

DIGITAL WATERCOOLER

Social media is transforming the company intranet from a dusty old file-sharing technology into a lively, people-driven environment

BY RACHELLE SPERO AND ANTHONY APPLEWHAITE

Let's face it, the days of the in-house newsletter as the main vehicle for employee communications are over. With so much happening online, companies need to find ways to harness the power and speed of social networking and this is especially true for internal communication.

Luckily there are more and more creative and thoughtful social engagement tools out there, and many corporations are looking at them to capture the popularity of online social interaction. However, many of these solutions live in what is commonly called "the cloud" – meaning they use multiple, interconnected virtual servers as opposed to a physical, corporate-owned network.

Products such as Salesforce's Chatter, Microsoft's Sharepoint, Yammer, and Jive provide secure, private social networks for internal communications. These products can be cost effective on a number of levels as they allow companies both to communicate more efficiently and to eliminate layers of bureaucracy and intranet infrastructure.

Such software can also transform the way we think about employee and internal communications. But not everyone is convinced. Some are worried that it is just another mechanism that adds yet another layer to an already complex and difficult-to-navigate online ecosystem. Who is right?

In these pages we have captured a conversation typical of one that might occur on a platform such as Yammer. The conversation is between Brunswick colleagues, and it touches on some of the more important nuances of taking company communications to these new platforms. We answer questions commonly put to us about the value of these services to internal communications, and we address some of the issues that can arise when introducing these new social networks. ☺

Rachelle Spero is a Partner in Brunswick's New York office specializing in digital and social media.

Anthony Applewhaite is a Director in Brunswick's Washington, DC office. He is a lawyer and specialises in technology, new media, profile raising and public affairs.

Brunswick's **Michael Buckley, Torsten Busse, Jonathan Ward-Brown, and Rob Bagley** also contributed to this story.



Anthony Applewhaite

Cool, that sounds good – though I'm having a hard time grasping the strategic vision. I understand that sites like these are another mechanism for employee engagement, but why do employees need another social media tool?



Rachelle Spero

Since they are secure, closed networks, employees are free to talk about topics related to work. This is (of course) not to be encouraged on external social media platforms.

In addition, internal social networking can flatten the corporate hierarchy and break silos between departments. This can make the company feel smaller and allow good ideas to come from anywhere.

Finally, I have no doubt that such networks can improve knowledge-sharing and transport the company culture into the virtual world.



WHAT IS THE PRIORITY?

Anthony Applewhaite

I guess my next question would be: where does this tool stand in the order of priorities when developing an internal communications program for a company?



Rachelle Spero

It's a top priority for highly regulated companies. Especially ones that are exploring ways to exploit social media for marketing, communications, recruiting or customer service. For example, companies in the pharmaceutical, financial and energy sectors are using internal social networking to show employees how to communicate across social media within the company's "rules of engagement," as well as industry regulations.

This will help to establish resource requirements, best practices and measurement goals. It will also reduce the risks before launching branded social networking sites externally.

Using social networking platforms such as Yammer, Jive, Chatter, and SharePoint can also solve lots of internal communications problems and foster deeper engagement at all levels within the organization. For example, companies are launching internal social networking sites to help communicate with employees after a merger or acquisition.

That said, you certainly don't want to underestimate the effectiveness of traditional internal communications tools. The world has become increasingly social and with more communication happening online, you also cannot realistically plan for an internal communications campaign without, at least, exploring the possibility of rolling out an internal social networking platform such as Yammer or Jive.



WHY DO WE WANT OR NEED ANOTHER TOOL?

Mike Buckley, Brunswick, San Francisco

Hold on. Can you just give me a scenario where a Yammer or SharePoint would be the ideal place to communicate with staff as opposed to regular e-mail, or even instant messaging?



Rachelle Spero

Hi Mike,
Think about it this way: the conversation we are having now is open to the entire organization. I only have to post the answers to your questions once. It reduces the number of e-mails and increases productivity. And you can get answers to questions even when you don't know who to e-mail or even know what to ask.



Mike Buckley

In the spirit of debate ... while I'm certainly open to experiment, I already struggle with information overload. The notion of yet another platform is daunting.

Rachelle Spero

I wish I had a solution for information overload. An internal social network is not going to change the world. What it can do is enable you to lead from the front by driving your teams to this more collaborative format. You can then choose what information you consume and the people on the site keep it organized for you.

For example, you can have your teams separated by client, organizational or geographical boundaries. You can easily monitor progress and stay up-to-date with what people are doing and talking about in a single view. This will greatly reduce overlap and duplicated effort, making colleagues more aware of each other's tasks. Also, imagine if you could make decisions faster with fewer phone calls and no more long e-mail chains?

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Anthony Applewhaite

Honestly, this stuff looks really cool. And conceptually, I am all for engagement like this because I think it ultimately benefits corporate culture. But I am really concerned about who owns the content that I post. Since this isn't a site that is owned by the company, I'm less inclined to engage, because once I type some thoughts, I have no idea where they go and how they will be used in the future. What do you think about that?

Rachelle Spero

I can understand your concerns and we're all over it! In fact, we've already engaged corporate communications, HR, legal, and marketing to help us develop the goals, policies, and guidelines, as well as define security requirements. Rob, can you chime in on what IT is up to as it relates to security?

Torsten Busse, Brunswick, Frankfurt

This works for me, news junkie that I am ... There is a ton of material to read in the digital space, but who has the time to consume it all?! Thankfully I have a bunch of engaging colleagues who post interesting reads on here every day. So, thank you for curating the content that is most relevant to our business! Keep on posting, please.

I am wondering if we can use this for other purposes. For example, would it be possible to recruit colleagues with special expertise to help on account teams?

Can we use it to solicit feedback on pitches, advice notes, etc? If we are on here already, creating a record of interests, why not use it for more purposes and in the process create a reference library of our combined know-how? What are the risks? What am I missing?

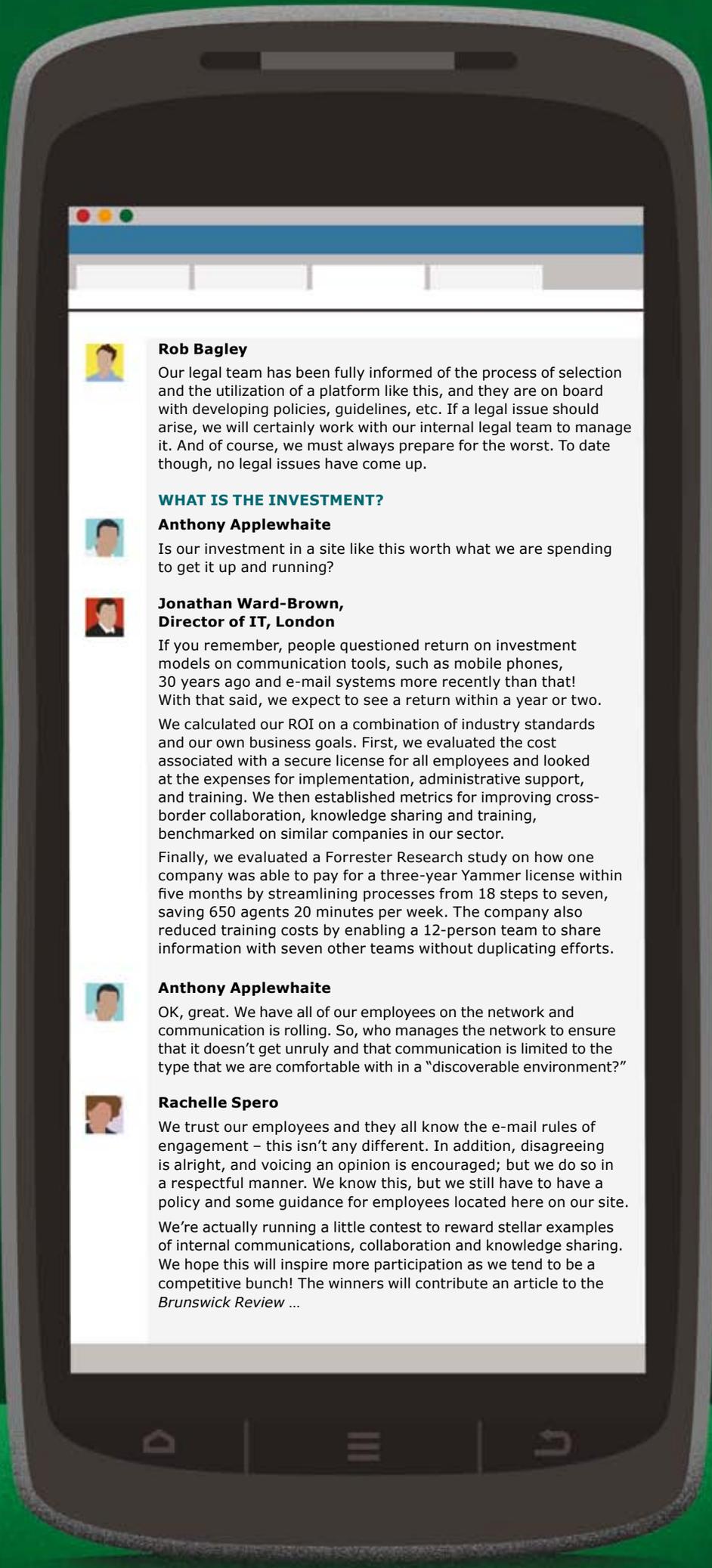
Rob Bagley, IT in London

Hi there,
Sure. This is a secure enterprise social network designed specifically for businesses, but with a consumer-friendly interface like Facebook or Twitter. Users cannot join the community unless they have an authorized *brunswickgroup.com* e-mail address.

We have a secure license, so information is completely private and can only be accessed by Brunswick employees with a valid password. The site is fully encrypted with back-end security protocols that are arguably the best in the business.

Anthony Applewhaite

Thanks, Rob. Sounds like you've done your homework. But there must be legal issues involved with using a site like this, don't you think? Especially considering the nature of our work and the sensitive materials we usually handle?



Rob Bagley

Our legal team has been fully informed of the process of selection and the utilization of a platform like this, and they are on board with developing policies, guidelines, etc. If a legal issue should arise, we will certainly work with our internal legal team to manage it. And of course, we must always prepare for the worst. To date though, no legal issues have come up.

WHAT IS THE INVESTMENT?



Anthony Applewhaite

Is our investment in a site like this worth what we are spending to get it up and running?



**Jonathan Ward-Brown,
Director of IT, London**

If you remember, people questioned return on investment models on communication tools, such as mobile phones, 30 years ago and e-mail systems more recently than that! With that said, we expect to see a return within a year or two.

We calculated our ROI on a combination of industry standards and our own business goals. First, we evaluated the cost associated with a secure license for all employees and looked at the expenses for implementation, administrative support, and training. We then established metrics for improving cross-border collaboration, knowledge sharing and training, benchmarked on similar companies in our sector.

Finally, we evaluated a Forrester Research study on how one company was able to pay for a three-year Yammer license within five months by streamlining processes from 18 steps to seven, saving 650 agents 20 minutes per week. The company also reduced training costs by enabling a 12-person team to share information with seven other teams without duplicating efforts.



Anthony Applewhaite

OK, great. We have all of our employees on the network and communication is rolling. So, who manages the network to ensure that it doesn't get unruly and that communication is limited to the type that we are comfortable with in a "discoverable environment?"



Rachelle Spero

We trust our employees and they all know the e-mail rules of engagement – this isn't any different. In addition, disagreeing is alright, and voicing an opinion is encouraged; but we do so in a respectful manner. We know this, but we still have to have a policy and some guidance for employees located here on our site.

We're actually running a little contest to reward stellar examples of internal communications, collaboration and knowledge sharing. We hope this will inspire more participation as we tend to be a competitive bunch! The winners will contribute an article to the *Brunswick Review* ...

Let's talk



How are these social media platforms different from e-mail or a corporate intranet?

- ✎ Reach a wider pool of internal experts
- ✎ "Conversational" communication
- ✎ Participants are self-selecting
- ✎ More engagement with internal news



What can social networking be used to develop?

- ✎ Culture
- ✎ Collaboration
- ✎ Communication
- ✎ Performance



What are the pitfalls? For example, how will they impact productivity?

- ✎ Another channel to look at
- ✎ Saved time versus wasted time
- ✎ Integration with existing infrastructure



What are the security concerns?

- ✎ Privacy
- ✎ Disclosure
- ✎ Is "the cloud" safe?



What are the benefits?

- ✎ Time and money saved from reducing e-mail exchanges and mailing lists
- ✎ Team building
- ✎ Real-time communications
- ✎ Knowledge sharing
- ✎ Employee retention and productivity



What is the best way to roll them out?

- ✎ Exclusive access
- ✎ Invitation only
- ✎ Launch all at once
- ✎ Inspire participation
- ✎ Training



What can be measured?

- ✎ Number of members
- ✎ Engagement
- ✎ Customer service
- ✎ Increased revenue
- ✎ Lower cost, compared to most knowledge-management systems