THE ROLE OF THE IT LEADER IS CHANGING. CIOs must shift their focus from “keeping the lights on” to enabling the organizational growth through new technology and improved processes. That means playing an active role in setting business strategy and aligning IT with business goals. But these are not easy tasks. And as CIOs begin to evolve their role, it is critical that they identify “easy wins” — projects that are almost guaranteed to succeed and will change the business’ perception of IT. Luckily, they don’t have to look far.

In a survey conducted by IDG Research on behalf of HootSuite, 45% of respondents indicated that enterprise social media is a highly important part of their overall business strategy today. Nearly three-quarters — 73% — expect social media to be a critical or very important part of their overall business strategy three years from now. With social media efforts taking an increasingly important role in the business, CIOs have an ideal opportunity before them: Demonstrate their ability to evolve by facilitating the organization-wide adoption of social media in a secure, compliant manner. This white paper explains how.

THE SOCIAL MEDIA OPPORTUNITY

The fact that social media is becoming an increasingly important part of business strategy is a testament to the benefits of social media. Survey respondents report some initial success in achieving desired business outcomes via enterprise social media initiatives, though there is much room for improvement. Creating new marketing strategies, improving customer service and support, boosting sales and increasing competitive advantage top the list of important potential business outcomes of enterprise social media initiatives.
For most organizations, accomplishing these goals will require preparation. Coordinated enterprise social media governance, structure and prioritization are in their infancy, and therefore may lack centralization, oversight and an internal champion. For 60% of organizations, enterprise social media strategy today is in the hands of a few individuals or a single team/department. Twenty-three percent of survey respondents identify their organizations as “social businesses,” where enterprise social is in the hands of multiple teams or departments, and 10% consider their organizations to be a “social enterprise,” a social business operating across time zones and cultures with enforced policies and empowered teams. That leaves plenty of room for improvement.

In addition to the business benefits, social media offers CIOs an opportunity to work with and build bridges with lines of business. According to the survey, there is a misperception that business executives are not as enthusiastic as IT about enterprise social media strategy. But business executives are significantly more likely than IT executives to highly rate the importance of enterprise social media as part of business strategy today (58% vs. 39%).

While the majority of all survey respondents (62%) feel senior business executives are at least supportive of the integration of enterprise social media into business strategy, those in IT are more than three times as likely as others to perceive business executives as indifferent or reluctant. Once CIOs recognize this fallacy they can embrace social media as an issue of mutual concern and breach the topic with their business counterparts.

Social media clearly provides CIOs with an opportunity to deliver value to the business. But the best news is this: Business executives are likely to welcome IT’s insight and guidance. Though IT is viewed as the top enterprise social media evangelist (61%) ahead of marketing (41%), executive business leadership is most likely to have primary control over the budget for enterprise social media tools. IT is typically involved in evaluating solutions and selecting vendors when organizations are purchasing enterprise social media tools and solutions.

**BUSINESS EXECUTIVES’ SOCIAL MEDIA CONCERNS**

The best way for CIOs to ensure that their social media efforts are a success is to proactively address the business concerns. The top concern business executives have about social media adoption is ensuring data security and access control. Survey respondents report that, on average, one-quarter of employees are actively using social media today, and their companies utilize 24 different social media accounts. Research by Altimeter Group has found that companies average 178 accounts. With no visibility into these accounts, it’s uncertain how many individuals are communicating on behalf of the organization or who has access to the accounts. Additionally, not having a chain of approval for posting content puts sensitive data at risk.”
The second biggest concern regarding the adoption of social media is a lack of internal skills and resources. This is understandable. Social media for business is relatively young, and while many digital natives are entering the workforce, their personal use of social media doesn’t translate to business use. Learning as you go is a risky proposition. One poorly worded tweet can result in a social media disaster that has a devastating impact on business and brand reputation. Companies need to find a way to arm their employees with the proper social media skills.

Recognized as the third most broadly shared concern, regulatory compliance as it relates to social media is a challenge for business executives, largely due to the risk of noncompliance. A company found to be out of compliance can be subject to penalty fees and bad press. It can be difficult to near impossible to recover. To further complicate matters, regulators are still trying to make sense of social media. This creates a fair amount of apprehension because organizations don’t know if their social media strategies will be in compliance with the next release of regulations. While they may meet current regulatory compliance requirements, they may quickly fall out of compliance.

INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP PLATFORMS

CIOs can easily address business concerns by deploying a best-of-breed social relationship platform (SRP). An SRP is an enterprise-grade technology that enables companies to push content to multiple third-party social media sites, as well as monitor, moderate and respond to posts — all from a centralized platform. In this manner, an SRP facilitates and enhances an organization’s use of social media across the organization, for needs such as social selling, customer service, marketing and social media management.

By consolidating social content and channels, an SRP increases visibility and control for improved data security and access control. For example, delegation features enable managers to assign social media accounts to specific employees without having to also give them the passwords. If an employee changes roles or leaves the company,
the account can easily be reassigned without having to change the password, thereby preventing unauthorized use. An SRP also enables companies to implement a process by which messages can only be posted from a list of approved accounts in the system and are routed through a layer of approvals before they are published.

Social engineering is an attacker’s weapon of choice when it comes to social media, so many SRPs also come with built-in malware and spam tools to notify users when they click on a suspicious link. This is an easy way to help prevent users from visiting malicious websites that could compromise their social media accounts. Social media management tools can also notify team leaders of suspicious activity taking place on their accounts, enabling them to shut down potential security threats.

By partnering with an enterprise SRP provider, CIOs give their companies access to a wealth of resources that they wouldn’t otherwise have at their disposal. CIOs should choose an SRP partner that deploys and manages SRP technology on a daily basis. A professional services team that has experience working with enterprise clients ensures that your solution is deployed properly and that you have access to necessary training. A partner that offers a variety of structured social media training programs gives organizations the confidence they need to move forward. These might include general on-demand social media training, strategy certification for managers and social media leaders, and customized education that addresses your unique business and industry requirements.

Employees can learn the best practices for utilizing social networks for the benefit of the company while maintaining secure control. In addition to increasing basic security, social media education can help improve the overall performance of social media campaigns. Training programs extend beyond basic education into advanced themes like social media etiquette and how to use social media to attract new clients.

HootSuite Enterprise is a best-of-breed social relationship platform that enables businesses and organizations to collaboratively execute campaigns across social networks such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Google+ Pages from one secure, web-based platform. HootSuite Enterprise empowers enterprise social media usage by addressing key business requirements:

- Protecting organizational resources and assets
- Adopting technology to comply with regulations
- Securing all communications, organizational information and data at-rest and in-transit
- Empowering employees to be more productive in their work while providing measurability and value to leadership
- Training employees to ensure success and adoption
- Finding a partner that understands your social vision

As a vendor-neutral SRP, HootSuite Enterprise gives companies the confidence they need to move forward with an organization-wide social media strategy. Your company won’t get locked into a single vendor’s portfolio of solutions, but instead will maintain flexibility through vendor compatibility. HootSuite Enterprise safely integrates with your existing systems, with a constantly expanding roster of market-leading technologies, and it extends a secure social media environment across all devices and departments.

To learn more about how HootSuite Enterprise can drive business value from social media efforts while reducing corporate risk, visit enterprise.hootsuite.com
Finally, choose an SRP that has built-in controls to help enforce compliance with regulatory requirements. Highly regulated industries such as financial services and healthcare are prohibited from using specific words, such as “guarantee”. Some SRPs can detect the use of these words in social media postings before they hit the wire and remove them. Some SRP providers also have the technical agility to interpret the latest regulations and provide technology solutions built on the existing framework. There is no need for a company to tear down and rebuild its social media strategy with each change in regulations. These SRPs evolve with the regulations to help ensure the organization continues to meet the changing requirements and reduce the risk of noncompliance.

OTHER BENEFITS OF A SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP PLATFORM

Using a robust SRP to manage enterprise social media efforts offers a number of other benefits as well, including the ability to integrate with existing applications. Integration, along with analytics and reporting capabilities, are among survey respondents’ top criteria when evaluating SRPs. This is easy to understand when you consider the impact social media is having on the enterprise — weaving its way through every department — and the need to reconcile social media data with existing technical deployments. How does the SRP run alongside legacy programs that have been providing analytics, in some cases, for decades?

Companies that prioritize integration and collaboration in their search for an SRP provider are on the right path. The SRP provider should have a robust partner ecosystem that includes programs like Facebook’s Preferred Market Developer Program, Twitter’s Certified Products and LinkedIn’s Social Media Manager Program. Programs such as these ensure tight-knit integrations with partner networks to ensure near parity with native platforms. A vendor-neutral platform can also make it easier to work with legacy line-of-business applications. Seamless integration with multiple CRM systems, analytics, compliance, social media management and customer service solutions help support the needs of all departments without the need to shift to a single vendor portfolio solution. The availability of an SDK and API allow for custom build-in and build-out capabilities, while an application marketplace offers a collection of extensions and applications to extend the capabilities of the SRP.

It is also important to select an SRP that gives your company the benefit of scalability. Pulling social media out of departmental silos means choosing an SRP that scales reliably, supporting upwards of 500,000 team members and manages an unlimited number of social media profiles. That also means servicing users in every business function. The platform should be built for social media beginners and power users alike.

CONCLUSION

As the role of social media in business grows increasingly important, reducing the risk of a social media disaster also becomes increasingly important. Companies that keep social media efforts in departmental silos and fail to manage the proliferation of accounts operating on behalf of the business subject themselves to risks that could be avoided. SRPs are designed to give companies the visibility and control they need to minimize risks while leveraging social media to improve customer service, market products and services, and gather customer feedback. CIOs are in the best position to make a recommendation to business executives. Those who do will earn the business’ respect and trust to become more intimately involved in setting business strategy.