

# Why Social Networking is Relevant

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**W**hether you are an IT manager, webmaster or business executive, you have undoubtedly heard about social networking.

But have you considered what impact social software is going to have on your business? Do you know why these sites have generated so much media attention (and traffic)?

Ektron believes that social networking is relevant to your business today, and will only grow in importance in the future. To see how this is true requires us to take a look at the history of the Web.

## From file servers to Web 2.0 to virtual communities

The Web has always been about sharing information; at its very beginning the information share was a one-way street—static files on a web file server. Soon the use of databases, templates and scripting languages lead to page scalability and allowed Web sites to support the business's client base through online purchases, user manuals, knowledge bases and FAQs.

Following the burst of the dot.com bubble, the concept of Web 2.0 emerged. At its core, Web 2.0 is the evolution of Web sites into true software applications. With Web 2.0, the Internet became a communication platform on which virtual communities could form. But as these virtual communities grow how can your Web site scale with them?

The answer is Social Networking.

## Social networks are not new

"'Social network' is not a Facebook term. Sociologist J.A. Barnes coined the phrase in 1954 to explain the friend-of-a-friend-of-a-friend connections that cut across traditional groupings of family or ethnic groups. These pathways have historically been the way people get jobs, find apartments, meet spouses and generally navigate the world."<sup>1</sup>

Wikipedia expands on this: "Social network analysis views social relationships in terms

of nodes and ties. Nodes are the individual actors within the networks, and ties are the relationships between the actors. There can be many kinds of ties between the nodes."<sup>2</sup>

These ties between nodes are how we find things in our daily lives. For example, a person meets their wife because she is the college roommate of a person he went to high school with. The tie is the high school classmate. The nodes are the happy couple.

If we apply this to your Web site, we see how social networking nodes and ties are integral to your site's ability to scale in terms of users, information, volume and usability.

As Figure 1 illustrates, nodes are users, groups, and assets (content,

documents and rich media). Meanwhile ties are personal and group tags, metadata, and categories (which can be applied to users, groups and assets). Importantly, some nodes are also ties: groups tie all users together that belong to that group; users connect their colleagues and friends.

These relationships become channels of navigation for finding the things we need (or want) and are used to discover items of interest. This is the way we already think today about information and people.

## The business value of social networking

Businesses ignore social networking at their peril and not because young people—the workforce of tomorrow—are on MySpace.

As we have seen, the term social networking has been misapplied in the mass-media coverage of online phenomenon like MySpace and Facebook.

Social networking is not about what is happening on these sites but rather why it is happening on these sites.



Social networking is more than just marketing buzz; it is a relational model that has been used for years to define the way human beings interact, and it is the next step in the natural evolution of the Web.

No one user, even the administrator, could possibly identify all the required nodes and ties that need to be defined for your intranet to be a truly collaborative business tool. With

social networking your intranet will scale and maintain usability on its own. Because the community defines the network, it can become complex while—through the eyes of each employee—it remains simple.

Put another way, "...the boxes and lines of formal organizational charts mask myriad relationships in networks that crisscross the borders of functions, hierarchies, and business units. These networks define the way work actually gets done in today's increasingly collaborative, knowledge-intensive companies."<sup>3</sup>

With the Ektron Intranet you can harness the power of social networks to get more work done on your intranet than ever before.

1. "An Unmanageable Circle of Friends" Monica Hesse, The Washington Post, Sunday, August 26, 2007: M10.
2. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_network](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_network)
3. R. Cross, S. Parise, and L. Weiss, "The role of networks in organizational change", The McKinsey Quarterly, McKinsey & Company, 2007.

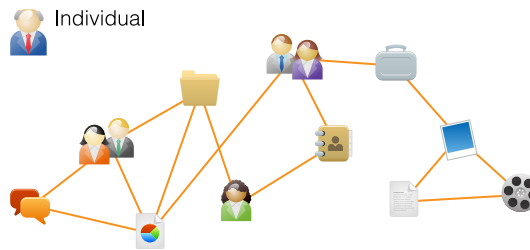


Figure 1: Nodes and Ties at work on a scalable, collaborative intranet.