#)
- [pause](#)

00:00
00:00

Recommendation

Four signs that you are seriously behind the Internet-driven times: 1) You type “www” in front of Web addresses, 2) You think “geek” is a term of derision, 3) You subscribe to *TV Guide* and 4) You have a landline. If these descriptions fit you, then you will find Maria Azua’s book eye-opening. She describes online developments such as wikis, cloud computing, crowdsourcing, widgets, social bookmarking, folksonomies, avatars and all the rest – and explains what they can do for your business. However, if you are already an experienced social networker, Azua’s guide will be a review of familiar information. *BooksInShort* recommends this book to businesspeople who are feeling mystified by the Internet – that is, anyone who needs to update his or her Web skills. Online, it’s a new world. Azua’s book provides a good map.

Take-Aways

- Social networking is the most revolutionary aspect of the Internet.
- Remarkable technological advances are ushering in a new age.
- The most radical changes are in socializing, collaborating and communicating.
- Online communities spur creativity and innovation.
- Tap into the power of social networking to make your company more competitive.
- Use social networking to plan, refine, test, critique, and redesign your products and services.
- Establish wikis to enable employees, vendors and others to collaborate, even when they’re all located in different places.
- Disseminate vital information immediately through company blogs.
- Use blogs to get valuable customer feedback about your products and services.
- Cloud computing can save you money on information technology and provide quick access to the Internet.

Summary

Social Networking: More Revolutionary than the Internet

How businesses operate and compete is changing radically due to three factors:

1. Information overload.
2. Commodified communication, which has resulted from technology standardization.

3. The emergence of Internet social networking tools that make inexpensive, two-way communication possible.

“The enormous social networking capabilities of the cellphone are transforming it into a genuine social extension for the user.”

The Web has had a huge impact, but social networking is the true revolution. By the millions, people have joined online social networks and now widely use social networking tools like wikis, blogs and tags.

Social networking helps people deal systematically with the proliferation of online information. Companies benefit from social networking in these six areas:

1. **“Teaming and collaboration”** – Online tools enable users to connect with other people and learn about and from them. Their commercial benefits include increased productivity and better team building. By collaborating over the Internet, companies can significantly boost their research and development.
2. **“Succession planning”** – Online “expertise profiles and skills assessments” make this extremely efficient.
3. **“Recruitment and on-boarding”** – Companies can use social networking applications such as LinkedIn to recruit new hires. Employees can use wikis to learn how to do their jobs. They can gain access to mentors through blogs and online profiles.
4. **“Content and expertise capture”** – Workers bring their knowledge and talent to the social networking communities they join.
5. **“Skills development”** – Online communities of experts are available to help people do their jobs better and become more professional. Social tools add a new dimension to e-learning that includes ratings, recommendations and tags.
6. **“Innovation”** – Social networking applications spur innovation by making collaboration possible.

Wikis

Collaboration thrives on the Internet. Wikipedia is a good example. Working together, contributors volunteer their time and effort to make Wikipedia the most comprehensive encyclopedia available online. Wiki applications enable people to collaborate on all types of projects. Using wikis, they can organize and monitor action items and distribute tasks. People working on wiki projects may never meet one another face-to-face. Indeed, project collaborators may be located just about anywhere.

“Company blogs are a great way to record institutional memory and provide a channel for expression to the most innovative employees.”

Businesses use wikis in various ways. These Web sites enable firms to communicate with people in diverse locations and to catalog company information, including “tacit knowledge” that employees gain on the job. Through wikis, all staffers have access to the same information. Thus, wikis provide transparency and make business practices more democratic. Using wikis, companies can bring people from far-flung locations together and set aside “private team spaces” for group members. Wikis inspire experimentation, which leads to innovation. Companies can also use wikis for data mining “to anticipate future demand and new products.”

Blogs

Anyone can be a publisher on the Internet. Through blogs, people disseminate their thoughts on every conceivable topic. Before blogs, most information about businesses came from approved sources and took the forms of newsletters and other company publications. By the time firms published the information, it was already dated. Using blogs, both employees and managers can publish company information immediately. Company bloggers can share insider knowledge of the organization’s identity and operations.

“The most successful blogs have identifiable themes or offer a particular political viewpoint or technical perspective.”

Blogs “push” information outward, whereas wikis “pull” information inward, from collaborators. Blogs can replace business e-mail blasts by providing frequent posts about important commercial matters. Use a blogging Web site like Wordpress.org, Blogger or TypePad to set up your own blog. They have these common features:

- **“Free”** – You can establish and maintain your blog at no cost whatsoever.
- **“Comments”** – They enable you to interact with the people who visit your blog. You can moderate comments and even delete comments that you don’t like.
- **“Profile”** – Use this to showcase your company’s history, capabilities and expertise.
- **“Access controls”** – You have control over who sees your posts.
- **“Customization”** – Choose from a variety of themes to design your blog.
- **“Widgets”** – These include “search, blog archives” and “recent comments.” You can also add such elements as Flickr and Twitter to your blog.
- **“Embedded authoring tools”** – Use these to write your blog posts. You can import photos, control format and work in rich text.

“Researchers have found the average enterprise worker spends more than 12 hours per week searching for information.”

Blogs and wikis are terrific vehicles for “social ideation,” wherein “individuals or groups generate ideas, concepts and hypotheses.” The process is like brainstorming over the Internet. Companies can benefit greatly from social ideation in the areas of “cost-savings, process improvements [and] innovative business model changes.” Using blogs and wikis, you can contact your clients and partners to explore emerging needs and opportunities.

Tagging

One recent, notable cyberspace development is tagging, which involves the labeling and classifying of items online. “Tag clouds” are keyword aggregations. You can tag a “Web page, a document, a video, some new music, a friend’s blog, some wiki comments, a book, a collection of bookmarks or even a person.”

“Virtual focus groups offer the opportunity for employees to speak honestly about their work, and they provide a forum to engage regularly with customers and business partners.”

Internet cognoscenti call tagging “folksonomy” (a takeoff on “taxonomy”). “Folksonomy” means classification by and for the collective. Folksonomies change as online

communities change. They are highly important to the groups that generate them. As such, they're also important to businesses that want to market products to these communities.

“The mark of an efficient innovation process is that everything is as easy as possible.”

Tag clouds provide insights that you can use to evaluate the opinions and interests of online communities. Data about how online communities tag your products and services are priceless for marketing to the more than 250 million people who belong to social networks.

Cloud Computing

In cloud computing, you store your information on the Internet rather than on your personal hard drive or a server. Cloud computing enables you and your employees to access computer services from anywhere. Computer clouds act as “colossal data centers” and provide information technology (IT) services at bargain rates, because you no longer need expensive “application configuration and maintenance.” They substantially cut energy costs as well. Cloud computing has “three layers”:

1. **“Physical”** – The hardware is largely “virtualized.”
2. **“Network”** – This layer “links computers in different locations.”
3. **“Services”** – This layer “provides an easy-to-use interface through available applications.”

Social Media

Numerous Internet tools and Web sites enable people to connect with each other and to share information:

- **Twitter** – A microblogging Web site on which you can post messages of 140 characters or fewer. Twitter communications can contribute to superb “business intelligence.”
- **LinkedIn** – Replaces business cards by providing personal and business profiles of members. LinkedIn groups form around innumerable topics.
- **Facebook** – Lets you stay in touch with your contacts and develop new ones.
- **YouTube** – Enables you to distribute videos concerning your products and services.

“Local knowledge spillover is one of the reasons high-tech companies gravitate to the same geographic area.”

Use these Internet tools to monitor social trends and customer preferences:

- **“Technorati”** – Discover the rankings of top blogs according to usage.
- **“Google Alerts”** – Monitor “Web pages, blogs, video [and] Google groups” through keyword searches. Google e-mails you the results.
- **“Twitter Search”** – Search Twitter for a specific word.
- **“Bloglines”** – Search for and subscribe to blogs that interest you.
- **“Google Blog Search”** – A Google-alert service about blogs.

“Open Software”

Software that people create collaboratively is “open.” Open software is a radical change from the way programmers traditionally created software. It is transparent. No single programmer or programming team controls how the software will function, and it is available to anyone at no charge. Social networking tools such as wikis and blogs enable programmers to participate in open development. Many companies use the “LAMP software stack” (“Linux, Apache, MySQL [and] Perl/PHP/Python”), a set of open software that works with most operating systems. Businesses should consider adopting the open-software development and distribution approach, which places a premium on collaboration, in other areas.

Innovation

Innovation involves more than technology upgrades. Meaningful innovation also incorporates “social innovation,” which centers on new-idea development. New ideas can emerge only in a “culture of innovation.” Social tools help innovators connect with one another and with “early adopters,” who are crucial to getting new developments off the ground.

“Combining open collaboration methodology and open source distribution creates a potent virtuous cycle.”

Implement an “innovation factory” approach at your firm. In this model, the “innovation community” transforms an idea into a working prototype. After gathering feedback, the team that created the item adapts it. It does additional testing and makes further refinements. Finally, the product is ready for release and marketing. Plan to spend 45% of your IT budget on innovation. The remaining 55% keeps your current infrastructure up and running.

Social Tools and Gross Domestic Product

Innovation and technological advances are important not only for individual companies but also for the countries in which they operate. A direct correlation exists between the rate of technology development and GDP growth. A similar correlation exists between the health of social networks and the economic growth of nations.

“The real power of Twitter is using Search to narrow your cyber-eavesdropping to those conversations that are relevant to your field, skills, interests or organization.”

Social networks spur the development of service companies, which are particularly important in advanced economies. Currently, 60% of all people in the United States work in “service-related businesses.” By 2011, this figure will increase to 80%. Online social networking will help enhance this growth.

Mobility

Because of recent technology advances, people now use mobile devices to “connect anywhere, any time.” Current devices offer far more computational power than similar devices did in the past, and social tools enable users to leverage this power. Using mobile devices, businesses can immediately access product and customer information. The data is literally at people’s fingertips.

“Tags are like fingerprints or an audit trail in social spaces that can provide a way for you to understand your customers’ preferences.”

According to IBM, more than five billion people will connect to the Internet by 2015, the majority through “wireless connections.” Such connectivity will increase the power, range and scope of social networking.

About the Author

Maria Azua is responsible for the development of cloud computing applications and methodologies at IBM. She was inducted into the Women in Technology International Hall of Fame.
