



Social media and social business are big themes for 2012. In which areas of business will the social movement have the most impact (or most potential for impact)? Why?

Let's Talk: Making B2B Apps More Social

Go to just about any business event, attend a webinar, download an ebook or whitepaper, and social media invariably comes up.

And it's for good reason. From a business perspective, social connects us to prospects and customers like never before. When people make decisions about where they are going to eat, what hotel they will book, what conference to attend, and, yes, what vendor they'll sign with, that decision is increasingly a social one. We want to know what our network of friends and colleagues think.

That has changed the game for app developers, who are increasingly designing in an interconnected ecosystem. Consider this: 20 million Facebook apps are installed each day. Clearly, people like it when their apps connect with their social world.

So our expectations have shifted. That apps work together seamlessly is taken for granted. My Spotify will tell my Facebook friends what I'm listening to. I can update Twitter and LinkedIn simultaneously from TweetDeck. Edits to a Google Doc can be done right from my Box account.

Our apps are not social simply because they push status updates to Facebook, but because they communicate with each other. I push a button in this app and it updates another app. It just works.

While this is the norm when it comes to consumer apps, the B2B industry has been slower to accept this change. The B2B infrastructure is fragmented. For too long, companies developed services as if they were in a vacuum, designing products that solve one particular pain point without thought for how it would work in the larger app marketplace.

That's too bad because if anyone needs social apps, it's B2B customers. We deal with long, often complicated sales cycles. To win these deals we deploy an always-growing selection of apps to grab buyers' attention, educate them and earn their trust. But when these apps live in a silo, unable to talk to each other, we're left with spotty data, a pile of spreadsheets and incomplete picture of the targeted buyer's behavior.

In other words, if the attendee data from the webinar I just ran doesn't connect with the platform I used to market that event and the CRM my sales team is logging into every day, I'm just painting by numbers. I can't see how the different apps I'm running are impacting the sale. And without knowing the revenue the app helps generate, the harder it is to justify paying for it.

The industry is adapting. Expect more announcements about developer centers and centralized marketplaces where apps work in concert. Features like social sign-on, which make life easier for the buyer and the seller, are taking root. An email sent from iPad can get recorded in my marketing automation and CRM systems.

Put simply, B2B apps need to be more social. The market demands it. As social media alters the professional landscape, apps give us the ability to adapt on the fly. But not if they only work boxed up in a vendor's platform.

It won't be enough to create a "cool" app this year. In 2012, the killer app is integration.

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