Enterprise 2.0: bringing social media inside your organization

An interview with Monika Wencek, Senior Customer Success Manager at Yammer

Interview by Gareth Bell

Monika Wencek

Increasingly, organizations are looking to social media as a means to engage employees, disseminate e-learning, and foster a sense of corporate community. While open social platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn have proven adequate for communicating brand messages, private Enterprise Social Networking sites such as Yammer claim to offer a service more tailored to specific business requirements.

Yammer aims to increase organizational communication by mirroring the methods that have become so embedded in the lives of many. The interface and functionality bear a striking resemblance to that of Facebook, an association that continues at board level, with Facebook’s founding president, Sean Parker, on Yammer’s board of directors.

In the days following this interview, Microsoft Corp. announced an agreement to acquire Yammer for $1.2 billion, with the intention of adding enterprise social networking to their growing portfolio of cloud services, such as Office 365.

Monika Wencek is Senior Customer Success Manager for Yammer in EMEA (Europe, Middle East and Africa). She is responsible for helping organizations to get the most out of the opportunities that Yammer provides for improving internal communications and business effectiveness.

Previously, as a Principal Consultant at SuccessFactors, she advised medium to large organizations on all aspects of talent management practice, through the use of workforce analytics and cloud-based solutions.

Monika holds a BA (Hons) degree in Business and Psychology from Kingston University.

Could you tell us a bit about Yammer’s journey as a company to date?

Yammer was launched in September 2008 and has experienced significant growth worldwide since then. We created the Enterprise Social Networking space and remain its leader with over 5 million users worldwide. The basic version of Yammer is free, and customers can pay to upgrade their network to receive additional administrative and security controls, priority customer service and a dedicated customer success manager. We now have offices across the USA and in EMEA and Asia-Pacific, employing nearly 400 people worldwide.

We are seeing organizations of all sizes including more than 85 percent of the Fortune 500 transforming the way they work through Yammer, from ten person startups to corporate
giants such as Shell, IKEA, Deloitte and 7-Eleven, across every single industry and 165 countries.

Yammer is enabling organizations to make transformative changes quickly by empowering employees to collaborate across departments, geographies, content and business applications. People are now connected to colleagues in real-time, have access to information and business data, creating an environment where people are getting work done collaboratively and are empowered to contribute to their organizations, irrespective of roles, locations and time.

We see the journey to date as a real reflection of the demand for Enterprise Social Networking tools within organizations and a validation of our philosophy that in today’s world, organizations should not adopt software that they are not able to try out for free first – there is simply not the need to anymore.

Yammer has gained significant recognition from the industry from winning the TechCrunch50 award for its launch 3.5 years ago to most recently being named a Leader in the Forrester Research Wave report “Activities Streams”, awarding the highest scores for its current offering, adoption strategy and significant market presence.

**What differentiates Yammer from other freely-available social networking sites?**

Yammer pioneered the business model of free-to-use enterprise software; our product has been free to sign up since we first launched. Since then, we differentiated ourselves through our focus on a single solution, our speed of innovation and our commitment to partnering with customers.

Yammer is solely committed to and focused on Enterprise Social Networking. This means we are able to direct all of our resources towards continued development and enhancement of what we offer to our customers, which includes everything from the product itself to our approach helping our customers get the most out of it and that they love to use.

Everything about the way Yammer is set up means we are able to innovate at a rate that is significantly faster than our competitors. We take developments in the market and conversations with our customers into account for the evolution of our product, which is improved incrementally every week.

We also very strongly believe in partnering with our customers to make them successful. Incorporating the capability of Enterprise Social Networking into an organization is something that goes way beyond installing a technology. We recognize this and take a stake with our customers in making them successful. Our Customer Success organization works closely with our customers to help them on their journey to social networking success. We invest significantly in this capability as we are committed to working with our customers to deliver lasting value.

**From an L&D perspective, what benefits does a private social networking platform such as Yammer offer?**

In the world of modest L&D budgets, decreasing employee engagement and increasingly empowered employees, private social networking platforms have proved to be mutually beneficial to both the employers and employees.

From an organizational standpoint, Yammer acts as a rich social learning platform free of both time and space boundaries, a third space between e-learning and classroom that can be used for cultural integration with one’s future workplace, manager and peers, induction, ongoing job-specific and workforce development training needs.

As the 70:20:10 model ascertains that people learn 70 percent of what they know about their jobs informally, our platform makes social learning easy, collaborative and engaging while propagating cost savings, classroom knowledge retention and dialogue throughout the organization. Yammer does it by putting the employees at the centre, enabling them to apply
their capabilities freely, interact with the learning materials and have conversations about the things that matter to them and their employers after the training has finished.

Some Yammer customers create Groups to connect participants, allow them to get to know each other and gauge audience expectations to drive agendas before the event and create richer classroom experience by keeping introductions short. They might also provide training materials, links and other resources for easy access before, during and after the event to stimulate conversations, encourage the Group to ask questions, foster learning before and keep it going after an event is over.

Other customers who facilitate online learning frequently, can use the platform to engage their virtual teams by regularly connecting with their workers in real-time on Yammer and increasing managers’ involvement. Yammer’s Wiki function pages provides a space for real-time collaboration and class-generated content that is searchable, sharable and easy to update after the event and encourages people who do not take part in training to participate from anywhere and learn anytime.

From an individual viewpoint, Yammer fosters a welcoming and safe collaboration space for experiential L&D where people learn by applying knowledge of a topic to develop expertise, openly and instantly seek feedback and continuously improve through informal mentorship.

Private social networks empower employees to discover opportunities across the organization through Activities Streams that can be used to advance their own projects, to learn and contribute actively as Files (any type of document) are being worked, and to personally engage with work, people and the organization. We believe this is the learning workplace of the twenty-first century.

How can Yammer, and other Web 2.0 technology, be effectively utilized by human resources departments?

Human resources functions can use Web 2.0 social networking technologies like Yammer to revolutionize the way they deliver HR initiatives, interact with management, engage employees and collaborate effectively with external parties on HR issues.

Private Groups can act as a communication channel for geographically dispersed HR teams to deliver different employee initiatives, seek real-time feedback, track progress by tagging content and provide status updates to colleagues and employees. Private social networks enable HR to have direct, more frequent and richer interactions with management that translate into a deeper understanding of organizational objectives and closer alignment, informed decision making and business outputs shaping the future of organizations.

Social collaboration platforms enable HR departments to stay connected with employees across the organization, give them a voice to ask questions, provide continuous feedback on things that matter to them and operate an open and collaborative culture for greater engagement and productivity. Leading by example, HR can actively support new ways of working, underpinned by social media, mobility and free device choice, that the Facebook generation is looking for in potential employers.

A collaborative organization enables HR departments to not only engage and communicate effectively internally, but also to transform relationships with external parties by connecting in a collaborative workspace, where files can be easily shared and discussed on the go. These innovative ways of engaging result in shortened project life cycles, retention of specialist knowledge and development of new products, services and industries.

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