

## Case Study: BT

**PA Consulting**  
A Second Life for Recruiting: How PA Consulting uses virtual worlds to recruit the Digital Generation.

**US Army**  
Playing the Recruiting Game: How the U.S. Army has pioneered the use of game technology to recruit the Digital Generation.

**Ernst & Young**  
Harnessing the power of social networking: How Ernst & Young uses Facebook to engage graduate recruits.

**Booz Allen Hamilton**  
Company and community: How employee-centric corporate citizenship at Booz Allen is used to motivate and develop young high-performers.



**BT**  
Enterprise 2.0:  
Social media tools as an aid to learning and collaboration in the workplace, for the Digital Generation and beyond.

This is the fifth in a series of case studies produced for partners in the Digital Generation Initiative, an innovation programme by [Career Innovation](#).



## Enterprise 2.0 - How BT is using a variety of social media tools in the workplace to encourage communication, collaboration and knowledge sharing.

### background and rationale

BT is a global communications company, operating in 170 countries, with 110,000 employees. BT sees its fundamental aim as using the power of communications to build better businesses and a better world. It is hardly surprising then that BT should be at the forefront of adopting a range of social media technologies within its own enterprise to promote a more efficient - and pleasurable - working environment. Ross Chestney, Head of Communication Services at BT, sees this as inevitable: "It's part of human

nature; people want to participate, and that's true at work just as it is in other parts of our lives."

nature; people want to participate, and that's true at work just as it is in other parts of our lives".

In turn, these new ways of working involve some significant cultural shifts. Richard Dennison, Senior Manager - Social Media at BT, explains that businesses need to move away from communication being seen as a top-down channel and into a conversation between people. "People give their best if they are recognised as individuals who are entitled

to be themselves at work and express their opinions. The environment must make them feel like they can make a difference."

Some people do find this cultural shift difficult. The 'Digital Generation' - today's young people who have grown up with the Internet and see technology as a natural part of life - tends to find it easier. In Dennison's experience, "They function differently; they are informal and will fire stuff off quickly to anyone, they are not scared of picking up the phone and speaking to the most senior manager. This breaks down the traditional business barriers, a culture where people hid comfortably in their silos." It's a new way of working but, Dennison points out, it wasn't done for the digital generation but with them, and with everyone else in the enterprise - because it makes business sense.

Even so the Digital Generation did play a big part in these developments. The first step in BT's social media journey was taken by a graduate who bought a simple piece of software which he housed under his desk and which became BT's enterprise-wide wiki tool, BTpedia, and formed the basis for a pilot blogging platform. Its usage gradually spread, despite the fact that it was not officially sanctioned by IT.

Graduates have been closely involved in introducing new technologies ever since. Interest in social media tools were high on the agenda of all the members of a recent graduate intake, reflected in the huge demand to participate in projects in the social media area.



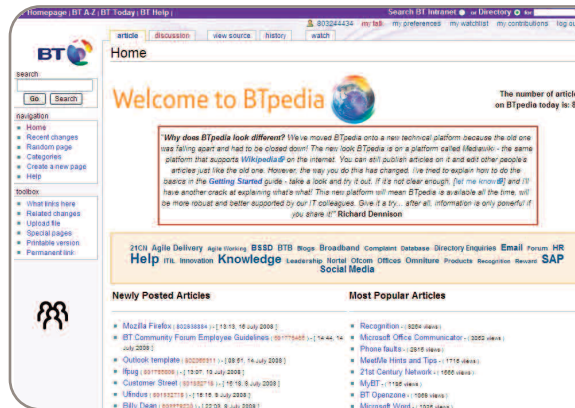


## the BT social media picture

Today BT uses many different tools to encourage collaboration across the enterprise. These include:

### practice 1: enterprise wide collaboration

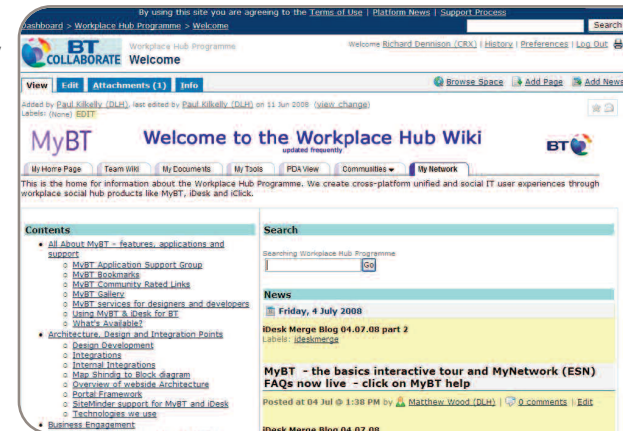
BTpedia is an enterprise wide wiki, enabling information sharing and collaboration between all functions across the world. It has more than 800 articles and is growing steadily. As BT's first social media tool it had symbolic significance in that it is completely open to everyone and set the tone for future tools and services. It is used for all kinds of purposes, from preparing monthly reports to keeping the Corporate, Legal and Regulatory Handbook up to date.



### practice 2: project team collaboration

Collaboration at the project level is also supported by project wikis. Users can choose between BT Collaborate, based on a technology called **Confluence**, and **Sharepoint 2007**. BT Collaborate provides an extremely rich collaborative environment for 'power' users, while Sharepoint 2007 is a 'lighter' self service tool which allows a user to establish a collaboration workspace within a few minutes and invite group members to add and edit documents. Both are widely used, for example, BT Collaborate (which has over 500,000 pages within it) is

used by the project team which recently launched BT's internal enterprise social network, and SharePoint is being used to support the development of a group-wide knowledge management strategy.



### practice 3: blogging

Blogging was introduced early on and took off fast. It is inevitably extremely popular with the Digital Generation to whom blogging is second nature, but many others have embraced the concept too. As with many of BT's other social media tools, blogging began with the early adopters and gradually spread, rather than being imposed by a major launch. Blogs are being used for a wide variety of purposes, from senior managers engaging with their people, through individuals road-testing their ideas, to employees reporting back what they learn at conferences and external meetings.

As with many of BT's other social media tools, blogging began with the early adopters and gradually spread, rather than being imposed by a major launch.



# digital generation



## CASE STUDY

### practice 4: on-line news

BT Today is an on-line newsdesk. As well as providing an enterprise wide news service it encourages user generated coverage in its high profile 'Your Space' section. This invites people to offer their photos, announcements, viewpoints and adverts. Your Space is generating tens of thousands of hits per month.



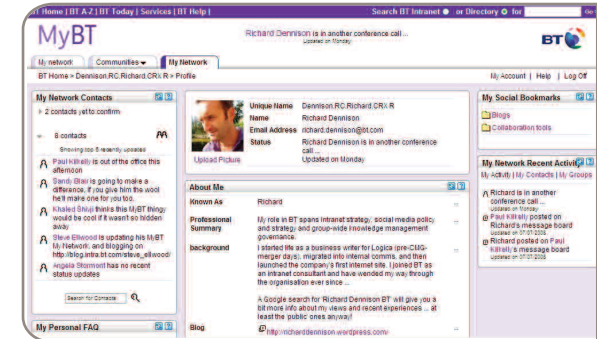
### practice 5: social networking

My BT enterprise social network is the most recent addition to BT's social media scene. It is similar to Facebook and other social networking sites, containing functionality for contacts, social bookmarking, news feeds and message boards.

As the user adds a skill to their profile, a dynamic drop-down box lists matching skills that other people have already added to their profiles.

In addition, are three sections - 'FAQ', 'Skills' and 'Interests' - where users can exchange information and ideas. A particularly powerful piece of functionality connects people together through their skills and interests. As the user adds a skill to their profile, a dynamic drop-down box lists matching skills that other people have already added to their profiles. At the click of a button, the user can select from the list and create a

shared space for that skill or interest group. Connecting people in this way creates community and prevents duplication of activity in different parts of the organisation.



### practice 6: podcasting

Both audio and video podcasting is available, with the emphasis once more on user-generated material. Audio podcasts were made available first but have not been widely used, probably because people are now more used to interacting than simply listening. Video has had a greater uptake; as always, it is the user who decides.

While users choose the tools they need from the portfolio on offer to meet immediate business requirements, it is becoming evident that the power of these tools is in their use together and their integration rather than in a standalone capacity. The challenge is to create a single user interface and direct people to the most appropriate functionality to meet their needs.





## benefits - the business case

To the Digital Generation, familiar with social networking, it is not unusual to have many hundreds of 'friends' all over the world. They do not need people to be located near them to relate to them, they see the value in connecting with anyone on the planet. This attitude brings huge benefits in a business environment, enabling people at any level and from any culture to offer their ideas and receive instant feedback. According to Dennison, "Using technology to break down traditional boundaries encourages a culture that reaches out rather than locks out, and that is something that the Digital Generation is ideally equipped to do."

Yet, despite this growing uptake, those trying to introduce these technologies are often asked to build a sound business case in its favour. Traditional measurements such as ROI are likely to be requested. Richard Dennison resists this approach, believing that its value to the business is self-evident. The value of these tools is also 'emergent' and so the notion that you can identify and describe that value before deploying them flies in the face of the way these tools work. Furthermore, there is little point in singling out any of the tools and trying to measure their value in isolation; they are part of a bigger picture.

Dennison also points out that most of the tools currently used are cheap, so the investment isn't that great anyway. There are a number of options when developing social media tools. BT used a combination of 'open source' software from the internet, bought in tools such as Confluence, plus functionality built internally such as its Aqualogic portal. There are many free software applications that companies can use and Dennison believes that building incrementally is the best approach.

For BT these efforts bring the added advantage of providing commercial opportunities as part of the communications technology it offers global businesses, but Dennison believes any company can benefit from introducing

social media applications. As more of the Digital Generation comes into the workforce, and more tools become available, the use of social media tools will be taken more and more for granted, expected even. Ross Chestney notes that in the nineties knowledge management was the big idea but hampered by a lack of technology. "We now have the technology for knowledge management and collaboration and we are still learning how to use it. There's much more to come."

## challenges and lessons learned

### gaining acceptance

BT is part of a highly regulated industry and, along with the banking and defence industries, concerns are often raised that this new found spirit of openness can compromise confidentiality and security. This is certainly a potential problem for those companies using external social networking platforms such as Facebook. An intranet based system, such as BT's, has the great advantage of keeping communications in house although there is still arguably some risk that greater openness can lead to indiscretions. Chestney, however, believes that employees generally do not want to damage either the business or their own reputation. The best approach is to encourage responsible behaviours through education and guidance, underpinned by sound and simple policies.



When introducing the technologies in the workplace it is crucial to recognise that these tools reflect 'an evolution rather than a revolution'. BT learnt this the hard way. In the early days there was a tendency to overstate the changes these tools would bring about and inevitably resistance was felt; not least from HR, legal and security policy makers. This was ultimately resolved by 'taking a calmer approach', including verifying that existing policies already covered all potential uses and abuses of the internet and intranet. Engaging these policy makers at an early stage so they felt truly involved helped too.



A gradual introduction of the tools, and being open to feedback, is equally important. It means users can decide what works best and it helps overcome

Another lesson is to avoid getting something 'just because it's there'; ultimately the technology and the culture have to fit together.

some of the fear people have for new technologies and ways of working. Concentrating on the benefits of these tools rather than any potential risks is the mindset to encourage.

Another lesson is to avoid getting something 'just because it's there'; ultimately the technology and the culture have to fit together. The corollary is to be able to 'let go' of those tools that do not work, and move on without criticism or attaching blame.

### ways of communicating

In BT, social media sits within the Communications function although it is in effect a collaborate effort across the business. Social media technologies bring a significant shift in the transparency and openness of communications. Whilst this has major benefits for the business, it does set a challenge for the communications function that has to adjust to, and encourage the movement of, communications out of traditional channels and into areas they do not own. In the noisy and competitive space in which communication now takes place they have to find new ways to attract attention; make it compelling rather than compulsory. Chestney sees the corporate communications role changing: "It's much more about listening and feeding back, plus more time is being spent teaching senior managers how to communicate in this new environment".

Senior managers have had to learn that their 'top - down' style of writing has to adapt, especially if they want to engage in blogging, developing personal profiles and other informal means of interaction. Chestney emphasises that "authenticity is essential, people have to learn to write as themselves". Some find this harder to achieve than others.

### work efficiency

Another common concern is that too much bonding and socialising tempts people away from their real work. But again Dennison remains robust. In his view there are any number of ways that people can waste time at work if they wish; that is nothing new. It is up to the performance management systems to

"If we can't trust them then we have to ask ourselves why we are employing them."

measure employee effectiveness. It's about trusting people to be responsible; he adds: "If we can't trust them then we have to ask ourselves why we are employing them." Those who abuse the system soon lose credibility and as such it is self policing. Designing the system to prevent anonymous publishing provides another safety net.

### the technical hitches

Technology problems are to be expected. The try-it-and-see nature of social media tools challenges existing IT processes and cultures more used to being presented with lengthy requirement documents and being given months to deploy solutions. Social media is about the here-and-now, real-time conversation and 'live' product development.

Users can also find it difficult to find easily the information they need and ensure it is up to date. As more and more user-generated content appears, so this challenge gets bigger.

An important solution for BT has been the use of RSS feeds and tagging so that people can track what is of most use to them. It is also installing a system to identify - and either archive or delete - those entries and documents that have not been accessed for a given time period.





## conclusion

For BT, social media tools are here to stay and can bring real benefits to businesses. They help create a culture of openness and, in turn, this encourages much greater levels of collaboration.

The Digital Generation plays a key role as early adopters, but the technology only 'works' if it reflects and reinforces the culture of the business as a whole.

Whilst these technologies are familiar to and popular with the Digital Generation, BT sees them as having a much broader value. The Digital Generation plays a key role as early adopters, but the technology only 'works' if it reflects and reinforces the culture of the business as a whole.

The introduction of these technologies and new ways of working brings challenges, but they can all be overcome.

## sources

Interviews with Ross Chestney, Head of Communication Services at BT and Richard Dennison, Senior Manager - Social Media at BT.



## acknowledgements

This case study was researched and written by Allison Hill. We would like to thank all those who contributed to the research by taking part in interviews, innovation events or informal exchange of ideas.

## about the Career Innovation Group

The Ci Group is an alliance of global companies using research as the basis for joint projects in the area of human capital. Based on eight years of research and innovation events, their goal is to help create the 'inspiring companies' of the future, through a focus on people and strategies for change.

### The Career Innovation Group

27 Park End Street  
Oxford  
OX1 1HU  
United Kingdom

**T:** +44 (0)1865 202 123

**F:** +44 (0)1865 201 033

**E:** [info@careerinnovation.com](mailto:info@careerinnovation.com)

**W:** [www.careerinnovation.com](http://www.careerinnovation.com)

© Career Innovation 2008