



# Social Platforms in Use

Here are several examples of how innovative business-to-business (B2B) companies are applying one or more of the platforms described earlier in this book.

## **Emerson Process Experts (Blog)**

It took two years for Jim Cahill and Deb Franke to convince the management at Emerson Process Management that a blog was a good idea. Their reticence was understandable. It was 2005, and blogs were widely perceived to be the domain of teenage diarists and scandal-mongers. Why would anyone want to get mixed up with that? And why would they want to read about equipment that manages large industrial plants?

Cahill and Franke persevered. Some technology companies were creeping into the blogosphere at the time and clearly enjoying good results. By pointing to successes elsewhere, the two eventually overcame objections by arguing that, as communications people, they understood the pitfalls and how to manage them. A blog called Emerson Process Experts was born.

Four years and more than 500 blog entries later, Cahill is enjoying the new job title head of social media at Emerson Process

Management. Emerson Process Experts was named Best Corporate Blog by *BtoB* magazine in 2010, and Cahill is now leading the company's charge into Twitter and Facebook while institutionalizing best practices among all the Emerson Process Management divisions.

The blog has brought numerous business opportunities into Emerson, including an invitation to bid on a large new plant for a contract that could total hundreds of millions of dollars. "I have the e-mail from that company on my wall next to a sign that asks 'Is there any value in blogging?'" he laughs.

Even after four years, Emerson Process Experts remains an enigma in a heavy industry that has done little with social media. Topics like "Sensing Liquid Levels with Vibrating Fork Technology" may cause the average visitor's eyes to cross, but the elite engineers who run giant process control systems can't get enough of this kind of technical wisdom.

And for a blog this specialized, the traffic is pretty impressive. About 2,000 visitors stop by on an average business day, and 15 to 20 messages land in Cahill's inbox every week. Although most are routine, a few gems inquire about business opportunities. After replying with a thank-you message, Cahill forwards them on to the sales team.

One reason for the blog's success is the search engine magic it delivers. Search on "process control" or "process management" and depending on the day, Emerson ranks in the first or second page of search results. Rarely used terms like "compressor surge control" deliver Emerson on Google's first page. The secret is the lack of competition. As an established presence in a community with few other bloggers, Cahill is a big fish in a small pond. And as we know, Google loves blogs.

Cahill approaches his job with a reporter's eye. He isn't an engineer, but with more than 20 years at the company, he understands the lingo and is able to write in the customer's language. "When I pass people in the hall, I'll ask if they had any recent customer interactions that were interesting," he says. "I'll dig into those stories."

His advice to prospective B2B bloggers: "Be prepared to stick with it for a while; it takes a couple of years to build up your presence.

Listening is a key skill. Blogging isn't just pushing out information, it's responding to the interests of your market."

## **CME Group (Twitter)**

The world's largest futures exchange is also one of the most popular entities on Twitter, with more than 750,000 followers. At the time of this writing, that put CME Group (formerly the Chicago Mercantile Exchange) ahead of well-known brands and celebrities like *The Today Show*, Dr. Phil, and Danny DeVito.

The exchange has been active in social media channels since the early days, having launched a Facebook account in 2007 and since adding Delicious, Digg, StumbleUpon, Twitter, and a corporate blog. Equally remarkable is that CME Group's market is highly regulated and has been under particular scrutiny since the 2008 mortgage bond crisis. Whereas most financial firms have preferred to stay out of the spotlight during the past couple of years, CME Group has talked in every channel it could find.

As is often the case with B2B companies, the online initiative was driven by the corporate communications department, and particularly by Allan Schoenberg, a career communications professional with a background in technology. "I was an early adopter of Twitter as I'm an early adopter of a lot of [social media] tools," Schoenberg says. "We got on Twitter when there were less than a half million people using it. In the early days, people could find us very easily." The Exchange's tweeters got to know a few people at Twitter, who added the Exchange to an elite list of people the company recommends its members follow. A partnership with StockTwits, the popular real-time investment discussion forum, helped, as did a broad-based effort by CME Group to promote its Twitter presence through press releases, speeches, and its web site.

Given the regulatory climate, the company has stepped carefully. Only designated employees are allowed to speak on behalf of the company, and they are thoroughly briefed in Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) disclosure rules as well as the SEC's social media guidelines. Schoenberg's team also leveraged good relationships with

the company's legal and information security teams to get buy-in at the front end.

About 80 percent of the tweeting content is about the marketplace and the economy, with the other 20 percent related to CME Group. Still, Schoenberg says, even the company-specific messages are intentionally nonpromotional. "One of the key drivers of our success is that [our Twitter feed] is about our audience and what they want," he says. "Now they know that if it's coming from us, it's a credible source." Company tweeters also make a conscious effort to respond to any messages that demand a reply.

Among the tactics the communications team has used is profiles of partners, traders, and other financial professionals who are active in the Twitter stream. As Schoenberg sees it, content equals visibility and Twitter is only one of many tools that are available.

Company management has seen the visibility CME Group is receiving and fully supports the social initiatives. So far, the communications group has run with the social media ball, but that's about to change. "One of the key goals for my team this year is to educate everybody within the company," Schoenberg says. CME's impressive visibility on Twitter has aroused interest from employees who are now asking to contribute to the company blog. By letting CME's skilled communicators introduce the rest of the company to Twitter, employees at all levels were able to learn how use this new channel for responsible, external communications by simply following the company's Twitter feed, and monitoring the interaction. With all the other social platforms the company has on deck, there will be plenty to keep them busy.

## **Infusionsoft (Video, Social Networks)**

With prices starting at \$199 per month, Infusionsoft has staked out premium-priced territory in the cost-competitive e-mail marketing business. Yet it has still managed to grow its user base nearly eightfold over the past two years. One reason is that the company bundles sophisticated enhanced services like print delivery and customer relationship management (CRM) into its product. Another is that it constantly innovates in its use of social marketing. Video is a key tool.

The e-mail marketing business enjoys high retention rates because the value of the service increases the more customers use it. That means the key objective is getting new customers in the door. Word of mouth is a critical marketing tool, particularly in the small business market that Infusionsoft serves. Customers frequently select vendors based on input from their friends.

Infusionsoft's library of more than 100 videos on their YouTube channel communicates the company's customer service commitment through quotes from dozens of employees. A premium account on Vimeo showcases in-depth product demonstrations and tutorials that don't conform to YouTube's 10-minute limit. Much of the library was assembled for an innovative promotion program called "Double Your Sales" that guarantees a refund if customers don't see an uptick in business.

Infusionsoft promotes its activities through a mosaic of social platforms, including a blog, groups on LinkedIn, and a Facebook page with more than 2,500 fans. It runs a public customer support portal and even a site where customers can submit and vote on ideas for new products.

Its Twitter account has attracted more than three times the following of much larger competitors. The secret? The company targets small business owners, follows as many of those people as possible and regularly comments on their tweets. "We reply to nearly every comment and engage with a lot of people," says Joseph Manna, Infusionsoft's community manager and social media evangelist.

One Twitter promotion asked, "If you had Infusionsoft free for a year, what would you do?" Several hundred respondents clicked through to a landing page to share their ideas. The promotion reeled in several new customers. "Some people who won are still talking about us on Twitter," Manna says.

The company has a knack for offbeat tactics that attract attention. In early 2010, Infusionsoft locked marketing vice president Tyler Garns in a room for a 12-hour live video webcast distributed by Ustream. Garns showed slides, chatted with guest speakers, and took questions from the audience via chat. The experience was exhausting for Garns, but the payoff came in the form of more than 1,100 viewers and several new customers.

Over the 2009 Thanksgiving holiday, Infusionsoft posted a Black Monday promotion on Facebook, offering bonus services to people who became new subscribers on the traditionally busiest online shopping day. The promotion was almost a spur-of-the-moment decision, having been conceived the day before Thanksgiving, says Manna, but speed is one of the beauties of social networks. “People signed up and all of them have been maintained,” he says.

By enabling word-of-mouth marketing, Infusionsoft cut its sales cycle time by about 30 percent in one year. “Social media efforts were a main contributor to that change,” Manna says.

## **Avaya (Twitter)**

When Paul Dunay joined data networking firm Avaya Inc. as global managing director of services and social marketing in 2009, he quickly set to work building the company’s social media capabilities. Already an award-winning blogger and author of *Facebook Marketing for Dummies*, Dunay was looking to apply the advice he had been giving others as a consultant to a real business case. He thought Avaya could use social tools to better convey its product differentiation message and to respond to what other people were saying.

One of Dunay’s key objectives was to focus on conversations rather than audiences. By using social channels, Avaya could more quickly spot issues and opportunities. Twitter would be the key for listening to and resolving issues, as well as finding prospects.

Avaya established a corporate presence in four key social media realms: blogging, forums, Facebook, and Twitter. Dunay assembled a cross-functional, global, and virtual social media team comprised of seven people from communications, marketing, support, legal, and other business units. Since then, this virtual team has grown to number 125 people who monitor social channels as an adjunct to their regular jobs.

The group monitors between 1,000 and 3,000 mentions of the company each week using a combination of TweetDeck and conversation monitoring software Radian6. A team member who “hears”

about an issue requiring action posts it on an internal microblogging application called Socialcast. The issue is assigned to an Avaya staffer who has the knowledge and authority to address it.

The tactic paid dividends almost immediately. In June 2009, a team member responded to a 57-character tweet that mentioned Avaya. “Time for a new phone system very soon,” the tweet read. Moments after the tweet was posted, an Avaya team member spotted it and notified Dunay, who responded that Avaya was ready to help. Two weeks later, Avaya closed the \$250,000 sale.

In late 2009, Dunay proposed a promotion of a 40 percent savings on technical services for new customers. Two hours after the tweet was posted, a government customer responded and the sale was closed early the next quarter. The initiative has also led to several smaller sales.

Today, Avaya operates more than 15 branded Twitter accounts, covering everything from corporate business to support, services, small business, and international accounts. The company also operates 42 Facebook groups, 5 Facebook pages, an external blog with 15 writers, and 12 LinkedIn groups. Inside the firewall, the company operates 14 blogs and numerous wikis.

The initiative has led to higher retention rates, customer satisfaction scores, and profitability, Dunay says. Avaya has also been twice recognized by J.D. Power and Associates for “Providing an Outstanding Customer Experience.”

## **IEEE (LinkedIn)**

You can't get much more B2B than the IEEE, which bills itself as “the world's largest professional association dedicated to advancing technological innovation.” Formerly called the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, the group's roots are in engineering and its lifeblood is membership. IEEE spends much of its promotional money on online advertising, because that's where the engineers can be found. When marketers embarked on a pay-per-click campaign in early 2009, they elected to try a targeted promotion on LinkedIn and measured the effect on conversion rates.

LinkedIn was more expensive than Google, but the quality of leads promised to be higher. IEEE was betting that LinkedIn members would be more forthcoming about their identities on LinkedIn than users on other social networks. For this campaign, the target was engineers in technology companies and ads only appeared on pages viewed by members who met that profile.

“The more niche the audience, the better LinkedIn works,” says Danielle Leitch, an executive vice president at Peter Nasca Associates, the marketing communications firm that coordinated the campaign.

Results more than justified the higher cost per lead. Two months into the campaign, the conversion rate for visitors from LinkedIn was three times that of other venues, and bounce rates were 10 percent lower. Bounce rates are an important factor in pay-per-click campaigns because advertisers pay for the click and not the conversion. Visitors who click through to the landing page and then leave are wasted money. Bottom line: “The quality of the lead was orders of magnitude better on LinkedIn,” Leitch said.

## **Cree (Video, Contests)**

You’d think an ad showing people slumped at their desks, sleeping in chairs, and drooling on the floor would never make it off the drawing board. But for the Cree LED Revolution, workplace lethargy has been just the ticket for getting its point across.

“The LED Lighting Revolution Tackles the Workplace” is a video that underlies an integrated social media campaign that promotes an entire industry. Combined with a blog, Facebook, and Twitter promotion, the program has “far exceeded our expectations,” according to Michelle Murray, head of corporate communications at the Durham, North Carolina–based Cree.

Cree is a 23-year-old maker of LED chips that’s making a bold move into a new market. The core products that make up more than 80 percent of its business light up the displays of cell phones and cameras. A couple of years ago, the company placed a bet that the same technology could also be used to light homes, offices, and even city



streets, yielding huge cost savings. The Cree LED Revolution is all about evangelizing that concept.

The lighting market isn't exactly accustomed to revolution. The last major innovation in the technology was nearly 100 years ago, when fluorescents came on the market, and led, of course, to the more recent growth of compact fluorescents. LEDs are starting to get hot (and we mean that figuratively; they actually generate very little heat) because they emit the same number of lumens as an incandescent bulb for less than a quarter of the power.

Cree's current mission is to raise awareness of LED technology's benefits so architects and contractors will start specifying it in residential, commercial, and public engineering contracts. But there's a catch. LEDs are significantly more expensive than convention light bulbs. In late 2009, the company embarked upon a major social media initiative anchored by online video, a photo contest, a blog, real-world stories, and a footprint in multiple social media venues. The idea is that a rising tide of LED adoption will lift all boats, with Cree getting more than its fair share of the business. "My number one marketing message now is that LED lighting is ready, and my number two message is that Cree makes the best LEDs," Murray says.

The dour tone of the "Tackles the Workplace" video, which was created by Shelton Group of Knoxville, Tennessee, was the subject of much debate within the company prior to its rollout last fall. After all, advertising is supposed to be happy. But Cree was trying to make a point: lousy lighting makes the workplace a dreary and sleep-inducing place, which drags down productivity. The video ends with a collage of bright LED alternatives.

"Tackles the Workplace" has one other thing going for it: it's funny. "We thought it would draw attention to the problem," Murray said. It's done that. The video garnered more than 5,000 views with a minimal push in its first six months. Overall, the CreeLEDRevolution.com site averaged a 25 percent increase in monthly unique visitors in the eight months after the video was released. Regularly updated blog content, new case studies, and YouTube videos all helped drive awareness. Cree LED Revolution was subsequently folded into the company's other marketing programs. At a recent trade show,

Cree devoted an entire wall of its booth to a demonstration area, where social media specialist Ginny Skalski showed off the site while a live Twitter stream scrolled by on a flat-screen monitor.

Skalski is the Revolution's eyes and ears in social media. A former newspaper reporter, she joined the company in late 2009 to manage its blog, Twitter, Facebook, and other online outposts. One of her first tasks was to organize a blogger outreach campaign. That drew attention from top lighting bloggers (yes, there are such people) like Jim on Light and conservation blogs like Energy Circle.

Cree's blog covers energy efficiency and the growing use of LED lighting. On Twitter, Skalski is @Cree, delivering a steady stream of updates about the same topics. "I'm a Twitter addict," she says. The Facebook group has more than 1,000 fans.

The web site makes liberal use of digital media. LED lovers can submit photos and videos of their successes. Cree groups these mini-case studies on a map in a manner that dramatizes the spread of the technology across industries and geographies.

Skalski also knows how to handle a video camera herself. At one point she placed one chocolate bunny under a 65W incandescent lamp and another under a 12W LED light, started the camera and filmed the results. Ninety minutes later, the incandescent bunny was a gooey pool while the other rabbit was barely sweating. Two months after that, the experiment had 20,000 views and a dozen embeds on YouTube. Cost after the capital outlay for the camera: about \$12 for the chocolate.

The Cree LED Revolution includes another dimension that's uncommon in B2B scenarios: a photo contest. Visitors can submit snapshots of dismal lighting conditions in their home or office and have a chance to win free products. The gallery demonstrates why there's so much potential for LED in the workplace.

Skalski embraces the social media philosophy of one-to-one relationships, and her most memorable stories involve interactions with customers. For one photo contest winner who owns a guitar shop in Sacramento, Skalski arranged to have bonus light fixtures delivered if the man would write a jingle about LED lighting. He did. You can find the song on the site.

## Cisco Systems (Simulation Game)

The excitement around virtual worlds has died down considerably since Second Life faded from the spotlight, but Cisco has remained a tireless advocate of simulations as a way to enhance human interaction. With myPlanNet, the company found a way to connect with the young IT professionals who comprise the next generation of network managers in a way that was educational and fun while also reinforcing Cisco's track record of 25 years of leadership in building the modern Internet.

Cisco myPlanNet is a simulation game that puts the player in the role of chief executive officer (CEO) of an Internet service provider. Over time, the player's business grows from a small dial-up provider into a multifaceted technology company spanning broadband, mobile, and collaboration services. The primary target audience is the "young professionals of tomorrow" who are interested in networking technology, as well as current Cisco customers and partners.

"The objective was to create learning opportunities by allowing players to bring services to life and discover Cisco's role in the evolution of the Internet," says Steve Liu, a Cisco marketing manager. "It's an interactive way for young professionals who are entertaining the idea of data networking to see how the Internet was built and what it's preparing them to do."

Conceived as an entry in an internal innovation contest and built on a \$200,000 budget that is considered tiny for gaming software, myPlanNet surpassed its download goal within three months and logged more than 30,000 players within the first six months. The related Facebook page had attracted more than 70,000 fans by mid-2010, with players coming from at least 2,500 different companies and 130 countries. In fact, the largest population of players isn't from the United States; it's from Indonesia. Administrators stoked activity with contests, a "CEO quiz," and opportunities to win prizes.

The skunkworks Cisco team that built myPlanNet had to ration its promotion budget carefully, so members invested mainly in word-of-mouth marketing. The \$30,000 launch budget was spent on demos, welcome ads, content syndication, and Facebook. A social network

based on the Jive platform provides technical support and enables players to swap tips and talk trash to each other.

There are plenty of benefits to Cisco. By watching players' activities and comments, the company has learned about how they prefer to engage with technology and with each other. The program has also been a low-cost way to spread awareness about a company that many of the players may have thought dealt only with chief information officers (CIOs). Media coverage in the *Washington Post*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *NetworkWorld*, *Computerworld*, and elsewhere was a bonus.

## **Deloitte Development LLC (Facebook)**

"In a highly commoditized business, perhaps our largest differentiator is our people," says William Barrett, global director of online strategy at Deloitte, the global accounting and consulting firm. With 169,000 employees worldwide, Deloitte needs to maintain a pipeline to attract new talent. Deloitte has been on Facebook for a while, but the details of presence had been mainly left up to individual country managers. As a result, by early 2010 its brand had become fragmented. Meanwhile, the Global Facebook Page was "a dormant and rudderless site," Barrett says.

Nevertheless, the 25,000 fans that the company had collected across its far-flung Facebook properties was an underutilized asset. An internal social media committee was formed with representatives from multiple countries. Its purpose was to develop a unified look and feel for all Deloitte-branded pages. The company also made the decision to invest resources to monitor content and address incoming comments. "The global page would function as a first-stop landing page for all those new to Deloitte on Facebook," Barrett says.

The page is now a beehive of activity. Its video library promotes career opportunities and celebrates the company's involvement with highly visible destinations like the World Economic Forum in Davos. One tab features the company's Twitter feed. A gateway page lets visitors easily click through to any one of 18 country-specific pages.

The company even set up a fantasy league for the 2010 World Cup soccer tournament.

Results were immediate and dramatic. Within six months, membership had nearly tripled and career inquiries were coming through the door. “We have also been able to enforce our branding guidelines, resulting in a more unified and consistent Facebook presence for our brand,” Barrett says.