

Social business speaker at HR Africa Summit shares thoughts

The 11th Annual HR Africa Summit, incorporating the HRD Expo, will run from 27-31 October 2014 at The Forum in Bryanston, Johannesburg. Top speakers include Mike Stopforth, CEO of Cerebra, who shares a few practical solutions for HR professionals, in the social era of business.



Mike Stopforth

Setting the scene

The term social media refers to a set of web-based and mobile tools, technologies and platforms that enable connection, communication and collaboration in ways never before possible. The problem is that this definition does not encompass the undeniable impact social media has had on society and business. Social media is not about tools, but about people.

I believe that companies that grasp the ethos behind social media, along with the behavioural changes resulting from the integration of these tools into daily life, will easily differentiate themselves from their competitors in years and decades to come.

Modern companies are still constructed on industrial age principles. The way information is disseminated and shared within organisations has not changed significantly over the last fifty years. Technologies may have evolved but the hierarchies remain. Few technological advancements have been able to challenge this hierarchical mind-set until social media burst onto the scene.

The social web gave us Wikipedia and Twitter, where influence is determined by what you share and contribute, not by your salary band or the plaque on your office door. There is no direct financial reward for those contributions; we share because we know we are building something bigger and more important than we are. Our Boomer parents were taught that the intellectual property you learned and retained made you valuable and competitive. Today that IP is smeared all over the Web. Becoming an 'expert' can be as simple as conducting a few Google searches and reading a few blogs. As the Cluetrain Manifesto prophesied 13 years ago, 'Markets are getting smarter faster than most companies can keep up.'

Employees need to be digital citizens

Countless organisations still ban their staff from using social media during office hours, fearing that they will waste time and bandwidth. This is short-sighted; their staff will either continue to engage on their personal computers or mobile phones or, even worse, find ways to access these sites via proxies or otherwise. Becoming a social business, means recognising the need for your employees to become 'digital citizens' and providing the training for them to manage their digital reputations.



Instead of banning use, why not incentivise the correct (or most constructive use) of social media during office hours? Make the content that staff find online and share with their colleagues a KPI, come salary review time. Judge the relevance and usefulness of these content submissions via a simple internal 'Like' mechanism coupled with a points system.

People do business with people

Business needs to change. You either keep up or become redundant in the minds of your existing employees, your prospective employees and your customers. While social media has helped many companies become more customer-centric, it is still treated primarily as a modestly effective marketing tool; social media is about media and people, which is one dimension of the overall world of business.

With social business, you start to look at the way people are interacting in digital experiences and apply the insights derived to a wide variety of different business processes. Social media is changing human communication at the most fundamental levels, affecting all aspects of business. From a business perspective, social media should describe the tools used to communicate with employees and customers.

We need to start thinking about social business as the term that could address the way rapidly evolving consumers and employees are challenging the way we approach finance, legal, human resourcing, strategy, governance and more.

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