

Dan Purvis

Business collaboration tools are a catalyst for productivity



There is a whole swathe of collaboration tools for businesses of all shapes and sizes, with SharePoint perhaps being the most well-known. SoHos, SMEs and large-scale enterprises can all boost staff productivity and vastly improve business efficiency from such software (particularly when cloud-based).

Even when you strip this back to the basic tasks of PowerPoint creation, the development of new business proposals, or devising new business strategies or innovative products, businesses can often grind to a halt as emails get shared with multiple co-creators, different versions start being saved on different hard-drives or in different places on a server, or some people simply miss the opportunity to contribute due to flawed workflow processes.

“Conflicts inevitably materialise, productivity suffers, and the speed at which different tasks or projects progress is criticised by senior management.”

Collaboration tools come in all forms – from internal social media networks to enterprise systems – and they allow for the sharing of documents, brainstorming ideas, fostering closer working relationships, and creating efficiencies of scale. Yet they all come with some kind of cost attached to them...often high costs. We'll come back to this point later in the post.

Clear business benefits from collaboration

Aside from the obvious business benefits of productivity, efficiency and a higher quality of output (the sum is greater than its parts, after all), employees become more engaged with the brand as a whole.

They are empowered to work as a collective unit, but with the added advantage of working wherever, whenever and however they want. Individuals feel like they are more than just a number on the payroll; they can directly contribute to problem-solving issues, ideation (idea creation) and innovative projects that they otherwise wouldn't have been able to.

Another challenge addressed by such



collaboration software is a tonic for Human Resources departments. Many leaders and heads of HR business units face a constant uphill battle to ensure that employees not only feel valued as individuals, but that they “buy in” to the organisation.

These tools can help build a greater trust of peers and of the decision-makers, while also enhancing the understanding of where the business is heading. Therefore, they help develop smoother processes, establish clearer roles and responsibilities, and

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promote a feeling of unity and true culture.

Furthermore, this collaborative environment eradicates the need to spend time and money travelling or even use up much-needed meeting room space. People can access the tools anywhere they are connected to the Internet – for example through their company's VPN or via the cloud for SaaS-based services.

“Collaboration tools harness together the relatively untapped potential of people with technology to provide significant cost, productivity and business advantages alongside immense flexibility.”

But we know all about the virtues of a collaborative ecosystem, right?

So what's the issue?

Many larger organisations face an ongoing battle to break down the silos that exist not just between different departments, but also within departments or even within smaller teams. With sometimes geographically dispersed staff members often working in different time zones (even within the same team), productivity and efficiency challenges are complex for both the executives and the IT department.

Compounding this is the need to communicate and to also share information and knowledge in an instant – 21st Century problems for the real-time, fast-paced,

interconnected world of business in which we now operate.

Teams or project groups need to know the right information, have access to the latest versions of documents or data, and to be told this instantly. (Or at least as soon as they have logged in in the morning!)

And don't forget the procurement guys in the finance department too! These tools cost money – whether that is an initial outlay, ongoing licenses and maintenance, training, upgrades and so on. Furthermore, it seems extremely difficult to prove or demonstrate tangible or direct ROI.

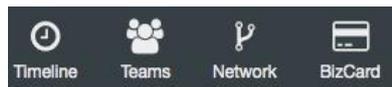
Putting a hard figure on “more effective communication”, a “more aligned workforce”, being able to “access information immediately” or “far quicker”, we have “ramped up efficiency” or we have been “more innovative” is tough when the business gains are often intangible. It's not impossible, yet it takes time.

But there is another way...

All the benefits, without any cost

There are some free and very low-cost alternatives out there, but they are limited in scope, scalability and functionality. A mouth-watering collaboration solution for start-ups, SoHos and SMEs, the SunZu Team feature provides all the productivity, efficiency and employee culture gains that costly enterprise solutions do.

Once logged in to the social business network, you can access your directory of “Teams” or “Network” (which is where the magic happens for Teams and Groupings) by clicking on one of the quick-links in the bottom left of the screen.



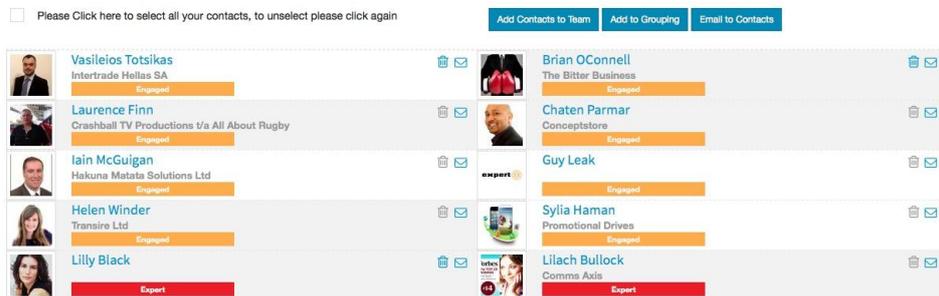
You are then presented with your business network of trusted contacts on SunZu. At this point, it is worth highlighting that SunZu Teams work seamlessly with the Groupings feature too.

You can group together anyone who is a SunZu member (not just your contacts) into specific categories (Groupings) through sophisticated segmentation – you can choose to filter them into, for example, a Grouping for your work colleagues, or filter them by Industry, Expertise, Sales Targets, Competitors, Bloggers & Journalists, and so on. This helps you save a lot of time when wanting to engage with a specific segment, do some competitive analysis, or conduct some prospecting by targeting specific contacts or types of contacts.

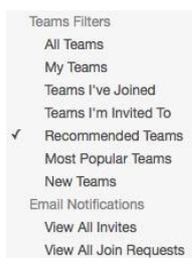
From this point it is really easy to invite any of your contacts into any of your dedicated Teams. Each Team can be used however you wish – for prospects, customers, mentors, staff, HR, media and PR, department-specific, project-specific and so on.

Once you have joined or set up a Team(s), you can access the Teams page and filter them according to your needs at that moment in time. You can view all Teams on SunZu (and request to join those that grab your attention), just your Teams, new or popular teams and so on. A neat option is “Recommended Teams” whereby SunZu's intelligent algorithms sift through all the Teams, each of their members' profiles and your own profile to match you with relevant Teams. You can then click on their Mission and Vision summary statements to find out what their purpose is.

Within each Team you can start discussion threads or join ongoing ones, view members, edit your Team members if you are the Team Owner (each Team can, currently, have up to 1,000 members), view and create



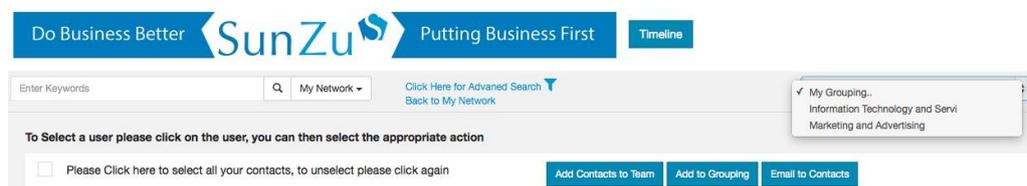
If you are happy with your filtering, then you quickly click the checkbox in the top left to select all of your filtered contacts and then with one click you can add the chosen contacts to a Team, or email each of them via the SunZu internal messaging system.



You can also click the same checkbox to deselect all of them or, if you need to further filter out some people, then simply click on a contact to deselect them. Alternatively, if you want to be even more selective, then you don't need to select all, but instead manually select specific individuals with just a single click on each name. Dark grey highlighting indicates that they're selected; white indicates that they are not.

articles rich in multi-media just for your Team, choose to leave any Team at any point, and also “Add/View file(s) for your Team”.

You can even share the Team and invite new members for it by clicking on the social media share icons too. Each Team also has Rules to abide by, to ensure that everyone behaves and interacts in a responsible manner.



Please Click here to select all your contacts, to unselect please click again

Add Contacts to Team Add to Grouping Email to Contacts

 Vasileios Totsikas Intertrade Hellas SA Engaged	 Brian O'Connell The Bitter Business Engaged
 Laurence Finn Crashball TV Productions t/a All About Rugby Engaged	 Chaten Parmar Conceptstore Engaged
 Iain McGuigan Hakuna Matata Solutions Ltd Engaged	 Guy Leak Engaged
 Helen Winder Transire Ltd Engaged	 Sylia Haman Promotional Drives Engaged
 Lilly Black Expert	 Lilach Bullock Comms Axis Expert

Upload New File

Title *

Select File *

No File Selected Choose file

Description

Allowed file types png, jpg, jpeg, pjpeg, gif, pdf, xpdf, doc, docx, xls, xlsx, txt.
Max size: 10Mb.

Upload

Team Files

Title	Description	Uploaded By	Date
 Tell Your Friends !		Laurence Finn	17/03/2015

Adding a file or document to a Team is super-easy: give it a title, choose a file from your hard-drive or server, then give it a description, click "Upload", and let the collaboration begin! Supported files are too numerous to mention: pdf, jpeg, png, gif, Word doc, Excel spreadsheets and so on.

(The example in the image above is from the Team set up for the SunZu founder's latest project: **Fortune Hunter TV.**)

According to serial entrepreneur and founder, Lyndon Wood, they are also in talks with nationwide and global enterprises about adopting **SunZu** Teams and SunZu Groupings for internal and external collaboration. Indeed, SunZu also offers a white labelled solution for internal global communications whereby all the features and functions can be branded according to a company's brand guidelines.

Exciting times for a social business network that only recently came out of beta and has already secured over 55,000 members in just six months! It offers so much more than a typical social media network too. Check it out and let us know what you think. It could well be the collaborative solution your business has been crying out for.

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About the Author

Co-Founder & Director of CommsAxis, with 15 years' experience Dan brings a wealth of agency and in-house experience to the Comms Axis party.

Dan looks after the growth strategy for the clients and also for Communications Axis. He knows how to align game-changing strategies to commercial goals. Passionate about social media, digital marketing and the value of digital properties and PR, he lives in the real world with an open door policy for all our clients and strategic alliances.

Dan has a proven track record of successfully leading various multi-discipline marketing and communications campaigns, messaging platforms, and rolling out internal communications strategies. His success and profile led to him being involved with the London School of Economics' ongoing research into "Semantic Polling" – essentially, comparing digital with traditional methods of communication and monitoring/reporting, and evaluating their value to modern society.

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Publication issued on 1 May 2015