Get Serious About Social Media

Terri L. Griffith
Santa Clara University, tgriffith@scu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarcommons.scu.edu/mgmt

Part of the Business Administration, Management, and Operations Commons

Recommended Citation
Get Serious About Social Media

General and supply chain-specific tools can connect people and companies while providing business intelligence.

Supply management is a social profession, where cross-functional interaction and team-based problem solving are the norm. We look to our coworkers and supply partners for information in their areas of expertise, and reach out to colleagues in the industry for advice. Facilitating this communication is technology, evolving from the telephone, to email and harness their potential.

The boundaries around these tools are fuzzy and dynamic, however, with permissions and privacy broadly or tightly controlled. Platforms can also offer many capabilities or be tightly focused. They range from Facebook and Twitter (which are considered consumer-grade tools), to Google (with both consumer and enterprise versions), to Jive, Moxie, Salesforce Chatter, Socialcast, Socialtext, Yammer and many other “built for the enterprise” offerings. Regardless of the tool used, the goal is to help supply management professionals ascertain who knows what, who needs what information and how to coordinate to get the job done.

Early adopters in supply management are using social tools, from consumer-grade, to enterprise-built, to supply chain-specific.

Aberdeen Group’s Kevin Permenter recently authored a report, An Emerging Social Paradigm in the Retail and Consumer Markets, describing current and future social media effects in retail supply chains. The use of social tools is playing a positive role in their respondent companies’ outcomes. Given the results, it’s not surprising that across supply chain activities in these industry sectors, 44 percent are using social media in their work and 37 percent plan to do so in the next two years. The question is: “What are the other 19 percent thinking?”

Early adopters in supply management are using the full gamut of social tools, from consumer-grade, to enterprise-built, to supply chain-specific. One expert in the use of social media tools designed specifically for supply management thinks of companies as the “nodes” in social media rather than people, as is normally the case. The focal use of social media, then, is not on “friends” but on businesses and supply management processes and procedures.

The tools available in the marketplace vary by offering. But some supply management-specific tools can leverage the social media stream of...
Effectively Manage All These Choices

How can supply management professionals manage social media tools in their complex business interactions and global operations? Supply managers must always be evaluating and designing with people, organizational processes and technology tools simultaneously. There is no silver bullet. Three practices provide a repeatable method for managing this juggling act:

1) Stop-look-listen. Pause, and then look across your organization for the best opportunities to leverage social business. Find out if there are grassroots efforts, and listen to how you might leverage the learning from these early adopters. Look for opportunities to support your key business initiatives (the heart of your business) through real-time demand tracking, expertise discovery, communities of practice and enhanced collaboration.

2) Mixing. Mixing is a formal process. It should look like a win-win negotiation made up of your available human, organizational and technical options. We all know how to negotiate. The trick for effectively mixing social media use is to put issues on the table. These include how much and what type of training is needed (human dimension), which technology features are most important and what incentives to provide for participation. As with most new initiatives, a strategy for how to remove roadblocks and encourage participation (from an organizational standpoint) is essential, as well. Greater training needs may affect which technology features you choose.

3) Sharing. Share your goals and practices with your collaborators to let people understand what you’re doing and why. Over time, this will increase the efficiency and effectiveness of your work together. You will all become more plugged in and gain greater value from social business.

The supply management community is well-positioned to take advantage of growing technical and human sophistication around connecting and collaborating. By managing through the three practices listed here, procurement professionals can find a social media solution to meet the needs of their unique situation.

© Institute for Supply Management®. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission from the publisher, the Institute for Supply Management®.