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Vignette Community

Extending the Value of Software Applications with Social Media Capabilities

WHITE PAPER

The Emergence of Social Software

More and more, the public is utilizing the speed and convenience of the Web to communicate and share information with people around the world. Surveys performed by the Pew Research Center, an independent organization that provides information and statistics about the latest trends shaping American culture, show that more than half of today's Internet users leverage the medium to create and/or share online content with others. Research published by industry consulting firm Deloitte confirms that number, and also claims that the number of people who consume user generated content (UGC) via the Web jumps even higher – to 71 percent – when the user base considered is under 25 years of age.

That's why the use of social software, applications that facilitate online interactions among users, is on the rise. Social software, also commonly referred to as social media or Web 2.0, includes a variety of Internet vehicles such as:

- Blogs, Web-based journals that focus on a specific topic or set of ideas, and are updated frequently with new entries.
- Message boards, forums, and social networking sites, online communities, like FaceBook and MySpace, where members can post comments or have discussions.
- Tags, descriptors that make online content easier for its creators to categorize and publish, and its consumers to find.
- Podcasts and Webcasts, audio and video files that are published to the Web, and can be accessed by the general public, or in some cases, subscribed users.
- Really simple syndication (RSS) feeds, the dynamic distribution of UGC and other information to subscribers, based on pre-defined keywords or topics of interest.
- Wikis, fully collaborative online dictionaries that allow visitors to alter or add content to topic definitions.

Just how quickly is social software growing?

Forrester Research reports show that FaceBook, one of the most popular social networking sites in the world, has seen an average of 250,000 new registrations daily over the past 18 months, with active users doubling every six months. Facebook's user base is expected to reach more than 60 million by the end of this year.

Additionally, according to Technorati, a recognized online authority that monitors more than 112 million blogs and 250 million pieces of tagged social content, there are currently more than 35 million active blogs – more than 60 times as many as there were three years ago. The firm predicts that the number of online journals will double in the next six months, as close to 75,000 new blogs are created daily.

Businesses across all industries are taking notice of the social media phenomenon, and are investing in related solutions. In fact, Forrester predicts that 51 percent of global 2000 companies will purchase social software this year, spending more than \$764 million in total. The analyst firm also expects the social software market to top \$3.9 billion over the next three years, as the industry experiences annual growth of approximately 43 percent.

The Value of "Socializing" Applications

It is clear that social software is more than a passing fad – it is a growing phenomenon that users are embracing at an astonishing pace. As independent software vendors (ISVs) plan future enhancements to their applications, they will need to incorporate features and capabilities that will make them more collaborative and social. And, with such tremendous growth in the social software market, combined with the need to rapidly add related features in order to meet growing customer demand, it makes sense that many ISVs are already realizing the significant advantages that can be achieved by extending their existing solutions with social software functionality that is delivered by a third-party provider.

Some of the benefits that ISVs can obtain through this approach include:

Increased user adoption

By encouraging the free flow of knowledge, ideas, and experiences in a “community” style setting, social capabilities make applications a more convenient, more comfortable, and most importantly, more valuable and relevant environment in which people can interact. As a result, end users are more likely to embrace the application and continue to utilize it. Additionally, user adoption rates will be further increased through viral participation, as colleagues, friends, and other peers are invited to participate.

Higher revenues

As today’s businesses seek new ways to leverage social media to attract new customers and retain existing ones, many are evaluating software solutions that can help them incorporate social media features and techniques into their day-to-day activities. Forrester predicts that marketing departments alone will spend more than \$10 billion on social software initiatives over the next three years. In fact, the analyst firm believes that social software will experience the second highest growth in the interactive marketing category. Therefore, software solution providers who “socialize” their offerings stand to boost sales and drive additional revenue from their offerings.

Enhanced internal efficiencies

While ISVs are experts in their specific markets, few of them truly understand the intricacies of social software. Therefore, those that want to incorporate social capabilities into their offerings must often divert existing development resources away from their current tasks, then reallocate them to learning about, then building, social media features. Or, they must hire additional staff, with the right background and skills, to develop the needed functionality. With the average software engineer earning more than \$60,000 annually according to Salary.com, a leader in compensation management statistics and solutions, bringing on even a small team can be quite cost-prohibitive.

But, there are some third-party providers that are highly experienced in social media and the underlying technologies that support it, and have already designed, created, and tested its social media capabilities. By forming strategic relationships with the right company, ISVs can extend their solutions in the fastest, most effective, and most economical manner possible. So, they can quickly make their solutions more valuable and more competitive, while continuing to focus on their core competencies.

Extending a software application with social capabilities offers dramatic benefits not only to the ISVs that sell the solutions, but to the customers who buy them, and their end user base. For example, social software can deliver:

Expanded mindshare

Thoughts, ideas, and opinions spread rapidly across social mediums, making them the perfect outlet for branding and public relations initiatives. Because the Internet user base is so expansive – far broader than any publication readership or television or radio audience – companies can reach more potential buyers than ever before, garnering higher name recognition and awareness. This, in turn, can make campaigns and promotions more successful.

Increased message impact

Social mediums can help companies to more effectively deliver their marketing messages and value propositions to their target audience. By distributing relevant and timely information directly to potential buyers, the chances of delays and information latency are significantly reduced. Companies also gain greater control over content, ensuring that their statements are always clear, accurate, and compelling, by eliminating the risk of messages getting lost in translation when journalists and editors alter, then re-publish the information.

Bi-directional communication

As more and more users embrace the Web as a viable and useful peer communication channel, they will expect the same type of open, unhindered interaction with the banks, insurance companies, online retailers, and other companies they do business with. By deploying applications with social media functionality, companies can enhance the way they deal with existing and potential clients, as well as strategic partners. As a result, they can build stronger, longer-lasting, and more profitable relationships.

Additionally, they can create a “virtual” user community, enabling these external stakeholders to communicate and collaborate with other individuals who have similar needs and interests. This can empower their customers to enhance productivity by connecting with “experts” (for example, other users who may have more experience with the software), and facilitate the rapid exchange of tips, best practices, and other innovative ideas among the client base.

Unparalleled insight and knowledge management

With socially-enabled software, companies can gather and centralize the collective wisdom of the entire community – which includes employees, customers, and business partners – and use it to build and publish a comprehensive knowledge base that can be easily accessed by all stakeholders. This can be particularly useful in a variety of scenarios. For example, in the case of software troubleshooting, it can enable users to answer their own questions or find solutions to their problems using intelligence and insight that has been previously shared by others.

RWD Technologies is a privately-held company that designs and develops tools that empower companies to increase worker productivity, improve product quality, and boost profitability. When the organization wanted to extend RWD uPerform®, its comprehensive performance support tool, it turned to social software from Vignette.

RWD uPerform facilitates the effective, efficient, and collaborative creation, storage, and management of application simulations, procedural documentation, and eLearning courses. With this powerful solution, employees can share and exchange the information and materials they need to most successfully perform their jobs.

With the help of innovative and robust social software from Vignette, RWD was able to incorporate comprehensive knowledge sharing functionality into RWD uPerform. Vignette was chosen over other social software providers because of its unparalleled flexibility and scalability, as well as its integrated search and document management features. Vignette also provided a fully customizable interface, allowing RWD to ensure that the new collaboration capabilities were seamlessly aligned with their proven end user learning and self-support methodology.

The results? A strong and profitable partnership. The new knowledge sharing features have helped RWD to expand its client base to include the Global 2000 and other large organizations. And, RWD’s Eric Bruner claims that, “on top of allowing us to provide real value to our customers, Vignette works with RWD to help us make money.”

Vignette Community: Today’s Most Robust, Innovative, and Comprehensive Social Software

Vignette is a proven leader in Web experience management, with a portfolio of powerful, state-of-the-art solutions that fully leverage digital content to transform stale, static Web sites into dynamic environments that provide users with the most exciting and engaging experience possible.

Vignette Community is an enterprise-class social media solution that combines services and application tools to empower companies to create highly interactive Internet communities. Through these sites, users can communicate and collaborate in an unlimited number of ways – expressing ideas and opinions, sharing information, exchanging documents and files, and much, much more.

With Vignette Community, companies can fully embrace the social media phenomenon, maximizing the impact of their external Web presence by facilitating greater brand awareness, improved customer loyalty, more open communication with existing and potential clients, and most importantly, increased revenues. Additionally, they can boost the value of Intranets and other internal Web sites by enabling improved networking, knowledge-sharing, and productivity across the enterprise.

What makes Vignette Community the ideal solution for ISVs looking to extend their software applications with robust and innovative social capabilities? Vignette Community is one of the most comprehensive and feature-rich social media technologies on the market today. So, instead of piecing together a bunch of disparate solutions to achieve the needed functionality, ISVs can leverage a single, complete, fully unified platform that provides the broadest range of services and applications to support the creation and sharing of UGC.

Vignette Community services can be readily incorporated into any public Web site, Intranet, extranet, portal, or embedded into your application. Each service enables convenient information access, and encourages contribution and participation from all end users.

- Blogs. Keep target audience members updated and informed through online journals.
- Wikis. Aggregate the collective knowledge of employees, prospects, customers, and business partners through a dynamic and easy-to-use vehicle for self-service and peer-to-peer information sharing.
- Forums. Create a bulletin board-style environment that allows users to hold discussions, pose and answer questions, conduct polls, and much more.
- Ratings and reviews. Give users the ability to rate, review, or rank any image, video, article, or other site content. This feedback can provide insight into the content's usefulness and popularity to other potential information consumers, and can provide companies with market intelligence that can drive innovation and sales.
- Tagging and tag clouds. Add descriptors to any piece of content, to make it easier for users to find what they are looking for, and prove them with a more personalized experience by displaying content based on relevancy.
- Comments. Allow users to instantly share their ideas, recommendations, and opinions with members of the company, as well as other existing and potential clients. This type of open and unhindered dialogue can provide businesses with true insight into the needs and wants of their target audience, and dramatically improve customer loyalty and retention by fostering stronger relationships based on mutual trust and respect.
- Rich content support. Make the Web experience more vibrant and dynamic by allowing users to submit and contextually associate documents, files, images, podcasts, and other binary content.
- Search. Provide full text searches on all blogs, wikis, and forums, to increase user convenience and accelerate content retrieval.

All social communication channels supported by Vignette Community come with pre-designed templates that accelerate the generation and delivery of content. Additionally, all services are flexible, configurable, and fully-customizable. So processes and rules for creating and sharing information, as well as how it is presented, stored, and managed, can be tailored to meet any unique collaboration and interaction need.

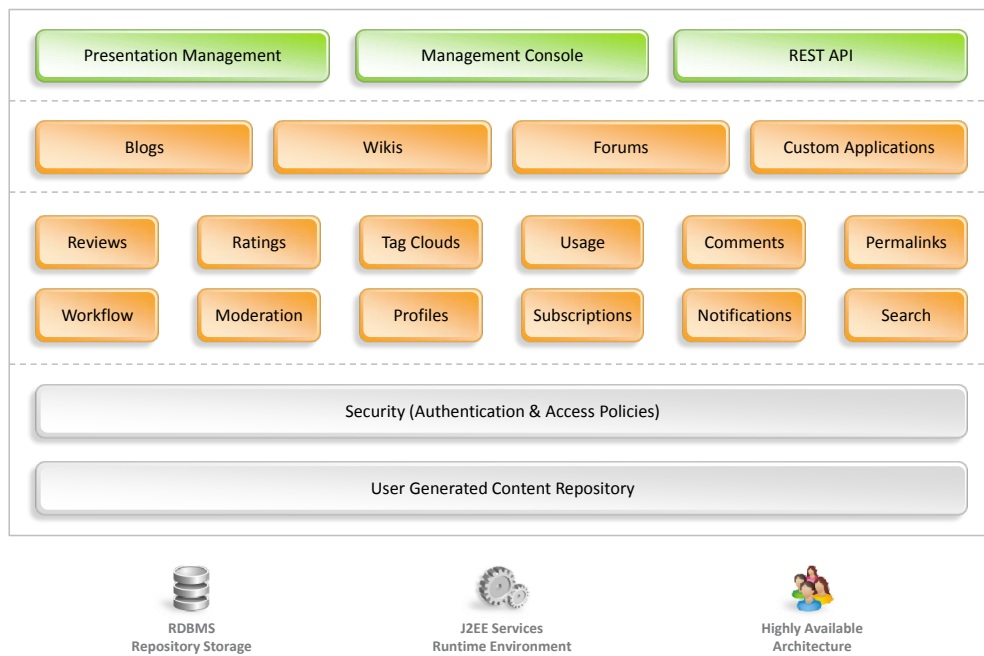
A simple and intuitive AJAX enabled administration console is also provided, to allow for easy, real-time moderation of all social media channels and related UGC. So all content can be reviewed and controlled (i.e. approved or rejected) from a single, centralized location. This helps preserve brand integrity and reputation by allowing companies to remove any negative or derogatory postings.

Administrators can also track all activity on each piece of site content. This facilitates the discovery of important trends in information consumption, providing insight into content relevancy that can be used to create more targeted and successful campaigns and promotions, product enhancement plans, and other business strategies.

A Comprehensive, Scalable Platform

Vignette Community is built on a robust, unified platform that enables fast and effective creation, management, and dissemination of user generated content across multiple social mediums. A lightweight Web services API is utilized to integrate social media services into Web sites, applications, and portals supported by Vignette technologies. Additionally, this architecture lays the foundation for seamless integration into third-party solutions, allowing any company to add social media capabilities to any Internet environment.

And best of all, Vignette Community is modular in design. So ISVs have the flexibility to incorporate a single feature, or any combination of services, into their solutions. Additionally, they can give their customers the freedom to quickly and easily implement and roll out the functionality they currently need, then further expand their applications with more capabilities as their social media needs evolve and change.



Summary

Experts and analysts agree – social media is not simply a fad. It is a viable, rapidly growing communication mechanism that has proven its value, and will only increase in popularity over time.

In order to keep their offerings competitive, ISVs must leverage this opportunity and begin incorporating social media capabilities into their solutions. However, adding these features through the use of internal IT teams can prove to be a time-consuming and expensive venture. But by choosing the right third-party provider, ISVs can extend the functionality of their applications to truly embrace the power of social media – without the costs and complexity associated with in-house development.

Additionally, ISVs must continuously innovate in order to ensure their products continue to drive business value for both existing and potential clients. But, ongoing innovation can be cumbersome and costly. But by joining forces with a third-party, ISVs can leverage technology advances that have already been developed by another provider, incorporating them directly into their own solutions to extend and enhance them in a faster, and more cost-effective fashion.

Vignette Community is today's most robust, innovative, and feature-rich social software solution. With Vignette Community, ISVs can rapidly and economically add a full range of social media capabilities into their software applications. As a result, they can boost user adoption, facilitate continued application usage, leverage new sales opportunities and revenue streams, and deliver greater value to their customers and end users.