

Web Experience Excellence:

Driving Strategic Online Advantage & Advocacy: Are your customers your evangelists?

A 3-Part Series by Frost & Sullivan, the Growth Partnership Company



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Turning Online Engagement into Customer-Driven Advocacy: The SAP Community and Online Marketplace Success Story

In the first part of our article series (see the “Executive Insight” column in the August Web Experience Excellence eBulletin), we looked at how the award-winning SAP Community Network is enabling, fostering and enhancing business and technology connections and professional collaboration in a large and diverse community of 1.8 million participants, across every industry and in 200 countries and territories worldwide.

I explained in that foundational interview that the SAP Community Network (SCN) is a network of individual communities, each one catering to different roles, functions and job profiles across the broader SAP ecosystem. For example, we have communities that are focused either on the individual or the organization. Some are focused on audiences with a technical bent, while others cater more to the business audience. Some are completely open for anyone to join and engage, while others with strategic or competitive topics can control their membership. Meanwhile, each of these communities are hosted adjacent to each other with easy access between them, in order to foster cross-role collaboration.

In this follow-up article, I'd like to explore how the SAP Community Network (SCN) is serving as a key launch pad for conversations with community participants across the broader and fast-evolving social media world. Here, community members become front-line advocates.

As I focused in on this topic with my marketing lead — Salim Ali, the Global Marketing Head for SAP Communities and

FIGURE 1 COMMUNITY & MARKETPLACE SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING MODEL



SAP EcoHub — we looked at frameworks and examples wherein the SAP Community Network has been able to engage customers and partners on topics of special interest in the context of the software buying cycle. In other words: how we leveraged our vibrant communities and other social media tools and techniques in pursuit of our marketing and sales objectives.

— Mark Yolton

THE MODEL: SAP'S COMMUNITY AND MARKETPLACE SOCIAL MEDIA MODEL

Through trial and error over the last few years, we have developed a fairly structured and repeatable framework for successfully executing a variety of marketing strategies and tactics via social media. We already had a best-practice for enabling SAP Community Network participants to engage and to participate in discussions via their presence in our own communities and in (independent) social media extension platforms like Twitter, LinkedIn or Facebook.

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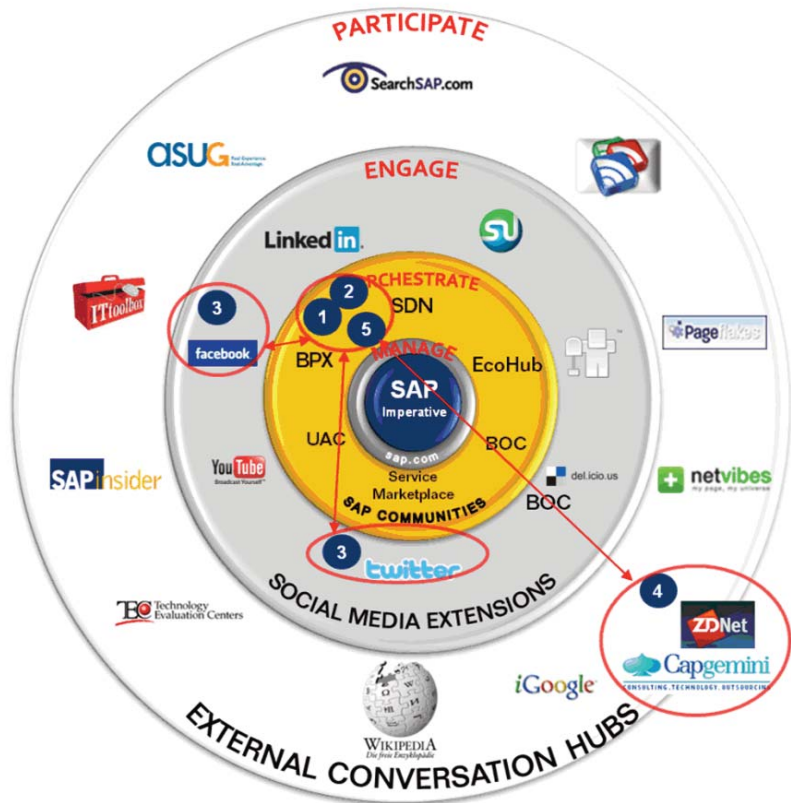
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Further experimentation led to some noteworthy marketing wins — for product launches, accelerated market adoption of new solutions, taking a leadership role and out-in-front position on select strategic topics, and so on — which we refined and codified. We then formalized this engagement framework as the Community and Marketplace Social Media (CMSM) marketing model.

The guiding principle of this model is to bring IT experts and influencers within the enterprise (usually individuals in our customers' or partners' companies) into the solution discovery and evaluation process in tandem with their decision-making and “buyer” counterparts (their own line-of-business colleagues) in the context of a business need. This would allow for the IT Influencer audience, who were often experts and strong SAP proponents, to share their expertise and their influence to help their organizations make the right decision to support their business need. The model moves from the center, outwards:

- As one moves from the “blue” center ring to the external ring, technology providers (or any enterprise) have to acknowledge the reality that one is moving from an environment that is highly “managed” to one that is “orchestrated” through incentives and disincentives, to one where they can actively “engage” but can’t control the conversation, to the wide-open platforms for more passive or occasional “participation.”
- The “SAP Gold” circle is where the 1.8M SAP Community Members engage, collaborate, share and discuss, and it is the anchor for links and connections to external communities and platforms.
- The grey Social Media

FIGURE 2: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ON IFRS-RELATED TOPIC AND SOLUTIONS



Extension layer is where LinkedIn groups, Facebook Fan Pages, Twitter handles, YouTube Channels and similar platforms live; the goal here is to actively engage in listening and conversation.

- The External Conversation Hubs are too large, fast-moving, diverse and independent to allow much influence; success here is in the value of listening — for emerging trends, market influencers, customer issues and opportunities — so you can leverage these as brand and messaging intermediaries where insight is a benefit and where nurturing strategies can be employed.

Our Global Head of SAP Community Marketing, Salim Ali, articulates a subtle but critical impact of the Community

Marketing and Social Network model for marketers as follows:

“Marketers have to think beyond classical audience segmentation, and develop and leverage the construct of “conversation segmentation” wherein the conversation topic is equally important as who is engaging in the discussion. In the world of communities and personal social networks, we have audience of diverse profiles (technical, line of business, buyers etc.) as participants in the same network or fan-group or friend-list, and therefore marketers need to listen in on the conversation as predictor for the right message and engagement tactic.”

A simple, real-world analogy would be the setting of cocktail party where the guests are of diverse profiles and interests, and the subject and nature of their conversations are the best proxies for optimal participation and engagement.

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CASE STUDY: MARKETING WITH SAP COMMUNITIES AND ONLINE MARKETPLACE

For SAP, this Community and Marketplace Social Media Marketing Model is enhanced and extended by the SAP EcoHub — the community-powered online solution marketplace. SAP EcoHub enables accelerated discovery of solutions with community-powered insights. Now, not only can community members discuss general topics in a “technical-orientated” setting, but they can also do this in a business-need-oriented “decision making” context of solution storefronts on SAP EcoHub. Community members can contribute to forums, review specific solutions, rank them, blog about them and otherwise make their experience and expertise relevant to the immediate business need.

Let’s look at a specific example wherein the SAP Community Network members played a critical role in engaging in the context of a new mandated “international financial reporting standard” (IFRS). Given SEC and other regulatory agency requirements, IFRS has time-sensitive and impending compliance implications, so it’s a hot topic for our customers who run some of the world’s largest companies and government agencies — including their financial record-keeping and reporting — on SAP applications.

This instantiation of the social media marketing engagement framework was triggered by the creation of IFRS-related content and community contributions on SAP Community Network. The activity among users can be tracked as follows:

1. SAP initiates and seeds the creation of IFRS content on SAP Developer Network and

Business Process Expert community sites. This includes formal content such as articles, whitepapers, videos and demos.

2. SAP Community Members are made aware of this new topic and active contributions and discussions get underway. This gives a head start to the Technical Influencer community (within the enterprise) on this topic of interest. The community members start contributing, resulting in user-generated content including expert blogs, forum discussions, a wiki area and more. Our own community programs — including a reputation management system that encourages content-sharing — accelerate the buzz on the IFRS topic.
3. Once critical mass of conversations was reached, a decision-maker/buyer-focused communication was launched, inviting audience participation from social networks (e.g. Facebook and Twitter), external community hubs (e.g. the independent SAP Insider Web site) to an informational best-practice webinar series hosted on SAP EcoHub.
4. This webinar attracted Buyers and Technologists/Influencers in record-breaking numbers and the vibrant community-powered discussion (no. 1) becomes a living source of information for the community.
5. Such a community enables continuous nurturing of the topic, thereby leveraging the

collective wisdom and knowledge of the broader set of participants

The results of this effort included thousands of registrations for the webinar series, hundreds of forum posts, scores of blogs, articles and wiki updates, and a market buzz that established SAP — and our solutions — as a leader in this emerging area.

SUMMARY

In summary, Communities and Social media marketing approaches have the potential to accelerate achievement of marketing objectives and drive top-line impact in new ways. The key is not to treat new and emerging customer engagement channels and communities in the same “old fashioned” way and apply simple push techniques to communicate marketing messages. The opportunity lies in listening, engaging in conversations and responding within a structured framework with appropriate messages, tone, offers and cadence. At SAP, we believe that marketing programs and campaign architectures will change to embrace communities and social media extensions of multiple flavors, i.e. Facebook, Twitter etc.

The reality is that is we are still in the very early stages of this exciting journey. We are delighted to share our learning and experiences, and hope to learn from you as well. Salim Ali and I will be present at the next Web Experience Excellence executive congress in San Francisco on December 2 and look forward to meeting and chatting with you.

You can also reach us via: the SAP Community Network. On Facebook: Mark Yolton, Salim Ali. On LinkedIn: Mark Yolton, Salim Ali. And on Twitter: @MarkYolton @Salimtweet.