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Like the black-and-white striped cartoon lover, true believers in any one social networking tool need a reality check and direction to bring real value to an enterprise.

We all know them. The people in your office who are so engrossed with social networking that they want to suck you into their world whenever possible. It may seem somewhat interesting, but please ... give it a break! In reality, these people, often so well-intended, become a nuisance if they are not reigned in in some capacity. Yet, their intent is often very pure and in certain respects, they may be paving a powerful path, that with guidance can introduce real value.

This issue is not isolated only to social networking technologies; it can be an issue that presents itself for anyone who is impassioned by a particular topic. Social networking is more unique in that its growth on the personal side has been prolific. In comparison, the business world is still wrestling with how to properly leverage such technologies and best practices.

In the context of social networking for business, it typically comes as a result of a person ("Pepe") who has a positive experience with a collaboration tool. The nature of the tool and process can vary greatly from document sharing, advanced content and expertise searching, workflows, live meetings, voting, screen sharing, blogging, wikis or any other technique/tool associated with social networking.

Examples of companies providing such products include [NewsGator](#), [Yammer](#), [Jive](#), [Lithium](#) and yes, [Microsoft](#) with their [SharePoint](#) product. The problem is introduced when tools and supporting processes may be a great fit for Pepe and his colleagues, but may not be for other people or may not be properly explained in a way that works for others. So what is one to do when an inspired and motivated employee is trying to spread the word and workers are too busy or disinterested to take notice?

In short, the answer is "**directed evangelism**." As can be inferred from the phrase, directed evangelism represents a mixture of both passion and control. The basic premise of the technique is to provide some level of structured direction to Pepe as he seeks to spread the gospel of social networking. This actually comes in two forms, with the first relating to how many social networking "widgets" are enabled and the second coming in the form of practical guidance in the use of these tools. For example, Pepe may want to spin-up a full business collaboration site from NewsGator, Huddle, Jive or Microsoft (SharePoint) and push people to start using as many elements of the solution as possible. While impressed with his passion, you may want to direct him to focus on an acute business problem that can be better facilitated with a subset of the tool, complemented by a light-weight set of instructions.

Mr. **Kenneth Corriveau** is the senior VP and CIO of **Omnicom Media Group**. His global organization embraced one of the leading enterprise content management platforms to allow for his campaign teams to collaborate with their peers using a number of social networking capabilities of the product. Corriveau states, "At first glance, we wanted to enable every possible component available and we pushed for that with our user community." He goes on to say, "After more time with the users, we realized that we needed to temper the approach by focusing on a few discreet challenges. Once we built some momentum by addressing those issues, we were able to strategically introduce more advanced components to further assist the users." This allowed the users to feel less pressured and as a result, they not only embraced the solution, it flourished.

The behavior referenced by Corriveau is commonly observed by key industry analysts who regularly meet with organizations looking to deploy social networking platforms. **Alan Weintraub**, a principal analyst with **Forrester Research** states:

The introduction of social networking technologies is important, timely and necessary for virtually every organization. It is also fraught with false starts as business leaders don't recognize the importance of "organizational change" to support these initiatives. In this context, the social Pepe Le Pews must be properly reigned in and managed to ensure that the right tone is set. As with any other technology, the honeymoon period will come to an end quick enough and when it does, the organizational change initiative will truly drive the success of social networking.

So, while the Pepes of the world may be impassioned people who seek to spread the word of social networking, they may need some guidance to avoid scaring people away from a good thing. Putting some type of grounded structure in place to direct their evangelism may prove to be invaluable.

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