Gartner

Press Release

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Gartner Highlights Six Core Principles to Tap the Power of Social Media

Analysts to Discuss Importance of Mass Collaboration at the Gartner Portals, Content & Collaboration Summit 2012, 19-20 September in London

Egham, UK, 29 August, 2012 — Many business and IT leaders tasked with executing on social-media-based efforts do not place enough emphasis on the "social" aspect of community participation, according to Gartner, Inc. Although numerous organisations have achieved social media success, failure rates are very high because leaders and managers rely too heavily on social technology functionality and often miss the critical design concerns.

"Far too many social media endeavours are failing because the managers leading the efforts lack knowledge of the fundamental principles of mass collaboration," said Anthony Bradley, group vice president at Gartner. "Business and IT leaders must understand the basic nature of mass collaboration and how to deliver on its unique value. Like never before, millions of people can simultaneously create content, share experiences, build relationships, and engage in other forms of productive work and meaningful activities."

Mr Bradley said that business and IT leaders shouldn't assume that the social technologies automatically come with the needed mass collaboration built in. Mass collaboration must be designed and delivered as part of the social solution, and no social technology is great enough to save efforts that ignore or omit the fundamental principles of mass collaboration.

"When these efforts are omitted, people don't view the social media environment as a place for them to meaningfully collaborate, and so adoption never really takes hold," Mr Bradley said. "Initial interest wanes quickly as community members realise that collaborating in the environment is too difficult. Participation lacks focus, and critical mass never materialises around a common cause."

Gartner has identified six core design principles that distinguish social media from other approaches to communication and collaboration, and form the foundation for its unique mass-collaboration value proposition. Business leaders should apply these principles to shift away from a "provide and pray" approach to a motivate and engage strategy. These core design principles can be viewed on Flickr at http://bit.ly/Lu3Dud.

1. **Participation: Getting Communities to Work for You**

Successful social media solutions tap into the power of mass collaboration through user participation. Many organisations miss the participation principle and look at social media as another channel for corporate communications rather than an opportunity for mass collaboration. Instead, Gartner recommends that business leadership set active participation as a priority design goal, with everything else revolving around getting the community to contribute valuable content. Providing seed content to promote community contributions, and motivating content contribution through social incentive mechanisms — such as social status and gamification — are recommended to drive participation.

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2. Collective: People Must Swarm to the Effort

With social media, participants "collect" around a unifying cause. People go to the content to contribute their piece to the whole. However, the most challenging effort with social media is to gain community adoption, and speed is critical. Swarming is almost completely dependent on the organisation's purpose for mass collaboration. Purpose is the specific reason business leadership wants people to collaborate; this is what draws together a community and gets them to contribute. More importantly, purpose also identifies the "what's in it for me" for the individual contributors. What's unique about mass collaboration is that people are self-motivated to participate if the purpose is compelling enough to them personally.

Gartner advises organisations to pursue a specific and well-defined purpose that is easily identifiable and meaningful to the target audience. It's important to capitalise on physical world events, as well as online events, as part of a "tipping point plan" to rally people and catalyse a community.

3. Transparency: The Community Validates and Organises Content

A social media solution also provides transparency, in that participants are privy to one another's participation. It is in this transparency that the community improves content, unifies information, self-governs, self-corrects, evolves, creates emergence and otherwise propels its own advancement. This principle of transparency distinguishes social media from other forms of content sharing, such as web content management and traditional knowledge management systems.

Gartner recommends empowering the community with a robust capability to view, use and provide feedback on the contributions of others: with functionality such as thumbs up and thumbs down, tagging, voting, star ratings, and social commentary. Employing transparency with social status and gamification mechanisms, such as leader boards, virtual currencies and badges, also helps to create incentives and recognise valuable contributions.

4. Independence: Provides the "Mass" in Mass Collaboration

Independence delivers anytime, anyplace and any-member collaboration, which means any participant can contribute completely independent of any other. To aid independence, Gartner advises organisations to consider the potential scale of the social media solution, and examine the design for anything that may impede anytime, anyplace and any-member collaboration. They should also eliminate, or at least minimise, any workflow, controls, administration and moderating, or other gating mechanisms that can create bottlenecks and negatively impact scale.

5. Persistence: Contributions Must Endure for Scaled Value

Social media captures participants' interactions and contributions in a persistent state for others to view, share and augment. This principle shows how social media differs from "same time" conversational interactions, such as telephone and videoconferencing, where the information exchanged isn't captured effectively.

Organisations should make it easy for participants to capture content using evolving technologies, such as contextual information capture, to help collect more interaction content. They should examine how much persistence is desired, how much of the contribution to capture, how to manage it and how long to maintain it, whilst identifying content that is critical to the purpose of the social media effort.

6. Emergence: Communities Self-Direct for Greater Productivity

The behaviours in mass collaboration cannot be modelled, designed, optimised or controlled like those in traditional systems. They emerge over time through the interactions of community members. Emergence is what allows collaborative communities to come up with new ways of working or new solutions to seemingly intractable problems.

Gartner advises organisations to focus on the ends and not the means, by providing the community with the time and flexibility to find its own way of achieving results. An organisation should observe social media behaviours, examine how productivity actually manifests itself through community interactions, then guide the community or make other organisational behaviour adjustments to accommodate new ways of working.

Additional information is available in the report: "Master Six Core Principles to Tap the Massive Power of Social Media," which is available on Gartner's web site at http://www.gartner.com/resId=1860514.

The Gartner Portals, Content & Collaboration Summit 2012, takes place from 19 to 20 September in London. For more information about the Summit please visit http://gartner.com/eu/pcc. To register for the Summit, the media can contact Rob van der Meulen on + 44 1784 26 7738 or at rob.vandermeulen@gartner.com. Information from the event will be shared on Twitter at http://twitter.com/Gartner_inc using #GartnerPCC.

About the Gartner Portals, Content & Collaboration Summit 2012
At the Gartner Portals, Content & Collaboration Summit 2012, Gartner analysts will help IT and business leaders harness the benefits and the challenges of a mobile and always-on workplace, exploit social engagement to drive innovation, and plan for the future workplace and the next generation social intranets.

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