

# Evaluating Social Business Software

## Five Critical Considerations

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Bryan House

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**S**ocial business is no longer a nice to have, but is now a business imperative to improve customer communication and engagement, build loyal partner networks and improve internal collaboration. We have been blogging, tweeting, connecting and collaborating online for years, but now it's not just for personal use. The growth in social business can be measured by the amount being spent on software solutions purchased to help enterprises meet their social business strategies. According to Gartner, spending on social software to support sales, marketing, product development and customer service will exceed \$1 billion worldwide in 2013.

their users. If integration and user experience are important to you, extensibility should be examined closely in your evaluation of social business software solutions.

**2. Cost.** The range in cost for social business software is wide. But keep in mind, paying a high cost does not ensure value in the solution, nor does it buy you success. According to the Altimiter Group, average corporate spending on social business was \$833,000 in 2010. That number includes 12 considerations, only one of which is technology.<sup>1</sup> So keeping the cost of the technology in check with the total cost of your social business program—including training, staff and

Enterprises nowadays need to reduce their dependency on vendors and find solutions that provide them greatest control. It's your brand and your data, it should be treated that way. Open source solutions allow vendors to not only modify the code as needed to ensure consistency with brand guidelines, but provide the freedom to take the code and data and grow their project as their requirements change.

**5. Usability.** When considering usability, it's essential to evaluate technology on the end-user experience and the site manager experience. The end user needs a familiar and simple way to interact with the solution to ensure participation. The easier it is for the end user to participate, the more successful the community will be. Site managers need to be able to add and manage content quickly and easily. If they want to add a poll, it should not take two weeks and hand-coding. Site managers need the ability to assemble content in their community site as the need arises and how they see fit, without going back to the vendor for updates.

Companies that don't adopt a social business strategy will be left behind. Each organization has its own business requirements and needs when evaluating technology for its online communities. Incorporating each of these considerations in your evaluation process will help ensure you are implementing the right technology that will not only address your needs today, but will be flexible enough to grow with your community through the future. ■

Acquia is the enterprise guide to Drupal. Clients worldwide have successfully launched community, corporate and marketing websites with Acquia's enterprise support and service. Drupal Commons is Acquia's social business software solution helping enterprises meet their social business strategies. Visit [acquia.com/kmworld](http://acquia.com/kmworld) for more information.

1 View the Altimiter Group's report for more details at [www.altimitergroup.com](http://www.altimitergroup.com)

2 View the white paper, "TCO for Open Source Social Publishing," at [acquia.com/kmworld](http://acquia.com/kmworld).

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While social software, as a product category, is gaining market momentum—the tools that make up social software suites are well defined and understood. Blogs, wikis, profiles and friends are all commodity capabilities—table stakes if you will—available in every platform. Therefore enterprises need to look beyond the feature set and evaluate the long-term value of the solution.

In that context, here are five key elements every enterprise should consider when selecting a social software platform.

**1. Extensibility.** Business units within enterprises all have different requirements for their Web needs. From customer communities that integrate with Twitter to show tweet streams, to product sites that post commercials and demonstrations from YouTube, websites all have specific requirements targeted to their need. Solutions with an open architecture and open APIs provide the ability to integrate with the best of breed tools. This allows enterprises to leverage third-party systems to create a rich Web experience for

marketing costs—is critical to ensure you have enough budget to successfully support your social business software solution.<sup>2</sup>

**3. Innovation and product development.** Enterprises need to focus on their business challenges and problems at hand, not on the product road map for the technology they are using to help achieve their business goals. Additionally, speed of innovation is critical to ensure you stay up to date with the latest capabilities of the market. Social features evolve fast. Selecting a solution that has a large community of contributors, such as an open source solution, drives product innovation that traditional in-house or proprietary development teams just can't match.

**4. Freedom.** If you've ever purchased a technology solution to support a key business objective, you're probably familiar with vendor lock-in and a loss in control. Traditional vendors lock in your data and your money, so you are not left with many choices. Loss of control in the brand and user experience are common as well.