

'Real cooperation gives a lot of benefits'

Social media are part of a shifting culture. Large companies are finding things increasingly harder. More and more companies will be organised as projects. The latest Dutch CIONet meeting was about the use of social media in a changing world.

Asking Frans van der Reep to be speaker was naturally asking for trouble. Van der Reep, lecturer of eBusiness INHolland and strategist with KPN Getronics, likes to take the broader view and context. Thus, it is not so much about 'effective use of social media', the theme of the CIONet meeting, but rather about opportunities and threats in a changing world. Social media are just a small part of that. This prompted an animated debate, which, chaired by Frits Bussemaker, continued for some time after the keynote address.

To Van der Reep, Twitter is becoming a symbol of a hectic world. "The public's memory is practically

zero." The time that you have to be able to predict anything meaningful is becoming increasingly briefer, he believes. "Stop making business plans. It's far more about direction, strategy."

A company is becoming a temporary project, like a film production, a temporary uniting of skills.

Social media and the internet in general are turning businesses inside out and backwards.

Companies hardly have any secrets now. Van der Reep says: "Misrepresent yourself and you will be punished in a flash. The chain is reversing, B2C is becoming C2B. That encroaches on the actual business models. Musicians now give away their music, in order to fill the venues."

According to Van der Reep, it means that an entrepreneur has to question increasingly closely how his business figures look to customers: just nine out of ten for you? "In short, that which is considered well within the company appears to be at least as good outside of it. This has to be the core competence of enterprises. You need to let go of the other activities. Innovation can very well consist of no longer doing something, as of doing new things."

A few sentences later, he predicted the end for big companies. "There is no evidence whatsoever that being bigger leads to greater earning power.

PICTURE

Frans van der Reep, lecturer of eBusiness INHolland and strategist with KPN Getronics: "Problems arise where there are managers, rather than that managers solve problems."





'A PLACE WHERE BUSINESS AND PLEASURE MEET'

Although dead scared of being branded 'the Twitter bird', at CIONet Netherlands' latest meeting Xaviera Ringeling, specialist in social media, spoke again about her 'Twitter research'. Although hardly representative, that research does provide some interesting impressions about Twitter's usage.

Most Twitter users start out of curiosity: how does it work, could there be something in it for my business? If the answer is yes, the tough questions follow. How can you deploy Twitter successfully, how do you become a much followed twitterer?

Ringeling thinks there are no general answers to this. What often scores well are amusing messages, current news and messages with links. These are the most retweeted. Otherwise, there are no hard and fast rules: tweeting too much is not good, too little as well, too many links is not good, too few too. There are 'professional' tweeters, who mostly tweet to enhance their brand and to expand and maintain their network. That is not without its hazards. A wrong tweet can cost you your job. Many stick to the rule of not talking about friends or colleagues in tweets. Given the informal nature of the medium, a mix of personal and business communications can rapidly arise. That does not always turn out well. Some respondents, who really cannot do without twittering, therefore have both a business and a personal account. According to most CIOs attending, businesses must impose the same code of conduct for social media as for email. They see a role for CIOs to encourage their implementation. One attendee said: "I encourage social media to allow employees to exchange knowledge and experiences voluntarily."

A few more findings from the research:

- 90% have a public account.
- 80% twitter from a mobile phone, the most popular app is Tweetdeck.
- 57% use Twitter lists to follow people and topics more easily.
- 76.6% of respondents have actually met other tweeps in person.
- There is much tweeting from bed (45%) and the toilet (39%).
- Most important rule: do not tweet about private matters (24%).
- Main business reason to tweet: enhancing the brand (60%).

The average company size is plummeting. It is no longer about bosses, rather about people who know how things work, about professionalism. That has an extraordinarily purgative effect." He expects the company to change as a concept. A company is becoming a temporary project, like a film production, a temporary uniting of skills. Each individual colleague works within it as a small business. Van der Reep is not too fond of managers. In his view, they are largely redundant in modern collaborations. It is more so that problems arise where there are managers, than that managers solve problems.

Who is my pal?

Traditional management focuses pre-eminently on 'control excellence', then on 'operational excellence'. According to Van der Reep, this is an effective approach for a dwindling proportion of businesses, because the world is becoming increasingly dynamic. A top-down approach fits in with this less and less. Real innovation always comes from the bottom up. Over the next few years, 'communication excellence' will increasingly determine companies' success. The key question here is: "Who is my pal?" It is no longer a matter of 'having to' but of 'meeting'.

To Van der Reep the bottom line is that the internet forces honesty. Otherwise, you will be punished via public pillories on consumer sites or via Twitter, the modern village pub. Honesty as a survival strategy, it will take some getting used to for some executives. 