

## UC + Social Networking = Big Business Value!

**Speakers: Fred Clarke, Business Development Executive with Unified Communications and Collaboration, GTS and IBM**

**Ed White, Integrated Business Communications Innovation Center Manager, GTS and IBM**

**Ed:**

Welcome to today's IBM podcast on the added value of social networking in unified communications. Hi, I'm Ed White, Manager of the Integrated Business Communications Innovation Center and I'll be speaking today with Fred Clarke, who is a Business Development Executive with IBM's Strategic Alliances and IBM Global Services. Hello, Fred.

**Fred:**

Hi Ed and how are you today?

**Ed:**

I'm great. I've heard an awful lot about social networking and its growing popularity within non-business applications like MySpace or Facebook. What is social networking and why is it important to a business?

**Fred:**

Social networking is a very simple concept. It's the idea that you have communities of people who have common interests and activities and they're able to use different tools, or what's commonly known as websites, where they can link with each other and communicate with each other. What happens is that businesses have caught on to these nifty websites like MySpace and Facebook and they've started leveraging those same social networking interest for things such as LinkedIn which is a business site which tries to link job openings with skilled professionals, but also companies are looking at setting up communities in these social networking sites where there may be a company that wants to get people that are interested in a certain product in the Facebook space, but also companies that take in these tools and capabilities and bringing them in-house. They're using it with employees within the company, linking to partners, perhaps linking to customers as well and creating blogs where they can get a dialogue and exchange information directly with customers. There are a lot of tools under Social Networking that businesses are finding out have a completely different way of reaching out, connecting and leveraging expertise and communicating with their customers.

**Ed:**

Okay, I think I understand that now. What does IBM have to offer that helps the business in this area?

**Fred:**

IBM has actually been doing a lot of things around social networking for the past few years. Recently, they have started shipping some products that are really enterprise-ready to support social networking. Lotus Connections came out and is on its second version right now. That provides some enterprise-ready tools for social networking. Also, there is a document management capability that supports some of the tenants of social networking that has come from Lotus as well called Lotus Quickr. Also, IBM has stepped-up their investments in this space. They recently announced the opening of the IBM Center for Social Software where they're doing a lot of research and a lot of work with customers to explore new ways to leverage social networking.

**Ed:**

Gosh, that's great. Can you elaborate a little bit on the Connections product? I've heard about that before. What exactly is it and how does it help a business be more competitive and agile?

**Fred:**

It's a pretty simple product platform of Connections. It's got five-core capabilities. The first is that it supports profiles for directory information and self-edited information being captured on individuals. This is where people can put in their information about their expertise and capabilities. There's also a capability to support communities. You can have communities of interest, communities of practice that can be supported with the various tools to link and communicate and to manage those communities. It also has a blogging capability making it easy to link or to search across blogs. It has something called "dog-ear" which is around the concept of social bookmarking so people can bookmark an external and internal website, they can tag it and they can save it for reference later. An interesting point there about dog-earing is that we find about half of all searches end with somebody finding a bookmarked website because somebody has already validated it and tagged it and usually a subject matter expert may have said that this is a great site that others need to see. The last capability is around activities. This is the idea that you can work with an extend team where there are certain activities that are identified, are shared and are worked against, especially team-based roles that are working with the Connections platform. The other thing that's worth mentioning about Connections which we're very excited about is that Rim BlackBerrys now support the capability to link any connections remotely. You can be on a customer's site or you can just be away from your desk, and if you're looking for a particular expertise, for example, you can easily use your BlackBerry, put in a keyword search, search in the profile capabilities and find that expert. You can then send an email or actually call them directly.

**Ed:**

Wow, that's pretty impressive. I was listening to you and thinking that the key business benefit is that I can find knowledge that I don't have today, I can get an expert in realtime that I don't even know exists. Being a mobile worker myself, I understand how hard it is to stay connected, since I'm not in a branch, to people with similar interests. I think that

with the drive for green technologies and with reducing travel that becomes even more important for all businesses to be able to reach their employees that don't come to the office everyday. Would you agree?

**Fred:**

Oh, yes I would absolutely agree with that. What is happening is that we're seeing a lot of companies that are looking to get a lot more remote workers or make people work in a home office as opposed to a set location. What happens is that those workers that are used to going down the hall or to a cubicle to knock on somebody's door to get that expert opinion, when you put them into remote work, you do need to give them some pretty easy-to-use tools that will still make them feel connected to the organization. Things like Connection and Sametime. Real-time communication tools and the social networking tools where you can identify experts, link to experts, and collaborate with those experts; those really are invaluable in supporting remote workers.

We're also seeing customers that may have an aging workforce. They, too, are also seeing the value of social networking where they may be engineers that have been in a company for a lot of years and have a lot of product experience and are nearing retirement. When you have new hires come in, they need to find who those old veterans are, identify where they are, identify intellectual capital that they've created, that they manage or that they provide or keep in file repositories. Linking these newer workers with these older workers is really critical. Social Networking has proven to be extremely valuable in helping accelerate that linkage and that knowledge transfer.

**Ed:**

That's an excellent point. One other thought I had was that these are IBM products that you're talking about with the connections in Quicker applications. Do these also link to public social networking products such as Twitter or something like that?

**Fred:**

Yes, they sure do. In fact, Connections has a homepage capability. The idea is that you can use your browser to go under your Connections home page and you have various widgets that you can pull together and customize. In my case, I have a list of profiles that shows my colleagues, people that often work together, and I'll have communities that I'm a part of a premium practice or interest that I support in my work. I also have widgets that link out into the social networking sites. In the case of Twitter which has turned into a really popular thing, kind of the micro-blogging on the fly; through Twitter, I actually have a widget that I can pull into my Connections homepage to keep track of some of my Twitter friends to see some of the key activities that they may be doing, as well. Also, because of the platform evolution that Lotus has done, one also has tools where they can create widgets and also mash-ups. They can go into the Connections homepage and if a company says they need a brand new widget that combines this or that capability and it could be created and provided to all their users that may be something completely new and different than support for other companies. It's very extendable and flexible for workers.

**Ed:**

Fred, thank you very much for participating today. The information is very valuable to us. If you're interested in more information about social networking and Unified Communications from IBM, you can contact your client rep or go to [www.ibm.com/lotus/uc2](http://www.ibm.com/lotus/uc2).