

# ZEST Digital social media case study with David Boloker, CTO, Emerging Internet Technology Group, IBM

## **Steven Lewis:**

Hello and welcome to another ZEST Digital social media case study. I am Steven Lewis and I am a director with ZEST Digital and in this series we are talking to people, preferably people in Australia who are using social media as part of their corporate marketing and communications mix.

In this episode I talk to David Boloker who is the chief technology officer of the emerging internet technology software group for IBM. David is based in Texas but he has a team in Sydney that includes Iwan Winoto and Iwan joined David for this interview so in that sense it is not a totally Australian interview but of course IBM is a global company of 30,000 people and as David says in the interview they couldn't operate if they didn't use social media as the teams are too widely dispersed. So in this sense it is both an Australian interview and not an Australian interview and you'll see what I mean when you here David and Iwan talking about social media as just part of their everyday tool kit. IBM is certainly a company that practices what it preaches and very much takes the view that if they're going to recommend this sort of thing to their customers, which they do, they have to be using it internally and many of IBM's tools that are available to their customers were first tried out internally.

Before we get to the interview with David we gave a breakfast presentation recently, ZEST Digital along with our sister company ZEST Healthcare, which is a health care education marketing company working in the health care space so the presentation is for pharmaceutical companies and pharmaceutical companies obviously have a very heavy interest in data and it was interesting how many of

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the questions kept coming back to what data are available for social media. But we took a poll of our own, we gathered some data of our own, so of the about 50 people there almost all of whom worked in the pharmaceutical industry we asked whether they used social media at work or at home and if they didn't use social media at work whether they thought they probably would in the future. So this is a very small sample I appreciate that this is not something that you could publish as data but nearly 20% of those who attended the breakfast session already use some sort of social medium for work, nearly 45% said that they would probably use social media for work in the future and exactly half of those who were there are already using social media in their personal lives. That data is up on our blog which is [zestdigital.com.au/blog](http://zestdigital.com.au/blog) and this podcast is of course available from the same URL, just replace that "/blog" with "/podcast". So just go to [zestdigital.com.au](http://zestdigital.com.au) and follow the links.

I started my interview with David by asking him about the use of podcasts at IBM.

**David Boloker:**

Podcasts are actually used in IBM as everyone around the world has a problem with time management, for the folks that are actually taking a train home or driving podcasts are wonderful because not only do you want to know what's going on say as an e-learning type of experience but also there are people who are podcasting news of the day, what's happening in technology, what innovations are really cool, as well as sales so this is all available internally. Now that deals with just two aspects; when we start looking at the other aspects there is the whole aspect also of community and groups and how groups interact with one another. When you look at sharing bookmarks well you'll see leaders in that they have obviously blogs and wikis, we have something internally in IBM called wiki central which is world wide and anyone can basically look at it and you name a type of topic and you'll probably find it on wiki central and that could be on topics that have to do with our products or it could be on what's going on in the world or it could be new technologies that are really cool and fancy. We actually do have pages that people have written into in terms of wikis for sure about and this may not be on wiki central because there are other wikis that hang around the company that are the people part of it coming to let's say Sydney and we all go to this restaurant here and that restaurant so you'll find that kind of information everywhere.

**Steven Lewis:**

And anybody can start a page?

**David Boloker:**

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Anyone can start a page. Any IBM employee who actually has got an ID.

**Steven Lewis:**

And they can edit other people's pages?

**David Boloker:**

And people can edit other people's pages unless the page is locked for some reason.

**Steven Lewis:**

Is there a policy about editing other people's pages, how do you manage those sort of questions?

**Iwan Winoto:**

It's like the typical wiki scenario is that it's very self regulating so if people are putting comments up and editing pages - because of the large number of wikis you are only going to be involved in a certain number of wikis that you are going to be interested in so you don't put up a wiki and then suddenly have 30,000 IBMers going and updating it because nobody has the time to do that. And it is self regulated as well, the big thing is that when you're in there you have to log in to do any editing so there's a whole auditability and accountability for anybody who has added any comments in there so you can trace it right back.

**David Boloker:**

There is wholesale editing of wikis there is no question; of various content when either new products come out or new ways of using different products or technologies you see that all over. I don't have a blog or wiki in IBM; I don't have the time to be very honest. I probably should but I don't but I would say about 20% of the company basically focuses and uses wikis on a daily basis.

**Iwan Winoto:**

And I think people feel safer with a wiki than with a blog because they feel part of a community and that is part of building up the profile and there are some teams where the management will say as part of your job you have to contribute to a wiki or it is recommended or encouraged that you have a blog, it is either internal or external, and by the way it can be both. So you can write to a blog internally which is purely internally focused just on the intranet but then you can push a button and it becomes an external blog as well and then we have all sorts of guidelines and policies around that of course you have to be much more strict about what gets published on our external blog.

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**Steven Lewis:**

So two questions would come out of that for me. One, in what sort of circumstances would a manager or a team decide that a blog was a good idea for the individual to have?

**Iwan Winoto:**

Well in our team because we're dealing with emerging technologies and we're trying to push the awareness of new technologies and help draft the strategy as well so in those cases for the internal wiki or the blogs we're putting up sites where we're trying to raise the awareness of certain technologies within the company so that more people can understand what it is we're doing and it helps our marketing, it helps our projects move along.

**Steven Lewis:**

So from an internal point of view it is sort of internal marketing of your own team and what you're looking at point of view?

**David Boloker:**

That's part of it. I think the flip side is we were discussing Wiki Central which is central to most IBMers, our team actually has its own blogs and wikis and I actually put most of my stuff in our private ones and the reason for that is I can do it on the road and it is easier for me to do it that way and I get immediately the actions I need to get done. Now when you start looking at well that's a very small community, absolutely it is what you're trying to do so if you're trying to guide a bunch of technologists that's one way of doing it. If you're trying to get your message out to the greater public well then you want to go to internal and internal discussion you'd go down the wiki central path or you might want to go and start thinking of using podcasts and if the topic is central to what a lot of people find interesting such as Web 2.0 which has been really hot we'll actually go out to the press and then it actually filters back through every possible entry into IBM is used.

**Steven Lewis:**

The second question coming out of what you were saying was policies, what are your policies relating to blogging particularly?

**David Boloker:**

Basically to externally blog it doesn't take much, there is no management sign off perse, typically when someone wants to blog externally for example I have someone who is the accessibility architect for the company, he has an external blog. I think you just have to be very cognisant of what you say, how you say it and every employee in IBM is yearly certified in business conduct guidelines.

There are guidelines to how we interact with the rest of the world so I don't think there is anything more than that.

**Steven Lewis:**

So what would you say if for instance, I have seen this a lot that companies are concerned about what their people might say in a blog or what they might say in a podcast?

**David Boloker:**

Everyone I know who does have an external log from Irving Wladawsky-Berger, who is extremely well known, to Bob Sutor to Rich Schwerdtfeger I am sure no-one reviews any of theirs, I don't read Richard's for sure. So we don't review it and no-one reviews the content of my key notes or any papers I might write. Obviously if there is papers, true papers, white papers you might run it through legal just for a sanity check but overall no.

**Steven Lewis:**

What about podcasts?

**David Boloker:**

I honestly don't know the answer to your question. There are podcasts especially marketing creates podcasts all the time.

**Steven Lewis:**

Internally or externally?

**David Boloker:**

Both.

**Iwan Winoto:**

Yeah both.

**David Boloker:**

Our group has never created a podcast so I am not very, I am a user of podcast as opposed to a creator of podcasts. A lot of what we do ourselves and actually to be very honest with you podcasts are probably the next thing to do.

**Iwan Winoto:**

The other thing we're doing quite a lot of recently is pop some stuff onto YouTube so if you go and have a look for - if you go and search QED Wiki on YouTube you'll find a few pieces of content on there.

**Steven Lewis:**

As consumers of podcasts, internal IBM podcasts, how do you find that, what do you find the benefits to be?

**Iwan Winoto:**

Actually I use it to find out what other people are thinking.

**David Boloker:**

Strategies, ways of looking at technologies, customers, what our new products are, because in a lot of cases I may not have the time to look at reading all of the information that comes at me but if I'm sitting on a plane or if I'm sitting in traffic in my car, you can put your iPod on and here it comes through the radio and you basically get full air play and it is actually wonderful. If you think about it it's the same paradigm as books on tape in the old days. It is a way of actually catching up in time that you're spending in traffic, it is a wonderful time to hear what's going on.

**Steven Lewis:**

One of the things I understand IBM has used podcasts to do is often to replace conference calls particularly because of this time difference issue, is that true?

**David Boloker:**

Absolutely true.

**Steven Lewis:**

How have employees responded to the implementation of social media within IBM?

**David Boloker:**

Overwhelmingly I think that it's a success, every bit of social media that's come through whether it be podcasts, whether it be Dogear, whether it is something like activities where people can share information in one place and or profiles on themselves so people can find you and find people. And what this is all about is tagging, information tagging yourself, I am known for Web 2.0, I am known for Java, people can find you by doing a search and you can look at the search and a lot of the same thing happens in wikis and this is now probably accepted in IBM as a way of doing business.

**Steven Lewis:**

Do you hear a lot about say generational differences with technology? Is it your experience that there's a big generational gap in uptake?

**David Boloker:**

The acceptance on a daily basis into your work is very very different to someone who expects change and at what point do you stop expecting change. If you're in a high school or uni change is every day. When you start looking at for instance IBM or Microsoft or anywhere else is change is evident, you go from job to job, everything changes and it is the job of the employee as well as the customer to say what's next? How can I basically deliver the information in a much better way than I have done before.

Now the question is as these things all collide is this going to be very age specific and I've actually found that in some cases it is, if you're expecting someone of 60+ or 65+ to start moving into SMSing on the phone it is going to be a hard experience. But starting to use voice over IP, use the internet, I think is common place at this point; it just so happens what's easier, it is easier just to pick up the phone and dial.

**Steven Lewis:**

So you don't find that older employees are more reluctant to blog or podcast?

**David Boloker:**

I don't see that at all, I honestly don't. Even when I look across other companies I don't see it.

**Steven Lewis:**

With the introduction of social media have you seen cultural change in the company? I mean speaking as employees yourselves?

**David Boloker:**

I have actually seen much more free sharing of ideas which actually I think is very very healthy for everybody and when I say free sharing of ideas it is at every single level, its looking at it from technology, uses of technology as well as also starting to look at how we take the technology and use it elsewhere as every technology has uses outside of its original focus area and the development group has in one sense blinders on in a lot of cases and you get someone who is coming very tangential at everything and you find other uses.

**Steven Lewis:**

Do you think it would be possible to run the team that you run spread as you are without social media?

**David Boloker:**

No I can guarantee that. I am too far removed from everyone in the group as well as they're also very removed for all of our projects. I have pretty much projects that are in Boston, we have one that's in England now, in Austin, Bill's part of an open source project that's world wide called Dojo you can't basically survive any longer without all of the different types of communication and inputs and outputs.

**Steven Lewis:**

Are there any other things that you found that wouldn't be possible without social media?

**David Boloker:**

Actually I don't think we as a company, as IBM, could exist without social media and collaboration to be honest with you. So it is actually a phenomenal use of technology and more importantly it is a way of collaborating and getting your message across and your strategy for that matter.

**Steven Lewis:**

It may be the case if somebody in a team that isn't required to work with your team is following your stuff because it is of particular interest of theirs do you ever have those people commenting on what you're doing, you know getting involved, suggestions?

**David Boloker:**

Yes actually. Just Friday this happened here in Australia, a colleague of mine basically who has been following work that has been going on and he's been following what I've been doing and in some cases I've watched what he's been doing and we started looking at a whole question of virtual worlds and had a really wonderful conversation for a few hours about this and it was all moved forward by comments that were internally very focused on how we can do things here versus there and what's going to come out of it. So this is very common place that you see now this kind of behaviours.

**Steven Lewis:**

These are internal conversations so obviously the confidentiality is all inside, does IBM worry that podcast is a portable format, it is an mp3, you've got an

internal podcast you could take it out of the building. Are there concerns about that?

**David Boloker:**

Sure there are concerns but it is the same concern as your PCs leaving the building, it is the same concern how in the old days you could put information onto a diskette and walk out.

**Steven Lewis:**

How do you or can you in fact measure the return on investment in social media?

**David Boloker:**

Well let's get focused first and then we can paint the big IBM picture second. From our group's perspective success can either be number of people coming in and looking for proof of concepts, it could be number of people coming in and asking for information by email, it could be the number of people asking us to come out and talk to them about technology or technology introduction, it could be the number of keynotes you're asked to give, there are many many different metrics you can give to this or it could be how many people have downloaded your code off our download site called alphaWorks.

The bigger picture in IBM gets much fuzzier because there are so many different technologies, so many different ways of driving out messages through what I'll call crusts, normal press, podcasts, webinars and then you can go into advertising, how do you start measuring. Advertising is easy to measure because you can get data from AdSense if you want to do it through Google mechanisms that you can figure out. It is all the others that are really difficult or how many people read someone's blog, probably the most read blog that IBM has right now is Irving Wladawsky-Berger, Irving is a visionary and the number of people that read his blog is a huge number. How many, who knows it is just very hard and it is interesting that you find analysts reading it, you find customers reading it, you find other companies reading these blogs and you say well this is phenomenal. It is actually very healthy when you start thinking about the intersection, it is new ideas coming out immediately and more importantly you actually can look at different relationships develop and how you can move forward whether it be technology relationships or the actual business relationships or whether they say well I am not really interested any more in working with you, all these things are actually fine.

**Steven Lewis:**

It wouldn't be easy to tie that back to a direct connection to the blog and is that important that's what I'm saying?

**David Boloker:**

But I think you can tie it back to the blog because the number of people who come in through that interface might send a mail to him as obviously right at the bottom of his blog in particular is his mail address so you can easily say put an entry on widget 'x' and all of a sudden I'm getting 5,000 mails on widget 'x', a very clear cause and effect. It's when you start talking about more esoteric things that are more philosophical it is a little bit harder to find out did it actually take root. For example Irving was behind the early strategy in IBM on the internet, well it took us three or four years to figure out that the strategy was right on the nose but you have to be patient.

**Steven Lewis:**

Because you are at the leading edge in terms of using the technology inside and taking it out to your customers, how important is it for a company to be up with the times when it comes to something like social media?

**David Boloker:**

I think it's imperative that every company in our space has to be using every type of methodology to get the message out to customers, a message out to partners as well as a message out to everybody about what's happening. Whether you like it or not everyone of us is touched by the web, everyone of us is touched by new technologies and technologies in general. Just think about the number of people carrying iPods today, whether it be an old style iPod that just does music or video iPod or any of the others, it is a communication mechanism to get something from point A to point B and it's actually mutated from a music only device to a podcast device to a video device to a storage mechanism that I can actually use for temporary storage and then you can look at the number of other things, it will be a phone or it actually already is a phone.

**Steven Lewis:**

How do your customers respond when they're using these products that you've been using? What do you see with them?

**Iwan Winoto:**

Particularly with social medium we're just starting with a real supported product and we've been talking to customers already about the whole thing and it is very much the questions that come up. What's the ROI going to be, how am I going

to use it internally and those, for these sorts of models, those are the hard questions to answer because there's nobody that really understands how it is going to have an impact in the long term so as David says who have to look at what phase your customer is in, what kind of customer it is, what's the business value they're going to get and for really large customers have a lot of different silos, a lot of different teams that don't work together currently what's the value of having them work together and social media and social networking is a good way to get them to work together. For a company like IBM where you've got people distributed all around the world on all the different time zones, working on lots of different things, we've seen value in having them work together so find an easy way for them to work together and from the introductory things we've done with large companies is to say let's start it off in a particular project, do it in a small way and then see how it expands out of that and either it will grow virally - this is not the sort of thing you're going to force down somebody's throat and say you're going to have to use this wiki to do something, it's much better if it comes out of it virally and let people use it and experience it and have fun with it and understand how it works and I guess that comes a lot to the cultural questions as well, how the company checks out this kind of technology.

**David Boloker:**

You're looking at new businesses develop, just think of any airline in the world, they're constrained in a lot of cases by the price of oil, fuel for the planes or we start developing a community they can sell their services and this is in a lot of cases what is easily possible whether they build that community out and you're starting to see if you want it working and an explosion starting to happen and revenue starts changing and patterns start changing and that's just one example. I mean the financial guys they've got this really quick saying if I can find a new avenue to start talking to someone and by the way if I can give you a view of your portfolio while you're driving home in the car and by the way it will spark some decisions and you'll come around the next day and purchase more, this is an absolute success and this is really what all this new social media is all about. It is how can we start looking at using the technology, blending it in with my business model and end up moving everything ahead.

**Steven Lewis:**

I would like to thank David Boloker and Iwan Winoto from IBM for talking to me there about IBM's use of social media and I would also like to thank Text 100 PR Agency for setting up that interview for me.

If you would like to contact me it is [steven.lewis@zestdigital.com.au](mailto:steven.lewis@zestdigital.com.au), that's Steven with a 'v', and L E W I S. You can find this podcast in our blog at [zestdigital.com.au](http://zestdigital.com.au) and you are very welcome to leave comments on the podcast



page and I would like to thank everybody who did take the time to comment on our first episode which was an interview with Simon Baker the CEO of realestate.com.au.