

How to Get Started with your Knowledge Networking Initiative

Prepared by introNetworks

We are frequently asked what it takes to be successful in creating a knowledge network. That answer can take many forms as the real answer is, it depends. It depends on you, your organization, your current situation, what your goals and objectives are and how ready you are to be a 'social business.' These 10 Steps will give you a roadmap on how to get started.

This new field of social business only feels overwhelming for the first few hours, once you become immersed in the process you will start to learn and become familiar with the concepts, it starts to become easier to understand the language and get a feel for the various types of tools and the variety of benefits that are available. We are here to help you along this path and welcome the chance to help you discover your own social business strategy.

This graphic outlines in broad terms what you need to pay attention to, think of them as critical success factors. Starting with strategy, you work your way around the circle, paying attention to each facet of the process. The circular nature of the graphic implies that this is a continuous process and this paper will highlight the nuances that will make your effort successful.



1 **Crafting a Strategy**

The first step is to focus on what you want. We find that most people do not have a knowledge networking strategy, at least not a formal one. You may have experimented with Twitter or Facebook or LinkedIn or more likely you may not have done anything yet. Take time with your colleagues to decide to figure this out, as it will make the rest of the process much easier.

You will need to;

1. Define who you are as an organization
2. Determine how socially-enabled your constituents are
3. Identify the drivers that will help you build a successful knowledge networking strategy
4. Clearly understand, as best you can, what measurable value you want to achieve from this initiative.

Ideally you want to build a mission statement for your strategy that will attract passionate and engaged users.

2 **Understand Your Audience**

This is the next step to success. You need to listen, ask and measure how communications, collaboration and decisions are made today, see what is working and where there can be improvements.

Not everyone wants to blog or tweet, some are introverted; some love to post articles and comments incessantly. By understanding these dynamics, you will know what features and capabilities you will need your strategy to deliver.

3 **What's important to you? What's important to them?**

Often this question gets lost in the quest to find the correct set of features. You need to determine what you want to know about your audience, and what they want to know about each other.

These two lists can be combined to become the beginning of your network. It's said that you don't know what you don't know. But what if you did know? This should be a guiding force for you as you put together these lists.

Understanding how people could be connected based on these concepts is actually the fundamental building block of a successful strategy.

4 **Socializing Your Strategy – Building Consensus**

It is our experience that in most cases you will be meeting with others in your organization trying to understand how this strategy will help them, and how they can help you accomplished your goals.

Be patient. During this phase, remember that everyone has a different

understanding of the value of a social business strategy and different experiences of 'being social'. Your goal here is to make sure your strategy gets traction. So listen loudly to what you are hearing in these sessions.

Getting everyone on the same page with the same level of enthusiasm will be a powerful step toward aligning everyone's goals and turning the strategy into a priority that will get attention and more importantly funding.

5 **Make Sure You Can Measure Everything**

Know exactly where you want to go, because measurement is not useful if you don't know what success looks like. Be sure to understand how you will utilize the information you will glean from the community. If you don't know at this point, you will not be able realize it's true value in the future.

When you start to look at vendors and potential solutions, be sure there are measurements in place that align with your stated goals.

6 **Create Your Action Plan**

By this step in this process you should have a good understanding of what you want to build, why you want to build it, and who will be using it.

Now you are ready to start to look for a platform to build your community on. This process will be much simpler as you know what you are looking for, not what the vendor wants to sell you.

We suggest making a worksheet with all of your requirements along one side and the various vendors along the top. Make sure you include items such as the vendors' capacity to understand your specific situation and their ability to configure their tool to meet your needs.

You should have already determined your need to integrate with your existing website and what data will need to be utilized, be sure to put that on the list, ask how hard is it to push and pull information from the Community? You will need access to this information for your measurement tasks.

Put down the most important features that support your strategy, now is the time to be very exact, as an overbuilt site will end up overwhelming you and your audience.

Evaluate which features have a higher payoff; those that streamline repetitive or expensive tasks should rank higher on your worksheet.

Remember to focus on value – you are building a community that will be contextual and relevant to your audience. These tools do not work in a vacuum, how are they going to work with your existing processes and people?

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Attend Product Briefings

You have done the work of understanding your needs and made a list of what's important to you and what the value will be to your organization once you have found the right partner to work with. It can seem overwhelming at this point, but with your list you will have a way to check what you see against what you need to be successful.

Don't be afraid to ask to speak to the executive of the company to better understand the philosophy of their platform, what is their vision for the future and how well do they understand your specific needs.

Be sure to understand exactly what it takes to be successful on their platform, how long to launch, what are best practices to grow and sustain the effort and what happens when you need strategic guidance down the road.

Make sure you attend these meetings with your core team so that you have a shared experience, make sure all of your issues, questions and concerns are answered so you do not have to make repeat visits back to ask questions from other members of the team. If a team member cannot attend, see if you can get their questions in advance.

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The Selection Process

You need to be diligent during the briefing process and keep good notes. Meet with your team afterwards and compare notes, be sure all of your questions were answered, if not, send email to capture key points that will help your decision process.

Depending on how analytical you are will guide how much effort you put into this step. You can weigh each of the features, benefits and specific needs you have, then you can tally the scores of each line item and come up with a definitive outcome. You may feel overwhelmed by this time, but the act of making the lists, and keeping track of each presentation has the benefit of making it much easier to make a decision, based on facts and not 'good salesmanship'.

Which vendor is also going to be a long-term partner for you as you build, launch and grow your Community? You will want to have confidence in their ability to work with you over the long term.

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Making The Decision To Move Forward

You have the opportunity to transform your organization with this strategy, now is when you need to trust the process and pick the partner to help you bring the initiative to life.

Once you have made a platform decision you can begin the journey down the path you have laid out according to your strategy. If you are working

with introNetworks we will be right by your side as your build. Launch and grow your Community for years to come.

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Taking the First Step

The last step in this process is the first step towards implementing the tactics that are driven by your strategic plan. The implementation plan needs to be clearly understood very early in the process. It is probably true that the problems you are looking to solve are challenges for your organization right now, today. You can not wait 3, 6, or 9 months to have this strategy pay off, so your implementation plan will be most viable if it is a series of small steps that grow and build momentum.

Changing how people connect, communicate and collaborate can be a fundamental cultural shift in your organization, give it time, but don't be complacent. Always be learning from how people are responding to what you have designed, and use the insight you gain from the constant monitoring of the activity to consistently improve.

At introNetworks we know that getting involved in selecting, creating and implementing a knowledge networking strategy can feel overwhelming. We work with clients at all stages of the journey and have seen what works, what doesn't and what pitfalls you can avoid. The above insight comes from experience of working with organizations over the past eight years, helping them to discover, implement and grow an effective social media strategy.

We would love to help you with your strategy. Give us a call at 805 722 1040 or visit our website at introNetworks.com to learn more about our various solutions.