

Redefining the Social Enterprise Network

Overview

The presence and influence social media has within the enterprise network is growing each day. The social employee is drawn to the new methods of collaboration and communication that social media tools provide. Consumer devices such as smartphones and tablets are taking an increased foothold in business, bringing social media right along with them. In a survey conducted at Interop Las Vegas 2011, half of the IT respondents found that the perk of using consumer devices at work as important as teleworking, flextime and other important benefits. Companies are recognizing the reach of social media and new products and programs are emerging.

Enterasys launched a social media product that integrates the communications network with the human social network – isaac. With isaac, Enterasys has revolutionized network management by incorporating a social element to it. It is not only a machine interface to social media APIs, isaac actually communicates using native human language to lower the barrier to communicating with your network. With isaac, the network is now a social product that interacts with social employees.

Social products are catching on. Toyota has also announced that they would be adding social media capabilities to electric and hybrid vehicles in coming years, validating the concept of social products. Using technologies from Microsoft and Salesforce.com, the cars will create a new social circle that includes the driver, the dealer and Toyota. The car can message the owner status updates, message the dealer to book service appointments etc. We are experiencing an evolution in product development that connects the products we purchase to humans in our native language.

For enterprises, combining social products with social people creates a social ecosystem that creates the social organization. The social organization benefits from social media's real-time collaboration and using a variety of communication technologies. Status messages help teams stay current on projects; information is distributed to those who need to know. With isaac from Enterasys, your network team now has a digital colleague that is sharing information about its status, and can interpret messages within the social media channel to execute commands. This new social capability enables new workflows that improve your ability to keep your business going.

Defining the Social Product

There is more to a social product than just being able to send a tweet or post a status message. The product must meet a few criteria. First it must be able to post and monitor on multiple social media networks. Sending a status message is a one-way communication with little benefit. Being able to monitor those channels and take specific action adds value. The second criterion a social product requires is the ability to translate machine language to human language. A social media gateway that simply repeats arcane log errors or SNMP alerts does not translate to a large audience – some may not even meet the 140 characters of a Twitter message. The social product must be able to translate what is happening to a human recognizable message, and be able to interpret human recognizable messages.

Enterasys isaac is a new social product that evolves how we interact with network control systems – with the ability to proactively manage any device connected to the IP network through a social media interface. The motivation to develop isaac was to address the complexity avalanche facing technology consumers. If we define the consumption gap as the delta between how products are used versus the capabilities of the product, that consumption gap can be seen as growing every day.

By humanizing the network Enterasys has enabled its customers to reduce the consumption gap. Inviting machines to collaborate with humans via social media and using natural language enables tier one support personnel to resolve problems that have in the past required escalation to network architects.

Use Cases

The best way to evaluate social products is to consider use cases and how the product improves current business practices. A common use case for many IT shops is supporting the 7x24x365 business. Our IT expert is balancing the many needs of the business. She is responsible for managing the IT architecture and is called upon when failures within the infrastructure impact the business.

It's noon and she is enjoying lunch with a business partner. An alarm sounds on the network management console; a wireless AP is dropping connections. The ringing phones match the alarm on the management console as end users start reporting connectivity issues. One user is a vice president preparing for a meeting.

In a traditional model, the Help Desk staffer would page our IT expert. A dialogue would ensue and generally lunch is forgotten as our expert spends time either on the phone troubleshooting or heading back to work. With isaac we have a new workflow.

It is still noon and our expert is enjoying lunch with a business partner. Her smart phone beeps and she sees a post to the Network Ops Chatter list from isaac; a wireless access point has failed. The next post is from a Help Desk operator – a vice president is having issues connecting to wireless and needs network access ASAP. She sends a Chatter post to isaac “#find chris”, the name of the vice president. A moment and isaac has located the vice president and it happens to be in the same area as the failed access point. Another message to isaac and the wireless access point is rebooted. The Help Desk posts that the vice president now is on the network – confirmed by a follow up message on Chatter. Lunch is saved in a matter of moments. Furthermore, this transaction could actually have been performed by the Help Desk staff if the company chose to provision it so.

Solution Walk Through

Enterasys isaac is provided with multiple social interface options, supporting enterprise class social networks such as Chatter from Salesforce.com to open social networks such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. The flexibility in interface options provides choice for how different organizations work.

Chatter from Salesforce.com is the enterprise class social media chosen by many companies that are looking for enterprise security (SAS 70 type II) and control. Organizations can create social ecosystems that include internal employees and external partners all in a public cloud solution. The best practice solution for isaac is to create an internal team within Chatter that includes the social employees that will interact with isaac. All posts and communications are secured using Salesforce.com’s enterprise-grade security and auditing.

Open social networks are also an option. Deployment models are a little different as the responsibility of securing these networks falls upon the user. Enterasys provides a list of best practices with isaac on the recommended security settings for each of these tools. As with Chatter, creating groups of contacts that are able to interact with isaac is fundamental and isaac monitors the number of users following the social product.

To provide additional security, isaac has a number of security features built-in. First is a multi-tiered consumption model. You can provision isaac to be an alert-only system. In this mode isaac would inform the subscribers of network events and status messages. Network operators would use traditional tools to remediate conditions. The second consumption model allows isaac to interpret commands that are posted on the social media channel and perform actions.

This mode is additionally secured by selecting which user accounts can request actions and the types of actions those users may request of isaac.

Just as businesses are concerned regarding posts about a company’s brand on social networks, they should be concerned about how much information is stored on third party networks. Within the isaac social media management console is the amount of time for isaac to leave tweets and posts on the social media channels. By continually managing the content stored externally, isaac is using the social media channel as a scratchpad vs. a permanent store. All isaac data is stored locally within the Enterasys NMS platform for long term data management and review.

The screenshot displays the Enterasys isaac Service Settings interface. At the top, the Enterasys logo and tagline "Secure Networks" are visible, along with navigation links for "Home", "Reports", "Social", "Devices", "Event Logs", "Flows", "Wireless", "Administration", and "Help". The "Social" tab is active, showing a "Latest Posts" section with several posts from "Smi Isaac" and "John Smith". Below the posts is a "Facebook Profile" section for "Smi Isaac" with a location of "Andover, Massachusetts". On the right side, there is a "Services Enabled" sidebar with checkboxes for "Twitter", "Chatter", "Facebook", and "LinkedIn". Below this, there are settings for "Clean Up Every" (set to 1 Hour) and "Pin Lifetime" (set to 10 Minutes).

Figure 1: Enterasys isaac Service Settings

Summary

Whether it's Toyota's ability to decipher the mysterious check engine light into information the driver recognizes or Enterasys isaac's ability to translate error logs to updates that a wireless access point has failed – the social products are communicating with us and in a language we understand. Social products are revolutionizing markets and businesses. Gartner finds in the “When Social and Business Processes Collide” that “by 2015, 40% of large enterprises will have a corporate “Facebook”, for circulating both business and personal data.”

Greater collaboration between social people and social products benefits the social organization, with measurable results in more efficient communications, new workflows and faster times to resolution.

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