

Forrester's Josh Bernoff on empowering business

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developerWorks: This is the developerWorks podcast. I'm Scott Laningham. My guest is Josh Bernoff, senior vice president of Idea Development at Forrester Research. Josh is the co-author of the new book *Empowered, Unleash Your Employees, Energize Your Customers, Transform Your Business*. Josh, thanks so much for being here today.

Josh: It's great to be part of this.

developerWorks: Two weeks ago we received the very exciting news that developerWorks had won the Forrester Groundswell 2010 award in the business-to-business supporting category. Very exciting. And your press release explained that winners were honored for "excellence in effective use of social technologies to advance an organizational or business goal." Why developerWorks? What stood out to you all?

Josh: Well, we've been running these Forrester Groundswell Awards for four years to try to recognize associate applications that not only are creative or interesting but also actually accomplish business goals. This year we got 130 entries, and IBM developerWorks won in the category of supporting for people in the business-to-business kind of applications.

And the reason is because while it's similar to many other customer communities, which can be pretty effective, this is perhaps the largest and most effective customer community we've seen. And in addition to the diversity of different tools that are in there, according to the entry, IBM says that it saves a \$100 million a year from people who use developerWorks rather than calling up IBM directly for support.

So you have an application that creates engagement among customers, makes them have a higher level of satisfaction and saves money, that's certainly worth recognizing.

developerWorks: You know, we talk about the idea of transforming your business, which of course is part of the subtitle of your new book. How much transforming do you see going on using some of these new tools like social technologies, and are you encouraged that companies are really getting it quickly or is it coming along slowly?

Josh: Well, these new technologies that we're talking about, social, mobile, video and cloud-based technologies, are now so simple to use and so accessible that people throughout companies are using them to reach out to customers. This means that you have technology innovation coming from marketing, from sales, from customer service. And inevitably when you have people building communities, setting up Twitter feeds, generating videos or video sharing, inevitably it's going to sort of up-end the top-down way that most companies are done.

Now, I wouldn't say that most companies have been transformed yet. There are a few that are running differently, and we talk about them in the

book, companies like Vail Resorts and Best Buy. But for the most part, I think a lot of companies are going to be caught by surprise by the fact that their own employees are now in charge of using technology to contact customers and they have to run differently.

developerWorks: Let's talk about another item then that you cover in this new book, and HEROs as you mention it. HEROs in the office. And you call them Highly Empowered and Resourceful Operatives -- that's what HEROs stands for. How does a company encourage and support that?

Josh: Yes, so these heros are the people within companies that are coming up with these new solutions. They're people like Ben Hedrington who figured out how 2,500 employees at Best Buy could all share a Twitter account at @twelpforce and how that would be effective for the business. People like Rob Sharp who developed a video-sharing system, sort of an internal YouTube that's used by all of the sales people at Black & Decker, to help train each other on how better to do their jobs.

And when you've got this kind of activity happening, the first thing a company has to do is to basically loosen up the technology a little bit -- know your IT department is not going to be successful in encouraging this activity if they block Facebook and Twitter from employee use. And you have to also put a system in place that recognizes these innovations and encourages them; or in the case they're too risky, shuts them down.

So that systematic encouragement of innovation and what we call the HERO compact which is agreement among management, IT and the HEROs themselves to encourage and support this kind of activity and to manage the risks associated with it, that's what really is necessary for a company to tap into the innovation that their employees are right now using.

developerWorks: So what's the impact, say, on the role of the IT professional, how that's evolving?

Josh: Well, IT professionals are used to being in charge of technology projects, able for big projects like a customer database, that's absolutely the right approach.

But people throughout the organization have gotten the idea that IT is the department of no, as in "hey, we could create a customer...no, I'm sorry, you can't." [LAUGHTER] And that knee-jerk reaction has to change. For IT to retain relevance -- and the whole second half of the book is about this -- they need to support these technologies with some recommendation. So when someone comes to you and says "can you help us to pick the right platform for this," the appropriate answer is "yes, we'll show you how to write an RFP and how to evaluate these different vendors."

"And we might help you to understand there's some security stuff that you hadn't realized." But IT is not in charge of the project, nor is IT in charge of the risks associated with the project. They become an advisor and a helper to the innovation that's happening throughout the rest of the organization.

developerWorks: Josh, let me ask you. I mean, we're certainly banking on yes being the answer to this question at developerWorks, but how feasible is it to expect people to join multiple social networks for different things in their life? You know, one for the IT professional in you, one for Facebook for friends and family, and another for another career. Is that reasonable?

Josh: It's not only reasonable, I think it should be expected. We did some surveys a little while ago to find out just how interested people in technology buying positions were in using social technology. And it turns out that they are more interested in using it and in using it for work than any other group we've ever reviewed. So this means that a community like developerWorks can be successful.

I also a little while ago -- and we talked about this in the book -- helped a company called PTC. It's a CAD and a product life cycle management software company, so you can manage the kind of customers they have, product designers. They did a survey and found out that their customers were ready for community and they created one.

So I think that in any profession, the people who have got that profession are interested in connecting with and bonding together around their issues. And if those people are your customers, if you're in a business-to-business kind of setting, then you really need to find ways to reach out to them, and developerWorks is a great example of how to do that effectively.

developerWorks: You know, Josh, so much buzz about social media, social tools and leveraging all of that to enhance company success and individual success. And what do you all see there at Forrester in regards to activity, for example, equating to benefit. Are numbers alone an immediate indicator in terms of an impact to this stuff?

Josh: No, numbers are important to keep track of, activity numbers. But activity numbers alone are not particularly effective at measuring whether you're accomplishing a business goal. And we recognize this in the awards. If you tell us that you've got half a million people to join your Facebook page, that's great but...

developerWorks: Who are they? [LAUGHTER]

Josh: What I'd like to know is did that translate into something that moves the business? If you say, our objective was to generate awareness, and if we did the amount of advertising that would be necessary to generate the same amount of awareness as the Facebook page, that would actually cost \$3 million, and by using the Facebook page, we showed that we were able to generate awareness...to double the amount of awareness of our product, okay, now I'm interested.

And any social activity should have with it metrics that measure things that are successful in the rest of the business, how many leads do you generate, how many sales do you generate? Have you increased the conversion rate? Have you decreased support costs?

Have you solved the problem that otherwise would require focus groups that cost a certain amount of money? And these are the actual ways that professionals should be measuring the value of social activity, not how many followers you have on Twitter.

developerWorks: I see. So that's how you can distinguish, you know, okay, I have a thousand followers, you have a thousand followers, are we all equal? And clearly, there's so much more to it than that.

Josh: Yes. I mean, we've written a number of pieces on the metrics associated with social applications. And the people who judge these awards, the difference between the 130 entries among the ones that won and the ones that didn't is pretty easy. The ones that won actually have some metric that shows that they've been successful for the business not just they did some whizzy thing that got a whole lot of people to take a look at it.

developerWorks: A self-serving question here: Are podcasts important in all of this? And video, and video conversations, and you know, the new media aspects of all this. How important is all that stuff?

Josh: Well, podcasts and video are so much easier to create now than they ever have been that it really is making it possible for companies to reach out in a new way. I know as I've done the book promotion I've been amazed that about one-third of the journalists that I talk to are now putting me on video, not just interviewing me.

But again, I want to come back to the business results. You want to look at your podcast or your video and say, what were we trying to accomplish? And especially one of the biggest measures of how successful it is, is does it spread?

So it's very nice to have put together some sort of a polished audio or video presentation, but it's much more effective if it's so interesting that you have thousands of people telling thousands of other people that they really have to have a look at it.

developerWorks: Josh Bernoff, senior vice president of Idea development at Forrester Research. Josh, thanks so much for your time.

Josh: It's been great to speak with you.

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