



# Becoming Agile and Innovative Grows Revenues

Meredith Corporation runs some of the most recognizable, storied magazine brands in America, serving nearly 75 million women. It counts 23 subscription based publications in its portfolio, including Better Homes and Gardens, Ladies' Home Journal, Family Circle, Fitness, and American Baby.

But the Des Moines, Iowa based Meredith competes in a challenging media market in the midst of transformation. The way people consume information is undergoing a massive shift, disrupting traditional revenue sources. In fact, according to this year's State of the News Media report by the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, the number of ad pages sold by magazines fell by 25 percent in 2009.

In order to thrive in the publishing industry, magazines must grow other sources of revenue to make up for this shortfall. That's where Meredith's marketing team takes on a strategic role. In order to better grow their subscriber base and offset the challenges of the current ad market, they deployed enterprise social software from Socialtext.

## Summary

### Challenges

- As team members make timely decisions, they needed access to the real-time information that could inform those decisions. But rolling up data from different sources required a series of manual exercises, which delayed the availability of critical information.
- In order to be more agile and innovative, Meredith employees needed a way to share and act on fast-changing market intelligence. They needed a way to quickly brainstorm implications and ideas, and turn those ideas into action. Prior to Socialtext, they used e-mail for sharing and collaborating. But as inboxes became cluttered, the staff became overwhelmed.
- To drive profitability in circulation and subscriber-based revenue, Meredith needed to increase efficiencies in its marketing operations and reduce communications overhead.

### Solutions

- Meredith staff members use Socialtext's enterprise microblogging tool to share news, links and ideas in a fast and non-intrusive way, getting fast answers and broad input.
- For deeper collaboration, Meredith employees now work openly in online workspaces, enabling them to collaborate on ideas and projects much more easily. This gives them a way to act quickly on new market intelligence.
- With a customized activity stream, employees stay informed on the relevant projects and work activities performed by their colleagues.
- Meredith team members now use online distributed spreadsheets that automatically roll up information from across multiple campaigns.

### Business Results

- Employees are much more informed, while communications overhead is greatly reduced. What previously needed to be communicated manually is now communicated automatically. Sharing is fast and easy, and email overload is reduced.
- Everyone has the latest picture of the business, and everyone can make timely and informed decisions that advance Meredith's market strategy more quickly.
- Employees collaborate much more effectively, and can share and act on fast-changing market intelligence.

## Overwhelmed by e-mail inboxes

Even before the Web, media has always been a difficult and at times tumultuous industry. Readership and ad revenue can go up one quarter, and dive the next.

Knowing how quickly the market can change, Meredith employees share links and information about competitor moves, as well as industry and consumer trends. Prior to Socialtext, Meredith relied on e-mail to share this information. According to Dave Ball, Meredith's vice president of consumer marketing, this hampered productivity across the department.

**“Doing this via e-mail was really inefficient, and it overwhelmed people. E-mail is great for something that requires an immediate response from a specific person. But if others might benefit from the information and a reply is not required, it doesn't belong in your e-mail inbox.”**

Dave Ball  
Vice President, Consumer Marketing

## A better way to share

Now Meredith employees use Socialtext Signals for sharing information quickly and broadly. Signals allows people to share short messages, links and work actions they take throughout the day.

“Socialtext Signals gives us a fast and easy way to share this type of information, and the entire team is more informed,” Dave says. “At the same time, having an effective outlet for this type of broad sharing has transformed our workflow. The e-mail we do get is more relevant, and the information we engage with openly via Signals often benefits all of us.”

## An easy way to collaborate

Socialtext Signals gives Meredith employees a medium for quickly brainstorming around the implications of new market conditions. Working openly on workspace pages, Meredith employees also now have a way to collaborate more deeply on ideas and action plans. Everything team members do on workspaces pages flows into an activity stream in Socialtext. Activity streams chronicle the work people do throughout the day, and keep everyone informed automatically.

**“People know what's going on in real-time, and good ideas get acted on faster.”**

Dave Ball  
Vice President, Consumer Marketing

This ability to stay informed, collaborate easily, and act on market changes has allowed Meredith to become more agile and innovative.

## Challenged by information lag

The results of Meredith's marketing efforts are measured in hard numbers. As each brand executes subscriber campaigns, the marketing team carefully tracks the campaign performance and results. From this data, team members get insight into new subscriber trends and segments, and new key indicators.

Each brand has one or more people in Meredith's marketing department dedicated to tracking this data. In the past, each brand would cull its latest subscriber campaign data into a “flash report,” typically in an Excel file. These files were then e-mailed into Dave. Then, when all the reports had been e-mailed, Dave's team would compile them into a master Excel sheet that would then be distributed broadly to Meredith executives and other key employees. This manual process created delays in information availability. It also presented Meredith with version control and accuracy issues, tying up people from doing more strategic, value-added work. Most importantly, it hampered Meredith's ability to get fast insight.

## Immediate insight, turned into fast action

Meredith now uses SocialCalc, the online social spreadsheet capability that is part of the Socialtext platform. SocialCalc dynamically rolls up data between interlinked spreadsheets. Now, each brand manager can keep their subscriber campaign data updated in one place, on their SocialCalc spreadsheet, and Dave can link to values in those spreadsheets from within his master spreadsheet. If one of the brand managers updates a value in his or her spreadsheet, it is dynamically updated in Dave's spreadsheet as well.

SocialCalc has core social components that distinguish it from other online spreadsheets. It can track who made each change with a people badge linked to a person's profile. The badge includes a person's name, a link to their profile in Socialtext, a picture, e-mail address, instant messaging handle, and other key information.

## The right solution for the business and IT

Dave says the investment he made in Socialtext was a fraction of what other offerings would have cost, in large part because of Socialtext's software as a service (SaaS) model. Because the social software is delivered as a hosted application, it requires no developers to deploy it. He doesn't need to worry about managing hardware, infrastructure, or asking IT to commit many of its own resources.

Dave says his team realized the business value quickly due to Socialtext's ease of use.

## Conclusion: Increased subscribers and revenues

Meredith knows the challenges facing its industry. As a whole, the advertising business continues to see a drop-off as readers migrate to the Web, where the revenues derived from ads remain staggeringly low in comparison to their print counterparts. For Meredith and its direct competitors, that means revenue derived from other areas, such as circulation, is all the more important. In order to drive high-impact subscriber campaigns, Meredith's marketing team must be able to share and act on fast-changing information.

Since Meredith began using Socialtext in the fall of 2008 to optimize this effort, its subscriber numbers bettered an industry that was in decline. According to the most recent State of the News Media report, the magazine industry's paid subscriptions, which make up nearly 90 percent of magazines sold, declined 1.12 percent overall. Meredith, meanwhile, in the second quarter of fiscal 2010, increased its circulation revenue by nearly half a million dollars from the same period a year before.

In a disrupted industry where flat revenue or even light losses are viewed as an accomplishment, the increase wasn't lost on Meredith's investors when the company reported its financial results. In fact, the company reported that the "revenues, profit and related margin in Meredith's circulation activities (that) increased in the second quarter of fiscal 2010 compared to the prior year (were) driven in part by efficiencies in subscription operations."

**"I used to get 10 e-mails a day from different people with Excel files. Now, with SocialCalc, I can go in at any point in the day and see what's going on in all our active campaigns right now. It helps us distribute information and knowledge faster, so we can respond more quickly."**

Dave Ball  
Vice President, Consumer Marketing

**"With Socialtext, I don't need to involve too much of our CIO's time. Once he was satisfied that Socialtext had the proper security and administrative requirements, I didn't need to tie up his staff to deploy it or manage infrastructure."**

Dave Ball  
Vice President, Consumer Marketing

**"One thing we liked about Socialtext is the learning curve is short and anyone can do it. Socialtext helps us distribute knowledge faster. With Signals especially, people know what's going on and good ideas get acted on fast. It helps us build our business faster because it's now easier to work together."**

Dave Ball  
Vice President, Consumer Marketing

## 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, OSIssoft, and Epitaph Records. To learn more, visit [www.socialtext.com](http://www.socialtext.com).

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+1 (650) 331-7307 [sales@socialtext.com](mailto:sales@socialtext.com)