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EMBRACE

YOUR INNER

HIPSTER

by Daniel Maree

Much has been written about the so-called Millennials or Generation Y, a generation shaped by technology with a (hopefully slight) sense of entitlement. When I reflect on such a description I almost involuntarily think of the hipster, a creature more fickle than a bipolar lab rat on ecstasy in a maze of multi-coloured strobe lights.

In today's scarce skills environment, businesses are keenly focused on this generation as it enters, and becomes an increasing portion of, the workforce, or at least they should be if they want to succeed into the future. One of the technologies that undeniably influences the modern workforce is social media. In light of this, it makes sense for businesses to have some form of social media strategy in place, ranging from firewall rules that block social media sites, to leveraging social media to benefit the business.

Whatever security, productivity, reputational or other concerns you may have, take heed: there is nothing to be gained by blocking social media. Those intent on limiting their careers will find creative ways to do so with or without social media, but blocking social media will only serve to alienate loyal employees and strong performers. Rather update your policy to clearly, and perhaps more eloquently, explain to people that when it comes to social media, the best rule of thumb is to use common sense, and try wherever possible, not to be an idiot.

It is far more interesting to try and leverage social media in business to increase the reach of your brand, to connect with people, to share knowledge, to collaborate. Between the fickleness of technology and that of the hipster, the popularity of social media channels constantly ebbs and flows, making effective leveraging social media that much more challenging and expensive.

When you're satisfied with, or have given up on, how you're playing the social media game, step back and you may experience something akin to an epiphany: the reason for social media's popularity is also its greatest failure. Humans are social beings, we crave a sense of belonging, we seek interaction with other humans, even if you are a Buddhist monk and have reached Nirvana you are by nature, in your very DNA, wired to value and need social interaction. Social media leverages this natural human need to belong, but is at best an approximation of social interaction that, more often than not, misses the mark.

We don't, at least I don't, crave endless streams of selfies, status updates and hundreds of "friends" we never actually speak to, we crave something real. One quick check at your favourite restaurant to count the patrons preoccupied with their smartphones reveals the irony that social media is often at the epicentre of anti-social behaviour. A solution that augments, or supports, real social interaction ultimately adds more value than an approximation of it and, given that your workforce mostly consists of humans (yes, even hipsters), it makes sense for a business to consider what lessons social media can teach us to apply elsewhere.

I'm very fortunate to be part of a team that values real social interaction in the workplace, not just for the sake of it, but in everything we do – be it tapping into the company's knowledge base or guiding careers to ever greater heights. No system can replace the need for, and the value of, conversations in the workplace, but it can help to support them. At least this is what we believe, we believe it strongly enough to invest our time and money into building a solution that does exactly that: MyWorkLife.

We've come to appreciate the difference between performance management and continuous feedback, the difference between haphazard rewards and peer recognition, and the difference between a stale knowledge repository and social knowledge discovery. We've also come to appreciate that a system is only part of the equation, the lesser part in fact. To truly unlock the power of social media in the workplace a cultural shift is required in most organisations.

Some organisations have already embarked on the journey towards this cultural shift, some are starting to realise what others may learn the hard way over time; in a knowledge-based economy it is no longer a choice, but a necessity to avoid being left behind by the competition. You can unlock the potential of your workforce by increasing the focus you place on the value of human interaction, or you can wait until artificial intelligence gives birth to the first humanoid robots that can do the work of humans without being as needy, from a social perspective.

The latter option sounds like a bit of a long shot though...



About the Author

Daniël Maree is a Software Product Manager at BSG, based in their Cape Town Offices. Daniël has extensive experience in all things software, project management and methodologies.

About BSG

BSG is a niche consulting and technology company with almost two decades' experience and a proven performance history across numerous industries, including telecommunications, mobile money, retail and investment banking, insurance, and oil and gas. We are passionate about being a proactive force for positive change, making a difference in everything we do; committed to delivering visible business benefit as a result of the work we deliver to our clients through our people.

BSG began trading in 1997, after identifying a gap in the market for services to create synchronicity between business and Information Technology (IT) functions. Initially specialising in Business Analysis, today BSG offers advisory and execution consulting services to improve business operations by aligning the needs of customers, business and IT.

BSG strives to deliver business value by collaboratively guiding its clients to better understand which initiatives will deliver the most value, and then, working together to make them a reality. By defining and understanding the purpose for change BSG designs practical solutions to build a bridge between the business expectations and the technology implementation.

BSG believes in the birth right of every child to a decent education, and in support of this it represents industry on various University Advisory Boards. Additionally, it makes a difference by positively impacting maths and science education in the lives of thousands of children within South Africa's poorest communities through its ongoing commitment to supporting LEAP Science and Maths Schools.



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