

The Future of Business Communications

# Moving Beyond Email



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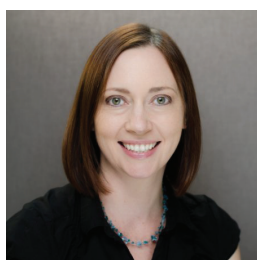


Late in 2014 Our Social Times ran a series of webinars around the theme of *The Future of Business Communications*.

The first in the series, titled *Moving Beyond Email*, analysed the challenge facing organisations that are seeking to wean themselves off email communications. The second, *A Practical Guide to the Mobile Revolution*, examined the impact of mobile usage and technology on enterprise communication. The recordings of these webinars are available online .



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This white paper is a detailed write-up of the discussion from the first webinar, *Moving Beyond Email*, with additional facts, quotes and comments sourced from industry practitioners and media.

The webinar itself featured three notable experts on internal communications: **Belinda Gannaway**, Social Collaboration Consultant at Nixon McInnes, **Angela Ashenden**, Principal Analyst at UK-based research and advisory firm MWD Advisors and **Richard Hughes**, Director of Social Strategy at BroadVision, which provides enterprise social networking through its Clearvale and Vmoso solutions. The webinar was hosted by Our Social Times CEO, Luke Brynley-Jones, who also authored this white paper.

## PARTNER



BroadVision

BroadVision was founded in 1993 and has been a publicly traded corporation since 1996. The company pioneered web-based e-commerce and was among the first to offer pre-integrated, packaged self-service web applications for process, commerce, portal and content management.

BroadVision's solutions help companies around the world streamline their communications, protect their intellectual property, manage employees more effectively, and ultimately serve their customer base more personally.

BroadVision's tools are proven to save time and create a level of transparency and accountability that last-generation methods such as email are incapable of providing.

For more information visit [www.broadvision.com](http://www.broadvision.com)



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Vmoso is BroadVision's secure, enterprise communication solution, designed to maximize individual and organizational productivity. With Vmoso, business communication activities – email, instant messaging, content sharing, workflow and social networking are unified in one online destination, consolidating activities in a single, interconnected solution; saving time and helping to avoid the duplication of work that occurs when using multiple fragmented tools.

In a world of "bring your own device", Vmoso's real-time synchronization allows you to seamlessly transition between a desktop and a smartphone or tablet with apps for iOS and Android. Secure access control keeps chat conversations, project activities, documents, and other important information safely within the organization's knowledge base putting you back in control of company information on whatever device is being accessed.

For more information visit the [Vmoso website](#).

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## INTRODUCTION

The theme for this white paper has vexed internal communications specialists for the last twenty years: *how can organisations wean themselves off email?*

Email was the first digital communication tool we had, and that seems to have had a big impact on its success. Globally we are now sending over 100 billion emails every day, the majority for work purposes, and most office workers say they use email every hour of the working day. Given the strength of our addiction to email it seems possible that many people may be using email simply because it's a hard habit to kick.

If it's so popular, you might ask "what's wrong with email?" it is, superficially at least, the cheapest, easiest to use and most versatile communication tool businesses have ever had. Many of us say we couldn't do our jobs without it and yet, many people have fallen out of love with their inbox.

The roots of our disaffection with email can be summed up in a single phrase: *email overload*. McKinsey, the management consultancy, has suggested that email takes up 28% of the time of knowledge workers (perhaps the most valuable commercial resource of any nation), while other research finds that a large part of this time is spent not answering emails, but on refocusing after reading and responding to emails. Coupled with the cost to organisations of hosting and managing email servers full of duplicated attachments, a need for change becomes patently apparent.

McKinsey, the management consultancy, suggests that email takes up 28% of the knowledge workers' time.

So, *what are the alternatives?* Apart from various housekeeping options to help us use email better, there are myriad social media, chat, document sharing, messaging, conferencing and knowledge-base platforms available now, all designed to save us time. "The big question is: do they" The answer is not as clear-cut as we might expect. According to the CIPD, 48% of employees say use of social media leads to information overload.

Organisations seeking to wean themselves off email are often advised to start by focusing on high-level issues such as vision, leadership and culture. But there are also many practical challenges, such as how to motivate staff to use internal collaboration tools, such as an Enterprise Social Networks (ESN), and how to measure progress when they do. There are also suggestions that, to a great extent, success will depend on the project's capacity to absorb feedback and adapt to change during the rollout phase.

Although industry commentators have been discussing 'inbox zero' and charting the rise of ESNs for the best part of a decade, it's clear that we are still at the beginning of this story. Working people may see email as their enemy but they are only just starting to become familiar with new forms of communication, such as social media, chat, instant messaging, blogs, wikis and video conferencing. Hopefully this white paper will provide the answers to many of your questions and help you move forward on your particular journey towards a more effective internal communications strategy.

## WHAT'S WRONG WITH EMAIL?

Many of us complain about email, but then opening our inbox is the first thing we do when we get to work. Why?

There's no denying that email has some powerful qualities. Email is extremely versatile; you can send an email for virtually any purpose. Email is quick and easy to use, requiring almost no training. Email is cheap to set up, host and run, with a tiny per-message cost. Emails are asynchronous (meaning they stack up) in time/date order. This provides a simple list to work with, which helps to ensure you don't miss anything.

There is no doubt, as a fast, cheap and easy-to-use communication tool email is hard to beat and it still has fans at the highest level of business and academia. At the *World Economic Forum* last year Marissa Mayer, CEO of Yahoo!, confided that she checks her smart phone 150 times a day. Her point was to stress the value of multi-tasking, but many people saw it as an endorsement of the email culture that prevails within large US corporations.

Email is a hard habit to break, or even consider breaking. Perhaps Bob Pozen, a senior lecturer of business administration at Harvard Business School and author of *Extreme Productivity*, sums up the feelings of many busy executives when he writes "I've had email since 1983. I couldn't live the life I live without it".

And yet there is groundswell of discontent over how email has come to dominate business communications in the past 30 years. The strongest case against email argues that it drains valuable time and resources from organisations, such that the obvious benefits it affords are undermined by a larger, often unseen, cost in lost staff time and inefficiency.

This argument has powerful backers. Research from Microsoft suggests that employees spend an average of *16 minutes* refocusing on their work after reading emails.

As Richard Hughes of BroadVision commented in our webinar discussion: "we've created a distraction economy which is really very unhealthy. I wonder how much more efficient people would be if they all just turned off the pop up alerts on their email".

The average worker receives over 300 emails per week, checks their email 36 times an hour and spends over 2 hours per day reading and replying to emails.

Other *findings highlight* the simple inefficiency of our email addiction: the average worker receives over 300 emails per week, checks their email 36 times an hour and spends over 2 hours per day reading and replying to emails, while only one in three emails is deemed essential for work.

While it's difficult to verify these numbers, there seems to be a lot of anecdotal evidence to support them. Last year a pediatrician from Penn State College of Medicine published his estimate that the college was wasting up to *\$3 million per year* in staff time by sending untargeted, mass distribution emails to its doctors.

Others have shared the benefits of their positive experiences *reducing email usage* or restricting it to *certain times* of the day.

Faced with such evidence, some organisations are already taking dramatic steps to reduce the amount of emails they send. Richard Hughes pointed out in our webinar discussion, "it was headline news when *Thierry Breton* of Atos said, 'I'm eradicating all internal email within my organization'. People laughed at him, but he made some genuine progress in doing that. He improved the efficiency of his organization by doing that."

Evidently, reducing the volume of emails we send may help to limit email overload, but is it merely addressing the symptoms rather than the root cause of the email malaise?

In our discussion Richard provided his own diagnosis: "For simple ephemeral messaging, email is great. It works on any device. You can probably run it on your fridge! As a repository of knowledge, though, it's really poor. As a collaboration tool, really poor. As a means of ensuring something gets done, really poor."

"For simple ephemeral messaging, email is great. As a repository of knowledge, though, it's really poor; as a collaboration tool, really poor; as a means of ensuring something gets done, really poor."

Richard Hughes  
Broadvision

His suggestion that email is not suitable for collaboration and knowledge management tasks, but is used for both anyway highlights the inherent risk of adopting such a versatile tool: misuse

To illustrate his point Richard gave us an example: "there's nothing wrong with using a fast, ubiquitous communication protocol for sending a short message to say 'Luke, I'm going to be 10 minutes late. Sorry!' But if the four of us had exchanged 20 emails each over a period of a week on what we were going to talk about today, email would be a terrible tool for doing that".

He also explained the challenge, as he sees it, for knowledge management: "email is a very poor repository of company knowledge. A lot of people say 'I know the answer to that I've got it buried in my inbox, which means you're distributing a company's knowledge throughout different people's Outlook folders – which is completely crazy."

Beyond the risks of email overload and misuse, Belinda Gannaway of Nixon McInnes identified a deeper challenge for organisations: "I keep coming back to this question of trust within organizations. In some organisations your inbox really becomes, not your to-do list, but somebody else's. And yet, they haven't actually asked if you're happy to do those tasks. I think this comes down to the culture of how people in your organisation communicate, how work gets passed around, and how it gets done."

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Belinda Gannaway  
Nixon McInnes

This concept of the inbox as a means of passing the buck is often cited as one of the downsides of internal email culture. "I didn't receive the email' has become the 21st century version of 'the cheque's in the post'", says Richard Hughes, "it's just far too easy to miss an email, for an overzealous spam filter to get it, or for you to receive it and just ignore it". Citing recent cases, including that of former BBC Director-General, *George Entwistle*, he continued, "a lot of high-profile people have been forced to resign for claiming not to have seen an email and fallen foul of email's lack of accountability and lack of a proper audit trail".

Perhaps the flip-side of such buck-passing is that many staff experience pressure to constantly check and respond to emails in order to be seen to be working. Belinda Gannaway questioned this in our webinar: "the concept of a healthy digital media diet is something that we're all struggling with, especially if you think about how many people check their emails in bed, or on holiday. Whether or not that's a healthy thing I think is really arguable".

The efficacy of email to communicate the right meaning has also been called into question. A hastily written or read email is very likely to be misunderstood, with potentially calamitous outcomes for the organisation. Research published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (several years ago now) indicates that people only have a 50/50 chance of ascertaining the tone of any email message, while they think they've correctly interpreted the tone 90% of the time.

There are evidently many criticisms of corporate email usage, but most of the problems appear to stem from a single root cause. Richard Hughes seemed to hit the nail on the head when he said: "I think the use of email within organizations typically reflects the culture, or the environment, of the organization. I think email can become a productivity tool, as we know, but it can also become a compulsive tool."

Indeed there is a growing pool of evidence to indicate that the compulsive use of email without adequate investment into processes, training and incentives to ensure it is not misused can reduce workplace productivity and increase overheads.

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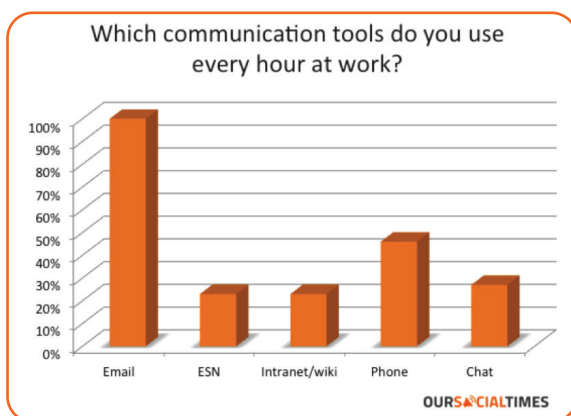


## HOW DID EMAIL COME TO DOMINATE BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS?

According to *The Radicati Group*, "Email remains the go-to form of communication in the Business world. In 2013, business email accounts total 929 million mailboxes. This figure is expected grow at an average annual growth rate of about 5% over the next four years, and reach over 1.1 billion by the end of 2017."

The same report reveals that over 100 billion emails are sent every day, the majority of them business-related, and that there is particularly fast take-up among mobile email users, the numbers of which increased by 28% to 897 million 2014.

During our webinar we wanted to check if our audience (of mainly communication managers) was still using email to this extent, so we launched a poll, asking: "which communication tools do you use every hour at work?" The result was unequivocal and unsurprising: email was used by almost 100% of our viewers every hour of every day, with phone a distant second on 43%, followed by chat (23%), then ESN and Intranet/Wiki both, on 20%.



### So how did we get into this state of email dominance?

"I think a significant element is the fact that it was the first online communication tool we had. Fundamentally, email is what instigated the use of PCs within organization. It was the first online communication tool that really worked", says Angela Ashenden of MWD Advisors. Take up was also boosted by its rapid ubiquity: "Everybody was on email, so you didn't need to know whether or not they were using the new tool in order to communicate with them".

Email also offered certain special qualities that other online communication tools, such as intranets and forums, didn't. "Email is not just an internal communication platform", Angela explains, "it is not just about communicating with your colleagues. It's about communicating with anyone that you work with, your business partners, your customers... whoever it might be. It doesn't matter which tool you use. You can communicate with other people using different email platforms... and that's extremely powerful."

Clearly, then, when it arrived on the scene in the mid 1990's email had an immediate impact on businesses that was bound to attract supporters. But why, when it became apparent that email also had significant negative qualities, didn't organisations take a step back and reconsider their communication strategies? As I asked our panelists in the webinar: *was there ever a point at which we missed an opportunity to re-evaluate email?*

Richard Hughes was clear in his perspective: "I think we did. A couple of years ago, there was a great deal of enthusiasm around the idea of enterprise social networking, the so-called 'Facebook for business'. I think that organizations and vendors both missed an opportunity at that time in that they underestimated how wedded people were to the way we're all currently working. That kind of collaborative approach is not so much in the news now."

Angela Ashenden agreed: "we've had discussion forums for years. We've had instant messaging for years. And yet, they've not significantly impacted on our use of email. In some organizations, instant messaging is used very heavily, but it's not really taken off in the way that you might expect. I think a lot of that is down to the fact that critical mass is key."

This raises the suggestion that because email was the first digital communication tool to achieve a critical mass of usage, it is, to an extent, preventing other communication forms from reaching that point. "Although other tools have come and gone over the years", says Richard Hughes, "email has continued to be the central force from an online business communication perspective". Adding that, as a result of this, "you have to incorporate email into any transition to another tool because most people are there. You need to encourage them away from it, but not assume that they're going to want to leave it."

There is also, of course, the argument that no other digital communication tools come close to meeting our demands for speed, utility, ease of use and ubiquity.

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Angela Ashenden  
MWD Advisors

As Angela Ashenden says: "I don't think it's that we've missed an opportunity. It's more that other technologies don't lend themselves so well to universal communication. For example, instant messaging is great for short, real-time chat, but it's not good for asynchronous communication. Discussion forums are fine only if you know where the discussion is taking place. So there are limitations to the tools that came along. It probably just seemed easier with email."

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MWD Advisors

And yet some people say the opportunity to implement a radically different communication strategy remains on the table. "We make the assumption that everybody is on email, but that simply isn't true", says Belinda Gannaway. "Many people in work today are not on email. So when we talk about the new social tools coming it, it's not as a replacement to email; often it's their first opportunity for them to connect with colleagues".

The numbers back this up. While *six out of ten* working Americans say that email is "very important" to their work, that still leaves 40% of working people who either don't have email or could do their jobs without it. As Belinda says, "even within a global bank, for example, an awful lot of people on the front desk, providing direct services to customers, aren't on email."

Perhaps reaching out to these employees, who aren't already wedded to email and who are likely to be more mobile-oriented and less desk-bound, offers the best opportunity for organisations to implement new, more efficient and collaborative communications strategies.

## WHAT ARE THE ALTERNATIVES TO EMAIL ?

We have explored the reasons for email's ascendance within internal communications, as well as the positive and negative ramifications of its dominance. We have also identified opportunities – especially among non-email using staff and mobile workers – where alternative communication tools could gain traction. But before we delve further into the alternatives, isn't there a simpler option? Why don't we just fix email?

As Richard Hughes highlighted earlier in our discussion, email is great for sending short, important messages that need to be read, but when people use it for long discussions or collaborating on documents, it becomes unwieldy. Surely then, a set of clear rules and agreed practices, combined with alternative tools for collaboration and document sharing will be enough to reduce time-wastage and increase productivity?

Many employees are already starting to use social tools and apps without the approval or oversight of their employer.

There are also many other alternative *tools and techniques* to help employees towards achieving 'Inbox Zero', from smart inboxes, which filter your emails for you, to sophisticated email threading and filing options. Perhaps the simplest solution is to control how and when you read your emails. As Belinda Gannaway of Nixon McInnes said in response to our live poll results: "if you could switch off the 'send and receive' function, or just separate out the two of them, would we still see the high level of email usage every hour?"

There is always, of course, the option of getting up and speaking to a colleague in person. Many business emails are undoubtedly sent to people in the same building as the sender. Given that many emails initiate an exchange that continues for days, a quick face-to-face conversation or phone-call may well have been the best option.

But even if your organisation manages to implement a set of rules and techniques for better email management or more productive face-to-face meetings, there will still be a need for additional tools to fill the gaps. Employees still need to be able to communicate instantly, collaborate virtually, store documents and share knowledge.

Many employees are already starting to use social tools and apps without the approval or oversight of their employer, leading to fragmented working practices and increased security risks (especially in relation to mobile apps).

## SO WHAT ARE YOUR OPTIONS?

Richard Hughes of BroadVision, which has developed successful ESNs for some of the world's largest companies, divides the alternatives to email into three categories:

- “Firstly, there are those who are trying to reinvent email by layering extra intelligence on top of it. It might look cool and it might be nice to slide messages away, but ultimately, it's rearranging the proverbial deckchairs.”
- Then there are companies that are trying to simplify it down to just straight messaging: the ‘Whatsapps’ of this world. This quick and simple approach is most suitable for consumers.
- Lastly, there are organisations, like BroadVision, that are looking at collaboration and communication as a much bigger thing. Where the lens is more towards wikis and Enterprise Social Networks. This is the most suitable option for businesses that need the complete communication suite.

For most large organisations, Richard's last category is proving the most practical solution to their needs, but it's also the most complex. “ESNs comprise a range of communication features, such as status updates, newsfeeds, chat and instant messaging with collaborative tools, including groups, blogs and wikis.” They are designed to be as versatile as email, so are modular in nature, but with best-of-breed features for each specific purpose.

The vision that ESNs can facilitate staff interaction without the need for interruptive or wasteful communication holds great appeal for large organisations. *As long ago as 2012* McKinsey was estimating that the productivity gains of implementing enterprise social technologies could contribute between \$900 billion and \$1.3 trillion in annual value to the US economy.

And they are proving extremely popular. In 2012 Deloitte predicted that by the end of 2013, 90% of Fortune 500 companies would have partially or fully implemented an ESN. We don't know if that figure was achieved, but based on the multitude of *ESN case studies* now available online, it seems highly likely that it has been by now.

To a great extent our snap poll results (above) echo this move towards ESNs. “Given how much we're dependent on email”, says Angela Ashenden, “I think it's fascinating that social networks and chat are not far behind the phone in terms of how much we use them.” She also raised the idea that ‘phone’, as listed in our poll options, might not mean voice-calls. “They may be texting, using WhatsApp or any number of other social applications.”

Beyond the complexity of selecting the most appropriate modules, apps, features or tools to create your ESN, there are challenges relating to access. Initially designed for internal collaboration only, many networks end up allowing at least partial access to third party suppliers or customers or integrating with external-facing knowledge bases.

The most frequent example of this occurs in customer service, where a phone-line, email or live chat may facilitate adequate communication, but a forum or knowledge-base where customers can ask questions, read previous answers and help each other is likely to provide a more effective, collaborative solution.

So, how do you get customers to understand that visiting a forum is better than making a phone-call or sending an email? Angela Ashenden recommends a gradual process of introduction whereby every call or email ends with referral to where they could have found the answer on the forum. When it's made clear that it's a quicker route to the answer, most people learn to shortcut inefficient processes.

Whilst implementing an ESN, training staff and encouraging customers and suppliers to use your new social technologies may make business sense, almost all organisations experience cultural resistance to change, and at all levels.

Suggestions that social media is part of an efficiency problem, rather than a solution, persist. According to the UK's Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), *48% of employees* who use social media for work still say it leads to information overload. To compound this the annual '*time-wasting at work*' survey from Salary.com in 2014 featured Facebook and LinkedIn among the top three time-wasting.

That some business leaders still confuse enterprise social networking, i.e. the use of internal business collaboration tools, with social networking, i.e. using public social networks to connect with friends, suggests that education at all levels of an organisation remains a key factor in planning an ESN activities of employees, fuelling the commonly aired board room sentiment that '*social media equals time-wasting*'.

There is also negativity towards social media on the 'shop floor'. After years of suffering, in many cases, badly designed Intranets and bungled ESN projects, it is perhaps understandable that when surveyed many employees are sceptical about the real value of enterprise social technologies. Just 18% of employees believe social media is important in the workplace" while 49% think it isn't.

While ESNs have the potential to deliver dramatic improvements in communication, it's clear that any organisation planning to implement a social communication strategy will still need to overcome many technical, practical and cultural challenges before it can achieve lasting benefits.

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## HOW CAN ORGANISATIONS KICK THE EMAIL HABIT?

A lot of working people moan about email overload, but it remains a fact: shifting us to alternatives is *extremely difficult*. I asked our webinar panelists how organisations should go about making this change and what the key elements of a successful strategy would comprise.

### A CLEARLY STATED VISION

The most frequently mentioned word in the subsequent discussion was 'vision'. It may seem obvious, but apparently most drives to reduce email and increase productivity lack a clear sense of purpose and agreed goals. Crucially, senior staff need to define this vision, buy into the process and explain to their employees what the benefits will be for them.

### ACTIVELY ENGAGED LEADERSHIP

"If your manager says 'you will communicate on this social network' but keeps sending you emails, then that's bound to fail", says Richard Hughes, highlighting the all-too-frequent hypocrisy of internal communications dictates. Our panelists agreed, for such a project to succeed it requires strong and committed leadership.

This is a sentiment *echoed by Gartner*, who state bluntly: "80 percent of social business efforts will not achieve the intended benefits due to inadequate leadership and an overemphasis on technology". It is therefore essential that senior managers and directors lead any drive for change by example.

### CHANGING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Case studies suggest that the success of an ESN will depend to a great extent on how closely it aligns with existing company culture. If the organisation has a culture of openness, sharing and democratic inclusivity, the ESN should enhance this, but if the company has a secretive, locked-down approach to data and information exchange, it's likely the ESN will flounder.

As CIPD Research Adviser, Jonny Gifford, who analysed the UK's Southeastern rail company ESN roll-out, explained in a recent interview with the magazine site *Rail Professional*: "If you bring in an ESN into a company with a very command and control culture, it will be used in a "command and control" way. Social media is inherently democratic, it's not about hierarchy, it's about who has got something helpful or useful to say...no matter who you are."

If your organisation doesn't have an open, collaborative culture, this may need to be worked on before implementing an ESN or similar communication approach.

### BENEFITS FOR STAFF

One of the most important requirements for success is the need for any alternative to email to provide *genuine benefits to staff*; a better, faster, more effective way of doing something that they do every day.

As was raised in our webinar, there is the classic case of putting the canteen menu on an ESN homepage causing staff usage jump to 80%. The temptation is to say you've achieved 80% usage whereas, as Richard Hughes points out, genuine usage hasn't increased at all: "we don't want staff to spend all day reading the menu. We want them to be doing real work. The question to ask is: what kind of real business processes now live in this social environment instead of living in an email environment?"

## EVOLVING STAFF ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The vision an organization has for reducing email dependency needs to be articulated to staff so that they buy into the concept from the outset, but it also needs to be written into job descriptions, with time allocated to working on it. It needs to be clearly set out in staff policies, added to staff contracts and made an integral part of everyone's contribution to moving the organisation forward.

## INTERNAL CASE STUDIES

The unproven nature of new communication tools understandably hinders early adoption, so Belinda Gannaway recommends creating a drip-feed of positive, tangible examples to motivate staff into making the effort: "You need to continually capture success stories; why people like it or how they're benefiting from working in a new way, and share those stories back into the network.

## OPEN TO FEEDBACK

One of the most critical factors, as highlighted by the Barclays Bank case study (see Appendix) is the process for taking on feedback from staff. Having a process for asking what they need and how the new process could be improved will help to refine and enhance it.

The success of the project may depend on their recommendations for, for example, a more seamless sign-in or a comprehensive mobile app.

## ENCOURAGING INTERACTION

One of the most popular methods of increasing usage of, for example, an ESN, is to create a system where employees can gain points for each interaction. Gamification, as this is known, taps into various triggers for motivation, such as status, reward or altruism to promote positive engagement.

The risk with gamification is that it can generate engagement for engagement's sake, rather than valuable, time-saving interaction. To combat this, as Richard Hughes explains, BroadVision's version of gamification involves a more sophisticated measurement of a person's contribution to the network: "we create what we call a CAP score by adding together scores for each users' connectivity – i.e. how many people they are connected to – activity – i.e. their number of contributions, and popularity – i.e. positive feeling towards their contributions."

For many ESN projects, in particular, finding hidden talent and previously unknown connectors within the organisation can be as surprising as it is beneficial. As Richard Hughes says: "the CAP score is hugely valuable, because it identifies the people who you might not realise are going to be the community champions".

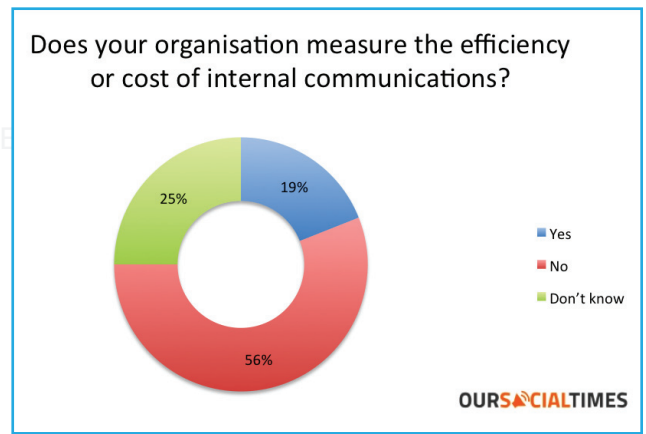
The question to ask is: what kind of real business processes now live in this social environment instead of living in an email environment?

## MEASURE PROGRESS EFFECTIVELY

While many organisations measure the volume of email data they maintain the majority of published ESN case studies make little or no mention of calculating figures for email reduction or cost savings generated from using a more collaborative approach to communicating.

The reasons for this are unclear, but may reflect a lack of measurement applied to internal communications in general. During our webinar we asked our viewers whether their organisation measures the efficiency or cost of internal communications. The results (see graph below) were not particularly encouraging.

Fewer than one in five of the people who tuned into our webinar said that their organisation measures the efficiency or cost of internal communications



Fewer than one in five of the people who tuned into our webinar said that their organisation measures the efficiency or cost of internal communications. 25% didn't know, while 56% were sure their organisations didn't measure either cost or efficiency.

The changes resulting from a project to reduce email dependency are likely to be incremental, at least to start with, so accurate measurement of critical indicators - such as staff time spend on internal communications, or email volumes - need to be tracked and measured.



## CONCLUSION

While email is still endemic within most large organisations, there is also strong evidence that social media usage within organisations is rapidly increasing and beginning to impact on how we communicate with colleagues.

As more employees become familiar with using social media, both professionally and in their private lives, Enterprise Social Networks (ESNs) - with integrated messaging, chat and document sharing capabilities - are starting to reduce corporate dependence on the email inbox.

The recent *CIPD* study into enterprise social networking highlighted the opportunity for organisations of combining email with enterprise social technology: "as we become more adept at using social media – not to mention more deliberate and effective in how we use it in conjunction with email – we will see greater benefit".

That said, the evidence also suggests that aiming for total *email eradication* is likely to lead to disappointment. Email has proven highly addictive and will remain a difficult for habitual users to drop.

But there are 'low-hanging fruit', such as employees who don't currently use email, who could be introduced to collaborative tools as their first and primary internal communication channel. Organisations should also focus their attention on providing better, more effective alternatives for those situations where email is *already failing* – for example when knowledge capture and retention, or team collaboration, is required.

Undoubtedly the *measurement* of for example, internal communication efficiency and the value of knowledge sharing, will play an important role in the replacement of email-based systems with social technology. As organisations begin to assess and monitor the cost of email versus the value of new, more open communication systems, we can expect the pace of change to increase.

David Allen, author of the celebrated book *Getting Things Done* once wrote: "email handled well reduces meetings. And meetings handled well reduces emails." There seems little doubt that, handled well, enterprise social technology has the capacity to reduce the need for both emails and meetings. Now it's up to us to deliver on that promise.

Organisations should focus on providing better, more effective alternatives for those situations where email is already failing – when knowledge capture and retention, or team collaboration is required.

## APPENDIX: TWO ENTERPRISE SOCIAL NETWORKING (ESN) CASE STUDIES

### *Southeastern rail's ESN project: Workmate*

During our webinar Angela Ashenden cited the recent example of the Southeastern rail company in the UK, which in an effort to reduce email overload decided to develop a thriving ESN.

Southeastern knew they needed to provide access to real-time information about delays and service changes and, according to Angela, meeting this need quickly became one of their main objectives: "how do you communicate real-time information quickly, give it some context and interact with the public, all in a seamless way?"

The company has a large, dispersed workforce, many of whom have experienced multiple re-branding exercises or management changes over the years, so it was perhaps not in the best position, culturally, to implement an ESN.

Fortunately they had already started building up staff commitment to the company and its values - using engagement exercises, hosting face-to-face forums and sharing information about corporate values - so the ground work for building a successful ESN was already under way.

"They're in no doubt as to the positive impact ESN has had, such as the improvements in culture, the identification with the organisation and the exchange of information."

Jonny Gifford  
CIPD

They started by running their ESN, Workmate, alongside their existing Intranet, but soon after launch they found that Workmate was receiving more than a hundred times more hits than their Intranet, so the latter was canned.

Southeastern haven't published figures on the impact of the ESN on email usage, but *according to Jonny Gifford* of the CIPD, Southeastern Rail experienced significant benefits: "if you talk to people like the HR director, they're in no doubt as to the positive impact ESN has had, such as the improvements in culture, the identification with the organisation and the exchange of information."

### Barclay Bank's ESN project: MyZone

Belinda Gannaway of Nixon McInnes cited the example of Barclay Bank UK staff ESN. In 2013 the bank was seeking an alternative to email, which was failing to work as an effective internal communication channel. The main problem was with front-line staff, the majority of whom don't have email accounts or PCs but frequently need expert advice on new products and services.

Under the guidance of Dave Shepherd, Head of Front-line Services, Barclays developed a mobile app called MyZone, which was designed to be used by staff in their day-to-day work as well as provide various HR and administrative features.

Within a few months of launch the app was being used by the majority of the bank's 16,000 front-line staff and, at the start of 2015, it reportedly had over 40,000 staff users.

But the most fascinating finding relates to how the platform is being used. *According to Dave Shepherd*, "we built it fundamentally to push information to colleagues, but it has turned into something completely different. Employees are not interested in info we push to them. They want info that they can pull from each other."

The use of video on MyZone is particularly impressive. As Ben Parsons, Head of Colleague Engagement at Barclays says, "we put out a message on My Site [the staff community within MyZone] and tell people we need a video to show a new functionality. We get an average of 10 to 15 videos in, check them and choose the best to go live on MyZone".

There are over 800 videos on MyZone - mostly created by staff - which are being viewed by their colleagues to solve day-to-day queries. While Barclays have not published any data on email usage, there is little doubt that MyZone is reducing need for email communications and, simply by choosing not to give branch staff email accounts and laptops they are restricting email usage within the bank .

There are over 800 videos on MyZone - mostly created by staff - which are being viewed by their colleagues to solve day-to-day queries.

## AUTHOR

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Luke Brynley-Jones is the Founder and CEO of Our Social Times, one of the UK's best-known social media agencies. Back in 2000, before Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or Myspace existed, Luke was working with global organisations to enable them to develop thriving online communities and blogs. Having worked with brands, celebrities, start-ups and SMEs, Luke is a recognised authority on how social media is changing the world of business.



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Based in Cambridge, Our Social Times is thriving social media agency that provides strategy, management, marketing, measurement and training services for a wide range of organisations, including Pfizer, DairyCo, Orange Business Services and Oxford University Press. To compliment its client work, the agency hosts regular webinars, seminars, conferences and courses on innovative aspects of social media.

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