

Social strategy and customer communities

Introduction

Any business considering introducing an owned community platform, whether for customer service, or to build other forms of relationship with customers, needs to identify:

- how the planned community will contribute to achieving the business strategies
- in particular, how it aligns with the existing customer service and marketing strategies
- how it can benefit the business
- what success would look like
- how the business can be benchmarked against competitors or comparable businesses

It also needs confidence that:

- the business needs and IT needs are coordinated
- the pre-planning is coherent and comprehensive
- customer-facing staff are trained in representing the company online, and presenting a coherent voice to the customer

Social strategists support the sponsoring department and the IT department in:

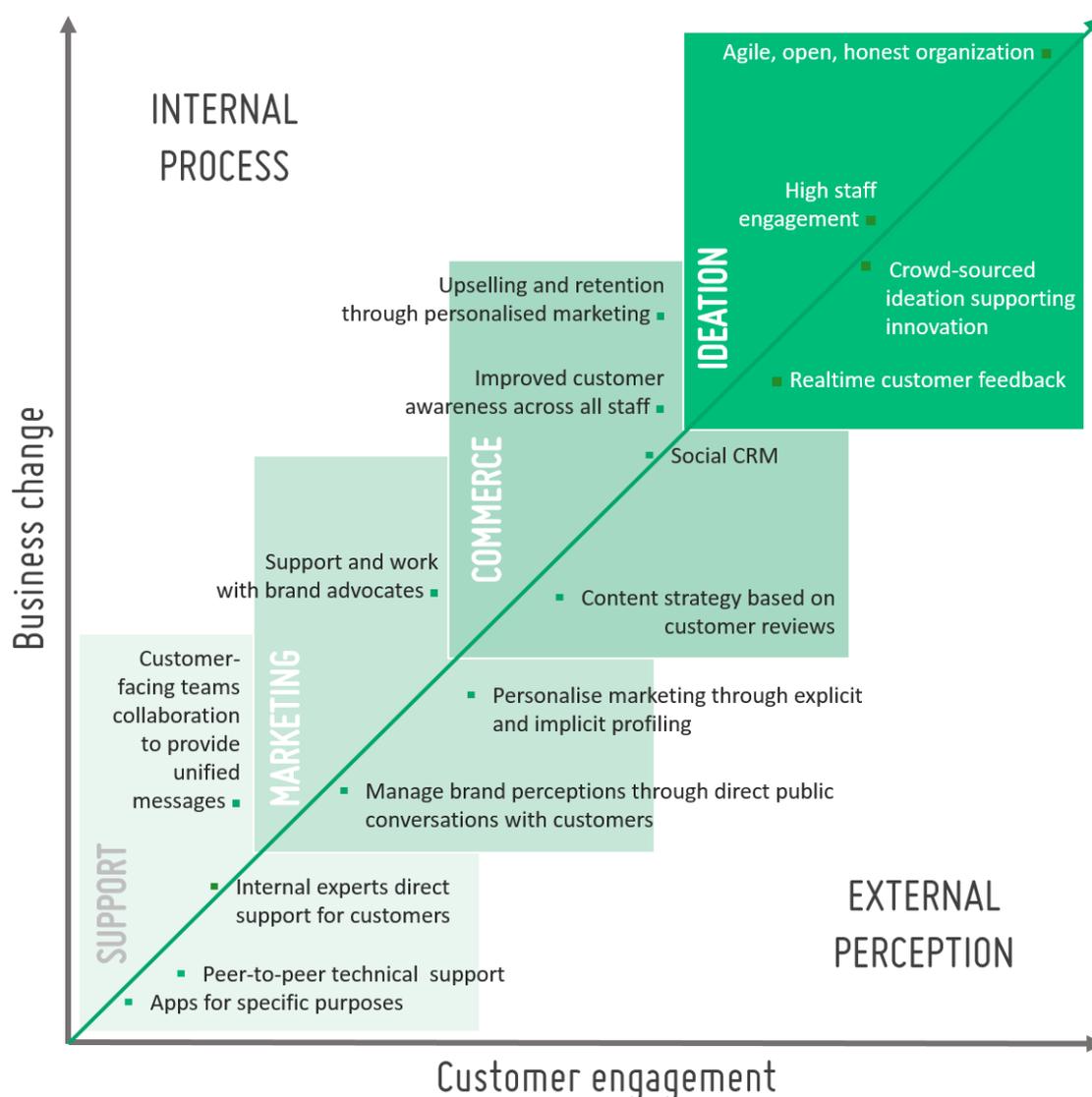
- proving the business case
- planning the launch
- driving adoption.

Proving the business case

1. Establishing the objectives

We will help you engage with key stakeholders across the business to agree what the platform is for. The outcome is a series of clearly expressed objectives that senior sponsors can put their name to and which will give you the strategic framework you will need to prioritise and plan successfully.

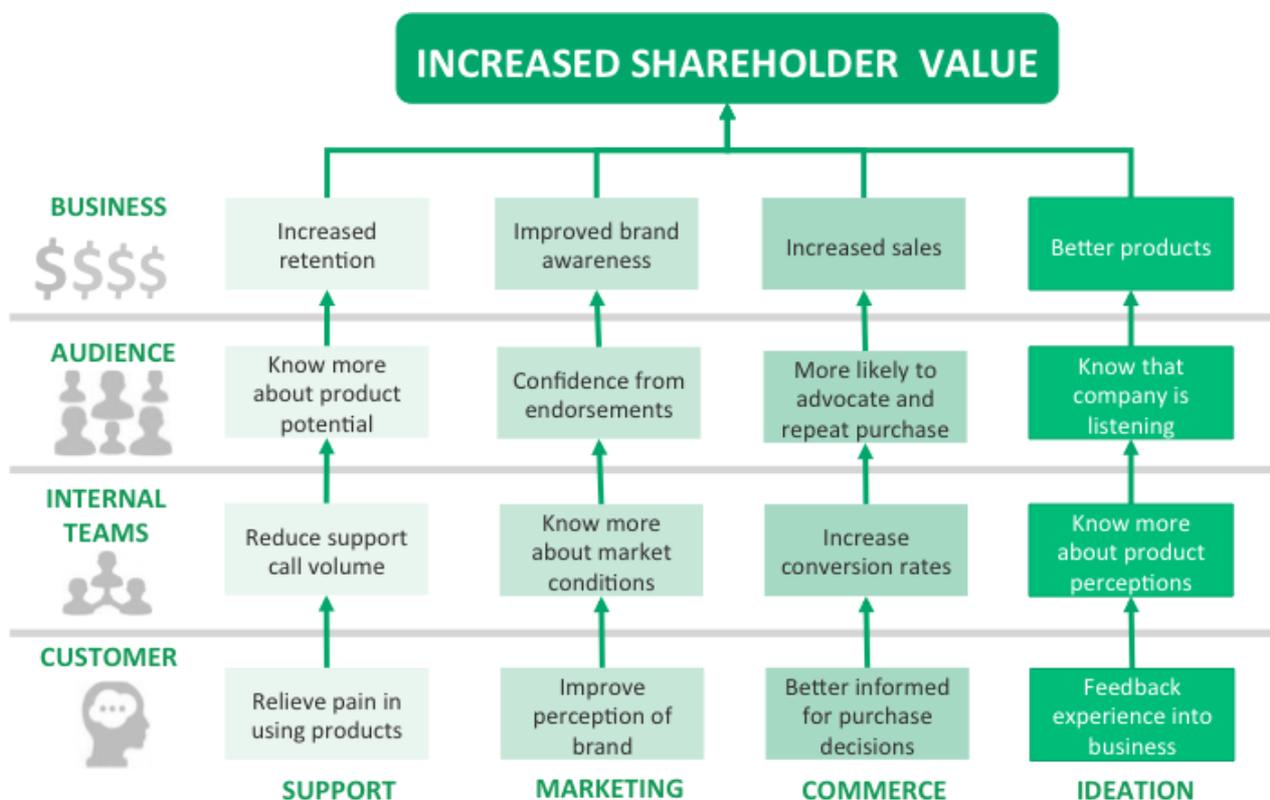
To help prioritise, we will explore the appetite for collaboration in the four 'dimensions' of support, marketing, commerce and ideation. These are increasingly challenging in terms of business change and correspondingly rich in terms of the customer engagement with the business. It is important to match this appetite to existing business strategies:



2. Adding value

Any sustainable customer community must benefit the customer and bring benefit to the business. This means its value should be identifiable at the levels of the internal teams and the wider public audience for the brand as a whole, as well as the customer. All these will lead towards clear business benefit.

These projected benefits will be the source of the KPIs and targets. As social strategists, we will work with the project team to establish not just the business need, but the potential value, across the organization.



3. Scoping the platform

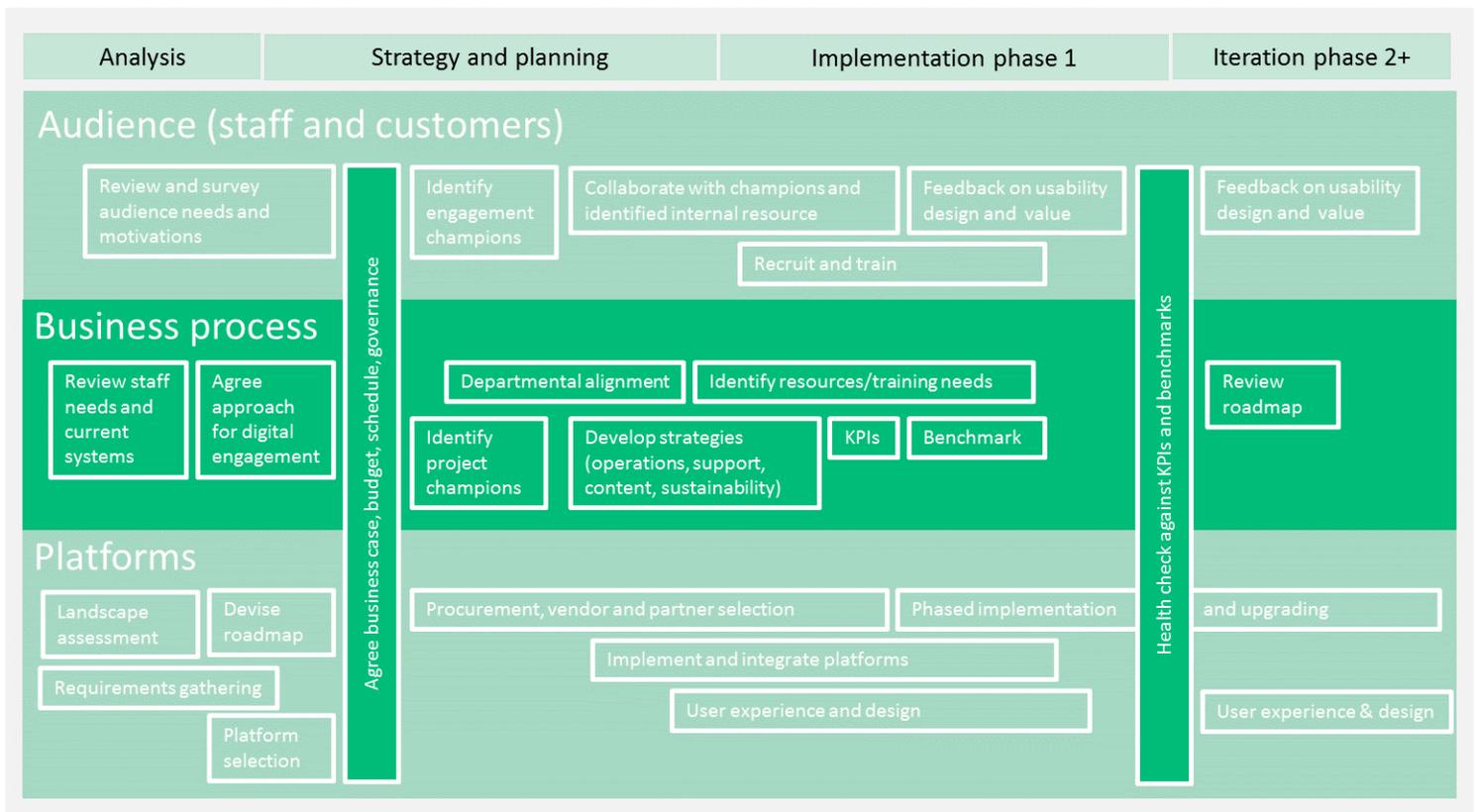
Here we provide you with a framework to draw up a proper specification for IT using the planning framework.

We will work with individual managers to establish the prioritised User Stories; a technique that will give you a plan to translate business needs into a robust technical specification. Working closely with IT, this method saves duplication and avoids the waste of developing features on the site that the business does not actually want or need.

At the end of the planning process you will have a scope that is fit for purpose and will help IT make key investment decisions in terms of how they select and deploy the main platform and supplementary applications such as mobile apps.

Planning the launch

Depending on the objectives, planning and launching a customer community can involve a complex project that incorporates the technical implementation, business alignment, business and technical governance, content planning, UI design, as well as working with the audience, identifying champions, and training.



Driving adoption

Driving adoption involves supporting the content and community managers in identifying and delivering engagement opportunities, ensuring that each relevant team is taking advantage of the platform and resolving any perceived obstacles.

It also involves planning and implementing incentive schemes, measuring activity and acting on the knowledge acquired.

Ultimately, the proof of the platform will be demonstrated by measuring activity against KPIs established off the value map.

SHILBROOK

Shilbrook offers strategy consultancy to a wide range of organizations, both commercial and non-profit.

Among the brands we have helped are:

- British Medical Association
- CIPD
- Coty
- National Trust
- We Are Social

Our consultancy is technology-agnostic, but we can support a wide range of implementations including:

- Acquia
- Telligent
- Workplace by Facebook
- SharePoint.

Partners

Lawrence Clarke

Lawrence co-founded the social strategy agency Shilbrook Associates. He has deep experience of helping businesses engage with their audiences, both internal and external. Lawrence has been working in the field of digital engagement since the mid-1990s, from online gaming to branded communities and corporate intranets – supporting more than 20 organisations.

Peter Furtado

Peter has helped many membership organisations, charities and publishers to rethink their business models, and train their staff for online engagement. They include the National Trust, the Football Association, Sustrans, the Caravan Club and the British Medical Association, as well as commercial organizations including the R&D department of a FTSE 100 company and We Are Social, a web marketing and social agency. Peter co-founded Shilbrook Associates with Lawrence Clarke in 2012.