

For tech firms, social media is serious biz investment

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IN HIS five year-long career as a software programmer, Vishwas Pendse always fell short of completing even twelve months in each of the three jobs he took up ever since he graduated from an engineering institute in Pune. Pendse, who belongs to the so-called millennial generation, is one among nearly two million 30-year-olds employed by India's thriving \$50-billion software services export industry, scrambling to attract new recruits and also retain the restless code jockeys.

For an industry battling with high attrition rates of around 20-30% and dealing with the restless millennial generation, in-house versions of social networking platforms at companies such as Cognizant, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and Wipro are beginning to make an impact in reducing attrition by up to one third of the normal level.

Pendse, who joined Cognizant in April last year, got hooked on to the company's Facebook-like platform called Cognizant 2.0, or C2, which allows him to connect with thousands others and share ideas without any intervention or mandate from the project managers.

"I find it quite cool, and worth spending time on. Ever since I started using it a year ago, I have kicked off around a dozen discussions, and now spearhead few special interest groups," he says. "In my last company, I was made to use a communication and email system, which looked really prehistoric," adds Pendse.

"Most of my friends and juniors coming out of colleges get the shock of their lives when they are introduced to old, clumsy email systems used by many employers. And, on top of all that, there are bans to use Facebook and Twitter in offices," says Pendse. "Why do we have so much of difference between our personal computing and work computing experiences?"

Top tech firms are realising that keeping the new generation glued, they need changes beyond pure salaries, which is already considered hygiene by new recruits such as Pendse. Launched around two years ago by Cognizant, the C2 already has around 60,000 active users and the site records over six million page views every month.

"That's how close you can get a Facebook to the business processes," said Malcolm Frank, senior vice-president and Cognizant's chief strategist. "The millennial actually have a completely different expectation in terms of how they work, they love to have virtual experiences," added Frank.

From the time a new customer project is kicked off, to when it's actually delivered, Cognizant 2.0

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glues the entire workflow together, across varied skills, geographies and business units. "The work flow is not a boring experience, it's so much refreshing," agrees Pendse.

For Cognizant as an organisation, the system helps it not only knit the project groups together, but also reduce the entire time taken to identify who can do a particular project better than the rest.

"It's like a Google search—we put the skill set required, and it throws up different project teams and individuals with prior experience in dealing with such situations," says Frank. Some 7,000 projects are already registered in the system, and employees have shared around 200,000 posts about these projects.

At TCS, the country's biggest software exporter, nearly one third of its over 1,50,000-

strong workforce is actively participating in the company's social media platforms already. TCS uses wikis, or personalised, websites that bring together specialised communities, apart from other tools to help its employees collaborate better. While Justask enables employees to ask questions openly, Ideamax encourages employees to share their ideas about a particular technology or a process.

"The format of Justask is similar to that of a Q&A forum. An associate can ask question which could be related to their work. Another associate or few associates can answer that question and the initiator of the question can tag an answer as 'Best Answer'. So, ideally, this becomes a knowledge-sharing platform," says A Srinu, vice president, knowledge management and digitisation at TCS.

In some ways, these internal social platforms resemble popular applications of Facebook and Twitter, which the millennial are used to in their personal computing environment. "These social platforms help associates within TCS in not only discovering knowledge but also aids in connecting people who have got similar knowledge/skill competencies," Srinu of TCS adds. "While there is similarity in terms of design concepts, reputation model etc in the TCS social networking platforms as that of Facebook & twitter, the application and use cases within the enterprise context is different," he says.

For tech firms, these social media platforms mean serious business investment now. For instance, according to research firm IDC, Cognizant spent nearly \$10 million on its C2 platform.