

8 ways CIOs can drive a social media strategy

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As digital media becomes a core business system, the traditional CIO focus on corporate IT will have to alter radically. Tech savvy marketers are increasingly moving into leadership roles and exerting influence over customer/consumer facing platforms and in some cases are bypassing the CIO. It is critical therefore that the CIO takes a leadership role in driving the adoption and innovation of digital media platforms as they will increasingly transform business. These are our observations and practical advice on how to align your role with digital innovation.

1. If your business does not already have a digital strategy then you have an opportunity to take responsibility for developing one. The heart of any business strategy is developing new ways of winning and keeping customers; digital platforms can be come of the most efficient and effective ways of doing so.
2. Hire creative, provocative people at all levels. Digital has been creatively disruptive to many industries and produced new business models and consumer obsessions in its wake. The most successful and fast growing businesses stories in recent years have embraced digital innovation. You need a few people in your business who aren't afraid to challenge convention and bring new ideas to the table. This works best when they are seeded at all layers of your organisation and free thinking is encouraged.
3. Think of your business as profit rather than a cost centre. The digital initiatives that will really make people sit up are those that make money. For example the CIO of a major newspaper firm who grasped the idea of setting up a digital business that created revenue from their image library or the CIO of a major fashion retailer who developed the capability to stream fashion shows live with full linkage of the garments to their ecommerce platform. Some success in revenue generating digital initiatives will clearly demark your contribution from marketing focused initiatives.
4. Focus on the relationship with marketing. Many marketing executives are extremely digitally savvy and will have many ideas of how they want to use digital innovation to connect with customers. If you don't provide them with the tools to do so or help shape their strategy then you could find the IT organisation bypassed. The closer to the end customer your team is the greater your influence will have in the business.
5. Where possible, try not to differentiate between internal and external IT. Generation Y don't see a distinction in how they consume technology in and out of the workplace. If an application or device works well outside of work and people are happy with it then chances are they will embrace it in the work place. Most consumers gravitate to the technology they love using outside of work so wherever possible, use the platforms that people enjoy using.

6. Take risks. While it is important to manage risk and information security the biggest risks tend to be behavioral and a locked down technology environment that stifles innovation is a greater risk to your business than giving people access to applications they want to use.

7. Try lots of stuff and learn how to fail fast. Experimentation is the key to success and you won't always know which ideas will be the most successful until you try them out. By allowing people the freedom to try out new ideas (and quickly shut down those that don't work) you have much greater chance of finding the real game changes. This culture is at the heart of most successful digital businesses so it is important to foster this within your team.

8. Trust people. Most employees don't want to spend all day on Facebook but as boundaries between social and business networks blur, you will find people using different mediums to communicate. Email for many recent graduates is old hat and shutting them off from communication platforms is a big turn off. Talented people want to work in an environment in which they can flourish and a reputation for digital innovation is a really smart way to attract top talent.