Social Media and the CPO
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CIPS and Procurious Social Media for Procurement Knowledge Partnership
July 2015
SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE CPO

Forget cost savings or even talent management, within five years social media literacy will be the X Factor that distinguishes top performing CPOs from the rest.

In no way does that diminish the importance or need for solid skills in change management, financial literacy, SRM, innovation and people management. These will always be core to the role of the CPO. Social media, however, allows you to approach these tasks with almost unimaginable scalability, influence and access to knowledge.

According to Roland Deiser and Sylvain Newton, authors of McKinsey Quarterly ‘The Six social media skills every leader needs’, social media has created a dilemma for senior managers: “while the potential of social media is immense, the inherent risks create uncertainty and unease.”

Certainly social media’s unscripted approach to conversations, horizontal collaboration and fragmented power structures, is unsettling for many of those schooled in 20th century management theories.

But the transformative power of social media is too big, too loud and simply too compelling to miss.

Social Media can help in an age where leaders need to ‘do everything’

From stimulating creativity and managing change, to building a values-based culture, being a customer and employer of choice and managing risk, social media just may prove the key to coralling, leveraging and optimising your To-Do list.

Leaders today must not only capitalise on the transformational power of social media, including the ability to create and disseminate engaging content, but also mitigate and manage the risk of unruly online behaviour.

If you’re hoping social media literacy is really just an issue for the CEO or the Chief Marketing Officer, sorry to disappoint you.

While every leader regardless of industry or profession needs a measure of social media literacy, the opportunities and expectations for CPOs to be masterful (not just literate) are ever greater. Here’s why:

**Procurement is inherently suited to horizontal collaboration**

Procurement and supply chain professionals are already well accustomed to working globally, often in a virtual team environment with cross-cultural suppliers and stakeholders. Social media actually makes this process easier by facilitating networking, strengthening the sense of personal brand, and providing the collaborative tools to facilitate more effective work.

**Procurement needs to create 360-degree visibility**

In terms of visibility to suppliers, your team, your Board, social media will help to reinforce your position as a connected thought-leader.
As a facilitator of connectivity across the business, it’s natural that Procurement should take the lead in the use of online networks. For example, consider setting up a private group on one of the social media platforms to facilitate discussion of ideas with the supplier network.

**Procurement wants to be a Customer of Choice**
Marketers have been using social media to connect with customers for nearly a decade. Although the use of social media to connect with suppliers is still in its infancy (although eMarket places within the public and NGO sector, in particular, are rapidly growing), be assured that savvy sales executives are already scanning social communities like LinkedIn and Procurious to understand your industry (and you as a customer) better.

**Procurement needs to upskill**
The labour market is tightening, which means the need to engage, retain, and upskill your existing resources is growing. The participatory and collaborative nature of social media is inherently suited to peer-to-peer learning, which is highly effective (learn real life lessons from subject matter experts), accessible (can be accessed across multiple devices at a time convenient to the learner) and extremely cost effective.

**Procurement has access to great, shareable content**
In the world of social media, the ability to tell compelling, interesting and authentic stories are key to getting noticed and creating influence.

Don’t just stick to talking about the serious stuff either. As we’ve spoken to more procurement professionals, we’ve found that procurement has some of the best stories to tell. Whether it’s buying gulfstream jets or fleets of jeeps, it’s important for people to know it’s not just about stationary and travel!

**A word of warning**
While the opportunities are great, so too is the importance of providing adequate guidance on smart social media practices. Dealing in issues of commercial sensitivity, CPOs must understand social media in order to develop and manage an operational social media policy that stimulates collaboration, but adequately mitigates risk.

**Never too ‘Experienced’ to Learn**
If the thought of social media literacy has you wishing for the ‘good old days’ when cost savings was where it was at, don’t despair - like any competency, social media literacy can be taught and improved so the key is to start by mastering the basics.

You might also look to improve your technical ability to create content – storytelling; video production (even if that’s just using your iPhone); investigate blog platforms (I recommend Tumblr or Wordpress but we also welcome guest blogs on Procurious) or podcasts.

So if you’ve been leaving it to your Chief Marketing Officer to worry about social media, I’m afraid it’s time to get your head out of the sand, find yourself a digital mentor and get literate.