

CUSTOMER CASE STUDY: ST. LOUIS PUBLIC RADIO

St. Louis Public Radio: Now Working at the Speed of News



Founded in 1972, St. Louis Public Radio (SLPR) serves more than 220,000 listeners in the St. Louis area. The station is a service of the University of Missouri-St. Louis, and the majority of its funding comes from individual donors and corporate sponsors. The station’s staff must manage the needs of these constituents while also coordinating with each other internally to ensure they don’t miss out on the latest news story or fundraising opportunity.

Although SLPR does a great job serving its audience with the best programming possible, the station faced some challenges with its internal communications, especially between departments. Employees in News didn’t always know what those in Membership were focused on, and vice versa. Reporters who track breaking stories needed a better way to update their managers and colleagues on their progress. They wanted to surface that information in a centrally viewable place in order to avoid having people ask the same questions, over and over, in e-mail. For example, if news broke that European beer maker InBev was going to buy one of the region’s largest employers, Anheuser-Busch, a reporter could receive seven e-mails that asked the same question: “Are you on the story?”

Summary

Challenges

- Internal communication was resulting in overloaded e-mail inboxes while people weren’t as informed as they needed to be
- The station lacked an effective way to share organizational news, upcoming events, and messages from the management team
- Collaborating on projects created a lot of communication overhead and was at times slow and tedious

Socialtext Solution

- Socialtext Signals allows employees to share status updates, ask questions, and more openly communicate with their colleagues
- A new company intranet provides access to a shared company calendar, links to key resources, a stream of company news, and more
- Socialtext workspaces provide a place for employees to easily collaborate on projects in a timely way without needless e-mail overhead and clutter

Benefits

- Employees are now aware of what their colleagues are working on, so they can respond faster to station members and breaking news
- Projects and their accompanying materials are kept up to date inside workspaces, so everyone has what they need, when they need it. The time lost looking for information is greatly reduced
- With activity streams and notifications automatically keeping their teammates informed, people can spend more time doing their work

Goal: Make teamwork easier

St. Louis Public Radio (SLPR) understands the benefits of social networks. They actively use several popular public websites such as Twitter and Facebook to openly communicate with listeners and donors. This allows SLPR to engage with their members to find out how they prefer to learn about new programming and fundraising opportunities. But could SLPR employees benefit from a Twitter-like product to communicate with one another internally?

That is exactly what Tim Eby, SLPR's general manager, asked soon after joining in January 2009. Would this allow SLPR employees to cut down on extraneous e-mail traffic, while making each employee more aware of what their colleagues are working on in real-time? Tim soon discovered the answers to these questions were a resounding yes.

Solution: Socialtext social software platform with integrated microblogging

After investigating different point solutions, including Yammer, Tim found Socialtext to be the perfect fit for SLPR because it includes secure microblogging integrated with a broad set of other social software tools. SLPR employees now use secure microblogging from Socialtext, called Socialtext Signals, to share short messages (Signals) with each other, to communicate status updates, ask questions, and share news. They use Socialtext workspaces as a social intranet that keeps them all on the same page with company news and information. They also use workspaces to work collaboratively on projects.

Employees get fast answers and clean e-mail inboxes

Before Signals, SLPR employees relied heavily on e-mail to update each other on their latest projects and tasks. This had pitfalls:

- **Redundant work.** Too often, workers found themselves fielding the same questions in e-mail, over and over again. Simple status questions – such as “what are you working on this week?” or “have you made the new membership list?” – flooded people's inboxes. Each of these e-mails required its own separate response. Repeatedly answering the same questions proved to be a costly waste of time. With people now openly sharing via Signals, the staff is better informed of what is going on, resulting in a noticeable reduction in process or status questions being asked via e-mail.
- **Employees missed out on valuable information that would be locked away in e-mail.** For example, if two people in Membership traded valuable information about a new fundraising campaign in an e-mail message, their peers wouldn't know unless they were copied on the message. Similarly, people can't search for e-mails not addressed to them.
- **Employees had no good way to find the right people and information.** When an employee had a question and didn't know who to ask, they had no effective way to get an answer. If they sent an e-mail to a broad distribution list, they added to already cluttered e-mail inboxes, and had long waits for an answer.

With Signals, employees now have a way to post a brief message that returns answers from those who have relevant information, while not interrupting those who don't. Unlike e-mail, microblogging is “reply optional,” so messages that aren't relevant just flow by without cluttering inboxes.

SLPR employees can view Signals via a web-based dashboard, a dedicated desktop client, and even from their mobile phones. Since Signals lets employees stay in touch and aware, it has reduced e-mail volume significantly. Signals are private and secure, available only to people within SLPR. The product's level of enterprise security is one of the key attributes that led to SLPR's decision to go with Socialtext.

SLPR can respond more quickly to new opportunities

To ensure employees engaged with Signals and derived value from it, SLPR deployed Socialtext Desktop, an application that runs locally on worker's computers. When employees sign on in the morning, Socialtext Desktop automatically starts. Throughout the day, they can quickly scan the Signals their co-workers contributed and stay aware of their priorities and activities.

Additionally, Socialtext automatically summarizes the updates people make to critical organizational information, such as page edits, comments, and new tags. With Socialtext, SLPR employees know what's current and what's changed, and don't have to spend additional time trying to find this out. Updates are shown automatically in various activity streams throughout the product. Users can also choose to Signal a change, by simply checking a box. For example, if Bob in Membership makes changes to materials for an upcoming fund drive, he can choose to publish his edit as a Signal by simply checking "Signal this edit" when he saves his changes. His colleagues will then see a Signal that says, "Bob edited the membership list," along with a link to the newly changed content.

"People understand each other more, and they know what others are doing. This lets us respond more quickly to new opportunities."

Tim Eby
SLPR General Manager

SLPR can now work at the speed of news

From May to August, the number of Signals sent by employees increased by more than 200 percent. As the level of connectedness inside SLPR increased, employees could spend more time doing what they do best. In News, reporters gather local news and build stories faster for the station's various programs, including local stories for National Public Radio's Morning Edition and All Things Considered programs. On the membership side, SLPR can react to donors faster. In the past, if a member had a complex question, the staff would e-mail each other to find who had the right answer, which could take hours and create an explosion of reply-all e-mails. Now, with Signals, they are able to ask that question as a short message that everyone in the organization sees, and the appropriate person can respond quickly, while others aren't interrupted.

The implementation of Socialtext Signals has greatly improved internal communications at SLPR, and enables employees to serve SLPR members more effectively and quickly. By seeing each others' Signals, and gaining a better awareness of activities that occur day-to-day and hour-by-hour, SLPR can react faster to the speed of news and the needs of members.

New social intranet keeps everyone on same page

With SLPR's staff now connected with each other more effectively via Signals, SLPR turned its attention towards solving another issue: Providing a common home page for finding and sharing information. Using Socialtext, Tim and his team easily created a company intranet, where everyone can now access important information. This new intranet gives the entire staff a way to quickly access information including:

- **Company resources** - A simple widget provides links to (among other things) employee manuals, HR forms, meeting minutes, budget information, and a common workspace where employees can share thoughts and ideas.
- **Announcements** - Rather than broadcasting company-wide messages via e-mail, announcements are now displayed directly on the SLPR dashboard. This simple and effective system provides a way for the station manager or HR department to publish critical organizational information.
- **Shared company calendar** - SLPR has integrated a shared Google Calendar, providing a single place for everyone to look at upcoming station events, holiday schedules, vacations, sick days, company meetings, and more. The calendar saves everyone a great deal of time by making it simple to find the information whenever they need it, in a single, organized place.
- **Newsfeeds** - Being on top of what is happening in the industry is especially important to a news organization. Rather than have each individual employee go through the effort of finding and staying on top of the best news sources all the time, SLPR embedded a newsfeed widget directly onto the dashboard, which displays an up-to-date list of the latest stories for everyone.
- **Photos** - SLPR manages a Flickr Group, where employees upload photos of local landmarks, exciting events, or anything else they want to share. By embedding a slideshow of these photos into the dashboard, they gave everyone on staff instant access to the photos, which is not only informative, but also fun.

Project teams work together more easily

SLPR employees also use workspaces to get work done faster. In particular, SLPR has found Socialtext wiki workspaces useful for projects and strategic planning. Just recently, SLPR was in the process of rebranding and changing its name from the callsign KWMU to the (now) current St. Louis Public Radio. Using a wiki workspace, employees on the branding team collaborated on the project in a timely way without needless e-mail overhead and clutter. And, according to Tim, the workspace reduced the number of meetings needed to manage the rebranding project.

Adoption happened quickly

As with Signals, adoption of workspaces happened quickly. Between May and August, the number of wiki pages created by SLPR employees nearly doubled. A big reason for this high adoption rate rests in the way workspaces work in tandem with Socialtext Signals. As edits occur inside workspaces, employees have the option to share those changes with their co-workers as a Signal containing a link, which prompts co-workers to make contributions of their own. As they see the usefulness of the wikis, they create new pages with more valuable information. In addition, Socialtext wikis are easy to use for people with no technical experience. People click an “edit” button at the top of a workspace page, and a “what you see is what you get” (WYSIWYG) editor opens. Employees easily make changes and add content, and simply click “save.” The content will appear on the page exactly as they modified it.

Projects get done faster

SLPR solved some essential business challenges with Socialtext workspaces. For one, SLPR created a social intranet and workspaces that employees can use without any technical expertise. Secondly, with a central online place where employees can share information, they can get projects done faster and ultimately serve members more effectively.

The ease of implementing Socialtext was also a significant factor in SLPR’s decision because the station has a small technical staff. Socialtext can be deployed as a software-as-a-service (SaaS), where Socialtext hosts and maintains the application.

Employees stay informed, respond faster, and serve members better

From politics to the economy to the arts, SLPR serves a diverse audience that turns to the station as their first resource for news and analysis on everything affecting the St. Louis area. Many of these listeners become members, expressing their appreciation for this station’s programming in the form of generous donations. This helps SLPR hire a talented, dedicated team, who deserve the best tools to do their jobs effectively. Using Socialtext Signals, employees are now aware of what their colleagues are working on, so they can respond faster to station members and breaking news. With their new social intranet, SLPR now has an effective way to share organizational news, upcoming events, and messages from the management team. And with activity streams and notifications automatically keeping their teammates informed, people can spend more time doing their work.

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, OSISoft, and Eptaph Records. To learn more, visit www.socialtext.com.

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