



# Business Agility Grows as Social Permeates the Way Work Gets Done

## Executive Summary:

**WHAT MAKES A BUSINESS A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE?** Not that long ago, a company likely would have considered itself socially adept if it provided the basic elements of collaboration for employees, such as installing an enterprise social network that offered a single, secure space for conversations and sharing documents.

That was a good start, but such simple sharing and collaboration doesn't really impact how business actually gets done. That's because it's divorced from *where* it gets done, in the core enterprise systems and via the processes that companies have spent millions of dollars and countless hours to deploy and develop. A strategy with more impact is one where social capabilities are integrated into business-critical applications, and into workflows themselves, so that it becomes possible to significantly accelerate the speed of business.

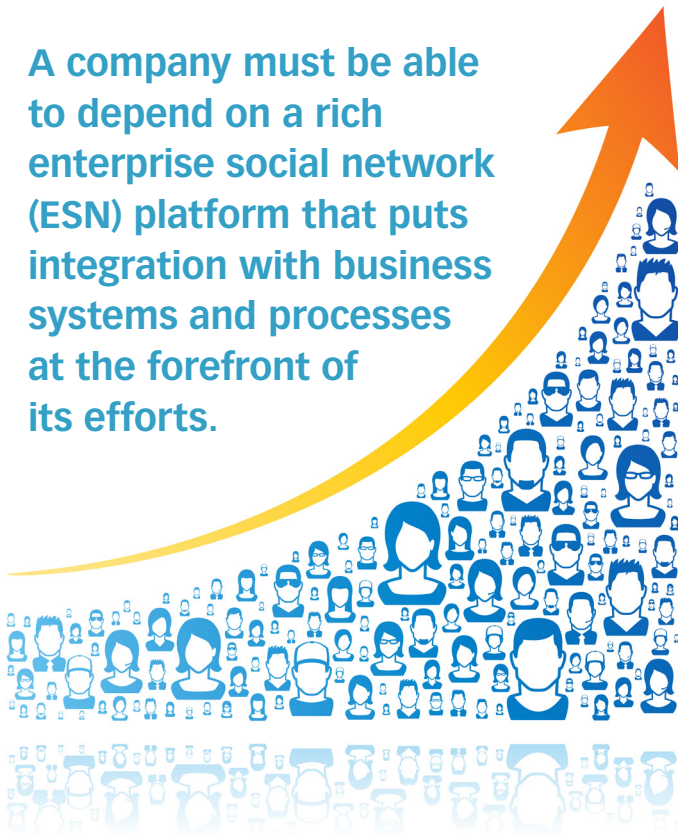


For that, a company must be able to depend on a rich enterprise social network (ESN) platform that puts integration with business systems and processes at the forefront of its efforts. Critically, that platform should offer different routes to integration to suit different requirements. The platform should also accommodate connections to any business system, so that not only workers but also the processes in which they engage can be united in collaborative, centralized activity streams.





**A company must be able to depend on a rich enterprise social network (ESN) platform that puts integration with business systems and processes at the forefront of its efforts.**



### Realizing the True ESN Value Proposition

**ENTERPRISES SPEND A LOT OF TIME,** money and effort on business optimization and process improvement, all in the service of business agility. But there's only so much duplication that you can weed out and standardization you can drive in. Even after all that, end users still struggle with processes that are not intuitive, particularly with workflows that require cross-system collaborations to conclude.

Largely untapped, however, is the impact that integrating social capabilities directly into core enterprise systems and processes can have on business agility and productivity goals. Tangible value to the business occurs not when social is *parallel* to business processes, but when an enterprise social network (ESN) enables social capabilities to *permeate* business processes—even to be the foundation upon which those workflows are built.

An enterprise social network is still fairly new technology, so it's not surprising that companies to date have reported only modest success regarding the impact on their business. A [2012 report](#) from Altimeter Group, for example, showed that companies still hadn't realized significant returns when it comes to the role ESNs play in improving workflows. On a scale of 1 to 4 (with 4 equating to a significant impact), streamlining a business process received only a 1.9 rating from respondents to the firm's survey on the state of ESNs. Improving collaboration between departments/teams received only a 2.91 rating.

However, these findings seem ripe for revisiting as some ESN platform providers are making integration with enterprise applications and with workflows a key focus of their efforts. As business systems are socialized, information is shared in real time between the ESN and the application. In that way, people can have contextual conversations regarding the activities they conduct in these systems, and they can take action without opening another application or browser. For example, sales teams could have in-the-moment discussions regarding a prospect from within their CRM application, with all the relevant metadata about the opportunity at their fingertips to help them with next steps. Information in hand, they can move ahead without ever having stepped outside the environment where they "live," so to speak.

The ability for users to easily start social interactions around business opportunities and activities from within their core business systems is important for creating awareness about critical events, and for gaining a better understanding of them before taking the next step in a structured workflow. An ESN can add a *discuss* choice to the traditional binary options of *cancel* or *submit*, and users can exploit colleagues' or partners' knowledge to get closer to reaching a goal, answering a question or solving a problem, across departmental lines and even diverse business systems.

Think, for example, of how an ESN can facilitate a sales rep using his CRM system to discuss whether the company has the capacity to handle a customer's out-of-the-ordinary request. And think of how it more fluidly facilitates a positive response from the supply chain manager working directly within her ERP system, setting up the salesperson to move quickly to initiate the actual business process that closes the deal.

But the integration picture is even bigger than that when it comes to sharing highly relevant and timely information so that the business can act on it quickly. The future for many businesses—and the present for some leading-edge companies—is about socializing workflows through automated integrations that don't require a human to manually initiate an interaction.

Business systems generating actions aligned with business processes represent a new paradigm. It is a world where machines themselves become actors in the activity stream.

### Integration Imperative: No Limits

**REGARDLESS OF WHETHER MACHINES OR HUMANS** instigate activities or drive workflows, an ESN must take into consideration that business information lives in systems of all kinds. So, there should be no limits to application integrations and socializing key business workflows. Yet those limits are imposed when an ESN's interoperability does not extend to common systems and business services such as internal ERP, CRM or purchasing apps.



How to avoid these restrictions? ESN platform Socialcast by VMware tackles the issue neatly: Prepackaged integrations of core capabilities, such as real-time group activity streams, thanks and resource recommendations, into *any* business system that accepts an HTML/Javascript snippet is possible with Socialcast Reach extensions technology. That runs the gamut from CRM to ERP apps, to intranets, wikis and Microsoft SharePoint. Using Socialcast Reach, any user at a company, even a nondeveloper, can embed the conversation inside systems while linking discussions from across multiple business applications. Socialcast serves as the conversation layer that unites disparate business apps and creates a unified view of embedded, contextual collaboration across and from within each system.

Just as important is the fact that no programming is required for these “cut and paste” Javascript integrations, so community managers, SharePoint page owners or system administrators can accomplish them on their own.

The Socialcast ESN platform also allows developers to leverage its API to powerful effect for more custom integrations or applications tailored to their business-specific scenarios. It includes OAuth 2.0 authentication to ensure that applications and integrations that may facilitate certain workflow processes can securely pass data to and from the Socialcast platform. The only limit of the Socialcast API is a developer’s own imagination regarding what applications and integrations best support the company’s interests. In addition to being a means of developing custom features, the API is the entryway to creating integrations that connect a machine with Socialcast so that it, too, may function as that aforementioned actor in the activity stream.

Programmers at one publishing company, for example, have used the API to integrate the business’s inventory system with Socialcast. A message is automatically posted into the ESN when stock for a particular ISBN number is low. That makes it possible for a new order workflow to immediately kick off, rather than having that process hang on a user making the discovery just when he’s trying to fulfill a customer order. This way, the publisher is never caught shorthanded, and business can continue apace.

Another example of an integration that is possible with nonhuman actors in the activity stream: Many marketing departments monitor social networks like Facebook and Twitter. They do it with an eye to how many “likes,” retweets or favorites a posting generates to help them guide their company’s social content strategy. An integration could connect social monitoring software with Socialcast such that a post automatically gets generated in the ESN by the business system, alerting the marketing team when a certain number of favorites or other criteria are reached, for instance, so they can take whatever actions are next prescribed.

## The Data Center of the Future



### At VMWorld 2012,

CTO Steve Herrod took to the stage to discuss the concept of the software-defined data center, where a company’s infrastructure is virtualized and delivered as a service

and control is entirely automated by software. However, the benefits of the software-defined data center, such as automating tasks that used to be manual, can only be realized if IT can effectively manage this environment.

But traditional IT tools focused on discrete functions aren’t built for a world of loosely coupled horizontal layers of infrastructure and applications, nor for one where the rate of IT change is accelerated to keep up with the pace of business.

VMware already has begun delivering enterprise management tools that map to this new world. But the future also may have Socialcast by VMware integrations playing a role in customers’ software-defined data centers—just as they do today in VMware’s own operations.

A socially enabled data-center dashboard of activity makes it easier for VMware’s own IT professionals to have comprehensive insight into its IT operations. At VMware, an IT person responsible for monitoring the status of virtual machines no longer need go to a specific tool or to the command line to answer a question she may have. That’s because VMware’s engineering team used the API to integrate isolated toolsets into Socialcast, allowing IT staffers to have a single go-to place to manage the data center.

Now, when there is a problem with a virtual machine or when other data center issues arise, an @ message will automatically show up in the activity stream to bring attention to the issue to the appropriate person in an immediate and seamless way. Or, as systems become intelligent and integrated actors in the activity streams, they may themselves take over some tasks humans used to perform around network availability, backups or solving problems with hardware in a cluster.

As the software-defined data center matures, and it becomes increasingly the norm for machines to become actors in the activity stream, total visibility into data center activity is only going to become more important to IT organizations. In addition, IT stands to benefit from all the other virtues an ESN will bring its way.



## ESN integrations that boost social capabilities in business applications and throughout

### workflows matter to companies that want to build more flexible, agile and connected enterprises.

Customer and user technical support processes that take place in forums, wikis and public social media sites also could benefit when ESN integrations automatically funnel questions and comments right to the activity streams of the individuals charged with responding to them. They can resolve issues more quickly, raising customer satisfaction, and also use the comments of clients to inform future product development.

Socialcast's multilevel approach to adding social capabilities to other systems makes the case for the importance of empowering administrators who don't know how to code with a way to streamline business activities. It equally makes the case for empowering internal IT developers to create workflows localized to their business's culture and processes on top of the platform. In many respects, that latter population hasn't been well serviced by other ESN platforms, and that has impacted developers' ability to innovate on behalf of their businesses.

### The Modern ESN in Action

**COMPANIES THAT RECOGNIZE** how critical an ESN is to the future of business have been leading the charge on the integration front. Health insurance company Humana, for example, has adopted Socialcast as its ESN platform, and has increased visibility of content and employee engagement by creating more than 100 SharePoint integrations using Socialcast's Reach extensions, and 20 different apps using Socialcast's REST APIs.

Humana leveraged Socialcast's API in the service of game mechanics aimed at driving greater collaboration and contributions to its burgeoning community, which it calls Buzz. The Hive, as Humana applications architect Adam Newbold [explains](#), is an app that uses discussion data to build a visualization of people's personal "hives"—rendered as honeycombs—which light up or darken to indicate their level of participation within the community. Additional apps Humana has rolled out include Buzz Map, a mashup of data from the

Socialcast API, the Google Maps API, and its internal HRIS system that plots active community participants on a map. This helps with identifying the most potentially influential employees in any given location.

The ease with which companies can accomplish these types of integrations sometimes comes as a surprise to CIOs, given how accustomed they are to the consulting and services expenses that for so long have accompanied integration projects. Newbold notes that Socialcast's "robust API" is easy to use, and that the job of building games, exploring data and presenting useful information to people was possible to accomplish very quickly, at little to no expense and without any headaches. Most of these items were developed within a lunch hour and with no budget, he explains.

### Social Is Everywhere Your Business Is

**THE PROSPECTS FOR GAINING** additional benefits thanks to a strong focus on integration within Socialcast are many. Consider the potential capability for any user to enable prebuilt machine-to-machine integrations between systems in the no-programming-required, cut-and-paste approach Socialcast offers. A CRM admin, for example, could set that application to automatically publish an alert into Socialcast when a sales lead reaches a certain status, so that colleagues can take the next steps in the workflow to lock down the sale.

VMware is building out Socialcast's integration capabilities in other ways, including a deeper Microsoft Lync integration supporting presence, so that users can see from their ESN if someone is logged into Lync and available for a chat. VMware also plans to offer a HootSuite integration for social media managers. Additionally, VMware recently announced a Rich Link Preview that uses the public oEmbed specification to allow employees to share videos, photos and links with an enhanced preview of the content right in their activity streams.

ESN integrations that boost social capabilities in business applications and throughout workflows have been, and will continue to be, a core focus for Socialcast by VMware. The reason is simple: These integrations matter to companies that want to build more flexible, agile and connected enterprises. The vision of these businesses is one where knowledge workers, relying on ESN technology that is agnostic about enterprise systems or platforms in use, can connect to each other right from within their key business systems. And, it is a vision where social layers sitting atop business processes ensure that employees can accomplish their work with greater speed and agility.

That's exactly what companies are constantly striving to achieve—and exactly why adopting Socialcast by VMware, an ESN that takes the approach to support these intentions, is the right move for building your connected enterprise. ■