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How Collaborative Networks will Replace Social Networks in the Enterprise

By Mark Fidelman on August 19, 2009



Most of us have delved into the world of social networking. Those that haven't are missing an opportunity to connect with the people you care about from around the world. For me the opportunity started with a company called [Zero Degrees](#) (later purchased by IAC) where a dear friend of mine named [Jas Dhillon](#) opened my eyes to the world of one on one social and business connections. In those early days I made it my mission to introduce this new concept to my business associates, friends and colleagues. 90% of them refused to participate wondering why they would ever share their Rolodex of contacts with complete strangers. I can recall most of them telling me to stop wasting my time with the company and to do something productive. Hindsight is of course crystal clear, but the naysayers were wrong.

You really can't blame them - the change from complete ownership of your personal connections to allowing anyone to see and contact them (including your competitors) was anathema to the seasoned professionals. Before social networking, you never would have shared your Rolodex with even your closest buddy. Yet a strange thing happened. For the younger generation not versed on the "importance" of keeping your hard earned business contacts secret, they saw a unique opportunity to build their own networks quickly and efficiently without years of cultivating. They saw they could reach Bill Gates because they were two degrees away from him and they got excited. They also saw they could make new friends with similar interests from around the world so they reached out and connected in enormous numbers. In effect, that early group of young visionaries made the first generation of social networking tools viral applications.

Today of course it's social this and social that. We even hear about the Enterprise using social networking tools to connect with those inside and outside of their organization. CIO's and VP's of IT dislike the tools while the younger generation embraces them. I constantly hear complaints from IT executives about the amount of time employees are devoting to social networking activities during work hours. So what should executives do to embrace the opportunity to leverage networking tools but still ensure their employees time is spent on enterprise objectives?

Enter [Collaborative Networking](#): it's about connecting groups of people to enterprise content. Instead of the user at the center of the social graph, enterprise content takes center stage with users contributing information to increase its importance and relevancy.



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Do you recall [Tim O'Reilly](#) of O'Reilly Media, challenging the technology community to develop real productive networking tools other than time-wasting Facebook applications? He used the "Superpoke" throw a digital sheep (or worse) at your friends application for noteworthy contempt. Mammal tossing aside however, there are a few first generation productivity tools that are beginning to answer O'Reilly's challenge. In particular I like Jigsaw.com, LinkedIn Job search, LinkedIn Answers and Xobni's Outlook Add-in as my most productive tools that help me become more efficient. These tools are about connecting with other people to help provide better information to solve business issues.

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Still, there are a large number of enterprise related issues that can't be solved by these first generation attempts at increasing business productivity. We do have Wiki's, blogs and forums, but these tools are not organized and structured to provide collaborative enterprise networks the ability to connect with corporate data silos, measure business objectives, allow groups of people to collaborate effectively and easily, and that help finance cut costs and sales increase revenue. Some companies like Jive, MindTouch, Alfresco and even Sharepoint are making headway in these areas, but a lot more thought and execution need to occur before we get to the dream and promise of Collaborative Enterprise Networks.

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This post is the fifth in a series of six that deals with Social Business and Social Enterprise. The goal of the series: to March 2, 2012 In "Enterprise"

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Mark Fidelman



EVP Sales of MindTouch. Mark has advised many start ups including a social networking site that was sold to Barry Diller's IAC. Before joining MindTouch, Mark led global sales efforts as an Executive Vice President for a publicly traded company, headed sales efforts for a technology division of AT Kearney and EDS, and served as Vice President of Sales and Marketing for a Singapore based corporation. Mark blogs at [Seek Omega](#)

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