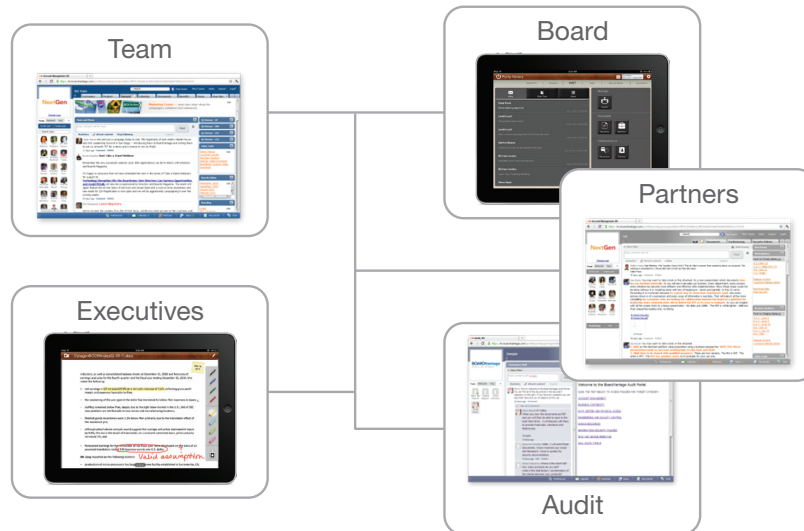# Social Tools Without Social Risks

Joe Ruck, BoardVantage CEO

Consumer social media companies are getting eye-popping valuations. Google and Facebook go head-to-head on a weekly basis. No doubt, consumer 'social' is hot.

So the question we asked a couple years ago, how to adapt consumer models to the needs of leadership teams, is more relevant today than ever. It was obvious then that social media was an ever-strengthening force, and it was only a matter of time before it would play a role in leadership communications. On the other hand, there was an argument to dismiss these models entirely as nothing but a distraction. After all, did we really expect boards and leadership teams to spend their time photo sharing?

Looking around the software market we noticed some vendors touting Facebook-style walls to improve enterprise collaboration. Those examples were compelling at first until it became apparent that they illustrated use at the lowest levels of the enterprise, and unfailingly, in non-business-critical situations. Of course, where confidentiality concerns are minimal and the stakes are low,

it's easy to improve communication—just open up access! The problem is that doing so will sacrifice process along the way. Perhaps that trade-off works in some organizations and at some levels, but it would backfire painfully at the top. When you're charged with the safekeeping of highly confidential board documents, proliferation of content is not an option.

The second problem was executive role complexity. Rarely discussed, but critically important nonetheless, it is a reality that executives wear many different hats. They invariably hold stakes in a wide range of initiatives. That role complexity, pervasive among executives, is simply not existent among the rank and file. It is for that reason that consumer networks and their simple corporate adaptations may work great at the department level, but have little value at the executive level. Without a richer model to address this challenge, these networks would never be a viable option for the leadership team.

That is the reason we built the NextGen architecture with the capability to segregate sensitive communication streams. Inside the platform,

ring-fenced TeamSpaces let executives create destinations for open and direct communication without chancing information leaks. It gives them focal points for collaboration where they can share information using a range of traditional (e.g. shared repository) and social (e.g. feeds) tools. In effect what we're doing is using 'social', not as standalone functionality, but as an organizing principle. The social paradigm is integrated at the core of the platform where a permission model exercises control over all content and communication flows. This assures that no content can proliferate outside its permissible boundaries.

At BoardVantage we agree that much of the promise of social media resides in sharing but, when applied to leadership teams, it cannot be done in isolation. The challenge is to strike a balance between the need to share and the need to maintain control.

Take-Aways

» Typical collaboration and social networking tools are quite effective for group communication, and often readily adaptable in the lower levels of the enterprise.

» But leadership is different. Executives multi-task across different initiatives. They face a degree of role complexity that does not exist among the rank and file. That rules out the use of typical collaboration tools currently used across the enterprise.

» The NextGen architecture segregates sensitive communication streams—by initiative—centralizing relevant activity inside ring-fenced TeamSpaces. This allows direct and open communication within a secure, team-specific environment.