

Social Networking Within The Boeing Company

Position Statement for W3C and OpenSocial

"Workshop on Social Standards: The Future of Business"

Boeing is huge:

- 175,000 employees
- 5 continents
- 71 countries
- 50 US states (w/ subsidiaries)
- 189 international sites supported by Boeing IT infrastructure
- 24,000 suppliers in 72 countries

... hence needs all modes of collaboration and communication. With one of the largest intranets in the world, Boeing has a major commitment to social networking for business purposes, both inside and outside the enterprise.

Our primary current 'social media' focus is on deployment of, and engagement with, an internally-built social networking tool, "inSite" (<http://www.w3.org/2009/Talks/Boeing-tpac09.pdf>). Within ~4 years, 83K employees (half the company!) have now customized their user profile and are extensively using this new tool for discussions, sharing, connecting, identifying expertise, and as the corporate people directory.

Primary goals of our social business enablers are to help users:

- Find out about each other personally or professionally
- Mine their own networks of contacts and acquaintances for advice, references, and referrals
- Form teams, both formal and informal communities/groups
- Collaborate on the same or similar work objects
- Discuss and comment on their work
- Organize work from their perspective
- Identify relevant work
- Discover other people with common interests
- Alert users to information or events that may be relevant to them
- Learn from others' expertise
- Capture knowledge with transparent collaboration instead of collaboration via private email threads where mostly knowledge is lost to others

We built inSite leveraging Java and open frameworks (e.g., Spring, Hibernate, Solr, Lucene) and with W3C and other open standards in mind (e.g. SIOC, FOAF,RDF,ATOM). inSite is integrated with the enterprise-wide Web single sign-on tool (a commercial product) for authentication and identity management.

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Note that most of Boeing's systems are COTS (Commercial Off-The-Shelf) tools. We have massive deployments of Microsoft technologies (SharePoint, Exchange, Office, Lync, Search), Atlassian Confluence (wiki), and a wide assortment of other collaboration and communication tools (telephony, video conferencing, data conferencing, streaming media, group chat, ...).

At the time inSite was developed there was not a wholly-integrated social networking platform available. We were able to study the various social business use cases from disparate stand-alone internet-based solutions and incorporate them in to a single integrated platform that matched our business use cases and needs. This approach afforded us the opportunity to be very "quick to market" for the Boeing community and still today allows us to very quickly integrate the user feedback that matches Boeing needs. Thus far, there have been 109 inSite releases.

Externally, Boeing Corporate Communications uses Twitter and a few blogs for marketing purposes. The Boeing Facebook account is primarily a recruiting tool.

We are actively exploring how the social tools might be used in our factory manufacturing environments, which are quite different from office environments. Factory workers have shared workstations and much less time to explore on the computer. Factory culture is more hierarchical 'command-and-control', which makes workers wary about whether or not they are 'allowed' to use a social networking tool or if they'll get in trouble for voicing a controversial opinion. Many managers are worried about people wasting time, or behaving inappropriately – both in the factory and in offices.

10s of 1000s of external customers, suppliers and partners currently log on at the Boeing firewall daily, and are allowed tightly-controlled access to specific resources – but not to our social environments. We envision the day when we can use the social tools for greater collaboration with our suppliers and partners, but haven't gone down that path yet. As is obvious, there are a wide variety of security and identity concerns. There tend to be differences in generational perceptions about the value of the new social tools.

Current questions and issues, which may pertain to the W3C Social Business Workshop:

- Our internal tool, inSite, currently holds each employee's personalized User Profile information, as well as a composite of corporate identity information pulled from multiple official data sources. As we deploy other tools with profile capabilities, how can we seamlessly integrate the profile information, consolidated within inSite? We do not want our users to have to recreate their information in multiple locations.
- In addition, we want to allow our employees to be able to update that profile information from anywhere.
- What are the best ways to consolidate and view one's activity stream, pulling activities from multiple sources? How to share one's activities between systems?

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- One of our primary goals for our social networking effort is to better identify expertise. What standards are needed for analyzing the social / professional networks in the company? Should there be a standard way to explain / describe expertise to make it easier to exchange this data between systems?
- Another big goal is to capture and manage our 'knowledge'. We widely enable tagging and category management – but humans are notoriously unreliable. Do we need any additional technical foundations to enable better information management, especially to achieve some sort of commonality between products? Boeing will always have widely diverse systems and sources. How are others either leveraging or augmenting COTS applications to exploit interoperability goals?
- How to “bridge” authentication schemes between COTS, internal applications and SSO (Single Sign-On) implementations? Can there be a standard that security providers and commercial product vendors all implement to make this easier for businesses? Is there an existing one that could be adopted?

By attending this workshop, we hope to gain perspective on topics such as listed above. In addition, we look forward to hearing what other companies are experiencing; what kinds of problems and solutions others have found; and helping to determine the future of standardization in this technology area within the industry.