

8 Key Metrics for Business Social Network Success

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In the traditional business environment, business processes evolve over time. As companies grow, most do not have the time or ability to implement infrastructure that continually enables effective collaboration, innovation or knowledge transfer. When implementing a business social network, the opportunity to create an infrastructure that fully enables employees, partners and other groups crucial to business success comes with the necessity to manage and measure its adoption. It also comes with great business benefits if done well.

The fallacy of “If you build it, they will come”.

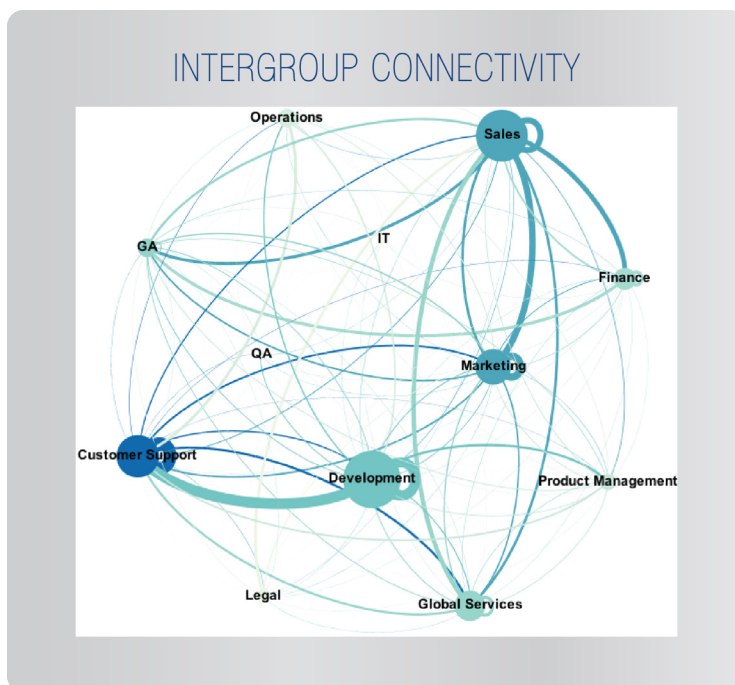
Even with the implementation of a single new process into existing infrastructure, businesses can find adoption difficult. Adoption of a new approval, reporting or similar process often suffers from the assumption that people will embrace or use them well if they are simply told to use them. If there were mechanisms in place to incent or drive behavior in a positive way, the likelihood of avoiding the pain of transition and unintended complexity would be averted. Similarly, implementing a business social network with an eye towards tracking adoption patterns will help you to understand the behaviors of your users, the gaps in collaboration and communication, and the areas you can incent your employees to improve. It is not enough to simply build your network and assume everyone will use it, or use it well. Tracking and measuring adoption and use is required for real success. If your organization is looking to implement a social network, here are eight metrics you should care about.

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1. Most active communities/groups

Which groups or communities are most active on the network? Active communities can serve as templates for best practices for those who are lagging behind. Some communities may be less active by nature (such as a community built for a project of a specified duration), but viewing activity by community or group over time can expose opportunities for incentives or education.

Ideally, these active communities or groups are focused on real business collaboration. What you don't want to see in an enterprise social network is over sharing about things like favorite movies, sports teams, etc. This type of interaction can foster a culture of camaraderie, but in excess, it turns your network into a chat room, and the business value is lost.



2. Inter-group connectivity

How much are communities or departments within the organization communicating and collaborating with each other? This metric looks at the volume of communication between different groups and departments in the network. A defined objective of many organizations' social networks is to foster better communication and collaboration between departments and remove "knowledge silos". Measuring the number and intensity of connections between departments gives great insight into how this collaboration is happening (or not). Network owners can then initiate steps to solve operational or even cultural behavior issues and the resulting departmental silos to facilitate better interactions.

3. Number of active members

Of all the people you've invited to join your social network, how many are actually logging in?

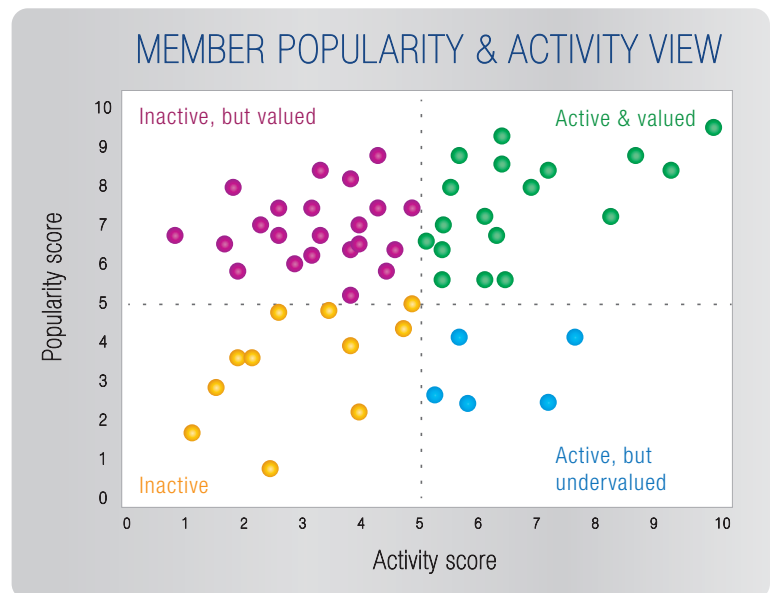
This is the most basic indication of whether your network is successful. If people aren't logging in, none of the other metrics matter.

How many users spell success? Ideally, you want to reach 100% adoption. How achievable that is depends on whether you've invited a specific, limited list of "required" users, or if you've included a wider audience that you hope will join in. As in all business initiatives, success can be measured in different ways. For your organization, 75% overall participation might mean more active collaboration and productivity than in another organization who is at 90%, if the majority of your users are key players and theirs are not. One thing to keep in mind is that it is common to see an initial peak followed by a short term decline. Don't let this discourage you. Eventually you will see a satisfactory leveling off.

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4. User activity

Who is contributing the most? Some users will contribute much more than others. In the early stages, these people can be critical to the success of overall adoption and can be turned into “community champions”. It is important to recognize them, and encourage continued contribution. Activity alone, however, does not adequately measure the value of contributions to the network or the network’s value to the business. You want the right kind of activity. Simple activity metrics can mean that a person who uploads a huge number of non-work-related photos is shown as equally valuable a contributor as someone who provides content that (for example) helps close business.



In a successful business network it is preferable to see active users from a range of groups and departments, as opposed to siloed teams who only collaborate with each other. Even so, it is useful to note which teams may be more active so you can bring applicable best practices across other groups and the entire network.

5. Contribution per user

How many content items, comments and ratings has the average user contributed?

This is important because you don’t want the majority of members lurking in the wings. You want them to contribute. A good business social network solution should contain a mechanism by which you can track behaviors and rate users based on how they interact. A point system that tracks multiple contribution elements such as content creation, comments and ratings, etc., is desirable, as this mechanism tells you a lot about how the network is being used. For example, high creation levels with low commenting levels suggests members may still be thinking in the old “broadcast” model of content management systems, rather than interacting with other members.

In this metric, understanding success again depends on the nature of your network and the kind of collaboration you are looking to achieve. You can set a value to different behaviors and monitor it to see how the activity changes over time. You can set an initial goal such as one content item and one comment and/or rating per working day per user – something that ought to be easily achievable if real work is being done – and then work to increase behavior in the key areas that are lagging by increasing points or building in other rewards.

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6. Most valued users

Who contributes the most valuable content in the network? Once the network is established, measuring volume of contribution alone is no longer as meaningful.

In a social network designed for conducting real work, content ratings should be built in, and simple to use. When launching a new network you will care most about people simply using it, but as the network becomes better established, your attention should shift to ensuring members are using it correctly and in support of business goals. At that point, metrics around quality will be more important than quantity.

Because content ratings alone are not perfect indicators of the value of contributors, you should look to validate this data by comparing a list of members with the best content ratings against a list of the people you would (subjectively) expect to be the most valued members of the network. These might be your product gurus, your marketing executives, etc. If the lists are wildly different, it suggests that the content rating mechanisms are not being used appropriately. For this metric to be truly valuable, it is important to get network members into the habit of rating and responding to the content.

7. Average social reach

How many other members does the average member effectively interact with? Social networks are all about connecting people. In a business environment, it goes further. If people are not engaging with each other's content, then they're not really working socially. They may be communicating effectively, but the real work is happening outside the network.

There are several different ways of measuring this, including the number of times they've commented on or rated things, but what's important to measure is active behavior (what they actually did) rather than stated behavior (how many people they chose to follow). To know if your users' average social reach is high or low, you need to consider the nature of your organization, and how many people a member would typically need to communicate with in doing their job. It can vary greatly from role to role. For example, an HR function might typically interact with all or most of the other members while someone on the Finance team might only interact with the others on their team. In this instance, looking at what is happening at the bottom of the scale is likely to be the most telling metric.

8. Participation Distribution

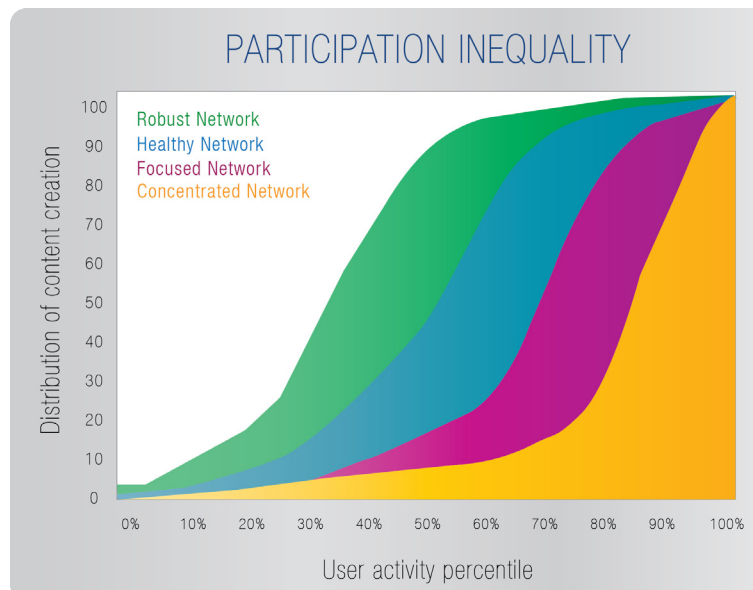
What percentage of users contributes 90% of the content posted? Highly active users can distort perception of network health. If your most active user left the network, how useful would your network be? To measure this, we recommend looking at the percentage of users who contribute 90%, or the lion share, of the total network activity.

In a highly balanced network, 90% of the activity would come from 90% of the participants. For typical internal social networks the following best practices can be applied:

- 90% activity from 10% of users = poor
- 90% of activity from 20 – 30% of users = OK
- 90% of activity from 30 – 50% of users = good
- 90% of activity from >50% of users = very good

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For external, customer-facing networks, figures can often be lower.



While there are many ways to look at user behavior, utilizing these metrics should get your social network implementation moving in the right direction. Through them you can strengthen the value of your network, and understand where to improve business processes and employee engagement. Mapping your network to your organization's business strategies, goals and plans for growth will also help to create an environment where information and expertise are readily found to help your employees be more productive and for your leadership team to more quickly respond to business challenges.

About Clearvale

Clearvale by BroadVision is the social network for business, where transparency and accountability mean real work gets done. Clearvale can be used as a social intranet or a social extranet. But only Clearvale lets you manage those individual networks together as a 'network of networks', allowing you to easily manage your entire ecosystem of employees, partners, and customers. For more information on how Clearvale enables social business processes, please visit www.clearvale.com.

About BroadVision

Driving innovation since 1993, BroadVision (NASDAQ: BVSN) is an innovative provider of e-business and social networking solutions for organizations seeking to grow profitably by improving online business processes through invited participation and social interaction. Our solutions — including Clearvale, the world's first network of networks for the socially driven enterprise — enable mission-critical e-business for next-generation organizations around the globe. The customers benefiting from BroadVision® solutions include Aeroxchange Ltd., Centre for Railway Information Systems, Controller General of Defence Accounts, Fiat S.p.A., Front Burner Restaurants, Iberia, Indian Railways Catering and Tourism Company, Kotak Mahindra Bank Ltd., Malayala Manorama Co. Ltd., Promart Retail India Pvt. Ltd., SINA, SOFTBANK TELECOM Corp., Thomas Cook India Ltd., Vodafone, and more. Visit www.BroadVision.com for more details.