

PROFILE

Synaptics

Synaptics (NASDAQ: SYNA) is a leading developer of human interface solutions for the mobile computing, communications, and entertainment industries. The company creates interface solutions for a variety of devices including notebook PCs, PC peripherals, digital music players, and mobile phones. The TouchPad™, Synaptics' flagship product, is integrated into a majority of today's notebook computers. Consumer electronics and computing manufacturers use Synaptics' solutions to enrich the interaction between humans and intelligent devices through improved usability, functionality, and industrial design.

Industry:

Human Interface Technologies

Headquarters:

Santa Clara, CA

Website:

<http://www.synaptics.com/>

IN BRIEF

Objectives:

Develop a social intranet for Human Resources that allows HR managers to collaborate with other managers, employees, potential hires and external benefits brokers, all while maintaining multiple levels of privacy and security.

Solution:

Clearvale Enterprise

CASE STUDY

"We were looking for an enterprise 2.0 solution that recognizes the reality that business is best managed not on a single social network, but on a 'network of networks.' Some networks need to be open to the public – for example, networks for recruiting employees – and some need to remain private. By enabling us to easily create and stitch together any number of functional networks, BroadVision's Clearvale Ecosystems solution is enabling us to easily develop an enterprise 2.0 environment that reflects the way work actually gets done."

- Senior Vice President of Global Human Resources Jim Harrington

Many organizations are aware of concepts such as enterprise 2.0, but don't fully understand how they can be utilized to perform specific functions. For example, when social networking benefits are understood and a clear strategy is implemented, it can become a valuable asset that can increase a company's efficiency and decrease immediate and long-term expenses.

Synaptics, a developer of human interface solutions such as notebook PCs, digital music players and mobile phones for the mobile computing, communications and entertainment industries, was able to do just that. As in most companies, finding and retaining a talented workforce is essential for its survival. Further, as Synaptics is a high-tech company, locating talent with the appropriate technical abilities can be difficult. To increase the odds of finding the best employees, the company reaches out to a global candidate pool, which also can be challenging. Then, once secured, it can be difficult and expensive to quickly train and on-board new hires.

Due to normal turnover, many employees move on to other companies, though they often remain in good standing with their former colleagues. To take advantage of these still-warm relationships, it can be beneficial to remain in contact with former employees, paving the way for new opportunities and long-term business relationships. On top of all of the aforementioned issues, Synaptics has to deal with the challenges and costs associated with human resources: health care, development and employee queries that can strain the HR department.

Jim Harrington, Synaptics' global director of human resources, said he recognized the need for a single solution that could deal with all of these challenges. Realizing the tools and infrastructure used by social networks such as Facebook also could be used by organizations, Harrington opted to implement an enterprise 2.0 solution: the BroadVision Clearvale Ecosystems for HR. This allowed Synaptics to create multiple networks to enable communication and collaboration among internal departments, partners, clients, potential customers and job candidates.

Choosing an access portal with an interface that is familiar to anyone who has used Facebook, LinkedIn or any other popular social network is beneficial as it creates a moderate learning curve, allowing talent managers to easily connect with employees. An unfamiliar interface can be daunting and can encourage employees to return to default tools such as e-mail, which does not foster collaboration.

For instance, like Facebook, a good enterprise 2.0 solution will have an easily accessible area devoted to uploading and storing files such as company policies and procedures. If managers need to make a change, they can do so. The new version is uploaded to the portal, ensuring everyone has access. If that document is sent out attached to a companywide e-mail, there is no guarantee every employee will access the new version when appropriate.

Further, HR departments deal with sensitive information. Concerns due to negative press about Facebook breaches in security and the loss of sensitive data have made many organizations wary of, and ultimately prevented them from, adopting an enterprise 2.0 workplace portal. Synaptics chose a platform that allowed total privacy and security control over who has access to what and who can edit information.

Just Like Facebook

Most employees are familiar with Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter. Synaptics decided to adopt a cloud-based platform similar to these social networks. Rather than existing as software that must be installed on every computer meant to employ it, once someone becomes a member of a network, he or she can access the portal via a Web browser. This is an important distinction considering Synaptics' global recruiting efforts. Individuals who want to browse the company's job openings do not have to download software or access job openings from particular locations; all they require is Internet access.

A good enterprise 2.0 workplace portal also employs popular social media-based tools such as blogs, forums, wikis and message boards. With these tools, marketing teams can collaborate on press releases, sales teams can maintain databases of potential customers, and employees companywide can learn about each other's roles. When content is uploaded, users have the option to allow communities, specific users or the entire network to have access.

A major concern for Synaptics was the difficulties many organizations face when departments or teams become siloed and do not effectively communicate with one another. The nature of enterprise 2.0 is to actively prevent this by making it simple for employees and departments to communicate easily.

"When designing our strategy, that was a potential problem we wanted to solve right at the start," Harrington said. "We were able to do that, and as a result, we are now in a position to further develop our approach to enterprise 2.0. The alternative would be to build multiple silos, none of which speak to one another. Using a portal promotes collaboration by making it simple for employees from different departments to work together."

However, to be truly effective, it's important to move beyond general enterprise social network capabilities and focus on specific goals. For Synaptics, that meant lowering recruiting costs and increasing employee interaction.

Thinking Globally

One of the most important ways Synaptics is using its enterprise 2.0 portal is to aid recruitment. Potential employees live all over the world, and for Synaptics to be able to build a talented workforce, it must be able to reach out to as many potential hires as possible without significantly increasing expenses.

Using the Clearvale portal, Synaptics has created regional recruiting sites around the world, including the U.S., South Korea and Japan. The company can customize each recruiting site to cater to the various languages in each geographic region. However, it's also important for Synaptics to retain certain company standards.

"In terms of recruiting, we use the portal to brand ourselves to the outside world and passive candidates," Harrington said. "Despite the fact that people are looking at our sites in a variety of places around the world, they know who we are and what our culture is."

Individuals looking for a job may take advantage of the anonymous option, allowing them to look through various job postings without having to worry that their current employer or anyone else will be alerted that they are looking for a new job. Even workers from competing companies have access to all of the jobs listed. Individuals who are passively browsing the listings may find a job that interests them and become active candidates. Converting passive candidates to active candidates increases the likelihood that Synaptics will find the right person to fill a position.

Compared with traditional recruiting methods such as building sites from scratch or employing job-listing services, Synaptics has reached a wider audience of potential hires through the portal. Since implementation in June 2010, it has decreased recruiting costs by about 20 to 30 percent, or between \$5,000 to \$10,000 per new hire.

Ancillary Benefits

Using an enterprise social network has benefits that extend beyond the recruitment process. For instance, employees can have access to company training materials, guidebooks and benefits documentation, all without straining the HR department.

“We’re also using Clearvale for employee collaboration, learning and development,” Harrington said. “It allows us to be creative, innovative and solutions-oriented, all in real time.”

Synaptics’ enterprise 2.0 portal also helped it to keep in touch with alumni. Employees move on, especially in the high-tech sector. It’s important to sustain good relationships with former employees, track their successes and maintain the possibility of future partnerships and other business relationships.

Initially, Synaptics utilized a static website for alumni, which did not foster interaction. Now that the company has adopted an enterprise 2.0 portal, former employees have a central location that allows Synaptics to stay in touch with them without having to dedicate many resources to the effort.

A major concern organizations have about using an enterprise social network is how to get employees to reduce their reliance upon traditional methods of communication, such as e-mail, and adopt something new. Synaptics leveraged a graphical user interface familiar to anyone who has used Facebook or a similar social network. Its home page is a centralized location for widgets, including blogs, status updates and file sharing that are relevant to the user. Individuals can customize the layout of their home page, ensuring they have quick access to the features that are most beneficial to them.

“It’s easy and self-explanatory,” said Harrington. “The fact that most of them have used Facebook is a major plus. For employees who have not used Facebook, you just need to show them a few of the features and they get it. The key is to not jam it down their throats.”