

## Facebook Groups in Business: A Peer-to-Peer Action Research Initiative

### Study Description:

About the Study February 8, 2008

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Made possible by participation from Adam Kovitz, Dave Duarte, Eric Edelstein, Francois Gossieaux, Jenni Beattie, Kimberly Samaha, Niki Lambropoulos, Ray Cha

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### 1. Background

The *Facebook Groups in Business* (FGIB) peer-to-peer action research initiative emerged summer 2007 while Jenny Ambrozek and Victoria Axelrod were collaborating on an article about "connecting intelligence" with colleague Kiki Mulliner. At the same time [Facebook](#) announced it was opening its platform to developers. Use by professionals and businesses started to soar. The [Alexa graph](#) reveals the story. The *21stCenturyOrganization Facebook Group* was created to follow Facebook platform dynamics.

The [Connecting Intelligence article](#) included Nancy White's observations about the importance of paying attention to the "space between the tools" The FGIB study initiators decided it would be interesting to explore not just how *Facebook* Groups work, but how they fit in an organization's collaboration and networking tools ecosystem for stakeholder engagement. As the starting point for our *Connecting Intelligence* article was "network laws and effects", conversations evolved with colleague Bill Anderson about "power laws", and how they work (or not), in *Facebook*. That question prompted the *Facebook Groups in Business* investigation.

Based on her experience in organizations ensuring data and reporting reveal the value of digital interactive spaces, Jenny Ambrozek, tracked activity in the *21<sup>st</sup> Century Organization Facebook Group* from its inception. The resulting spreadsheet became the basis for the FGIB study data-tracking model and form. Study participants helped refine the spreadsheet used for group activity reporting.

## 2. Study Premise

This study explores the potential of Facebook Groups in Business. Stowe Boyd's generative blog post, *The Individual is the New Group* illustrates the power that the interactive web provides individuals to create, join, and participate in diverse and distributed groups. Stowe points out the potential this has to realign established business organizational practices. We agree. Social software applications like Facebook allow individuals to connect with others. Some connections are based on shared interests. Some connections are based on friendship. Some are both. Some are just experiments in linking. Before social network applications, business collaboration platforms were based on (closed) group models, and very often these groups mirrored common hierarchical patterns. In social networks, groups grow from individuals out; they form patterns of relationships around topics of interest. Investigating these processes and the potential for business use is one of the study goals.

The study began December 2007, when media coverage revealed organizations' skepticism about Facebook. News stories focused on very real concerns about individuals and groups having no control over data submitted to Facebook. Reports circulated of companies blocking employee access for fear of employees wasting time and inappropriately sharing intellectual property.

The history of new enterprise technology adoption is consumer experience driven. For example, pressure from employees using Google at home drove improvements to corporate intranets search. Hence it seemed reasonable to argue:

*Facebook may, but also may not, become THE enterprise social networking platform, but it's here, use is growing, so we need to understand the phenomenon and learn from it.*

That was the starting premise.

## 3. Assembling Participants

Except for the study's tenth participating Facebook Group, all group owners found the study

through online communications. These included specifically targeted Facebook communications, several blog posts and email. Prior to study start the conveners knew just two of the participating Facebook Group owners.

From the beginning we wanted global reach. The study enlisted 10 Facebook Groups representing four continents and six countries.

## **4. The Participants**

The participating Facebook Group owners are an eclectic group of entrepreneurial and innovative business developers. They represent a wide range of industries and applications, from a South African based retail chain and software development company, to a leading Australian public relations firm and global trends consultancy. They include European and United States based real world and virtual associations, and professional interest and expertise networks.

## **5. Data Gathering**

The study uses a spreadsheet tracking form co-created by the group to measure weekly Facebook activity. Participants are asked to update weekly. The study is completely voluntary and focuses on collecting data readily available to Facebook Group administrators. In addition to weekly membership changes, group owners are asked to identify specific actions taken by the owners to stimulate group activity, as well as any group member actions.

## **6. Collaboration Spaces**

A closed wiki workspace is used to store the data and gather related resources.

A private *Facebook Group* supports communication around the study and sharing relevant resources as they emerge.

Email is also used for group communications.

## **7. Next Steps**

Data gathering continues through February 2008.

The first results will be presented to the University of Warwick's *Knowledge Innovation Network* meeting, Northampton, England March 6, 2008.

To learn more about our study, or share interest in participating in a second round, please contact the conveners through *Facebook* and the [21stCenturyOrganization Facebook Group](#). We look forward to hearing from you.

*Jenny Ambrozek, Victoria G. Axelrod, William L. Anderson.*