

# YOU INC.

## Living and Working in a Changing World

After downsizing, outsourcing and telecommuting, the social network is transforming the workplace

The workplace | Altering from within

### The one constant at work is change

Almost everyone who entered the work force during the past few decades has participated in a sweeping transformation that continues to radically alter the process of work, the nature of employment and the structure of the office environment.

Multinational businesses have been dramatically affected by a dizzying array of technological breakthroughs, combined with economic and political convulsions that include globalization, downsizing, outsourcing and rewritten social contracts. Though the ballyhooed paperless office has so far failed to materialize, many employees have witnessed failure of corporate governance, repeated reorganizations intended to eliminate inefficiencies and the disappearance of pensions. Increased productivity and a better understanding of environmental factors have been counterbalanced by shifting demographics and a volatile global economy.

"The enormous, pervasive and unrelenting changes in the workplace during the past three decades rival those of the Industrial Revolution," says Paul Sanchez, director of the organization research and effectiveness business at Mercer, the world's largest human resource consulting firm. "They have changed the way organizations relate to employees and the way employees relate to management."

Flexible work schedules, a mobile work force and non-standard employment agreements continue to alter the traditional nine-to-five working cycle, while a less hierarchical corporate structure and more collaborative decision-making process demand a fresh set of social skills.

Technological competence is now a prerequisite in most jobs, and many projects, often global in scope, are international, team-based efforts. Most companies have also adopted a competitive strategy that involves a greater em-

pathy with customers' objectives. Although fewer employees may go into the office regularly, physical surroundings are generally user-friendlier. Many companies have "de-stress" spaces and gyms close to unassigned wireless workspaces that theoretically encourage collaboration, improve communication, reduce infrastructure costs and accommodate different work styles.

Finding a job is also radically different than it used to be. It took Philippe Dubé, a Canadian Internet security specialist working for a multinational high-tech company in Sophia Antipolis in the south of France, less than 48 hours to locate his new California-based employer in October. He put his keyword-heavy résumé on the Irish site of Monster, the world's leading career network, and a headhunter in London soon put him in touch with a company in Silicon Valley.

"There's more fluidity compared with five years ago, when I still might have applied directly to a specific company," says Dubé. "Job-seekers, recruiters and HR departments all tap into online employment networks."

Social and business networking, an important aspect of the ongoing workplace revolution, should continue to alter the structure, performance and mind-set of both employers and employees.

Online networking is now among the most important life skills in determining business and personal success. Communications, networking and related industries are currently the single largest business entity in the United States in terms of sales, and connections to the right contacts determine one's next sale, promotion or job offer.

"Networks are revolutionizing the way people work and in-



Tech-savvy, multitasking employees: Companies are seeking to enable this emerging breed to thrive in the workplace.

**'Networks revolutionize the way people work and interact'**

teract within and beyond their own companies," explains Christophe Langlois, a business networker with 10 years' experience in the European banking industry who now concentrates on online banking and networking applications. "Forget six degrees of separation, because each of us can easily create a global network of immediately contactable professional and social acquaintances."

This is a made-to-order ambience for multitasking younger workers raised with e-mail, instant messaging, mobile phones, blogs and wikis (Web pages with content that can be edited by readers). Corporations are scrambling to determine how to best utilize the burgeoning reservoir of well-educated, tech-savvy employees who innately access, create, manipulate and exchange information. Employers have discovered that these same individuals tend to challenge authority, demand flexibility, prefer less formal communication methods and seek a better balance between work and their private lives.

"Today's work force embraces the power of technology and is introducing innovative working methods that are influencing the configuration of companies," says Sanchez. "Bosses must win their hearts and minds while meeting the key challenges of knowledge management, accessing and distributing information, and attracting and retaining talent."

For better or worse, this should ensure that the workplace revolution doesn't slow down. Who will come out on top? Concludes Sanchez: "The corporate winners almost everywhere will be companies that can combine leadership with recognition and rewards, respect for an employee's productivity and an active communication environment." ■

Social networking | The new telephone

### The coffee hour on a worldwide scale

Online personal, social and professional networking has rapidly changed the way corporate personnel interact and collaborate with their employers, colleagues, competitors and random acquaintances throughout the world.

Employees at major multinational companies are increasingly complementing internal corporate networks with individual or business accounts at well-known platforms like Facebook, MySpace or LinkedIn, which has millions of registered users active in 150 different industries. "Smart companies encourage participation in these networks because they make employees more visible and provide them with a greater opportunity to be creative," says Christophe Langlois, an ardent fan of business networking and the founder of [www.Visible-Networking.com](http://www.Visible-Networking.com), which extols the virtues and pitfalls of business and social networking. "A person's increased exposure to their colleagues, competitors, industry associations and the media enhances their credibility and creates a valuable group of contacts."

Says Philippe Dubé, an Internet security specialist who uses his Facebook account for personal and professional communica-

### Guidelines for professional networking

- An easy-to-find and visible online identity is indispensable.
- Determine your objectives and carefully choose a few appropriate Web sites to achieve them.
- Ensure that you have complete control over your personal data.
- Create and regularly update an enticing profile or CV.
- Use key words to attract hits, and let visitors know they can leverage your network.
- Post regularly to your blog to demonstrate your passions and share your expertise.
- Create relevant contacts, and never send out generic e-mails or invitations.
- Quality, not quantity, is the key to a productive online network.
- Presence, credibility and traffic are the gold standards.
- Don't exaggerate or lie — it will be sure to backfire.

tion: "Online networking is basically a time-saving extension of the coffee hour, business lunch, exchange of business cards and after-work drinks with a lot more people."

Business-oriented LinkedIn enables more than 18 million professionals, including executives from every Fortune 500 company, to better leverage their professional relationships. Members post résumés and expand their networks as they reconnect with former colleagues, explore business opportunities, create a global team, and seek clients and job candidates. "Facebook is like Happy Hour, where you can do some level of schmoozing, but people aren't really there to do work," says Kay Luo, director of corporate communications at LinkedIn in Mountain View, California. "There's a natural distinction between that social playground and LinkedIn because people like to keep their professional and personal lives separate."

Scores of other popular social and professional networks, like German-based Xing.com, which has already gone public, co-exist to encourage networking among a potential global market of more than 220 million white-collar professional employees. But not every company wants its employees to network at the office. An August poll by Sophos, a leader in Internet security, found that 43 percent of companies block employee access to Facebook because of concerns about productivity and security. Sophos also discovered that companies allowing access to Facebook either see it as a valuable networking tool or are worried about an employee backlash to a corporate ban.

Yet the trend in most corporations is to promote networking while implementing guidelines and procedures that protect assets and productivity without being overly intrusive or counterproductive.

"Most large businesses encourage employees to take advantage of internal and external networking because they realize it creates knowledge," says Paul Sanchez, partner at Mercer consulting, noting that decades ago some companies were reluctant to let employees use the telephone at work. "It expands the boundaries, or even eliminates the boundaries, of where an employee can search for ideas, find collaborators, create new intellectual capital and explore new opportunities," he says. ■

### The virtual agora, or the rise of the blog

Blogs and other user-generated online platforms have become an integral aspect of most companies' efforts to augment their internal and external communication campaigns.

Bob Lutz, GM's 75-year-old vice chairman, began contributing to his corporation's FastLane blog more than two years ago. In addition, Microsoft now supports thousands of blogs and wikis.

But the growth of increasingly pervasive communication techniques that provide a virtual 24/7 contact between individuals, coworkers, businesses, customers and the media is just getting under way.

"Organizations are paying more attention to communication on a formal and informal basis than ever before," says Paul Sanchez, a partner at Mercer consulting. "But we've just scratched the surface of what's possible."

Corporate blogs and wikis, intended for either internal or external consumption, may critique

the latest corporate memo. But most highlight particular aspects of an organization or hype its products. The better ones are a source of high-quality information with content relevant enough to engage readers and create a virtual community.

"The best business blogs enable passionate authors to demonstrate their expertise in specific areas and develop credibility that will lead to exciting business opportunities," says the networking specialist Christophe Langlois, whose four blogs include [www.Visible-Banking.com](http://www.Visible-Banking.com).

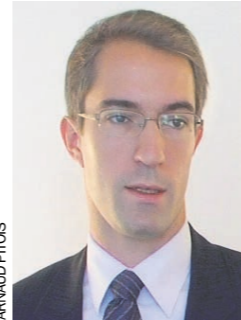
Meanwhile, buzz from bloggers should continue to keep corporations on their toes. "It's increasingly difficult for any business to get away with anything, from bad customer service to a minor misdemeanor, because somebody somewhere will invariably report it on a blog," points out Mickey Kaus, author of the popular [www.kausfiles.com](http://www.kausfiles.com) blog for more than eight years.

### It's never too early to get started

Children may not yet need a MySpace profile or Facebook account to get into grammar school. But it's probably smart to seriously consider their initial requests to join an online social network.

"If you're young, it's not possible to get by without being computer-literate and involved in networking," says Paul Sanchez, a partner at Mercer consultants. "The divider between the world's haves and have-nots has become technological sophistication rather than money."

Kids can begin creating an online presence at social sites like Club Penguin, Whyville and Habbo. In August, the Walt Disney Co. paid \$350 million to acquire Club Penguin, a children's virtual world with 700,000 paying subscribers. The site calls itself a "kid-friendly virtual world" where children from six to 14 play games and interact with each other. Of course, children can also obtain



Christophe Langlois.

some early corporate experience and expertise in cyberspace. Whyville is a virtual world with an educational twist that enables users, mainly from eight to 14, to run a business or design a car. Created in 1999 to support a science and education article, the site's "City Hall" monitors language and behavior.

Slightly older youngsters can check out Habbo, a "hangout for teens" from 13 to 18 that instructs users in "The Habbo Way," a code of conduct suggested for anyone who wants to dance, eat, drink and chat in cafés, restaurants and game rooms at the Habbo Hotel.

Most teens inevitably enter virtual worlds featuring massively multiplayer, online fantasy role-playing games, like the Sims, EverQuest and World of Warcraft, where they manipulate avatars through environments reminiscent of the real world. And nearly

everyone watches or posts video clips on YouTube, which last year was bought by Google, or uses Flickr, the sharing platform for photos that has more than 300,000 groups.

If a teen does want to abandon the virtual world and work in the real one, there are numerous youth-oriented job sites like SnagAJob.com, Groovejob.com and CoolWorks.com, which offers employment slots in ski resorts, ranches and theme parks.

"Attuned companies know how youngsters communicate and want to see creative résumés," says the longtime social networker Christophe Langlois. "But every potential employer will invariably Google you and investigate your online personality." So it pays not to do anything too outrageous at the Habbo Hotel.



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