

CUSTOMER CASE STUDY: EGON ZEHNDER

Egon Zehnder Globalizes with Intranet 2.0

Egon
Zehnder
International

Globalization is changing the executive search business, and Egon Zehnder International uses enterprise social software from Socialtext to lead the way.

A Global Leadership Opportunity

Egon Zehnder International is best known around the world for their largest professional service, Executive Search, where they identify, assess and recruit senior business leaders, typically at the C-suite level. The firm is distinguished in the market by deep expertise in specific industry segments and management functions. Every consultant and partner brings years of experience as a top executive in one of Egon Zehnder's targeted industry practice areas.

Globalization presented Egon Zehnder with a significant business opportunity. Fortune 500 companies—Egon Zehnder's typical clients—now manage fully globalized operations. This is driving a new approach to the sourcing and development of senior talent. Executive mobility is on the rise, with cross-border searches becoming standard in the industry. Experience with multiple languages, markets, and cultures increasingly shows up as a core requirement on many talent searches. With 1,500 employees spread across 64 offices in 40 countries, the firm has emerged as one of a handful of firms capable of leading in the new world of global executive search.

The global opportunity required Egon Zehnder to take a fresh look at its internal operations. Executive search is based on personal relationships between the firm's partners and senior business leaders, developed over decades of face-to-face interactions. These relationships are intensely valuable, but also highly localized. In order to serve multi-national clients, the firm needed to integrate its rich collection of country-specific personal networks into a firm-wide capability for sourcing and placing senior executives globally.

“A Whole New Kind of Intranet”

Egon Zehnder's technology leadership immediately recognized that the firm's IT systems would need major improvement. Partner James Martin and Director of Operations Bill Hopkins launched two major initiatives. First, they upgraded the global CRM system that the firm uses to track its candidate pool and placements. Second, they replaced their traditional intranet, which, since it required IT's help to update, became static and unused. So they set about building Symphony, a dynamic, social intranet built on Socialtext.

James and Bill recognized that the Intranet was a critical capability for the firm's newly globalized scope. “We had this vision of a global watering-hole, a place where everyone in the firm could talk to each other, exchange best practices, share research and knowledge, and leverage

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James Martin
Partner

firm-wide our incredibly rich set of relationships,” James said. The vision included a place where any member of the firm—from senior partners to junior researchers—could both contribute and find such resources as:

- Current research on specific industries, functions, and executives
- Up-to-date information on the firm’s work with strategic clients
- Approved templates for engagement proposals
- Current marketing materials describing the firm and its approach to specific types of searches
- Thought leadership on industry and functional trends
- Expert help handling exceptional searches, i.e., searches with specific and non-standard requirements

“Our old intranet was nowhere near where it needed to be,” James said. Egon Zehnder had launched an intranet in the late 1990s. Like many organizations, Egon Zehnder did not see its intranet as a strategic tool, and most members of the firm did not use it in the daily flow of work. “When we started this, the intranet was really just a place to park documents and HR information. There were a few sections that were pretty well maintained, but for the most part it was a mess. If you didn’t know exactly what you were looking for, you wouldn’t find it. And even if you did know what you were looking for, chances weren’t too high that it would be there.”

Security without the Management Burden

Budget and resources were a major concern. “We run a very lean IT department for a firm our size. To compound matters, the financial crisis hit right as we were scoping this project. We weren’t sure what the future would hold, and we didn’t want to lock ourselves into a solution that would carry a long maintenance burden—in terms of either cash or headcount.”

Bill was attracted to the economic proposition of Software as a Service (SaaS). When you look at the total cost of ownership, it’s a no-brainer,” Bill said. “Once you factor in the total personnel cost of implementing and maintaining a SharePoint or some other major piece of on-site infrastructure, the price gets a lot higher than just the software. We didn’t have budget for dedicated FTE’s we could devote to this project.”

At the same time, Bill and the Egon Zehnder partners were not comfortable with the security implications of a hosted solution. “Security is incredibly important to us,” said Bill. “One of the reasons why our clients trust us is because they know we are utterly, fanatically discreet. Often the very fact that we’ve been engaged to fill a position would be front-page news if the papers found out about it.”

“From an IT standpoint, that means our data must be completely secure. There was never any chance of letting our data leave the firewall. It just wasn’t going to happen.”

With the Socialtext on-site appliance, Egon Zehnder has the benefits of SaaS with the security of on-premises deployment. The Socialtext appliance hooks into a company’s existing infrastructure, and sits behind the firewall. Socialtext performs the software updates, so it requires little to no IT maintenance.

“We knew we needed a whole new kind of Intranet. Instead of a traditional, rigid document repository, we needed a tool that would enable consultants and researchers to interact with each other flexibly. Most importantly, it had to be incredibly easy to use—both to contribute and to find what you need at a moment’s notice.”

Bill Hopkins
Director of Operations

“Socialtext’s on-site appliance was a major selling point for us. It gave us the data security we need, without sucking up a lot of resources.”

Bill Hopkins
Director of Operations

Rolling it out: “The level of enthusiasm was stunning”

Bill focused on the organizational aspects of rolling out Socialtext to the firm. “Technology was only half the battle,” Bill explains. “Adoption is the other, arguably bigger, half. These are very smart, busy, impatient people. We were asking them to make some pretty fundamental changes to their daily flow of work.”

“We knew we had only one shot to get this right,” said Bill.

To roll out Socialtext, Bill worked hand-in-glove with Ramona Nussey, Manager of Training for Egon Zehnder. Together, they defined a basic information structure, pre-populated some content, and posted self-guided training videos. “We wanted the initial experience to be easy and intuitive,” Ramona explains. “We didn’t want people to feel like they were walking into an empty room.”

The next step was to recruit the firm’s researchers to further develop content that would be more specific to the firm’s daily flow of work. As Bill puts it, “the consultants and researchers had to own this. If it was viewed as an IT-led or a training-led initiative, we knew it would fail.”

Bill and Ramona were surprised at how enthusiastically the researchers took to Socialtext. “We gauge success by how much people take to it and rely on it,” said Bill. “We had pretty much 100% unanimous adoption from the researchers within a month. They took to it like gangbusters. They wholeheartedly adopted it. The level of enthusiasm around Socialtext was stunning.”

Three months later, Egon Zehnder rolled out the solution company-wide to all of their 1,500 people. “We rolled it out at our annual partner’s conference,” said Bill. “After I showed what it could do, I got a rousing ovation from the partners. That had never happened at a technology unveiling.”

“Within a month we had over 50% adoption from the firm,” said Bill. “Newer colleagues in particular adopted it very quickly.” Within six months, the firm had generated over 3,000 pages of content and the site was routinely logging 30,000-40,000 hits per month.

“Socialtext hit a sweet spot, a real pressing need for us,” said Bill. “And as far as technology rollouts go, it was almost a non-event.”

An Evolving Strategic Tool

As Egon Zehnder’s use of Socialtext grows and matures, it is also changing to keep up with the times. “People look at what they need to accomplish, and structure it the way they need it,” says Bill. “It keeps growing and evolving without IT involvement, which is exactly what we wanted.”

“Our social intranet is now a strategic tool,” said Bill, “and it becomes more powerful every day.”

The firm is also exploring ways to expand the impact of its Socialtext implementation beyond Bill’s original vision. “We’re starting to look more seriously at Signals [Socialtext’s microblogging capability],” said Bill. “It wasn’t a core part of the original vision, but it complements that vision beautifully as our people are becoming more familiar with tools like Twitter and Facebook.”

“We’re actively investigating ways to use the tool not only internally, but also potentially with our networks outside the firm,” Bill explains. “There’s a lot of change going on in executive search. We feel that our use of Socialtext is helping us lead the way—in the industry and, more importantly, for our clients.”

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About Socialtext

Established in 2002, Socialtext is the first company to deliver social software to businesses. By unlocking knowledge, expertise, ideas and data, Socialtext eliminates information silos across the enterprise to drive superior business performance. Socialtext's enterprise social networking products — including microblogging, blogs, wikis, profiles and social spreadsheets — provide simpler ways for employees to share vital information and work together in real-time. Delivered in a variety of hosted cloud services, as well as on-site appliances, enterprise customers are provided with flexible deployment options that meet their security requirements. Built on a flexible, web-oriented architecture, Socialtext integrates with virtually any traditional system of record, such as CRM and ERP, enabling companies to discuss, collaborate, and take action on key business processes. More than 6,500 businesses worldwide have accelerated their business performance with Socialtext, including Oxford University Press, Egon Zehnder, Getty Images, Symantec, Meredith Corporation, NYU Stern, OS/soft, and Epitaph Records. To learn more, visit www.socialtext.com.

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