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Enterprise 2.0 Keynoters: Time To Get In The Game

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Volltext: Note: Speakers from Wells Fargo, Nike, FedEx share what they've learned about enterprise social collaboration.

7 Examples: Put Gamification To Work (click image for larger view and for slideshow) "The world is one big data problem."

Nathan Bricklin stood onstage at the Enterprise 2.0 conference in Boston, just a year after he attended the event for the first time, and credited some of the people he met through the conference with helping educate him on what makes social collaboration work.

Bricklin was one of several enterprise social networking practitioners featured as keynote speakers Tuesday at the opening session of Enterprise 2.0 Boston, a UBM TechWeb event. Bricklin said he came to Boston last year, shortly after being appointed head of social strategy for Wells Fargo wholesale services.

Bricklin gave the first part of his presentation by quoting a series of tweets from speakers he met at the event last year, like Andrew McAfee, Ross Mayfield, Rachel Happe, John Stepper, Oliver Marks, Sara Roberts, and Michael Wu.

Their guidance taught him to take social collaboration seriously, for example by appointing a real community manager and not counting on someone to fill that role in addition to their regular job (advice from Happe), but also to relax a little, understanding that, as McAfee tweeted, you can't win or lose the game in the first inning.

From Wu, the chief scientist at Lithium Technology, he learned to embrace a spirit of testing and experimentation. "You've got to be willing to change your plans--to use what you've learned to change your plans," Bricklin said.

[ See our special report: Enterprise 2.0 Boston 2012.]

Their thoughts helped him figure out "how to connect the relevant dots" in a market filled with a lot of noise, Bricklin said. In addition to taking clues from the social world, Wells Fargo determined what was most important through its own internal testing, he said. By now, Bricklin thinks he can offer some advice of his own. "You shouldn't have a separate social strategy," he said. "What you should have is a business strategy, and then you can layer social efforts and social tools to support the business strategy."

Enterprise 2.0 attendees also heard from Richard Foo, enterprise collaboration director at Nike, and Bryan Barringer, manager of enterprise collaboration implementation for FedEx. Lithium's Wu was the only representative of a vendor included among the keynoters, but rather than talk about his company's products he performed an onstage experiment in social network analysis based on treating tweets about his own lecture as a set of notes about the content of the talk, which also showed collaboration between the people who retweeted each other.

Nike's Foo took the stage in a track suit and made a Nike slogan--"it's not about being fast, it's about being faster"--part of his pitch. "Some of the traditional collaboration tools, like file shares and email, are not fast enough for us to be competitive," he said.

"Staying connected has gotten more complex. We've gone from finding people down the hallway to finding people around the world," Foo said. When the company decided to take a core product design team that had formerly been concentrated in one location and distribute those people to different locations close to the markets they served, the design team hired a Web development team to design a custom collaboration system.
to keep them connected, he said. In one sense, that was a mistake because the software didn't scale and will be impractical to maintain over the long run, but on the other hand it was a learning experience, he said. "We do not sit on the sidelines. We get in the game and learn from our experiences," Foo said.

Nike has since selected as its collaboration software Cisco Quad, which Cisco announced Tuesday was being rebranded WebEx Social. This enterprise social environment grew from 1,000 to 5,000 users in the first 60 days after it was launched, solely through viral adoption, and Foo is now preparing for a more formal launch to win participation from 30,000 employees.

Like Bricklin, Foo said he values what he has learned from the Enterprise 2.0 conferences and from connections with other organizations pursuing similar goals. But researching what was going on within his own organization has proven just as important. "We've discovered several collaboration-type initiatives in the company," he said, meaning "we've been spending millions of dollars on several redundant things."

Cisco's enterprise social software is not necessarily perfect, but the vendor has been working with Nike to address requirements such as the ability to connect with external as well as internal collaborators, Foo said. Nike's collaboration is built around a mobile-first strategy, he said, and being able to offer an enterprise app store is a "killer concept inside our company."

FedEx's Barringer had a slightly different story to tell, not about creating a collaboration environment but about using gamification techniques to drive more and better use of that environment. Sharing tools are only effective if people are motivated to share, and altering behavior is where gamification has the most potential in business, he said.

Specifically, FedEx wants to shift employees from thinking, "I have knowledge, and I must limit access to that intelligence in order for me to be valuable," to believing, "I am valuable because I am knowledgeable and I am willing to share that knowledge." The former is "a very old way of thinking," not only at FedEx but in many hierarchical organizations, but it's not the way the company wants to operate going forward, he said. Gamification techniques, like awarding badges for posting blogs or participating in communities, is one way to give recognition and positive reinforcement to employees who embrace collaboration, Barringer said. Yet in an organization with a relatively formal culture--founder Fred Smith was a Marine, "and he taught us all to be good Marines," Barringer said--it's better not to use the language of games and play to describe these initiatives. Instead, emphasize that the goal is to get work done. Certain gamification techniques, like making users gain some levels of achievement before they can "unlock" a feature of a system, also don't make sense in a business context, Barringer said. If you put barriers in people's path when they're trying to accomplish a collaboration task, "that's going to stop them dead in their tracks," he said. "Most people are going to say it's not worth it--I've got work to do."

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