



# Enterprise Microblogging Whitepaper

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## Summary

*Knowledge Workers find themselves drowning in email and interrupted by IM, yet spend 1 day per week searching for people and information. Within an organization, it is hard to ask questions when you don't know who to ask; and hard to get answers without interrupting others. But over the last two years, a new model of communication and knowledge discovery has emerged on the web. Microblogging, as popularized on the web by Twitter(TM), is increasingly deployed as an enterprise solution, private for companies. This whitepaper will provide an introduction to microblogging, how it is adapted for private enterprise use, how it is different from email and IM, how to foster adoption and the benefits of implementation.*

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## Microblogging 101

Many people didn't see the rise of Twitter coming. It was too simple. Too constrained. Too public. Twitter is consistently growing in double digits per month and has exceeded 40 million unique visitors in June 2009 according to Comscore, a number that while consistent may be understated given that half of Twitter usage is off-site and through their API. And answering the question "What are you doing?" in 140 characters or less is far from the only use of microblogging.

Let's explore the fundamental traits of Twitter to help understand microblogging:

**Simple** -- Sharing of text messages constrained to 140 characters. The origin of 140 character constraint is Twitter's SMS support at the time of launch, where SMS messages are limited to 160 characters and they estimated up to 20 would be needed for addressing. This constraint encourages brevity, creativity and makes messages easier to consume.

**Public** -- While Twitter offers to change the default to "Protected," or private, 95% of users share their messages publicly. This makes messages, and the people behind them, discoverable.

**People-centric** -- Unlike discussion forums, which are topic-centric, microblogging is people-centric by default

**Opt-in not Opt-out** -- People choose which person or company's messages to subscribe to through the act of Following. This lets users self-regulate against information overload. This ability to pull information stands in contrast to user-push mediums like email, where information is pushed into someone's inbox without their control.

**Asymmetric Follow** -- Other social networking services such as Facebook require symmetric following for information to be shared. Confirmed ties between two people provides greater privacy, akin to email, but at the cost of discovery. This trait also provides the affordance to some to use the medium in more of a broadcast pattern.

**Reply-optional** -- There is not an expectation to read every message, let alone reply to it. This reflects the Asymmetric Follow trait, and in part the newness of Twitter as a communication medium. But it reduces the formality for what should be shared and the costs of consuming what is shared.

**Private Messaging** -- Private, or direct messages, are an affordance of Twitter that enables one-to-one private conversations. Because you can not CC others, you avoid sending occupational SPAM.

**Microsyntax** -- New syntax conventions are created by users and some have been implemented as features by third party apps and in some cases by Twitter themselves. Hashtags, for example, help with open group and topic forming. Slashtags help identify geo-location. See [Microsyntax.org](http://Microsyntax.org) for what emerges next.

**Amplification** -- The "retweet" or RT microsyntax convention provides a way to explicitly amplify weak signals. The ability for conversations to quickly amplify an explicit or implicit meme turns weak signals to strong signals.

**Social Serendipity** -- A facet of discovery, microsyntax conventions such as @replies, mentions and retweeting help you discover people you aren't following yet.

**Accessible** -- The availability of web, mobile, desktop and other clients for microblogging enhances contribution on the go and in the context of other activities and applications.

**Open** -- This accessibility is made possible through open ReSTful APIs. In Twitter's case there has been a proliferation of thousands of apps and integrations as a result.

## Personal vs. Business Use

As with other Social Software that emerged on the consumer web first, the community that uses it imparts patterns that are not carried into companies when they apply similar technologies. Deploying a wiki is not building Wikipedia. Deploying Social Networking is not enabling Facebook. Deploying microblogging is not turning on Twitter. The questions your organization raises about Social Media -- from how to block it to how to engage through it -- don't apply to Enterprise Social Software.

Whereas Social Media sites have built new social networks, Social Software in the Enterprise, or Enterprise 2.0, is implemented within an existing social network. A network of your employees, partners and customers. A network that already has relationships and information flows that can be improved.

In many cases, you have already developed applicable norms, culture and policies of use for similar technologies. Policies that govern what is appropriate for email

and IM can be built upon to cover potential amplification risks in microblogging. Norms for use of private discussion forums where messages are public by default. Cultures that have emerged to favor "need to share" over "need to know" in other social software implementations such as wikis can be fostered.

The above general microblogging traits apply to more than Twitter. They are common in other microblogging software such as Identi.ca, and in enterprise solutions such as the Socialtext Microblogging Appliance. When evaluating microblogging, here are 3 key traits that should be mandatory in any platform you choose:

- ✓ **Secure** -- Deployed behind the firewall; consistent with enterprise security policies
- ✓ **Bounded** -- Twitter is an open network that anyone can join. Behind the firewall means more than security, there is a level of trust when users know the boundary is the organization and what is appropriate to share.
- ✓ **Integrated** -- Users will increasingly demand an integrated user experience with microblogging and other Social Software such as wikis, blogs, social networking, dashboards and even social spreadsheets. It is increasingly common to integrate other enterprise systems with microblogging and activity streams.

## Three Core Patterns in Enterprise Microblogging

Upon the fundamental traits of Twitter and microblogging, three core patterns of enterprise microblogging have emerged: sharing, status and Q&A. These core patterns are not germane to process-specific deployments, but are more general in their use:

1. **Sharing knowledge:** Microblogging lowers the threshold for sharing information and links
2. **Updating status:** Microblogging enables regular and rich context sharing
3. **Q&A:** Microblogging provides the ability to ask questions and get answers without forcing expensive interruptions

## How Microblogging Replaces Email, IM and Forums

Enterprises that have deployed microblogging are filling a gap in their communication and collaboration needs that before was only partially filled by email, instant messaging, forums/discussion boards. Most notably, some organizations have seen email volume decline by over 30%, as microblogging is used for the above three core patterns.

New Modality	Wiki	Microblogging
Old Modality	Email, Forums	IM
	Asynchronous	Synchronous

The table above illustrates some of the differences between communication modalities. While many refer to Microblogging as real time, it actually is not. Microblogging is a new asynchronous modality that feels like it is real time to many users. Some user interfaces, such as Adobe AIR based Desktop applications, provide automatic polling that pull messages rapidly into the user's view. Synchronous modalities have live sessions between users, that can create expensive interruptions. Microblogging straddles asynchronous and synchronous communication, providing the best of both worlds.

Whereas Microblogging is a pull medium, Email is a push medium. You have no control over what goes into your inbox. The transaction cost for someone to send an email is nominal, especially for adding another person to a CC line. As a result, people are overwhelmed with email, spending as much as 4 hours a day in their inbox. 30% of email is what the Gartner Group describes as Occupational Spam. Characterized by excessive CCing, it is stretching the use of email for group communication into a broadcast medium. In part because of this implicit cost on people's time, addressing an email has a cognitive load and it is often difficult to decide who should receive it. Email is best used for one-to-one or one-to-few asynchronous communications that require formality and length.

Instant Messaging, once users have chosen to add each other to their buddy lists, is also a push medium. Because it is synchronous, it demands focused attention and is prone to interrupt people while they are engaged in other tasks (researchers have

found that when interrupted, it takes 15 minutes to cognitively recover and return to the task at hand, what they call the Interruption Tax). Status in IM is rarely updated by users and reflects the state of a communication channel (busy, available), not the context of what someone is working on. IM is best used for short one-to-one conversations and escalating urgent issues (which could be further escalated to voice).

Forums, or discussion boards, is a pull medium. You choose when you want to consume information. However, it is topic-centric, not people-centric. You can choose a given topic, but you have to browse through every message to find the one you are looking for, or more importantly the one from the person you trust on that topic. Forums are good for heavily moderated topical conversations over a prolonged period.

Here are some best practices for what modality to use when:

- ✓ **Email:** best for one-to-one or one-to-few communication that is more formal
- ✓ **IM:** best for escalating issues in one-to-one conversations with known colleagues
- ✓ **Forums:** best for topic-centric many-to-many moderated communication
- ✓ **Microblogging:** best for people-centric, near real-time and many-to-many communication

## The Value of Microblogging

Gaining a return on microblogging is highly dependent upon where it is deployed, how it is implemented, and how adoption is gained. Deployments in small groups will yield communication productivity compared to email, IM and forums. A ripe area of return is combating Occupational Spam, 30% of email volume according to the Gartner Group, characterized by excessive CCing as users attempt to stretch it into a broadcast medium.

Process-specific deployments will yield improvements in existing Key Performance Indicators. Information latency, search and coordination costs can be reduced while information sharing is increased -- to move such metrics as Revenue (Sales & Marketing processes), Time to Resolution (Support processes) and Customer Satisfaction (Service and Support processes).

The value of broad implementations with employees is a little easier to measure than the ROI of email. For large implementations, a general value proposition has emerged that goes beyond traditional Collaboration & Communication ROI. The average employee spends an 8-10 hours, or a day a week<sup>↓</sup>, looking for people and information. The answer to the problem isn't enhancing enterprise search alone -- it relies on making knowledge easier to share and discover.

Enterprise Microblogging connects people and information in new ways. And "more than 50% of employees want the ability to locate expertise to help them with their daily jobs," according to a survey by Reconnind (2009). Today, however, according to Vanson Bourne (2008) "to find experts 71% of people "ask around," 46% use the company directory, 34% use the company intranet and 30% actually send a company-wide email." Asking around is grossly inefficient, and without Enterprise Microblogging, the company directory and intranet are static and asocial.

If your people spent less time looking for people and information, if they could ask questions and get answers without forcing interruptions, how would it change your

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<sup>↓</sup> IDC Research found that "...knowledge workers spend 15-30% of their time seeking specific information and these searches are successful less than 50% of the time. For the Fortune 500, the cost of the fruitless searches represents between \$60 and \$85 billion in direct costs and twice that in opportunity costs." The Delphi Group found that employees spend 1/4 of their time looking for information. A Butler Group study also found that employees spend 1/4 of their day searching, which accounted for 10% of labor costs. Intel and Cisco internal studies independently found their employees spend a day a week searching for people and information A Bersin & Associates study finds that most senior-level executives spend hours each week searching the Internet in frustration for business-related information that will help them stay informed and current. It shows that costs of time searching for information can exceed \$50,000 annually for each executive.



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business? While you may not save all 20% of your employee's time, the organization will make decisions -- and adapt to change faster -- than the competition.

It should be noted that broad Enterprise Microblogging implementations, and those creating new interactions with partners, and can have transformative value, as discussed in the Socialtext Rollout Cookbook, available upon request.

## 5 Practical Next Steps

Now that you have learned about enterprise microblogging, and perhaps shared this whitepaper with your colleagues, the best way to take your learning to the next level is to try it with people in your company.

1. **Use Socialtext for Free:** Sign up for Socialtext Free 50, a hosted service which provides microblogging and more for up to 50 people in your organization without cost. You can invite your colleagues to join the free account and together evaluate the potential of microblogging for your organization.
2. **Sharing links & updates:** The next time you learn something that some of your co-workers might benefit from knowing, send a Signal about it. For example, you get a great customer quote, learn something about a competitor, or read an interesting article. Without bothering or interrupting anyone, you have helped everyone be more aware of what's going on.
3. **Fast answers:** Often at work we have questions and we don't even know who to ask. Typically, people either interrupt their closest co-workers with an IM or email to ask who might be able to answer the question, or they send an all-department or all-company email. Microblogging gets fast answers without interrupting co-workers or adding to their workload. It is shared by a broad audience, yet is "reply optional." Next time you need an answer and don't know who to ask, or want to collect broad input on an issue or question, send a Signal.
4. **Status updates:** Our key advice here is don't be afraid to toot your own horn. When you finish that case study, test plan, new demo, development story, customer meeting or anything else that moved the business forward -- share it with a Signal! The increased awareness you've created helps your co-workers. And when you are stepping out for an hour for that doctor's appointment, it can be useful to Signal your status.
5. **Augment any meeting:** We suggest you plan to use Signals at the next meeting that involves a conference call with multiple co-workers. Signals can add a powerful dimension to the meeting. Here is how you do it:
  - ✓ Make sure everyone has signed up for Socialtext before the meeting and added a picture to their profile.
  - ✓ At the beginning of the meeting, have everyone pull up Signals.
  - ✓ Open the meeting by asking a question, and tell people to post their response as a Signal.
  - ✓ As the meeting progresses, find an opportunity to share links and information relevant to what is being discussed in the meeting.

- ✓ As people see how this works, they will follow suit and soon you will be augmenting the meeting in a powerful way.

## Choosing a Microblogging Solution

When considering a microblogging solution for your business, be sure your vendor can answer these questions:

- ✓ **Is the microblogging solution integrated with other Social Software?** While you may choose to focus initial implementation on microblogging and social networking, user demands for additional collaborative capabilities may grow. Your solution should have an integrated user experience across microblogging, social networking, wikis, weblogs, widget dashboards, social spreadsheets and activity streams. It should also have a robust REST APIs for integration with other enterprise applications.
- ✓ **Can the microblogging solution be securely deployed behind the firewall?** This may be required by your company's security and IT policies. It also provides essential integration benefits for enterprise infrastructure (Directory integration for single sign on with other intranet applications and profile content population) and enterprise applications.
- ✓ **Do activity streams in the microblogging solution manage access and security considerations?** Privacy restrictions on content, documents and workspaces should be inherited so users only see the activity they should have access to.
- ✓ **Can the microblogging solution be rapidly deployed with minimal overhead?** Appliance deployments provide rapid on-site implementation to accelerate Return On Investment (ROI) and reduced administrative and maintenance burdens for a lower Total Cost of Ownership (TCO).