
Informal TechEd Podcast: Social Media and SAP - BS or Value?

"An Informal discussion about what works and what fails in SAP social media for companies and individuals"Podcast
Taping Date: September 15, 2011

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SAP TechEd is always full of gut-ripping event conflicts. While my fellow SAP Mentors were meeting with Vishal Sikka, I conducted this recorded expert lounge discussion on social media in the SAP world - "BS or Value?" I was glad to be joined by some very sharp people, including Marilyn Pratt and Natascha Thomson, who is very well-versed in social media issues herself. As an extra bonus, Natascha posted video of some of the session in her own TechEd post, so check that out on SCN. SAP's David Brutman also participated in the talk, along with a number of conference attendees.

Now that Dennis Howlett and I have posted all 21 of our JD-OD SAP TechEd Vegas videos, I can now post a couple audio souvenirs from TechEd Vegas, including this podcast. One thing to note: the recording is not ideal from an audio standpoint, due to a couple quirks such as crowd noise. For that reason, I have added detailed podcast notes below which hits on almost all the key points in the 24 minute conversation.

I'm posting this audio in imperfect format because I thought this conversation captured something - a sense of collective frustration about the excesses of "social media as a popularity contest", but also some important talk about another very different and more powerful way to go about social media, by creating kickass content that fosters community and conversation around your "tribe." There was also some worthwhile debate about how "personal" people should get on social media, and whether brands can be authentic. You might be surprised to learn I believe there is a limit to how authentic we should get on these channels. But the obvious pushback is that "building a global microbrand" seems soulless. Well, it doesn't have to be. Not with soulful content and a community-driven approach.

Note: this podcast is rated PG-13. I swear a couple of times, "creating kickass content" for one.

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Podcast Highlights

1:50 Audience input - what do you want to get out of the session: do we want to talk about social media for companies/project teams, individuals, or both? The challenges of filtering. Using social media to share information versus consuming it. The personal brand - how do you build it around a set of SAP or other topics? Starting to participate: the quality of the information improves when you interact rather than just read content. The need for good information, becoming an expert. Blogging about new topics, such as BI 4.0, and how that leads to new conversations and better know-how.

6:20 Jon: biggest problem I see with social media is that it's perceived as the first step when it's actually one of the last steps. The first step is identity: we have to know who we are and then figure out what part of our identity we want to share. I don't like talking about personal brands because I don't think we're about putting all of ourselves out there. We're always making decisions about what we do or don't share. A better question is: how can I build a global microbrand and international community around what I do. But you have to be passionate about it, otherwise people will see right through your phony broadcasting.

8:23 Jon: Once you've conquered identity, the next piece is about context. It's embarrassing to see blogs that are not aware of the conversations going on. You're joining a conversation and trying to advance it. If you don't understand the context of other experts in your topic, how can you advance the conversation? For myself, I have spent hundreds of hours prioritizing my feeds and keyword searches so that I can quickly dip in when I'm busy and hone in on what I need when I'm busy, and when I have more time, I can expand that input. So you want to have a series of prioritized layers you can dip into according to time.

10:18 Jon: The next piece is about content. Kickass content. If you create great content, you don't necessarily need to broadcast it. Other people will seize upon it and broadcast it for you. Challenge yourself and do work you're proud of, make it easy for people to share it, and create content that centers around your global microbrand and the community you are building around it. You don't have to push the content yourself, you can then start engaging in relationships.

11:50 Natascha: It all comes down to figuring out why are you doing social media, jumping onto channels like Twitter without thinking through your objectives. If you're not willing to put in effort, then don't do it. You have to put the time in to monitor what you're doing and be interesting. I disagree with you a bit about the brand thing, if it's just automated, that's not a personality. Your brand is who you are as a person, not just a brand. Marilyn: It's about doing kickass stuff, the brand will build itself. Jon: I'm not saying you should have an obsessive focus on one topic only. But it is important to make a distinction on what kind of content you share so as not to overwhelm people and to give them a clear idea on why they are following you.

And there is a too much information factor to consider. I do share content about my personal life. I don't talk about why Beyonce's latest album sucked, even though it did. But last Friday I posted a few favorite YouTube videos because it does add some flavor to who I am and what I care about. Social media is about inviting people into your living room, not into your bedroom, so we are making conscious choices about what to share and what not to. Bringing people into your living room does create intimacy and authenticity to a point, but making clear choices about what you share does matter. When you're working for companies and navigating social media policies, those issues become even more important.

15:06 Pushing through lifestreaming "I'm at the airport/I'm at the coffeeshop" all the time can get irritating. The same with excessive retweets when you're not producing anything yourself. Is that all they have to say? This is not a good personal brand and I see that too much. That's why you need to apply your own filters before you post. Especially in social media, there is an obsession about having a presence and being liked. That's the wrong direction. What Seth Godin talks about with tribes is where you want to go. It's about creating and sharing quality content with a core group of people. When it's just you and you're thinking about your personal brand, you're losing touch with that overall conversation. It's really about the tribe and gathering the right group of people around you and furthering that conversation with quality content.

16:49: Jon: That comment about tribes is really true and it ties into the nature of influence. We were talking about Hugh MacLeod's Ignore Everybody, turn off "how many followers do I have," "What is my Klout score?" and that kind of

bullsh*t. I know someone who has a pretty low Klout score who has a lot of traction with customers. But his Klout score isn't that high. He's the one who's influencing purchasing decisions, not the person who's constantly retweeting and engaging in a popularity contest. It's about forming a tribe based on content that has inherent value that you are passionately committed to. When I wrote my SAP career white papers, what drove me was the idea that the content would help people. People took care of the marketing for me because they thought it had value. Create something of value and make yourself accessible. That part is simple. Where the complexities come in are around filtering, company policy, and making sense of the information. Figuring out sentiment and how to participate in the conversation is really tough.

19:44 Natascha: You don't need to do social media. You need to figure out your business goals first. The whole measuring thing - people shouldn't get too caught up in measurement. There is a huge topic around how companies participate in social media in general. The fact that you're a company doesn't put you in a good position. Jon: an independent person has an advantage on social media because I can speak authentically without running things up a corporate flagpole. With social media, you can't put window dressing on something that is inherently corrupt because people will call you out. I use the phrase "drive by replies" to describe how companies superficially engage in resolving issues they see on Twitter without truly addressing the problems, and that simply creates more resentment. It almost made things worse. I think that's one of the big concerns right now. Listening is fine, but now follow through comes into play. People wants results. Things unravel sometimes when companies try to move from social media talk to follow through. Take care of people and then let them speak for you.